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Chinese Social Media Representation of
Taiwanese Legalisation of Same-Sex Marriage:
A Queer Analysis of the Weibo Discussion

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ABSTRACT

Taiwanese Judicial Ruling on Same-sex Marriage which announced prohibition of same-sex marriage unconstitutional on 24th, May 2017 has caused interesting responses on social media in Mainland China. This research investigates how legalisation of same-sex marriage legalisation as well as gender and sexual identities were both represented on Chinese Mainland's social media in the event of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage from a queer-theory-based perspective with attention to the complexities of sexual citizenship rights as well as exclusions in globalisation. Previous scholarship in non-Western social media public spheres and in LGBT and queer representation often left out such local complexities and global disparity. User generated content on Weibo during this time when Taiwanese attempted to achieve marriage equality was collected by a computer programme. A mixed-method research design was applied. Quantitative and qualitative content analysis as well as semi-structured interviews were conducted. The research contributed to the knowledge about social media representations of gender and sexual identities and of same-sex marriage in relation to global and local complexities in a non-Western Chinese Mainland context. The limitations in the Mainland social media public spheres led to a mostly one-sided supportive opinion expressions about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Identities were analysed at their intersections. The heteronormative stereotyping and assumptions as well as homonormative depoliticisation were found in the representations of gender and sexual identities. The findings show the influences of globalisation, especially the global LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) movement. Also, the studied Weibo discussion found to reflect the Chinese Mainland context in locally concerned issues such as marriage, identities' disclosure and queer visibility. The study suggests the universalised content of sexual citizenship has harmed local persons' agency in collective innovation of localised activism on social media public spheres in non-Western context. Future communication studies can confront and examine heteronormativity more directly by investigating the heteronormativity and its manifestations including family ideals across cultures, especially in non-Western contexts, to help the development of localised strategies for inclusion.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Research Overview and Context.....	1
Research Overview	1
Research Background	1
Research Topic.....	3
Research Questions.....	3
Research Methodology and Method.....	4
About the Researcher.....	4
Research Context	5
Demographic Features of Chinese Social Media Users	8
User Habits and Gratifications.....	10
The Controversial Taiwanese Identity.....	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review	14
Queer Theory and Heteronormativity	16
The Performativity of Gender Identities.....	17
Butler's Heterosexual Matrix.....	19
Introducing and Unpacking Heteronormativity in Representation	21
Global Overview of LGBT Identity.....	25
From Sexual Perverts to Sexual Citizens: A Western Viewpoint about Sexual Identities.....	26
Globalisation of Sexual Identities and LGBT rights	31
Chinese LGBT and Queer Identity Development	36
Marriage, Marriage Equality, and Love	40
The State Recognition for Same-Sex Relationships in the Global LGBT Movement	41
The Construction of Modern Marriage and Love in China	46
Public Spheres of Chinese Social Media and Representation of LGBT Identities and Queer Topics	
Online	52
Online Public Spheres on Chinese Social Media.....	53
Chinese Social Media Representation of LGBT Identities and Queer Topics	62
Theoretical Framework	65
Conclusion	70
Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Method	73
Overview of Queer Methodology.....	73
Rationale for the Adaptation of Queer Methodology	79
Mixed Methods Research.....	80
Research Ethics in Theory and Practice.....	83
Research Ethics in Queer Studies	83
Mitigation of Ethical Risks in Practice and Gaining Ethics Approval	85
Quantitative Content Analysis	87
Data Collection of User-generated Content Online and Sampling	88
Quantitative Content Analysis	92
Qualitative Content Analysis	95
Semistructured Online Interviews	96
Invitation and Conduction	97
Transcription and Analysis.....	99
Researcher's Reflexivity and Positionality	99

Conclusion	102
Chapter 4: The Weibo Discussion about Taiwanese Legalisation of Same-Sex Marriage .	104
Formats of Posts' Content	104
Format Combinations in Posts' Content	105
Hyperlinks.....	105
Images	107
Emojis	111
Manifestations of Popular Culture and Queer Fan Cultures in Posts	112
Languages in Posts	114
Facts in Posts	115
Types of Facts	116
Facts Mixed with Opinions	118
Opinions in Posts	119
Originality of Opinions.....	120
Positive Tone of Opinions	123
Theme Map	124
Regional Disparity.....	125
Love	125
Binarised Representation of Identities	126
Queer Criticism.....	126
Conclusion	126
Chapter 5: The Representation of Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation.....	129
Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation: An Advancement Overseas	129
A Taiwanese Achievement in the Process of Modernisation.....	130
A Juristic Victory of Human Rights.....	136
Taiwanese Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation as a Victory of Love	139
Queer Views on the Taiwanese Legalisation of Same-Sex Marriage	147
Marriage as Degendered/Desexualised.....	148
Queer Criticism of Same-Sex Marriage.....	150
Conclusion	152
Chapter 6: The Representation of Gender and Sexual Identities	154
The Limited Representation of Gender and Sexual Identities.....	155
The Gender and Sexual Identities Mentioned in Posts.....	155
The Limited Personal Point of View: Few Coming-out Posts	157
The Heteronormative Identities	159
The Popular Gender Binary and Rarely Mentioned Heterosexual Identity	160
The Hegemonic Heteronormativity in the Representation of Heterosexual Identity and Gender Binary	162
Criticism of Heteronormativity	169
The Nonheteronormative Gender and Sexual Identities	172
The Visibility of Nonheteronormative Identities	172
The Representation of Nonheterosexual Identities in and out of Gender Binary	176
The Influences of Popular Culture and Queer Fandom Culture on the Representation of LGBT Identities	186
The Representation of Nonheteronormative Identities at an Intersection with National Identity	190
Opinions about Nonheteronormative Identities	197
Conclusion	201

Chapter 7: Discussion.....	204
The Harmonious and Limited Public Sphere Discussion Online	204
A Fragmented Online Public Sphere with Homophily	204
A Weibo Discussion under Global Influences	207
Same-sex Marriage Legalisation Supported by the Civil Rights Frame	211
The Civil Rights Frame of Same-Sex Marriage Represented on Weibo.....	212
The Civil Rights Frame of Same-Sex Marriage Accepted Slackly on Weibo	216
Gender and Sexual Identities Neglected and Voiced	221
The Limited Visibility for Gender and Sexual Identities.....	221
Representations of Gender and Sexual Identities in the Global Era against/for Heteronormativity	225
Chapter 8: Conclusion	229
Chapter 9: Reflection	236
References.....	242
Appendices	270
Appendix A: Codebook	270
Appendix B: Posts Snapshots	300
Appendix C: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Interviews (Sample)	306

List of Tables

Table 1 <i>Formats Used in Post Content</i>	105
Table 2 <i>Posts Classified by Hyperlinks Inside and Outside Weibo</i>	107
Table 3 <i>Number of Images in Posts with Images</i>	108
Table 4 <i>Use of Combinations of Images</i>	110
Table 5 <i>Posts Containing Images with or without Symbols for the LGBT Movement</i>	110
Table 7 <i>Posts with Popular Cultural or Queer Fan Cultural References</i>	114
Table 8 <i>Types of Facts Used in Posts</i>	118
Table 9 <i>Facts and Opinions in Posts</i>	119
Table 10 <i>Opinions in Posts</i>	119
Table 11 <i>The Originality of the Opinions</i>	121
Table 12 <i>Sources of Cited Opinions</i>	122
Table 13 <i>Emotional Tones of Opinion</i>	124
Table 14 <i>Opinions Towards the Taiwanese Legalisation of Same-Sex Marriage</i>	130
Table 15 <i>Possibility of Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation in China (PRC)</i>	134
Table 16 <i>The Nature of Marriage Represented in the Posts with Opinions</i>	138
Table 17 <i>Arguments for Taiwanese Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation in Posts with/without Opinions on the Nature of Marriage</i>	139
Table 18 <i>The Precondition of Marriage Represented in the Posts with Opinions</i>	140
Table 19 <i>Arguments for Taiwanese Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation in Posts with Different Views about the Precondition of Marriage</i>	142
Table 20 <i>Children or Children's Education Mentioned in Posts with Opinions</i>	143
Table 21 <i>Arguments for Taiwanese Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation in Posts with or without Mention of Children or Children's Education</i>	144
Table 22 <i>Mention of Other People's Gender Identities</i>	157
Table 23 <i>Mention of Other People's Sexual Identities</i>	157
Table 24 <i>Categories of Sexual Identity Self-Disclosed in Posts</i>	158
Table 25 <i>Terms Used to Represent Other People's Gender Identities</i>	160
Table 26 <i>Male and/or Female Gender Identities Mentioned</i>	161
Table 27 <i>The Heterosexual Identity with or without Non-Heterosexual Identities</i>	162
Table 28 <i>Appearances of Gender Identities in Posts Mentioning Heterosexual Identity</i>	166
Table 29 <i>Mentions of the Nonheteronormative Gender Identities</i>	174
Table 30 <i>Categorised Communicative Terms Conveying Nonheteronormative Sexual Identities in Posts</i>	176
Table 31 <i>Appearance of Gender Identities in Posts Mentioning Nonheterosexual Identities</i>	177
Table 32 <i>Mainland China's Identity</i>	191
Table 33 <i>Taiwan's Identity</i>	192
Table 34 <i>Existence of Opinions about LGBT and Queer Persons or Identities</i>	198
Table 35 <i>Opinions towards LGBT and Queer Persons or Identities in Posts</i>	198
Table 36 <i>Nonheterosexual, Nonconfirmative, and/or Noncisgender Identities of Other People Mentioned in the Romantic/Marital Setting or the Human Rights Setting</i>	200

List of Figures

Figure 1 Heterosexual Matrix and Compulsory Heterosexualisation	21
Figure 2 Heteronormativity and Heteropatriarchy	23
Figure 3 Theoretical Framework	69
Figure 4 Research Design	82
Figure 5 Theme Map	124

Glossary

AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome): a chronic, potentially life-threatening condition caused by the human immunodeficiency virus.

API (Application Programming Interface): a type of software interface, offering a service to other pieces of software, allowing multiple computer programmes to communicate.

APP (Application): a software programme that is designed to perform a specific function directly for the user or, in some cases, for another application programme.

BATS (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, and Sina): four major technology companies in China, providing users with popular social media platforms.

C2C (Copy to China): Chinese companies copying the business model of a successful foreign company, especially web and other information technology companies.

CCP (Chinese Communist Party): officially, the Communist Party of China, the founding and sole ruling party of the People's Republic of China.

CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Centre): the administrative agency responsible for domain registry affairs and for conducting surveys about the development status of China's Internet.

Confucianism: an ancient Chinese belief system, which focuses on the importance of personal ethics and morality.

IM (Instant Message): a type of online chat allowing real-time text transmission over the Internet or another computer network.

Kuomintang (Nationalist Party): also referred to as the Guomindang, the Nationalist Party of China or the Chinese Nationalist Party, a major political party in the Republic of China, initially on the Chinese Mainland and then in Taiwan since 1949.

Lala: a Chinese phrase for lesbian, derived from the first syllable of the word “lesbian”.

LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans.): this initialism and its variations, which include LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning) and LGBTQAI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more), referring to anyone who is non-heterosexual or non-cisgender.

Maoism: a form of communism developed by Mao Tse Tung, the founder of the People's Republic of China.

Microblog: a form of online blogging using short posts without titles.

Piaopiao: literally meaning “wandering man”, a regional term in southwest China for men who have sex with men within the local homosexual culture.

QQ: an instant messaging software service and web portal, also known as Tencent QQ.

Rele: a Chinese social media platform for lesbians.

SNS (Social Networking Site): an online vehicle for creating relationships with other people.

Taobao: a Chinese online shopping platform.

Tik Tok: a short-form video hosting service.

Tongxinglian: the Chinese translation for homosexual.

Tongzhi: literally “comrade”, its characters in Chinese also meaning “same interest”, originally representing the revolutionary comrades who led China’s political modernisation, an identity shared by LGBT and queer persons in Chinese-speaking countries and regions.

WeChat: a Swiss-knife-like social media platform Chinese multipurpose social media mobile application software developed by Tencent, widely used for communication via instant messages.

Weibo: a Chinese microblogging website, one of the biggest social media platforms based in Mainland China.

Chapter 1: Research Overview and Context

This research is going to study Chinese social media discussions about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage under a queer theoretical lens that is discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. This research aims to present the landscape, that is the general features, of this online discussion and to capture this online discussion not only as a discussion about a news event but also one about gender and sexual identities as well as about marriage and law. Both quantitative and qualitative content analysis and semistructured interviews are employed within a mixed-method research design. Posts from a Weibo (a major Chinese social media platform) discussion were sampled, and online interviews were carried out.

Research Overview

Research Background

This study is about the representation of a Chinese social media discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. The Taiwanese Judicial Ruling on Same-sex Marriage (also called the Judicial Yuan Interpretation No. 748) announced the prohibition of same-sex marriage as being unconstitutional on May 24, 2017 (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], 2017). The quest to legalise same-sex marriage in Taiwan started from an activist, Chi, and his individual activism in 1986 and became part of the major goals for the Taiwanese Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) movement by the mid-2000s (Jian, 2012). The proposal for legal recognition of same-sex relationships was made by the Taiwan Alliance to Promote Civil Partnership Rights (TAPCPR) in its draft bill, Bill for Diversified Family Formation, which proclaimed the paths to protect same-sex couples' right to marry, mutual-contract-based civil partnerships, and multiperson unions to have the legal recognition of a family in 2012 after the failed proposal of the Same-sex Marriage Bill in 2009 (Jian, 2012). By 2016, the legislature was ready to replace the

gendered terms and clauses related to family and marriage to gender-neutral terms in the Taiwanese Civil Code (Yuan, 2016). Then, the Judicial Yuan Interpretation No. 748 was announced after activist campaigns, political lobbying, and open debates (for example, the hearing over same-sex marriages was streamed by PoliticalSaga in 2017). Yet, 18 months after the announcement of the Judicial Yuan Interpretation No. 748 was made by the Judicial Yuan, a referendum that legalised same-sex civil unions and denied same-sex relationships the entitlement of marriage and some of the legal rights enjoyed by married heterosexual couples was campaigned for by conservative groups, including transnational religious organisations (P.-R. Liao, 2020) and passed by voters in Taiwan on 24th, November 2018 (Z. Zheng, 2018 November, 29). As a legislative response, the Taiwanese legislature published the Act for Implementation of Judicial Yuan Interpretation No. 748 where same-sex couples were entitled to every right the same as their heterosexual counterparts except for rights to joint adoption and the use of artificial fertilisation (Act for Implementation of Judicial Yuan Interpretation No. 748, 2019). However, the Civil Code's definition of marriage has remained unchanged, and the term "marriage" seldom appears in the Act for Implementation of Judicial Yuan Interpretation No. 748 (2019) where the same-sex relationships that can be registered in Taiwan are referred to as "a permanent union of intimate and exclusive nature for the purpose of living a common life ... [in Article 2 and then as] ... a union as stated in Article 2". The TAPCPR has been seeking to abolish the current restrictions on same-sex relationship recognition by legal cases and has several successful proceedings involving the right to adoption and access to transnational same-sex relationship recognition, but the administration and legislature in Taiwan have not shown any intention to revise the Civil Code or the Act for Implementation of Judicial Yuan Interpretation No. 748 (Davidson, 2022; TAPCPR, 2022).

Research Topic

The Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage, although not entirely successful in achieving marriage equality, has caused interesting responses on Mainland China's social media during the developments in the Taiwanese path toward marriage equality. This study analyses the social media expressions about the event from the announcement of the Taiwanese Judicial Ruling on Same-sex Marriage to the time shortly after the release of the referendum voting results. Studying social media representations of (non)heteronormativity and related identities in Mainland China narrows the global gap in knowledge production about Western/non-Western contexts in the digital era. This study offers fresh and much-needed perspectives about the indications of (non)heteronormative identities from the Global South, which enrich cultural understandings about both the universal applicability of queer theoretical concepts and the particularities of their implications in a less studied non-Western context.

Research Questions

Representation is an important part of the construction and maintenance of identities. It is defined as “the production of meanings of the concepts in our minds that enables us to refer ... to imaginary worlds of fictions, objects, people and events” (Hall et al., 2012, p.37), so it is an essential practice in the creation and maintenance of identities' rooted belonging to an imagined community that is built upon shared systems of concepts (Hall et al., 2012). Meanwhile, identities are shaped, performed, and recognised through ways of representation in a cultural context (Hall et al., 2012). Therefore, my research questions start by outlining the online discussion before looking into the representations of same-sex marriage legalisation and of gender as well as sexual identities.

The research questions are as follows:

- 1) what was the landscape of the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage?
- 2) how was the legalisation of same-sex marriage represented in this Weibo discussion?
- 3) how were gender and sexual identities represented by Chinese social media users in Mainland China?

Research Methodology and Method

User-generated content on Weibo posted from after the Judicial Yuan Interpretation No. 748's announcement on May 24, 2017, until November 27, 2018, was collected. Queer methodology that derives from queer theory provides the guidelines for the design and the application of methods in this research. A mixed-methods research design was applied to find nuanced answers to my research questions. Quantitative and qualitative content analysis as well as semistructured interviews were conducted under the requirements of queer methodology and of research ethics. For more about this study's research methodology and method, please refer to Chapter 3.

About the Researcher

My name is Xiao Fei. I am a Chinese student studying a PhD in Communication at the School of Communication, Journalism, and Marketing at the Massey Business School at Massey University in New Zealand. I have been living the experience of being a foreigner—Chinese—as well as someone who is neurodivergent and into the queer sides of the world. These experiences have offered me multicultural perspectives both in daily life and academic endeavours. For more about my reflections on this research, please refer to Chapter 9.

Research Context

My research questions focus particularly on the representational aspect of Dahlgren's (2005) analytical categories, but, first, this section will provide an overview of the structure and landscape of social media. In general, social media has become a popular communication channel for opinion expression for Chinese Mainlanders. Among the various social media platforms, Weibo stands out as one where opinions about public issues are expressed in a timely and relatively freely way compared to other more private and relationship-building/maintaining platforms. Weibo's openness allows its users to express emotions, and share information and opinions about social topics, in spite of geographical differences, as well as the sociocultural restraints in the offline world, which enable Weibo to provide a virtual space for discussions about sensitive issues, such as same-sex marriage legalisation. In addition, Weibo has been studied as an online space for public opinions (Bolsover, 2016; Cairns & Carlson, 2016; M. Chan et al., 2012; Rauchfleisch & Schäfer, 2014; X. Wu & Montgomery, 2019), which offers perspectives about how Weibo works as an online public sphere(s) in the context of Mainland China. With support from these studies, my choice to focus this research on Weibo was made.

I provide an introduction to social media in China's Mainland and the controversiality in Taiwanese identity as the context for my research, because an up-to-date understanding of Chinese social media and its users was necessary for designing this study. In the next section, I introduce popular social media platforms in China and the social media context where they position themselves to meet the local demands and compete with each other with their user-generated content (L. Xu, 2017). In the next two sections, Chinese social media users are profiled in terms of their demographic features, and their habits and gratifications in using social media

as a communicational channel. The last section is about the controversies centring the Taiwanese identity in relation to the Chinese national identity.

The Landscape of Social Media in China

Chinese social media has developed its unique, fragmented, and dynamic features since the Chinese government enforced strict censorship to block most foreign Internet services in 2009 (C. Gibson, 2009; L. Xu, 2017). Social media practitioners had experienced the international technology spill-over effect prior to the censorship, which left success models as legacies for Chinese social media developers (Quan, 2005). The subsequent isolation from international social media channels has contributed to the development of exclusive Chinese platforms and a unique ecosystem. The unauthentic Copy to China (C2C) model, where copycats of successful foreign platforms were produced to fill the market gap, proved to be a failure due to the epic fall in popularity of Renren, a platform that replicated Facebook (N. Li & Hui, 2014). Thus, the survivors transformed their functions to fit the need to socialise in Chinese acquaintance society (Fei et al., 1992; Kantar, 2017). For example, WeChat, with its Friend Circle, became the leading platform in user penetration and user activeness by offering space for an interpersonal network formed by acquaintances (Fei et al., 1992; Kantar, 2017). The need to accommodate the Chinese Mainlanders' needs in the absence of international players will continue to shape Chinese social media and its exceptional context.

Fragmentation is an evident characteristic of the Chinese social media landscape, although Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, and Sina (BATS, four representative platforms) acts as the dominating core of it (Flemming, 2017; L. Xu, 2017). As the market develops, fragmented platforms and applications continue to target their detailed user segments respectively (China Internet Network Information Center [CNNIC], 2017, 2018). Nonetheless, BATS has become the centre for ensuring Chinese social

media is a viral, informative, and practical communication channel (L. Xu, 2017). With over half of the Chinese population being netizens, Tencent's WeChat app alone has achieved a 94.5% user penetration rate among them, indicating its popularity (CNNIC, 2017; Kantar, 2017). In 2018, the fragmentation of social media platforms deepened with the introduction of instant message (IM) platforms applicable to specific social needs (CNNIC, 2018). Sina Weibo experienced a steady increase (1.2%) in its number of users in 2018 (CNNIC, 2018). In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Weibo, as a major public social media platform and information source, increased its popularity, reaching up to 40.5% (CNNIC, 2020).

The dynamic feature of Chinese social media has been driven by fierce competition of countless platforms and applications (CNNIC, 2017; Flemming, 2017). The focus of the competition for active users has shifted from serving market segmentations to the creation of multimedia eye-catching content (CNNIC, 2017; Kantar, 2016; N. Li & Hui, 2014; L. Xu, 2017). After the C2C stage, social media platforms competing for users employed detailed market segmentation to provide virtual space for online communities (Flemming, 2015). Prior to 2017, marketers mainly concentrated on the fast tempo in which various social media channels emerged and disappeared, and only some survived the competition (Kantar, 2015, 2016). However, reports by CNNIC and Kantar in 2017 revealed a change of focus to the creation of attractive content. L. Xu (2017) noticed the user-generated nature of entertainment content that was encouraged by the platforms' and applications' newly updated features. CNNIC (2018, 2019, 2020) reported that the content providers and the platforms they used adopted increasingly detailed marketing segmentations to target more diversified user groups as a response to the fragmented Chinese social media. According to CNNIC (2018, 2019), mobile applications have focused on content improvement for an upper hand in competition. In 2020, almost all Internet

users used mobile devices to access online content and services (CNNIC, 2020). Young social media users have quickly embraced the video-sharing and live-streaming functions enabled by smart mobile phones, which resulted in the increasing popularity of social media platforms that are essentially designed for and on smart mobile phones, threatening social-networking-site (SNS)-based social media platforms in China and in the rest of the world as well (M. Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Also, video-sharing apps, such as Tik Tok, have quickly become the second most frequently used kind of app for Chinese netizens next to instant messaging apps in 2020 (CNNIC, 2020).

Demographic Features of Chinese Social Media Users

Early adopters of Chinese social media were likely to be younger with higher education, and to be single people living in major cities (CNNIC, 2017; Flemming, 2015; Rogers, 2003; L. Xu, 2017). These groups of people formed an early majority over time and expanded the personal networks as informal structures for the diffusion of Chinese social media, which helped Chinese Internet users' acceptance of social media (CNNIC, 2017; Flemming, 2015; Rogers, 2003). The average age of Chinese social media users was 33.1 years in 2016 according to Kantar (2017), which corresponds to CNNIC's (2017) survey result saying 77.2% of Chinese netizens were under the age of 40. With the increase in older users connecting to the Internet, 41.5% of Chinese netizens were found to be over 40 years old in 2020 (CNNIC, 2020). It was reported that middle-school students have been standing out as the biggest user group (24.8%) in Chinese netizens (CNNIC, 2018). Compared to other platforms offered by BATS, Sina Weibo has a significantly younger user profile with 82.0% of users under 30 years old (SinaDataCentre, 2016).

As for education level, seven out of ten Chinese social media users were reported to have acquired a tertiary education, which signifies their higher education level as

compared to general netizens (CNNIC, 2014; Kantar, 2015). This tendency intensified in Weibo users, which meant that Weibo had a more elite user group than other platforms (SinaDataCentre, 2016). Kantar (2014) reported that unmarried users took up almost half of the social media user population while only 29.5% of the urban population were the unmarried.

Major Chinese social media platforms, like WeChat and Weibo, tend to be dominated by males, mirroring the gender imbalanced birth ratio in population and in netizens (CNNIC, 2017, 2018, 2020; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001; SinaDataCentre, 2016; Tencent, 2016). Since 2018, statistics have shown that social media platforms with content focusing on lifestyle sharing attract more male users, who also engage more actively with content on traditional public sphere topics than female users (J. Chen, 2020; Messias et al., 2017). Nonetheless, social media still offers space for feminist activism in the world, especially with the spread of the “MeToo” movement (Rodino-Colocino, 2018). In Mainland China, social media platforms such as Weibo have also become an important channel for feminist expressions in an unfavourable sociocultural environment (Chang et al., 2018).

However, Chinese social media users are breaking away from their young, urban, and elite stereotypes to a more complex profile. As social media is gaining in its popularity over the years, its user profile has become older, more diverse, and less educated, indicating that Chinese social media users are more representative of Chinese netizens and the Mainland Chinese public, which is similar to the changing user demographics in other countries, such as Japan and United States (J. Chen, 2020). In recent years, numbers of users in smaller cities and rural areas are increasing, though most social media users are still in major cities where access to the Internet is comparatively easier (CNNIC, 2014, 2017; Flemming, 2015).

User Habits and Gratifications

Similar to their American counterparts, Chinese social media users have developed two tendencies: the trend to participate across platforms and the trend to use smartphones as the main log-in devices (J. Chen, 2020; CNNIC, 2020). Chinese users tend to participate on social media across platforms (Kantar, 2015; L. Xu, 2017). CNNIC (2014) found that 33.7% of social media users had adopted multiple SNSs, microblogging sites, and IM platforms in 2014, which shows that Chinese social media has developed interconnectivity among different platforms (L. Xu, 2017).

As the use and gratification theory indicates, all media users prefer a communication platform or channel over others to satisfy their needs, which include information, personal identity, self-expression, entertainment, and social interaction (Gordon, 2011; Lipschultz, 2014; Ruggiero, 2000). Users in China mainly use social media to gain gratifications of information, entertainment, and connection building (CNNIC, 2017; Kantar, 2017). The lack of desire for self-expression has turned a large group (46.0%) of social media users into silent browsers (Kantar, 2015; Men & Tsai, 2013) since social media is a credible information source for news in China (Kantar, 2017; L. Xu, 2017). Entertainment on social media has entered the pan-entertainment stage in China, which motivated users, especially younger ones, to create and to consume entertaining content through the integration of information across the traditional public/private distinction (Kantar, 2016, 2017; L. Xu, 2017, X. Xu & Hou, 2018). X. Xu and Hou's (2018) media analysis concluded that pan-entertainment on Weibo blurred the boundary between public issues and entertainment-oriented commercial promotions. Coupled with intense competition among technology giants, the pan-entertainment strategy with its promising revenue has worsened the public sphere space on Mainland China's social media where public

issues have to make way for commercial, entertaining content (S. Wang, 2021).

Communication with existing acquaintance networks became the most preferred gratification for Chinese social media users, which is about to continue as older users increase their presence on social media (CNNIC, 2018, 2020).

In addition, 35.0% of Chinese have been using mobile banking services, which connect seamlessly with social media applications like Tencent's QQ and WeChat, along with Alibaba's Taobao, to make purchase decisions and virtual payments (CNNIC, 2018). Thus, Chinese social media has increasingly impacted offline commercial practices (X.-d. Liu, 2017). The trend continues with the developments in commercial cargo transportation and postal services (CNNIC, 2018, 2019, 2020).

The Controversial Taiwanese Identity

Before coming to the term “national identity”, it is important to first clarify what counts as a “nation”. The understanding of a nation used to be ontological when the nation was perceived as a pre-existence to be freed or maintained by its people who usually came from the same ethnic background, such as the European nation-states (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Later, under the influence of global immigration, multicultural and multiethnic countries emerged, resulting in national identity's separation with place of birth or ethnic identity (Yuval-Davis, 2011). A nation in a cultural sense is not viewed as a natural pre-existence of one ethnic group or as a legitimate political entity but an imagined community of belongingness where its members are constructed and normalised in terms of racial/ethnic origins, religions, sexualities, classes, languages, and so on (Hughes, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2011). National identity is a social (or collective) identity, a constructed naturalised belongingness to an imagined national community of a nation (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Yuval-Davis (1997) differentiated nation from state or ethnicity since a diasporic nation can be sustained without a state, and a modern nation can contain multiple ethnic groups within itself. Thus, one's national

identity can be different from one's citizenship or ethnicity. National identities are also performative in queer theory. New immigrants could be detached from their former national identity by becoming an American through individual actions (Morrissey, 2013; Rottenberg, 2004). Another example for performative utterances of a national identity is offered in Kuus's (2007) analysis of the Estonian identity, which has changed from pronouncing its independence in anti-Russianness to employing multiculturalism to affirming its place in the European Union.

The construction of the modern Chinese national identity follows roughly the same historical procedures mentioned above. Prior to the Qing dynasty, the Chinese national identity had been incorporated with the Han ethnicity (G. Zhao, 2006). After Manchu, who started the Qing dynasty, settled in Beijing in 1644, the Manchu rulers constructed a multicultural as well as a multiethnic national identity of China that was inclusive of all ethnic groups submitted to the Qing regime, as found in G. Zhao's (2006) historical study on original documents in the Man and Han (Chinese) languages. After Qing dynasty's end in 1911, the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) had promoted unification of Chinese people against Japanese invasion, regardless of their ethnic origins (Chu & Lin, 2001; Hughes, 2013; X.-d. Liu, 2017; Wei, 2014). Since 1949, the socialist construction of Chinese national identity resulted in unity of the Chinese national identity, Chinese citizenship, and recognition of a new regime (X.-d. Liu, 2017; Wei, 2014). While Chinese nationalistic discourse used to be centred around class struggles by promoting the masculine proletarians, the nationalistic discourse after the 1980s has increasingly favoured middle-class, heteronormative, and gender-normative Chinese as shown in queer reading of China's National Ceremony (Y. C. Zhang, 2016). Therefore, Chinese national identity is not different from other national identities in terms of being under constant construction and maintenance (Cairns & Carlson, 2016; Yuval-Davis, 2011).

Taiwanese identity is defined by its relationship with the Chinese national identity, whether it is included in the latter or not. Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the Nationalist Party, emphasised the importance of unifying people under one national identity to fight against the imperialistic invasions and to protect the integrity of China's territory, which implied Taiwan was at the frontline of this fight because of Japanese occupation of Taiwan at that time (Hughes, 2013; G. Zhao, 2006). After the Chinese Civil War, the Nationalist Party ended up retreating to Taiwan after its military failure, starting the 39-year-long confrontation across the Taiwan Strait (Chu & Lin, 2001; Hughes, 2013; X.-d. Liu, 2017; Wei, 2014). Prior to Taiwan's democratisation movement in 1990, two authoritarian governments, led respectively by the Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), treated Taiwanese identity as Chinese local identity while disputing the Chinese identity's linkage with the CCP-led People's Republic of China (PRC) or Republic of China under the Nationalist Party (Chu & Lin, 2001; Hughes, 2013; X.-d. Liu, 2017; Wei, 2014). After democratisation ended the Nationalist Party's dictatorship, the emphasis of nationalism shifted to the development of a peaceful relationship between Taiwan and Mainland China as well as a local Taiwanese identity (Chu & Lin, 2001; Hughes, 2013; X.-d. Liu, 2017). The former is welcomed by CCP authority while the latter is rejected by them as a threat to the Chinese nation (X.-d. Liu, 2017; Wei, 2014). Recently, a coexistence of the two has transpired as a new Taiwanese/Chinese identity or, more precisely speaking, a double identification as survey results show that more than 40.0 % of Taiwanese residents identified both with being a member of the Chinese nationality as well as being Taiwanese with their historical, political, and cultural uniqueness (X.-d. Liu, 2017; K. Chen, 2012; Wei, 2014). The Mainland China authority has changed its careful attempts from constructing a non-Taiwanese identity belonging to Chinese ethnicity to facilitating the Taiwanese/Chinese double

identification in the promotion of a united Chinese national identity in the face of the sensitive geo-political issues between Mainland China and Taiwan (K. Chen, 2012; Wei, 2014); however, its disapproval of a fully independent Taiwanese identity is still salient (X.-d. Liu, 2017).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides academic and theoretical support for my research about the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation since 2017. Specifically, this chapter considers key writings around gender and sexual identities and of same-sex marriage and its legal status in globalisation from a social constructionist point of view. Identities, desires, and social norms are taken as socially constructed instead of naturally determined in the context of this study, yet I agree with most communication scholars on the independent objectiveness of the natural world (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). In addition, the queer critical reflections about the influence of globalisation are included in this chapter.

This chapter contains six major sections. The first section presents the core theoretical lens of this chapter and of this thesis—queer theory. It begins by introducing the queer theoretical deconstruction of gender as well as sexual identity and its critical viewpoint on heteronormativity, mainly based on Butler's (1990, 1993, 1997) theoretical works of critics. Works of radical feminists, such as Rich (1983) and Nagel (1998), are also included to capture manifestations of heteronormativity in cultural and political arenas. This section ends with Yep's (2014) call for research with a queer theoretical lens in the communication discipline. The second section then explores the development of LGBT and queer identities in the globalised world. Chronologically, it shows LGBT's and queer identities' transition from sexual perverts to sexual citizens, first in the Western Global North and, then, in the rest of the world.

The focus then moves to East Asia and its regional changes under the influence of globalisation. The influence of the primarily American-based Gay Liberation Movement on the present global LGBT movement is acknowledged. The key historical as well as theoretical perspectives employed in this section are the construction of homosexual identity in the modern discourse of the West (Foucault & Hurley, 1990) and sexual citizenship (D. Evans, 1993; Richardson, 2000). The LGBT and queer identities are examined in their interplays with the national identity as indicated by my research context. The second section ends with a discussion about LGBT and queer identity development in the Chinese cultural region, including Mainland China. The third section of this chapter shifts the focus to same-sex marriage and its legalisation within the broader conceptual background of marriage, love, and of human rights in the era of globalisation. It contains an introduction about the development of love-based marriage as well, mainly based on the historical findings of Coontz (2005). This section also offers an analysis of the American approach in the legalisation of same-sex marriage through the civil rights frame of same-sex marriage. This constitutionally based frame of same-sex marriage was proposed by juristic scholars, including Perkins and Silverstein (1973) as well as Hohengarten (1994), based on the equal protection of rights. Its introduction is followed by a brief critique from the viewpoints borrowed from Binnie (2004) and Altman and Symons (2016) about the disparity in right protection in terms of global recognition of same-sex relationships. At the end of this section about marriage, an analysis based on past studies is presented to probe love and marriage in modern Chinese society as well as the possibility of future same-sex marriage legalisation in Mainland China. The fourth section talks about Chinese public spheres on social media and the public online representations of LGBT and queer identities as well as of related topics, particularly in the social media public sphere discussions, with the

focus on the Mainland Chinese scenario. The next section introduced the theocratical framework. The last section offers a conclusion for this literature review chapter, highlighting the research gaps addressed by my research.

Queer Theory and Heteronormativity

The early adaption of the previously abashing term “queer” to signify subversive strength held by people under multilayered oppressions was found in Moraga’s (1982) and Anzaldúa’s (1987) statements about the experience of working-class women from ethnic minorities outside of the dominating American ideals centred around middle-class Caucasian males. They also expressed their activist concern over the impact of globalisation in the developing world. In the context of globalisation, nonheteronormative identities in different national contexts have varied implications (Binnie, 2004). Later, the term “queer” proposed by Lauretis (1991) noted the need for a term to cover lesbian and gay identities as well as other identities within these two sociocultural communities without the medical indication carried by the previously used “homosexual” since homosexuality had received social acceptance to a certain extent in America by then. Butler (1990, 1993) is disapproving of restricting identity categories that tend to bury power relations under essentiality as well but called “the totalisation performed by identity categories a necessary error” (Butler, 1993, p. 240) when it comes to activism. Butler (1993) opens the queer identity category to people from different ethnic communities who find or do not find the “more institutionalised and reformist politics sometimes signified by ‘lesbian and gay’” (Butler, 1993, p. 238) frustrating. It was proposed to confront the homogeny of norms centred arounds heterosexuality as well as the tendency to further categorisation being enforced upon the nonnormative groups as well as lives (Lauretis, 1991). So, the concept of queer theory came to be.

Queer theory is not about ready-made propositions but offers a social constructionist approach in a postmodernist context to interrogate identities, gender and sexual identities in particular, and social norms in relation to them (Warner, 1993; Wilchins, 2004; Yep, 2008). Queer theorists, such as Butler (1990), Lauretis (1991), and Sedgwick (1990), continued the social constructionist traditions to focus on the meaning-making of the social world and on the role of language in the meaning-making process, which is achieved via communication (Littlejoh & Foss, 2009). They examined norms derived from predetermined identities, such as gender and sexual identities as well as national and ethnic identities, by placing them more toward the social end of the social–natural spectrum. According to Lauretis (1991), “‘Queer Theory’ conveys a double emphasis on the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production, and on the necessary critical work of deconstructing or on discourses and their constructed silences” (p. iv). Moreover, queer theory seeks to unite academic efforts on areas outside of normative gender and sexual domains to challenge normalisation and pathologisation of the nonnormative (Butler, 1990; Lauretis, 1991). It is a theoretical lens, not a propositional given.

This section has three parts. The first one begins with an introduction about Butler’s (1990) view regarding gender/sex identity being socially constructed and performative in the historical context. The next one introduces the heterosexual matrix proposed by Butler (1990) and, lastly, an analysis about heteronormativity and its manifestations in the state institutions is offered in last one.

The Performativity of Gender Identities

Butler (1990) argued the distinction of sex and gender as socially constructed and historic by critiquing and rejecting the mind–body or gender–sex dualism that leads

to the distinction between biological sex and sociocultural gender rather than viewing gender as sex's sociocultural expression. Butler (1990) stated in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* that sex is gendered to serve gender asymmetry, which, in turn, supports the naturalisation of sex. Butler further explained that "gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture, a political neutral surface *on which* culture acts" (p. 7; emphasis in the original). In the absence of the naturalised sex, an individual is only identifiable once they are gendered (Butler, 1990). Being gendered is a necessity, at least in the Western context (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). With globalisation, this Western-style gender binary has proliferated into non-Western lands together with the identity categories based on sexuality and biological sex (Binnie, 2004).

Furthermore, gender now is not the sociocultural expression of some essentialised biological features; it is an identity category socially produced and reinforced by discursive power over the body (Butler, 1993). One cannot choose whether to perform or what to perform in terms of gender identities the way they choose their outfits as Butler's (1990, 1993) nonvoluntary view on performativity indicates. For instance, gender policing of female bodies is not alien in Chinese cultural communities as well (J. Zhang, 1999). Butler wrote: "Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being" (p. 33).

Performativity of identity, although proposed through an analysis of genders, is not unique to gender studies (Butler, 1990, 1993). Identities of various categories can also be found as performative. Through the performative approach, identities no longer represent either the inner unchangeable essentialities of social categories nor

replaceable customs that can be put on or taken off at will (Butler, 1993). By viewing identities as performative, a researcher can depict identities with complexity in dynamics without limitations from normativity (Butler, 1993; Kuus, 2007).

Butler's Heterosexual Matrix

The materialisation of bodies does not stop at sexing/gendering them but continues to sexualise or, more precisely speaking, heterosexualise them into normative manners (Butler, 1990, 1993). Drawing on earlier notions of “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1983, p.632) and “heterosexual social contract” (Wittig, 1992, p.XVI), Butler proposed the heterosexual matrix:

I use the term heterosexual matrix ... to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalised ... a hegemonic discursive/epistemological model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (Butler, 1990, p. 151)

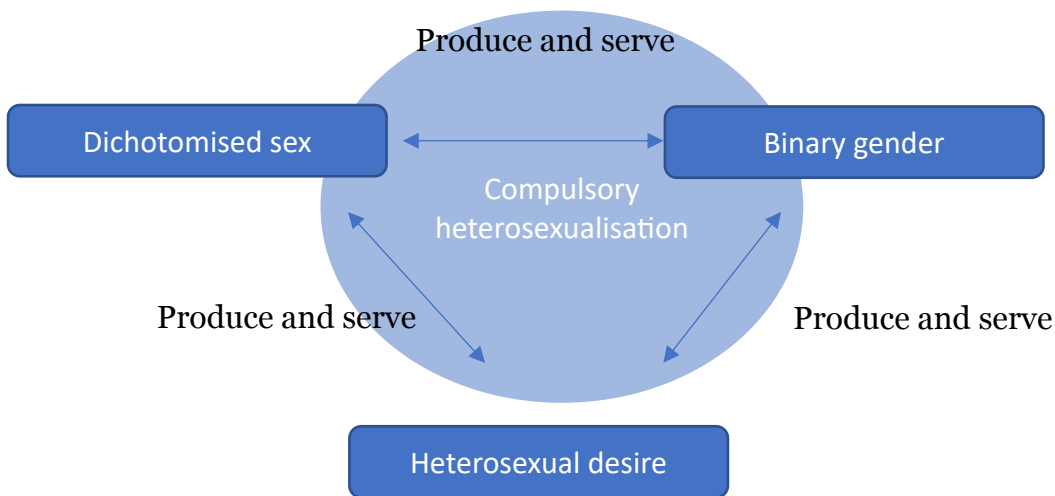
The heterosexual matrix naturalises binary sexes/genders and heterosexuality as norms while othering those that do not fit into it completely (Butler, 1990). Social media can offer a momentary space to disrupt Butler’s heterosexual matrix in its users’ conscious representation of gender in ways where the coherence of gender, sex, and desire are questioned and rejected, as found in Cook and Hasmath’s (2014) content analysis of posts on a Facebook feminist activist group page. Bodies, genders, and sexual desires out of this matrix are dehumanised, unrecognised, and prohibited in cultural, economic, and sociopolitical institutions by performative activities of the individuals and the state (Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997). Marriage acts as the legal

instrument for the state power to issue licence of recognised bodies and desires within the heterosexual matrix when only heterosexual couples are allowed to legally marry (Zylan, 2011).

As illustrated in Figure 1 on the next page, the heterosexual matrix forcefully interlinks sex/gender—as Butler (1990) suggested that sex and gender are two categories merged into one another—and sexual identities (Butler, 1990, 1993), constructing and naturalising gender asymmetry and heteronormativity. Genders are performed according to the needs for heterosexuality as a hegemonic norm, which replicates itself by reproduction of gendered heterosexual bodies in both symbolic and material ways (Butler, 1997). The matrix is observed cross-culturally. For instance, the Japanese male identity is built upon the desire for, and rejection of, the opposite female gender as well as prohibition of homosexual conducts (Ueno & Wang, 2015). The analysis of the heterosexual matrix in Chinese cultural settings is still lacking, yet queer theory is about denaturalisation and deconstruction of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1993).

Figure 1

Heterosexual Matrix and Compulsory Heterosexualisation



Introducing and Unpacking Heteronormativity in Representation

Heteronormativity denotes the unquestionable universality and hegemony of heterosexual human experience based on binary genders in queer theory (Castro Varela et al., 2016; Yep, 2002). Within the heteronormative discourse, heterosexuality is normalised as the only default standard for all, which creates a social culture where only the heterosexual identity is considered “natural”, and, thus, it escaped examination as well as deconstruction (Nielsen et al., 2000; Yep, 2014) until feminist theorists, such as Rich (1983), came to disclose it as compulsory, constructed, and constantly maintained. Contrary to the static view that heterosexual identity is transhistorical and essential, Western history witnessed almost a century-long process where heterosexuals subverted the immoral implication of heterosexuality being sinful when it was not involved with procreation until unprocreational heterosexuality successfully gained justification via love, romance, and marriage (Katz, 2007). Not all heterosexuals are equally happy and fairly rewarded for their heterosexuality. Rich (1983) revealed heterosexuality as

institutionalised subordination of women to heavily policed performance of binary genders by compulsory heterosexualisation. The compulsory heterosexualisation operates to remove nonheterosexual alternatives of performativity of gender and sexual identities for individuals, especially for women (Butler, 1990; Rich, 1983). Heterosexual identity adhering to the heterosexual matrix is established during the compulsory heterosexualisation with its borders being repetitively and carefully policed (Butler, 1990). Genders have to be performed accordingly to naturalise the unnatural social construction of heteronormative gender performances that rationalise gender asymmetry (Butler, 1990).

The violence of heteronormativity is pervasive and cross-cultural. Yep (2014) stated that “heteronormativity is violent and harmful to a range of people across the spectrum of sexualities” (p. 48) and to people of binary and nonbinary gender identities. Its harm is manifested in different ways and to various extents (Castro Varela et al., 2016; Nielsen et al., 2000; Yep, 2014). It eliminates the possibility of what one’s body can perform in order to reiterate heteronormativity in its self-presentations, communication, and other actions (Butler, 1993). It stigmatises the sexual identities performed by the nonheterosexuals through discursive as well as institutionalised discriminations (Butler, 1990; Castro Varela et al., 2016; Yep, 2002). It ostracises those who do not fit within its borders, announcing them as foreign (Bleys, 1996), psychically ill (Shi & Ye, 2015; Kong, 2016), mentally abnormal (M. Yu & Wang, 2015), or the Other (Foucault & Hurley, 1990).

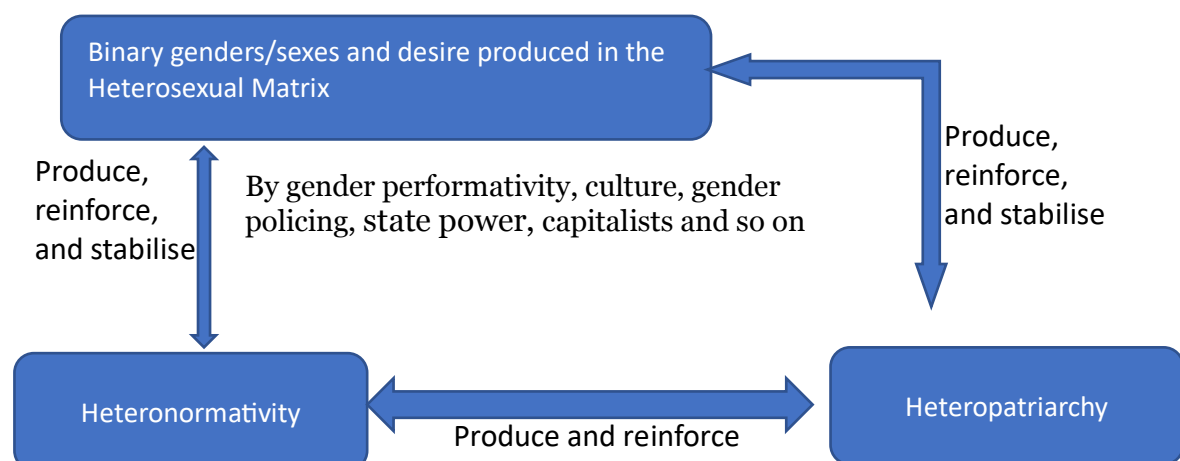
The queer theoretical lens reveals heteronormative representations and how such representations harm marginal communities and lives, which justifies the inclusion of the queer theoretical lens in communication studies to analyse and to reduce the discursive power of heteronormativity as it is conveyed and represented (Yep, 2008, 2014, 2017). Gendered representations of humans within the asymmetrical power

distribution have been naturalised, at least in mainstream Western culture; Zarzechna et al. (2020) found in their psychiatric study that people cognitively tend to place the male gender in the powerful position at the top of the hierarchy and to place the female gender at the bottom. Heteronormativity is founded upon the sufferings of those who are not heteronormative by their refusal of compulsory heterosexualisation and upon the submission of the less privileged gender in its gender dichotomy (Butler, 1990; Nagel, 1998; Rich, 1983).

The Heteropatriarchal Nation State. Heteronormativity manifests itself in heteropatriarchy, which is “an overarching system of male dominance through the institution of compulsory heterosexuality” (Yep, 2014, p.31). The state is designated as the implementer and maintainer of heteropatriarchy at a national level (Nagel, 1998). The procreation of the nation’s next generation is crucial in any nationalist project that strongly emphasises the biological (patri-)lineage to develop the nation by procreative heterosexual intercourse within social norms (Nagel, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Figure 2 shows the connection between heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy, which is rooted in the gendered heterosexual desire produced by Butler’s (1990) heterosexual matrix.

Figure 2

Heteronormativity and Heteropatriarchy



Family founded upon marriage functions as a vessel to maintain a nation as a heteropatriarchy. The state has created a nation as “a natural extension of family and kinship relations” (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 12) via compulsory heterosexualisation disguised as natural, essential, and distinctive to the national identity. The ideal family is promoted by the state as a model unit (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; Coontz, 2005). The modern Western nation states have confirmed the heteronormative (and, thus, procreative) nuclear family as the national norm for family organisation (Baba, 2011; Coontz, 2005). In non-Western nation states, the promotion of this nuclear family in nationalist projects was often included in their Westernisation or modernisation processes (Baba, 2011). The married couples in the nuclear families are often portrayed as liberal, civil, and modernised citizens of the nation state and as fundamental to its independence and continuance (Baba, 2011; 515; Jin et al., 2006). The national family projects have harmed women who fitted into the promoted models as well as the foreign Others around the world (see, for example, A. Smith (2015) about the American case; Baba (2011) about the Turkish context; Lyons (2004) about Singaporeans; and Jin et al. (2006) about Mainland China). More about marriage in Chinese society is introduced in section Marriage, Marriage Equality, and Love.

The nonheterosexuals and the nongender binary are faced with the silencing force of heteropatriarchy. Butler (2009a) argued that the nation state’s power produces a subject—physically, discursively, and maternally—through social norms, their repetition, and the interactions between obligation and desire. LGBT individuals are alienated, medicalised, and sometimes criminalised by their nation state’s active maintenance of heteropatriarchy (Altman & Symons, 2016). Force is often used in the name of the state law. For instance, X. Guo (2007) pointed out that homosexuality was still considered an offence by law enforcement in Mainland China in the 1990s.

While the “national” is marked as the moral heterosexual good, the modern, and the civilised, the “foreign” is represented as the immoral homosexual evil, the ancient, and the barbaric, waiting to undergo the process of modernisation or in another word, Westernisation (Bleys, 1996; Mungello, 2012). The need for Westernisation of sexuality in China was proposed by Western scholars as well as native Chinese reformers who accepted their heteronormative views about gender and sexuality and advocated restrictions of nonheteronormative performativity, actions, and expressions in the early 20th century (T.-L Sang, 2003; G. Song, 2004). More about the struggles against heteronormativity in Chinese and other non-Western contexts is introduced in the following section.

Global Overview of LGBT Identity

This section provides a global overview of homosexuality identity from the period of the Enlightenment to the new millennium across Western and non-Western societies. It draws on Butler’s notion of the heterosexual matrix and identity performativity as well as sexual citizenship (D. Evans, 1993; Richardson, 2000). These theoretical concepts are incorporated with historical analysis as well as critiques from Foucault and Hurley (1990), Katz (2007), and Louis-Georges (2012) to establish the global context of heterosexual identity against which my thesis, with its focus on representations of same-sex marriage, is situated. This section begins with an introduction of the transition from sexual perversion to sexual citizenship for the nonheterosexuals, especially the homosexuals, in the Western context. Then, an introduction about how these Western categories of gender and sexuality influenced the non-Western world is offered in the next section, followed by a focused analysis of the developments of modern Chinese LGBT and queer identities.

From Sexual Perverts to Sexual Citizens: A Western Viewpoint about Sexual Identities

How individuals experience themselves sexually—that is, their sexuality—was not always associated with established identity categories (Bleys, 1996; Foucault & Hurley, 1990). Prior to the Enlightenment era, homosexual conduct, such as sodomy, had been morally condemned in Europe by Christianity (Bleys, 1996). The development of capitalism fuelled urbanisation out of a need for free wage labour, which resulted in clusters of new city residents whose sexualities were liberated from feudalistic constraints, first in industrial centres in 17th century Europe, then to cities in America and the rest of world (Jagose, 1996; Katz, 2007). The independence from church and extended families gave individuals, especially men, the opportunity to express their sexuality, regardless of previous religious doctrines and feudal homosocial bonds (Jagose, 1996; Katz, 2007; Louis-Georges, 2012). Meanwhile, modern discourse centred around sexual conducts developed in the city-dwelling bourgeois under the influence of the Catholic Church in 17th century Europe (Foucault & Hurley, 1990). Since the Enlightenment, scientific knowledge has empowered modern pathologisation and medicalisation of human sexuality (Foucault & Hurley, 1990).

It was scientific knowledge about sexual practices of the healthy and of the pervert that gained power after the Enlightenment (Foucault & Hurley, 1990). Historians traced the invention of the terms “heterosexual” and “homosexual” back to the late 19th century when the medical scientists named people who had morbid attractions to members of the same or the opposite sex compared to procreation-oriented Victorian sexual norms (Katz, 2007; Louis-Georges, 2012). Katz (2007) pointed out that early definitions in the late 19th century of the labels “heterosexual” and

“homosexual” described a deviant perversion associated with pathology and nonprocreational desires. In Foucault’s analysis of historical discourses of sexuality, the definition of the homosexual as an identity was the oppressive product of the psychiatric knowledge that linked homosexuality to one’s innate nature and gendered self (Foucault & Hurley, 1990). Foucault wrote this scientific invention of the homosexual identity as: “with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology ... the homosexual was now a species” (Foucault & Hurley, 1990, p. 43). Other forms of sexual experiences and presentation of gender, such as masturbation, female experiences of painful intercourse, and cross-dressing, all of which diverged from the procreative dichotomically gendered ideal, were also listed by Foucault and Hurley (1990) to demonstrate “the strategy ... to strew reality with them and incorporate them into the individual” (p. 44). Gradually, heterosexuality overthrew the religious and pathological accusations of permissiveness within the medical community in the 20th century because of the public’s acceptance of heterosexuality as the dominant cultural norm; the increasing destigmatisation of sexual pleasure, including female sexual pleasure; the emerging needs for fertility in the world’s major economies after World War II; and, more importantly, the intelligibility between child-rearing and sexual conduct between a man and a woman (Katz, 2007; Louis-Georges, 2012). Butler’s (1990) heterosexual matrix, where binarised gender has to be interlinked with heterosexual desires, was fully normalised, celebrated, and institutionalised. On the other hand, the homosexual remained a pathological and criminal identity category, and a deviant, nonprocreational, immoral sexual perversion in post-World War II Europe and America (Jagose, 1996; Katz, 2007; Louis-Georges, 2012; Wilchins, 2004). For historians, such as Katz (2007) and Louis-Georges (2012), the line between sexual identities in and out of normality in the modern Western context has been drawn on the involvement with homosexuality or

with heterosexuality instead of on the practice of procreational or nonprocreational sexual activities.

In response to the pathologisation of homosexuality, gay and lesbian communities in Britain and the United States started to self-identify with the homosexual identity and to negotiate their homosexual identity with the mainstream by the end of the 19th century (Jagose, 1996; White, 2009). For instance, in the main courthouse in London in 1895, the famous author, Oscar Wilde, made his apology to defend homosexuality as a form of noble love (Linder, 2007). From the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, homophile organisations in major American cities attempted to persuade the heterosexual mainstream to accept homosexuals as a minority with abnormalities (Wilchins, 2004). No matter if it was given or self-identified, the Euro-American homosexual identity was largely restricted to the medical or psychiatric discourse before the Stonewall Riots (also called the Stonewall Uprising) where LGBT persons united in their political pursuit for civil rights and confronted the police in 1969, New York (Jagose, 1996; Wilchins, 2004).

Prior to the Stonewall Riots, the major attention for gay and lesbian activism was the acquirement of social tolerance of nonheterosexual conducts by the promotion of harmless and sympathetic homosexuals as well as their sexual activities (Richardson, 2000; White, 2009). The deviants, once named by others and deemed intelligible for their identities performed outside of the heterosexual matrix, began to actively seek public voices and political impacts to claim the right for subversive identity performativity against heteronormativity (Butler, 1990, 1993 ; Rimmerman, 2015). Soon after the Stonewall Riots of 1969, the Gay Liberation Front issued an agenda that linked the oppression suffered by other marginalised groups, including women, ethnic minorities, and members of the working class, to the oppression suffered by homosexual people, which signified a more active subversion against the state-

promoted ideal for sexual citizenship in the United States than before (D. Evans, 1993).

As the works by Foucault and Hurley (1990), Katz (2007), and Louis-Georges (2012) show, the early development of homosexual identity was predominantly about the status of homosexuality in the medical and psychological fields. However, under the influence of social constructionist views about gender and sexuality, the focus moved to what D. Evans (1993) called sexual citizenship, which refers to the citizens' duties and rights in relation to the state when they conduct their sexual intimacies in a modern capitalist state. Sexual citizenship can be traced back to the feminist critiques about how public policies had functioned against the interest and safety of women since the late 20th century when feminists questioned the exclusion of people whose profiles fell out of the category of the dominant group in the public sphere presence as well as the discriminatory policies inflicted upon those people (Josephson, 2016; Richardson, 2000). Sexual citizenship, analysed politically, involves legal rights and duties as well as other forms of state policies that are either based on sexual activities or gender expressions, or have impacts on them (D. Evans, 1993; Josephson, 2016; Mackie, 2017; Thomas, 2017). Yet, D. Evans (1993), with a critical view of developed capitalist economies, proposed that good sexual citizens were active consumers and willing free labour, unaffected by their sexual identities, in post-World War II capitalist societies with pronounced consumerism.

The concept of sexual citizenship was rooted in the liberal democratic Euro-American context (Mackie, 2017) where citizenship became market driven, fluid, and disenfranchised with the physical territory in globalisation (Ong, 2005). Citizenship components are rested in what is valuable in free-market-driven globalisation, such as interest, resources, right claims, and discourses (Ong, 2005). In Asian settings, the notion of modern citizenship resulted in self-enterprising for people in some modern

nation states, but others were excluded from basic human rights in market-driven globalisation (Ong, 2005), and the LGBT and queer or nonheteronormative persons often suffered from such exclusions (Monro, 2020). Monro (2020) questioned the universality of the Euro-American-centred sexual citizenship standards in the Global South where the cultural, social, and economic context is vastly different.

In practice, sexual citizenship demonstrates the sexual and gender norms within the public policies enforced by the state power that usually favours males over females, heterosexuals over nonheterosexuals, and the majority over the minority (D. Evans, 1993; Josephson, 2016; Richardson, 2000). Feminist, queer, and LGBT-activist scholars used the notion of sexual citizenship to reveal the inequality in laws, regulations, and public policies and to build their discourse about sexual rights (Josephson, 2016; Richardson, 2000). Richardson (2000) summarised three aspects of the discourse: the conduct-based, identity-based, and relationship-based claims of sexual rights. The Stonewall Riots marked a shift of attention in LGBT activism to the pursuit for identity-based claims for equal rights that were unfulfilled by their sexual citizenship (Richardson, 2000). Kuhar et al. (2018) analysed policies related to the trans population in previously socialist countries in Europe and found that the heteronormative masculine model for citizenship obstructed the fulfilment of citizenship rights for trans people.

With critical viewpoints from D. Evans's (1993) analysis, some gay liberationists also joined the political Left and claimed to free people from all forms of oppressions (Jagose, 1996; Warner, 1993), forming the progressive stream of the LGBT movement, which has influenced the queer theoretical standpoint to criticise heteronormativity in various racial and class contexts (Anzaldúa, 1987; Lauretis, 1991). On the other hand, efforts have also been made to incorporate activities and relationships within the LGBT population into public policies to gain state

recognition for equal rights and political as well as economic status compared to the mainstream, state-protected sexual citizens, marking the assimilationist stream of the LGBT movement (Richardson, 2000; Rimmerman, 2015). The campaign for marriage equality and same-sex marriage can largely be seen as derived from the assimilationist stream where legal access to marriage is extended to same-sex couples through their realisation of civil rights (Rimmerman, 2015). The relations between marriage equality, civil rights, and same-sex marriage legalisation will be further introduced in the coming section.

From the paragraphs above, developments in modernity and sexual identity categorisation are closely linked. Homosexual identity, later joined with other nonnormative sexual identities, has undergone a transformation from a pathological perversion to an autonomous sexual citizenship in the Western liberalist discourse while the consumeristic feature of modern capitalism became distinct. The American-led LGBT movement in the Global North has led to the liberationist and assimilationist streams for equal right protection (Rimmerman, 2015). Meanwhile, Western ideas about sexual and gender identities have greatly influenced non-Western countries and regions in their modernisation process in globalisation.

Globalisation of Sexual Identities and LGBT rights

The Western binarised categorisation of sexualities and sexual identities has been globalised into a sociocultural context outside of Europe and America, creating similarities and disparities in terms of sexual rights and practices for people from different geographical regions (Altman & Symons, 2016; Binnie, 2004). Coupled with the capitalistic demand for the continuous reproduction of workers and consumers, globalisation, led by Euro-American nations, has facilitated the propagation of the otherisation and pathologisation of the nonheterosexual and gender nonnormative (Altman & Symons, 2016; Bleys, 1996). Before the Gay Liberation Movement had its

international impact, the exotic Others with their queerness or homosexuality were often viewed by Westerners as evil barbarians or aesthetic ideals as suggested by historical and anthropological findings (Bleys, 1996; Mungello, 2012).

The European colonialists had taken the heteronormative dichotomy about gender and sexual identities to the rest of the world since the 18th century (Binnie, 2004; Bleys, 1996; Mungello, 2012). Bleys 's (1996) analysis of European commentators' reports about their cross-cultural encounters with foreign male–male sexual intimacy concluded with the construction of “otherness” by European cultural and sexual standards in Asian, African, and Oceanian indigenous communities. Mungello (2012) investigated accounts of Western men who had been oppressed for their desire for men and fled to imperial China in the late 19th century and found the absence of homophobia and cultural stigmas about male–male sexual intimacies. Since the Middle Ages, Europeans came to view these locals, such as ancient Arabic and feudal Japanese, as overtly barbaric people (Bleys, 1996). Leupp's (1995) study of historical accounts of premodern Japanese homosexuality among sixteenth- to eighteenth-century urban residents also disclosed a lack of punishment and social stigmatisation for not only homosexuality but also other nonprocreational forms of sexualities. The globalisation of sexuality has encouraged the moral prohibition of nonprocreational sexualities, which later narrowed down to homosexuality, to non-Western cultures till this day when conservative Christian values regarding heterosexuality over other forms of sexuality have been localised by their merging with the patriarchal and sometimes patriotic values and practices (Altman & Symons, 2016; Binnie, 2004; Leupp, 1995; P.-R. Liao, 2020; Louie & Low, 2003). For instance, both Japanese and Chinese ideals for masculinity abandoned their softness and Confucian influence by transforming into warriors with science on their minds and weapons in their hands in the face of colonialist threats (Louie & Low, 2003). In

the Westernisation process, nonprocreational sexual activities were frowned upon in China and Japan (Louie & Low, 2003), and homosexual conduct became unnatural, losing its aesthetic appeal (Sang, 2003). These cases in non-Western contexts show the heterosexual matrix and its subjected identities as social constructs of specific cultures, geographical locations, and times in history (Butler, 1990).

Besides the depreciation of non-Western deviants in sexuality, the appreciation for the non-Western as both a sexual and geographical Other developed after the Enlightenment as well. Said's (2003) work on modern orientalism presented the imagination of the non-Western cultural contexts, which were represented didactically as being free of the sexual repressions noted in Foucault and Hurley's (1990) criticism about Western development of scientific knowledge about sexuality. The Orientalist lens over sexual and gender performativity of oriental subjects as the Other has constructed a hierarchy where the Euro-American identity is more mature and developed than other citizenship identities whose performative actions and expressions are considered childish and underdeveloped (Butler, 2009b). The homogenic heterosexual identity has continued to produce and torture oriental subjects by attaching the homosexual practices to them and, by doing so, to effeminate and depower them, following the hieratical binaries between the Western/Eastern, masculine/feminine, and heterosexual/homosexual (Butler, 2009b). Alahmed (2020), in a critical analysis of local news stories about Arab Spring in Egypt where anti-government protests against former president, Mubarak, and his corrupted regime spread from the capital city, Cairo, to nationwide in 2011, found that because of the beliefs about the Western world being superior and its trajectory of development as universal, local struggles have been represented in the linear evolutionary narrative towards what is defined by the Global North as the uncivilised Orient with little agency given to common citizens. Orientalist representations can be

also self-produced in the online world for gains in the global market as a Japan-based case study showed (Miyake, 2023). Ranji (2021) and Alahmed (2020) warned against the Orientalist binary between the Oriental/Occidental, Western/non-Western, and democratic/nondemocratic for the construction of Euro-American superiority in the field of media studies. The reduced and simplified picture of China in such a binary was found in a content analysis of media reports about COVID-19 (Zhang & Xu, 2020).

China, in its imperial times, was pictured as a utopia without persecutions from religious or medical discourse towards homosexuality (Mungello, 2012). As Chinese scholars G. Song (2004), Y.-h. Li (1998), and Chou (2000) noticed, unlike Europe, androgynous and homosexual behaviours were tolerated in feudal China and the regions under Chinese cultural influence. Chou (2000, 2001) valued the traditional Confucian low profiling of topics of sexuality within familial communication and, thus, suggested a subtle “coming-home” model for homosexual identity negotiation in Chinese cultural settings.

The concept of sexual citizenship and its interpretations of sexual rights has had a transnational impact beyond the Euro-American region since the 1970s (Altman & Symons, 2016; Binnie, 2004; Mackie, 2017). Mackie (2017) conducted case studies in South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Australia to explore sexual citizenship in the Asia-Pacific and found that the legal challenges were only a small part of the concerns for local LGBT rights and women’s rights. The Euro-American focus on same-sex marriage legalisation might not be applicable to other contexts where both “sexuality” and “citizenship” were perceived and implemented differently in the struggle for equal rights in the Asia-Pacific region (Mackie, 2017). Mackie (2017) noticed the role of the Internet and social media in the information exchanges and relationship bonding for an alternative sexual citizenship among young people in the

LGBT communities and the pressing need for media visibility of nonheterosexuals, the gender nonbinary, and other forms of nonnormative activities.

The disparity in the LGBT rights protection was highlighted in the comparative analysis done by Altman and Symons (2016) with their statement that the national policies involved with LGBT rights, especially sodomy law and same-sex marriage, had become symbolic for showing a nation's affiliation and disaffiliation with certain liberal values promoted by Euro-American governments on the international stage. Case studies found that same-sex marriage legalisation had signalled a nation's level of advancement in human rights and, thus, promoted homonationalism (Jungar & Peltonen, 2017; Mackie, 2017). This view of measuring a nation's development in terms of LGBT rights protection was pinned as the "developmental narrative of lesbian and gay rights" (p.73) where a Euro-American or Western-centric lens was applied to non-Western contexts (Binnie, 2004). Homonationalism cooperation with the developmental narrative of lesbian and gay rights led to an Orientalist and xenophobic view of the cultural Other (Jungar & Peltonen, 2017). In Sabsay's (2012) analysis of the diplomatic policies in America and Europe, the risks in universalising the Western model of sexual citizenship included sexualisation of the cultural Other's citizenship, selective inclusion, and the creation of political homophobia on the international stage. Further, Sabsay (2012) pointed out the Orientalist logic in the presumption of a homophobic Other waiting to be civilised or excluded at the border to a country or at the door to metropolitan queer spaces at home, while sexual citizenship in the United States was removed from its context to an abstract concept in the LGBT movement's global pursuit for equal human rights. Similar to the Orientalist representations of the local in political events (Alahmed, 2020), state policies in the West have disregarded the local nonheteronormative person's agencies as well as their cultures by simply preaching the Western approach to sexual

citizenship, incorporating the struggle against local homogenic heteronormativity into becoming a Westernised sexual citizen. Such a strategy has caused setbacks as public policies often oppress LGBT rights to pronounce a disconnection with the Western ideology in countries such as those that were previously socialist (Kuhar et al., 2018).

Binnie (2004), a queer critic, noted that since the 21st century, LGBT and queer identities have been conveyed cross-culturally in the globalisation process, which has raised issues of new hierarchies based on racial and national identities in relation to nonheteronormativity. The largely worldwide adherence to Western gender and sexual norms laid the foundation for LGBT and, later, queer identities to be acknowledged first in English-speaking countries, then in other developed countries and regions, and, finally, in developing countries (Binnie, 2004). However, the proliferation of gay liberationist LGBT identities was not a lengthy or perfectly coherent process (Binnie, 2004; Jagose, 1996). Hybrid identities representing local homosexual and transgender/sexual community members were created to better fit into the local settings (Binnie, 2004), such as Chinese Tongzhi, which will be discussed in the following part in this section in more detail.

Chinese LGBT and Queer Identity Development

This part will focus on the development of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities in Chinese cultural settings, which include Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China. I support the view on minority sexual orientations and gender identifications as identities showing one's belongingness to more than one cultural group (Eadie, 2015). Although some scholars began to discuss LGBT and queer individuals in Chinese culture as identities in the 1990s, nonheterosexual orientations and gender nonconfirmative conduct have been a relatively taboo topic

(Chou, 2001). Many articles written on Chinese LGBT and queer persons still treat these identities in the heteronormative medical and psychiatric discourses (Shi & Ye, 2015; Kong, 2016) by probing the bio-/neurological differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals to: locate the cause of the hypersexual nature of homosexuality (Han & Wu, 2017); bio-testing the abnormal hormone of homosexual participants as compared to their heterosexual and, therefore, normal counterparts (M. Yu & Wang, 2015); investigate childhood abnormality in psychological development to explain later homosexuality in adolescence (X. Wang & Wen, 2002); and a combination of the above (Shen, 2015). Medical studies published by the Chinese Association of Radiology Conference and the Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology have fuller explorations of the medical and psychiatric aspects of this research tradition. Also, most literature centres on gay men or LGBT and queer cultures in Hong Kong while fewer studies consider other groups or Chinese Mainlanders.

It is important to consider the historical and cultural backgrounds when investigating how LGBT and queer identities came into being in the Chinese cultural context as both of them were highlighted by Butler (1990) for global subversion against heteronormativity. Although traditional Chinese culture in imperial times used to take a rather tolerant attitude towards nonheterosexual conduct (Chou, 2001; Y.-H. Li, 1998; C. Wu, 2004), it only did so if sexual conduct in general did not conflict with Confucian patrilineage by which heteronormativity was supported and reinforced (Fei et al., 1992; C. Wu, 2004). Homosociality and same-sex intimacy between males was not viewed as a threat to heterosexual marriages because it could not distract marriages' prioritised function for procreation (Y.-h. Li, 1998; Chou, 2000). Public sanctions were enforced in modern times, as discussed previously, where Y.-h. Li (1998) and L.-f. Chen (2011), respectively, reported that homosexual

conduct was publicly viewed as sexual misconduct and punished in the 1980s and 1990s in both Mainland China and Taiwan. Overall, queer and nonheterosexual identities would have been impossible to form under the strong oppression of Confucianism, political persecution, and gender inequality until the 1980s (Cao & Lu, 2014; Sang, 2003). Cao and Lu (2014) stated in their field study on Mainland China's gay activists that development of globalisation and the movement against AIDS had made it possible for sexual minorities to gain a certain degree of visibility in public.

To be visible, LGBT and queer groups created local identities with some references to Western identity labels for self-representation (Cao & Lu, 2014; Engebretsen, 2014; A. D. Wong, 2008). Some homosexual males, such as piaopiao (meaning 'wandering man' in English) in Chengdu (Wei, 2007), continued the local identities in places where homosexuality was better tolerated. Others adopted the cosmopolitan label "gay" without translation or took other hybrid identity tags as the former tongxinglian (homosexual) label became unpopular for its clinical associations. For lesbians, the oppression of being silenced and invisible was heavier, especially for the control over females' nonmarital sexual behaviours and the tradition to overlook female sexuality (Engebretsen, 2014; Sang, 2003). The heterosexist official negligence towards lesbians continued into the new millennium, as reported by Engebretsen's (2014) ethnographical study on Beijing lesbian communities. Lala, which is the repetition of the first Chinese character in the Chinese translation of lesbian, gained popularity with urban lesbians as an alternative to imported terms, "les" or "lesbian" (Engebretsen, 2014; Hildebrandt & Chua, 2017; Sang, 2003). Compared to homosexual identities, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities are less often studied in Chinese cultural settings because bisexuals and transgenders are less visible, and awareness of queer identities was not raised until the 2000s (Kong, 2016). Studies on transgender and queer identities often provide queer reading of

visual or written materials (Chiang & Wong, 2016; He, 2014; C.Y. Zhang, 2017) since there is a lack of visibility of well-constructed nonheterosexual or gender nonbinary identities in real life. These identities are under reconstruction from the residue left by highly sexist and heterosexist policies during the Maoist era (He, 2014).

As mentioned above, the various identity vocabularies could not unify the LGBT and queer groups under a shared identity. Inspired by the Western gay rights movement, Tongzhi (literally meaning “comrade” and “the same interest”) became an identity shared by LGBT and queer persons, first in Hong Kong and then in other Chinese countries and regions, in the 1990s (Chou, 2001; A. D.Wong, 2008). During the 1980s and 1990s, homosexuality was viewed as a bio-medical model with a strong clinical, etiologic focus, which tended to stigmatise and pathologise homosexual and bisexual individuals (Kong, 2016). The Mainland Chinese government accepted this model and regulated homosexual conduct by state force until 1997 (Kong, 2016; Y.-h. Li, 1998). Thus, local activists in Hong Kong and Mainland China promoted equal rights for their communities by advocating Tongzhi as a universal nonheterosexual and, later, gender nonconfirmative identity to avoid the pathological and stigmatising identities in local cultures and foreign identities imported from the unfamiliar Western culture (Bao, 2012; Chou, 2001; D. Wong, 2011). Tongzhi, originally representing the revolutionary comrades who led China’s political modernisation, literally means the same interests and was subverted by LGBT and queer discourse to announce their unconventional gender and sexual identities as well as shared vision for equality and well-being (Bao, 2012; Cao & Lu, 2014; Chou, 2011). Bao (2012) found Tongzhi was more often used by unmarried youngsters than the married older generation of gay men during his field study in Shanghai. However, the popularity of Tongzhi as an identity with its underlying essentialist implication often stirs up controversy when a more glocal lens is used to compare it with other self-

identification labels (Lau et al., 2017; Wei, 2007; A. D. Wong 2008; D. Wong, 2011). Survey data analysis has indicated that attempts to replace homosexual for Tongzhi would not increase the public's acceptance for nonheterosexual identities (Lau et.al., 2017). Bao (2012) detected the depoliticisation of the Tongzhi identity while A. D. Wong (2008) reported—after in-depth interviews—that the political undertone of Tongzhi led to reluctance in identification among nonactivists.

It is apparent in this section that LGBT and queer identities are fragmented, hybrid, and fluid in most Chinese cultural contexts. One can employ several identities in the same or different places in time and space (Bao, 2012; Wei, 2007). On the other hand, Chinese LGBT and queer identities have not escaped the influence of normativity like their heterosexual gender-normative counterparts. A commercialised, depoliticised, English-speaking, well-educated, gender-normative middle class is normalised as the standard accepted content of homosexual or Tongzhi identity, which forms a Chinese homonormativity (Luo, 2016). Thus, homonormativity of the Tongzhi identity in Mainland China has produced good homosexual citizens who eagerly participate in the commercial economy instead of political movements (Binnie, 2004; D. Evans, 1993; Luo, 2016).

Marriage, Marriage Equality, and Love

Prior to the rise of modern nation states, the alternative recognitions for relations and even family arrangements based on same-sex intimacy were found in historical evidence (Benemann, 2006; Bleys, 1996; Coontz, 2005). However, the struggle for same-sex marriage legalisation did not begin until the late 20th century after the Stonewall Riots in 1969 when the claim for equal sexual citizenship produced the activist pursuit for equality in relationship-based rights, as mentioned in the previous section (D. Evans, 1993; Richardson, 2000; Rimmerman, 2015). Works of juristic scholars, like Hohengarten (1994) and Perkins and Silverstein (1973), is included in

this section, followed by queer critiques from Binnie (2004) and Altman and Symons (2016) about the global disparity in relationship-based right protection for same-sex couples. The analysis of the implications of same-sex marriage by Butler (2002) and Yep et al. (2003) are mentioned in this section as well as comparative cross-cultural studies about same-sex marriage by Kuo and Chen (2017) and D. T.-S. Tang et al. (2020). This section provides an understanding of love-based marriage and the legal framework for same-sex marriage legalisation, which offers contextual support for this thesis. This section continues with the global perspective in the previous sections. It begins with same-sex relationship recognition in globalisation, introducing the American approach in the legalisation of same-sex marriage through the civil-right frame of same-sex marriage, before moving onto love and marriage in modern Chinese society with the possibility of same-sex marriage legalisation.

The State Recognition for Same-Sex Relationships in the Global LGBT Movement

As the AIDS pandemic forced same-sex couples and the LGBT community into contacts with the public service, particularly medical institutions, relationship-based claims of rights in sexual citizenship were issued by activists and other members within the LGBT community in major American cities, seeking legal recognition for same-sex relationships to receive insurance, welfare, and the right to care for their partners (Richardson, 2000; Rimmerman, 2015). Against this backdrop of the heteronormative nation state, many countries have grappled with societal pressure to modernise the institution of marriage to include same-sex couples. The proponents of same-sex marriage legalisation mainly came from the assimilationist stream of the LGBT movement, stressing marriage equality—their equal right to marry just like their heterosexual counterparts (Rimmerman, 2015; Yep et al., 2003). Social media campaigns for marriage equality in the United States followed the assimilationist

approach in the LGBT movement by portraying same-sex relationships as being love based, just like ideal opposite-sex relationships, yet denied the right to enter marriage (R. Gibson, 2018). Yep et al. (2003) were concerned that diversities within the LGBT and queer communities would be harmed by the normalisation of same-sex marriage as a homogenic practice, while Butler (2002) considered same-sex marriage as a milestone to detach marriage from the heterosexual, patrilineal kinship.

Winter (2018) claimed that “same-sex marriage has become a major twenty-first century social and political cause, central to debates over equality, citizenship and the democratic rights and the representation of minorities” (p. vii), linking same-sex marriage legalisation to the development of liberal democracies. In Europe and the United States, this link between same-sex marriage or recognition for same-sex relationships and the partisan liberal or neoliberal values has been well established (Hamilton, 2018; Kollman, 2016). Meanwhile, same-sex marriage legalisation has not become a popular and well-supported public demand in countries with less of a liberal political tradition in non-Western contexts (Winter, 2018) as, for example, South Korea with its feudal past and the strong influence of the Catholic Church (Wondong et al., 2019). The framework used in the United States and other Western democracies for same-sex marriage legalisation will be analysed in the coming part in this section.

The Civil-right Frame of Same-Sex Marriage: the American and Western Approaches. The promotion for rights based on sexual citizenship led to the theoretical proposal of same-sex marriage as the next step to the disruption of traditional gendered family roles (Hunter, 1991). However, for liberal juristic scholars, such as Hohengarten (1994), the civil-right or rights frame for same-sex marriage was pronounced in the debate of whether the state should legalise or prohibit same-sex marriage during and after the decade-long *Baehr versus Lewi* case,

where same-sex couples appealed to the court for their equal constitutional right to marry in Hawaii, United States, in 1990 (Goldberg-Hiller, 2002; Hull, 2001). The claim that same-sex couples should be given equal rights to enter marriage was promoted online and offline during a series of legal cases between same-sex couples and American states (R. Gibson, 2018; Hull, 2001). The early formation of a civil-right framing of same-sex marriage was traced back to Perkins and Silverstein's (1973) argument, where they said: "the stringent requirements of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment argue strongly for removal of this stigma by granting marriage licenses to homosexual couples who satisfy reasonable and non-discriminatory qualifications" (p. 589). The next year, Weitzman (1974) proposed a civil contract that could offer some of the legal right of marriage to couples of all genders, which resembled a prototype for civil unions. As the LGBT movement developed in the United States, the prohibition of same-sex marriage was called out as discriminative on the basis of differences in sexual orientation (Sunstein, 1994). Hohengarten (1994) highlighted the need for equal rights to marry based on the constitutional right of privacy against state interventions. In 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled for the legalisation of same-sex marriage based on the equal fundamental right to marry that is protected by the Constitution, which proved the adoption of the civil-right frame of same-sex marriage that was successful in achieving marriage equality for the proponents in the United States (Gerstmann, 2017).

The civil-right frame of same-sex marriage has, to some extent, freed marriage from heteronormative assumptions enforced by the state and challenged the discursive power of heteronormativity (Goldberg-Hiller, 2002; Zylan, 2011). Butler (2002) viewed it as a separation between marriage and kinship by the accomplishment of "symbolic recognition' for dyadic relations by the state" (p. 16)

without the emphasis on procreational rights. Goldberg-Hiller (2002) confirmed earlier advocacy by Hunter (1994), Sunstein (1994), and Hohengarten (1994) for legalisation of same-sex marriage in order to prevent the state's intrusion into privacy and to discontinue the use of state power to maintain male supremacy by its exclusive recognition of legal marriage to heterosexual couples who performed normative gender identities. The state's role as a facilitator of heteronormativity was criticised for its discrimination against women in the legal institution of marriage with sexist assumptions as well as practices (Hohengarten, 1994; Sunstein, 1994; Weitzman, 1974). Nonheteronormative people and their romantic relationships were not able to have equality in the courtroom under the heteropatriarchal power of the state, and neither were other nonmainstream relationships during that era, such as interracial marriage in the United States in the 1960s (Hohengarten, 1994; Weitzman, 1974; Zylan, 2011). However, same-sex legalisation accelerated the process for assimilation of then former sexual dissents into the mainstream in a capitalist society, forging a superior homonormativity where same-sex couples could mimic their opposite-sex counterparts (or an ideal based on the heterosexual family) in every possible way (R. Gibson, 2018; Rimmerman, 2015). Such an assimilation into the ready-made marriage institution ran the risk of producing sexual citizens as merely labourers and consumers within their households by a reconstruction of the private sphere, which would damage the alliance with other activist groups made in the Gay Liberation Movement (D. Evans, 1993).

Applicability of the Civil-Right Frame of Same-Sex Marriage. Since American activists' campaign for marriage equality gained political attention in the 1990s, the civil-right frame of same-sex marriage has proliferated outside of the United States, especially in Western democracies (Binnie, 2004; Kollman, 2016; Winter, 2018). Globally speaking, differences in the countries' legal systems, geo-

political environments, and local cultures have created obstacles in the promotion of equal access to legal marriage (Hamilton, 2018; Winter, 2018). Similar demands emerged in Europe for same-sex marriage legalisation out of the necessity to realise the equal human right to marry (Hamilton, 2018). With the globalisation of the LGBT movement, the right to marry has become a basic human right that can be realised by the legalisation of same-sex marriage (Melehi, 2014). However, localisation is needed. In East Asia, Confucian familial values have strengthened the symbolic significance of same-sex relationship recognition in the extended family and the larger community, from which the configuration of rationales for current and future promotion of marriage equality should follow a different approach from the Euro-American case (Tang et al., 2020).

Some studies have begun to consider the juristic aspects of the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. For example, a comparison study showed that the Taiwanese court followed a similar judicial approach to recognise same-sex relationships by the protection of the equal rights of citizens to enter legal marriage, regardless of gender and sexual orientations (Kuo & Chen, 2017). The proponents for same-sex marriage legalisation in Taiwan advocated for the civil-right framework for same-sex marriage, more in terms of marriage equality than for LGBT rights, which helped same-sex marriage legalisation appeal to the wider public on social media (R. Gibson, 2018). However, the civil-right frame of same-sex marriage cannot guarantee same-sex marriage to be legalised or accepted, and it is not globally applicable. Jeffreys and Wang (2018) compared the political systems in Taiwan and Mainland China and concluded that the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was a victory of social activism in a young democracy, and the possibility of same-sex relationship recognition would be a government-orientated act for Mainland China.

The civil-right framework's reliance on the equal constitutional right for all overshadowed other grassroots voices promoting marriage equality based on tolerance (Hull, 2001).

The Construction of Modern Marriage and Love in China

In most parts of the world, marriage prior to the eighteenth century was for the production of material wealth and of the next generation rather than for personal fulfilment and sexual satisfaction (Coontz, 2005). Like most places in the world, marriage in China supports and is supported by heteronormativity that ritualises, moralises, and naturalises procreational, gender-asymmetrical, heterosexual relations (Fei et al., 1992; Hildebrandt, 2018; Ye, 2017; A. Zhou, 2004). The institution of marriage dates back to 400 BC with a well-documented Confucian statement in *Li Ji*, or *the Book of Rites*, saying that the purpose of marriage is to bond two families, to secure the services in the ancestral temple, and to secure the continuance of the family line (T. Yang, 2004). Coontz (2005) found that marriage used to be an institution where one family shared resources with another to gain practical benefits and heirs to their traditions, possessions, and titles. Fei et al. (1992) documented the practical needs to marry the opposite sex and produce male heirs of the land to sustain the patrilineal family economically and lineally in the premodern agricultural society, similar to the productive and procreative functions for premodern marriages in Europe (Coontz, 2005). Romantic love and sexual satisfaction between spouses were simultaneously welcomed as a trivial yet pleasurable addition instead of a must-have precondition in one's family life in China (Ebrey, 1993; Fei et al., 1992), just like in European countries (Coontz, 2005). The emphasis on marriage's procreative function has been sustained in contemporary China by Confucian values of filial duty as the gatekeeper for morality, which is

argued by anthropologists to be pervasive and internalised across different gender and age groups (Hildebrandt, 2018; Schneider, 2014; G. Song, 2004; Yan, 2011).

Although fluid gender expressions and representations were not frowned upon in premodern times, they were a privilege exclusive to the males, homosocial context while females were subjected to misogyny and restricted to the matrimonial functions of housework, caretaking, and procreation once they became wives (G. Song, 2004; T. Yang, 2004). Marriage was to produce an obedient wife through a set of ceremonies to serve their husband's patrilineal family (T. Yang, 2004). Marriage is still a gender asymmetrical construction where the male is given more power over the female (Y. Chen, 2009; Schneider, 2014; Young, 2005). The historically inherent gender asymmetry in marriage has attracted a considerable number of gay males to enter heterosexual marriage (K. Tang & Zhan, 2016) and has weakened gay men's interest in the legislation of same-sex marriage out of fear of losing their male privileges—including the production of heirs to continue the family line—in family life (Wei, 2010). Y. Chen (2009) observed and interviewed lesbians about their relationship and marital statuses. She concluded that marriage's deep-rooted heteronormativity is not compatible with lesbian relationships in China unless the gender binary is dismissed as its precondition.

Urban youth in China have been preaching free-chosen, love-based marriage since the idea was imported to China early in the 20th century. The Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution facilitated urbanisation and aspired individualism among young people, causing their demand for free choice of marital partners (Coontz, 2005). The Victorians put emphasis on love and fidelity between spouses, yet sexuality was suppressed for both males and females (Coontz, 2005). When the younger generation escaped their parents' control and Victorian gender roles, they began to value their sexuality in a romantic relationship, stressing worldly love,

fidelity, and companionship between spouses as necessities for a good marriage (Coontz, 2005). The West proliferated such romantic ideals to the rest of the world (Binnie, 2004; Coontz, 2005).

In the early 20th century, the word for romantic love was introduced to the modern Chinese language by the educated elite (Coontz, 2005). Stories featuring young love birds who fled their parental control for the pursuit of freedom in love were popular in Chinese cities, and the independent, monogamous, romantic, free-chosen, and love-based marital ideal was desired by young people who were eager to embrace Western civilisation (Lee, 2006; Lin, 2007). Marriage or state-recognised heterosexual romantic relationships trumped traditional familial ones and were becoming the prime relationship where companionship, sex, and intimacy ought to be fulfilled in the minds of Chinese metropolitans (Lee, 2006; Schneider, 2014; Yan, 2011), similar to their counterparts in North America and Europe (Coontz, 2005). Along with this ideal from the West, the rejection of homosociality and fear of homosexuality were introduced to the Chinese elite in the name of (pseudo-)science in the globalisation of homophobia (Binnie, 2004; Sang, 2003). Sexual relationships now became linked to not only personal romantic feelings but also the public institution of marriage, which had substantial influence on a nation's fate through its procreative and child-rearing functions (Coontz, 2005; Lee, 2006; Sang, 2003). The importance of one's sexuality was raised to the height of survival of the Chinese nation in the Republic era by intellectuals as well as the state, oppressing both females' and males' desire for same-sex bonding (sexually or emotionally) out of the concern that such bonds were destructive to the prime status of procreational heterosexual love in marriage (Sang, 2003; Tan, 2011; Chou, 2000).

However, this new trend was limited to the city elites only and did not affect the traditional and more practical base for marriage that was practised according to

Confucianism in the rural areas (Lee, 2006). After the end of the Civil War in Mainland China, economic difficulties and political unrest led most people to marry for practical reasons and convenience (Lee, 2006; Schneider, 2014), although the freedom of heterosexual marriage and women's access to most workplaces and gender equality were enforced by the Mainland Chinese authority under its radical Communist ideology during the 1950s to the 1970s (Schneider, 2014; Jin et al., 2006). The radical sociopolitical movements in the 1950s that motivated women to join the workforce and public affairs in Mainland China eradicated the chance for Coontz's (2005) male-breadwinner/female-homemaker model where the husband's contribution was financial support and social status and the wives offered housework, emotional, and moral support to the family, to have an absolute mainstream presence (Schneider, 2014; Jin et al., 2006). Gender norms that used to confine women to the households were diminished in the new Maoist China (Jin et al., 2006). During the 1950s to the 1970s, women were encouraged to be not men's Other but their equal, while the old logic existed to infer that the masculine is preferred—even by women—for its superiority (G. Song, 2004; Jin et al., 2006). The importance of procreational heterosexuality was stressed by the Mainland Chinese regime as essential for the state's prosperity and the nation's survival to produce enough healthy babies while nonprocreational homosexuality (especially male homosexuality) was forbidden (Engebretsen et al., 2015). Homosexual behaviour between males was punished by the state for their connection with the morally corrupt West during the Cold War and pathologised by the then widely accepted medical science (Y.-h. Li, 1998; Sang, 2003).

Romantic love began to shatter the practical emphasis on procreation in marriage in the 1980s when the People's Republic of China (PRC) embraced globalisation (Schneider, 2014). Romantic attractions and sexual appeal have subsequently become

increasingly important factors for people to make marital decisions as the results of content analysis about TV dating programmes showed (P. Wang, 2017), yet this has not yet become of prime importance among other more practical factors, such as income and social status (Schneider, 2014). Among the younger generations in urban areas, romantic love is the priority for dating that can lead to marriage, and most of those who were born in the 1990s were expected to be the first generation of Chinese to basically marry for love (Schneider, 2014). The romantic marital ideal regained its position and was represented with privacy of marital life, binary gender roles, as well as the sexualisation of marriage (Schneider, 2014). Women were appreciated for their differences from men and were expected to be at the lower rank in the gender hierarchy (Engebretsen, 2014) while the masculine female worker image became outdated (Jin et al., 2006).

The law makers in contemporary China, after the Reform and Opening-up policy in the 1980s, reflected the heteropatriarchy in juristic publications and amendments of the law while promoting love's role in a marriage. Marriage based on heteronormative gender roles has been constructed as exclusively heterosexual, monogamous, and procreational by the Matrimonial Law since 1950 when it was implemented (X. Guo, 2007; Young, 2005; A. Zhou, 2004). After analysing the content of marital laws and regulations, X. Guo (2007) pointed out that the legal construction of marriage overlooks queer and nonheterosexual relationships by restricting citizens' identities to binary genders and their relationships to heterosexual monogamy. A. Zhou (2004) further stated that the legal preconditions for marriage included gender/sex identity and the possibility for procreation. The heteropatriarchal position of marriage as the legal site to produce the next generation of gendered members of the nation is clearly reflected in the Matrimonial Law clauses in contemporary Mainland China (Nagel, 1998). The role of mutual feelings of the

people involved in a marriage gained legal importance as well. The 1980 amendment of the Matrimonial Law allowed the broken emotional connection as the rightful precondition for divorce, positioning the individual marital decision as a human right (A. Zhou, 2004). Nonetheless, the subject of the law is presumed to be exclusively heterosexual, resulting in the heterosexual partners' inevitable failure to divorce their partners based on differences in sexual identities (X. Guo, 2007). In addition, marriage, as a legal construction, is established in an obligational discourse that emphasises the citizens' duties in their intimate relationships if their relationships were to be recognised and protected by and within state institutions (D. Evans, 1993; X. Guo, 2007; Hildebrandt, 2018; Yuan, 2018). In the Chinese Mainland's Matrimonial Law, the two people involved have to perform caretaking, procreative, and educational functions, all heavily influenced by its Confucian cultural context (X. Guo, 2007; Hildebrandt, 2018; Yuan, 2018). These expected familial functions of legal marriages in law make it difficult to include same-sex couples in marriages. Yuan (2018) compared the lawful support of same-sex marriage in the United States in 2008 and the Chinese Mainland in 2018 and concluded that the Chinese Mainland will not legalise same-sex marriage if it remains largely in the obligational discourse.

Besides the heteronormative obligational discourse in the legal clauses about marriage, the emphasis on the family-building function in kinship over loved-based sexual intimacy was found to be widely accepted in Chinese cultural regions (D. T.-S. Tang et al., 2020). Marriage was not sexualised in China as much as it was in America and Europe since sexual attractiveness and romantic feelings ranked below practical needs and Confucian requirements (Schneider, 2014). The heterosexual romantic ideals where marriage surpasses all other relationships as found in the Western context (Coontz, 2005) did not have a chance to be fully established. In rural, traditional areas, heterosexual public displays of intimacy gave way to

homosociality (Fei et al., 1992), similar to the situation in European societies during the Middle Ages when sexual relationships were ranked under loyalty to one's family and other feudalist ties (Louis-Georges, 2012). D. T.-S. Tang et al.'s (2020) comparative study on queer views of same-sex relationship recognition found that participants from Chinese cultural backgrounds were more eager to have the procreational rights and equal rights in adoption via same-sex marriage legalisation compared to their Japanese counterparts. The Chinese participants also stressed the need for acquiring acceptance and respect within their extended familial kinship circles via the legal recognition of same-sex relationships (D. T.-S. et al., 2020), which disproved Butler's (2002) assumption of same-sex marriage as a separation from kinship. A more suitable approach to legalising same-sex marriages in the Chinese cultural context should be the emphasis on marriage as an institution to form new families and to extend kinship circles (Jeffreys & Wang, 2018). The next section continues with the focus on the Chinese context through an introduction to the public online representations of LGBT and queer identities as well as of related topics.

Public Spheres of Chinese Social Media and Representation of LGBT Identities and Queer Topics Online

Since the diffusion of information technology, the Internet has offered ways for communication that are more interactive than traditional mass media (Dahlgren, 2005). The social networking sites and other types of social media have fostered active user groups who engage in discussions on public issues and express public opinions, constructing online public spheres at local to global levels and covering partisan and nonpartisan opinions (Dahlgren, 2005; Kozinets, 2015). The popular use of social media as a communication channel also offered opportunities for LGBT and queer persons and activists to seek visibility, to voice their concerns, and to form alliances, regardless of cultural challenges, state censorship, and geographical

barriers, although there are pitfalls on their way to better online representation (Bao, 2018; Cao & Lu, 2014; Engebretsen et al., 2015). The two parts of this section offer a brief analysis of the social media space as a public sphere online in Mainland China and of Chinese LGBT and queer online representations to establish the context for this research. The first one outlines social media as a developing public sphere in Mainland China, however limited it seems, and the next one notes how LGBT and queer identities are represented on Chinese social media.

Online Public Spheres on Chinese Social Media

Chinese social media forms a virtual space for users to express their opinions about certain social issues and to form views or discourses different from the official ones (Chang et al., 2018; S. Liao, 2019; X. Liu, 2021). Social media has become a vital venue for public opinion expressions, forming valuable bottom-up, public spheres that offer information as well as expressions of views from the people's standpoints (F. Yang, 2022). Weibo, due to its technical function to share multimedia content timely and to publicly list popular hashtags, has become a major platform for a public sphere online in Mainland China (F. Yang, 2022). The official news outlet was usually challenged by Weibo users during crises and disasters (Shan & Tang, 2021; X. Wu & Montgomery, 2019).

Mainland China's public spheres do not fit into the traditional Habermasian public sphere or Mouffe's (1999) model of an agonistic, deliberative public sphere. The goal for the traditional Habermasian public sphere is to form public opinions to influence the decision-making process of a depersonalised state by rational means (Habermas, 1989). C. Wang and Bates' (2008) analysis noted that Chinese social media was more of a communication channel where a Habermasian-style public sphere could slowly form over time and eventually accelerate the development of democracy in China, largely because of widely proliferated negative sentiments

towards authority as they assumed. However, Sunstein (2017) argued that the commercial nature of social media platforms would not facilitate rational opinion exchanges to establish a public space to facilitate democracy even in United States, regardless of the absence of strict state restrictions. The profit-driven algorithms have led to individuals' exposure to increasingly unbalanced and, sometimes, even extremist content in their social media (mis)information streams (D. Anderson, 2021; Clark, 2023; Sunstein, 2017). Misinformation, including fake news, refers to incorrect information poorly supported by evidence—if there is any evidence (D. Anderson, 2021; O'Connor & Weatherall, 2019). For analysts, including Clark (2023), O'Connor and Weatherall (2019), and D. Anderson (2021), the objectivity of truthful information sets it apart from misinformation, showing that it is in the “weak social construction camp” (p. 4) with most communication scholars (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). With a critical revisit to Foucauldian concepts of truth, knowledge, and power, D. Anderson (2021) argued that online debates about controversies rely on semantic meanings of certain terms, reflecting the disagreements among various discourses over the power to claim the truth over how people should perceive the controversial issues, such as gender and race, and the political struggles with misinformation to voice the real truth—that is, the truth for the oppressed against power's oppression. In other words, multiple “truths” about key concepts in controversies are usually presented as objective and factual, even with a lack of truthful evidence (D. Anderson, 2021). Misinformation produced and protected by power has been used to harm democracy by the spread of extremist ideologies (D. Anderson, 2021; Clark, 2023) and to mislead users with pseudo-science for financial gains (Y. Li et al., 2022; O'Connor & Weatherall, 2019; W. Yu et al., 2022). A Chinese survey of young social media users found that the strength of arguments has been the most influential factor in the increased credibility of a Mainland China social media message, followed by

the freedom of expression of the platform, indicating the risk for strongly argued misinformation to be proliferated on social media (Jin et al., 2017). Most studies on social media misinformation have been about health or scientific topics, such as W. Yu et al.'s (2022) experiment regarding the made-up Weibo posts that established the positive factors of source reliability and formal tone in the misinformation correcting process. Y. Li et al. (2022) found the semantic features of health misinformation that distinguished it from real health information on WeChat by using statistical analysis. Misinformation on social media also generates false beliefs in the social sectors in Mainland China and Western nations alike. While investigations revealed the links between online participation in misinformation dissemination and offline participation in extremist groups in Europe, the United States, and New Zealand (Clark, 2023), studies on Chinese social media public sphere discussions about social controversies, such as capital punishment and same-sex marriage legalisation, has found that the dissemination and extreme nature of misinformation helps to form and amplify the opinions in adherence to the status quo (D-, 2021; Z. Liu, 2022). Z. Liu (2022) revealed how the judges' decisions about capital punishment was impacted by intolerant and misleading social media opinions that overly supported capital punishments in Mainland China, showing the real-world consequence of misinformation on social topics. Furthermore, Morozov (2011) stated the unrealistic promise of a neoliberal future for non-Western nations in their use of social media as a communication channel to propagate progressive social changes because of the users' tendency to offer the least amount of commitment for the satisfaction of personal image on social media.

In her deliberative democracy model, Mouffe (1999) proposed that the public sphere exists in agonistic pluralism where various social groups can voice their opinion in debates. The goal for debates in a pluralistic and often agonistic public

sphere is to regulate in terms of discursive power to sustain democracy (Mouffe, 1999). Y. Song et al. (2016) noticed that negative sentiments, such as distrust and discontent, tended to outweigh other more positive sentiments on Weibo in response to local public crises, indicating the online public sphere in the Chinese Mainland loosely reflects Mouffe's (1999) model in the role that passion played. However, positive emotions were found to be more pervasive yet less influential on Weibo (Y. Song et al., 2016). Other studies also confirm that the Weibo users responded with stronger expressions during stressful crises (M. Chan et al., 2012; S. Liao, 2019; X. Wu & Montgomery, 2019). The disproportionate impact of different kinds of emotions expressed in a social media discussion went against the need to have emotional expressions from different viewpoints to maintain balance in a deliberate public sphere.

For the previous two models which are the Habermasian model and the deliberative democracy model, the online public sphere is one united virtual space for debating a social topic. However, while the Internet facilitates flourishing online public spheres, fragmentation makes voices within one public sphere isolated from those of the others, and shared motivations are hard to form in cyberspace (Dahlgren, 2005; Shao & Wang, 2017). Dahlgren (2005) rejected the need for a single public sphere to unite all citizens under the same set of behavioural rules. He defined a functioning public sphere as “a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of information, ideas, debates—ideally in an unfettered manner—and the formation of political will (i.e., public opinion)” (p. 152). Dahlgren (2005) outlined three analytical dimensions for online public spheres: the structural, the representational, and the interactional. The structural dimension refers to the external environment or sociopolitical institutions related to online public spheres. The representational dimension deals with online media output generated by one-on-

one and one-on-many communicative behaviours as, for example, private messages and comments under a post. The interactional dimension, where communicative behaviours are usually mingled with those on the representational dimension, consists of two aspects: the individuals' encounter with media channels and interactions among individual users on a certain media platform (Dahlgren, 2005).

The Structural Dimension. Neo-authoritarianism is the leading feature to notice in the structure dimension if one is to depict the structural dimension of Chinese online public spheres on social media. Neo-authoritarianism was used by the Mainland Chinese authorities in modernisation to reduce major threats that can cause instabilities, after the Reform and Opening-up policy. Neo-authoritarianism was proposed as a transitional tool to democracy in the late 1980s by Chinese intellectuals and was later adopted by government authorities (Petracca & Xiong, 1990; Sautman, 1992). It features a coexistence of an interdependent free economy and a centralised political power (Petracca & Xiong, 1990; Sautman, 1992). Economic development is welcomed and accelerated as long as it poses no threat to the centralised state power (Petracca & Xiong, 1990; Sautman, 1992), which resulted in restrictions in Mainland China's offline public spheres where the top-down power obstructed the people's voices from being heard (F. Yang, 2022). Understanding neo-authoritarianism helps to recognise the seemingly double standards applied in Chinese Mainland government interventions when it comes to areas such as the online public sphere and public involvement.

According to CNNIC's (2009; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013) reports, named Chinese Internet Chronicle, the regulations enacted by the Chinese government have increased in terms of frequency and enforceability. Since 2007, censorship has become normalised and internalised by average Internet users (Damm, 2007). Apart

from a passive ban on sensitive phrases, the Mainland Chinese government actively engages on social media platforms by creating platforms and participating on BATS platforms to reinforce its power in the online discourse (Cunningham & Wasserstrom, 2012; Harwit, 2016; J. C. Zhang & Chen, 2015). Meanwhile, state monitoring of online public spheres has been enacted through legislation and administration in a similar way to how offline public spheres are controlled. Literature analysis and a case study showed that neo-authoritarian policies enforced on social media and the online space in general have a negative impact on online public spheres' development (C. Wang & Bates, 2008). F. Yang (2022) noticed that state policy has made popular social media content containing defamation illegal in Mainland China, thus markedly declining Weibo's public sphere and increasing its fragmentation since 2013; however, Weibo still acts as a primary online public sphere. Under the name of information defamation, the content that is perceived as threatening to the state is censored, and the content creators face legal prosecution, which discouraged opinion expression and exchange (F. Yang, 2022). Sina, the company that owns Weibo, has employed technical measures to obstruct, and reduce content creation and sharing on sensitive topics during sensitive times and from sensitive locations in response to state censorship (F. Yang, 2022), making it difficult for action-oriented online social communications to develop and have impact online and offline. On the other hand, misinformation, most of which is created for financial gain, like fake healthcare suggestions, is still present and has even spread under the strict policies (X. Liu, 2021; Z. Liu, 2022; W. Yu et al., 2022) because of its low threat to state power.

The Representational Dimension. The representational dimension is the media output (Dahlgren, 2005). It overlaps with the interaction dimension when content is created or publicised in the interactions, such as reposting and

commenting (Dahlgren, 2005). Dahlgren (2005) confirmed that investigation into the representational dimension allows researchers to focus on the study of media output which is a traditional terrain of communication studies covering topics such as diversity of opinions, agenda setting, and ideologies. Although Dahlgren (2005) placed more emphasis on the interactions in the civic discussions in a deliberative public sphere, this study mostly focuses on the representational dimension because the research question is about the meaning of concepts and opinions about them rather than about immediate civic actions grown out of an online discussion.

The influences of censorship and passion in the representational dimension of Mainland China's social media coexist. Without enabling conditions from the structural dimension, the representational dimension would be underdeveloped (Dahlgren, 2005). The censorship imposed by the CCP-led government over Chinese social media limits the range of topics allowed in online discussions (Damm, 2007). Many social media users therefore adopt self-censorship to avoid conflicts with the authorities in their communicative contents (Damm, 2007). The content often aspires to heuristic thinking, which is centred around the actual idea by textual cues to avoid triggering censorship, as Tai and Fu (2020) found in a statistical analysis of WeChat. This leaves less room in Sunstein's (2017) "daily me" (p. 1), a highly commercialised and customised social media feed, for the more critical content that requires systematic thinking to be created and shared on Mainland China's social media. Nonetheless, these limitations on what can be visible online cannot stop Mainland Chinese from forming public spheres on social media and making their voices heard (F. Yang, 2022). Various rhetorical and linguistic techniques are adopted by some to express dissenting positions in posted content (Rauchfleisch & Schäfer, 2014). For example, sarcasm was found to be conveyed via intentional semantical distortion of seemingly positive words, according to Rauchfleisch and

Schäfer (2014) in their case study on Weibo users' discussion about the disastrous Wenzhou high-speed railway incident. Variant word choices to avoid keyword-based censorship were found in the Weibo posts on sensitive topics, such as disaster aftermath (Rauchfleisch & Schäfer, 2014).

Passion has played a vital part in social media discussions in Mainland China. Y. Song et al. (2016) used machine-learning technology in combination with network analysis to study social media users' online expressions in China. They argued that the predominant emotional discussion lowered the effectiveness of a deliberative online public sphere. Bolsover (2016) compared comments under news stories on Facebook and Weibo and concluded the lack of rationality to reach a common consensus blocked the development of one shared Habermasian public sphere. Nonetheless, passions can be viewed as motivation for participation under Mouffe's (1999) deliberative democracy model. Negative emotions, such as anger and grief, were identified in Weibo users' discussion about crisis aftermath (Rauchfleisch & Schäfer, 2014). Another illustration for emotion as motivation is that the severity of perceived risks can be aroused by distrust in governmental actions, particularly in areas concerning equality, which could motivate users' public involvement online (Q. Huang, 2017). Besides dissenting emotions against authorities, emotions like strong nationalism and worship of the CCP reign's achievements exist in social media content generated by both official institutions and everyday users (Damm, 2007; Qin et al., 2017). This is especially so when it comes to sovereignty and Westernisation in politics as found in case studies on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island dispute and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong (Kou et al., 2017; Cairns & Carlson, 2016). In the case of the Umbrella Movement, Weibo users who mainly based in Mainland China were more patriotic than Facebook users and more often blamed the Western

influences in the Umbrella Movement, while presenting a much negative stand Kou et al., 2017). In the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island dispute, the negative sentiments on Weibo were expressed on a patriotic standpoint towards the government in Mainland China, after the detention of Chinese nationalists who tried to land on the disputed island and they were re-directed to offline xenophobic protests that were not targeted at the state institutions but at business and individuals (Cairns & Carlson, 2016). The study shows that censorship was used to manage and redirect the Weibo opinions from anti-governmental sentiments to anti-Japanese and anti-West sentiments (Cairns & Carlson, 2016).

The Interactional Dimension. The interactional dimension of online public spheres is about the users' encounters with media platforms and their interactions on them. In the case of Chinese social media, Weibo is the leading social media platform used to participate in online public spheres (S. Zhou & Lu, 2017; Stockmann & Luo, 2017). As mentioned at the beginning of this section, fragmented user networks form in public spheres online where one group of users' discussions is isolated from others' (Dahlgren, 2005). Fragmented groups on social media, although placing obstacles for the formation of influential public opinions, offer space and opportunities for subculture development and small group activists to gather, overcoming time and distance (H.-T. Chen et al., 2016; Harwit, 2016). Yet, Harwit (2016) found in a WeChat public account that the tendency to foster smaller clustered circles on social media tends to diminish the effectiveness of its users to participate in deliberative discussions. Thus, private social media platforms like WeChat were considered less effective in facilitating users' opinions of public issues (Y. Song et al., 2016). Although other platforms cannot be ignored (Stockmann & Luo, 2017), Weibo is considered to offer guidance for online public opinions in Mainland China because it is affordable and is able to form and circulate information, emotions, and opinions regarding

public issues (S. Zhou & Lu, 2017; X. Wu & Montgomery, 2019). As a more public social media platform, Weibo offers a more open space for opinions to flourish and be exchanged and shared on topics of public interest (X. Wu & Montgomery, 2019).

Chinese Social Media Representation of LGBT Identities and Queer Topics

The need to internationalise LGBT and queer research with awareness of the non-Western contexts was stressed in L. Chan's (2017) literature analysis. In Mainland China, identities outside of heteronormativity cannot easily reach the general public because of censorship within the representational dimension (S. Liao, 2019; Y. Yang, 2019). The struggle with censorship forced nonheteronormative activists in Mainland China to create an independent online space to share information and build community while seeking publicity and visibility (Bao, 2018; Cao & Lu, 2014; Engebretsen et al., 2015). Prior to the era of information technology, support line for Tongzhi via telephone service was established in major cities (Y.-h. Li, 1998). Independent website and social networking sites were opened to provide educational materials, especially after AIDS transmission caused major public concerns in Mainland China and offer a virtual platform for self-identification and in-group communication for members of the LGBT community (Bao, 2018; Cao & Lu, 2014; L. Ho, 2009). With the adaptation of social media among most Chinese Internet users since the first decade of the 21st century, organisations behind Tongzhi-specific websites began to post Tongzhi- or queer-themed content on more public social media platforms, such as Weibo (Shaw & Zhang, 2018). Social media's increasing popularity with relatively freer censorship attracted nonnormative content, which gave activists hope it could become a deliberative virtual space (Cao & Lu, 2014). Yet, the popular use of social media also facilitated xenophobic and homophobic expressions in in-group online discussions about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-

sex marriage among members of a homophobic group (X. Liu, 2021). The concern about same-sex marriage and other issues related to LGBT rights becoming a target of political homophobia (Altman & Symons, 2016) was proved in X. Liu's (2021) content analysis.

The representation of LGBT-related topics faced overcommercialisation, self-censorship, and misrepresentation as well as state censorship (L. Ho, 2009; Mountford, 2010). A critical analysis by L. Ho (2009) expressed concerns that commercialisation of social media would lead to the hyper-sexualisation of Chinese Tongzhi identity representation and, as a result, it would lose its connection to social activism by submitting to consumerist sexual citizenship in a booming market economy (D. Evans, 1993). The self-censorship as a reaction to state censorship also limited representation of LGBT identities and participation in discussions about LGBT-related topics online (J. Ho, 2010). The role of social media in communication with real-life acquaintances was found to be another obstruction for social media users to make online interactions in a LGBT-related discussion as, for example, about censorship over homosexual content (S. Liao, 2019). Meanwhile, misrepresentations still existed on the new media. The need for AIDS prevention has triggered the tolerance for gay-related health information to circulate publicly online (Cao & Lu 2014; Mountford, 2010), but such content could limit the online representation of same-sex relationships and people who were involved in them to a medical and even pathological discourse (T. Zheng, 2016), which was not distinctive from the prior representation on traditional media. The medicalisation and pathologisation of the homosexual identities were found as prominent in traditional media representation in Mainland China in Chang and Ren's (2017) content analysis of the state-sponsored *China Daily* newspaper.

Since social media users are mostly entertainment seekers (Flemming, 2017), the online arenas of queer popular culture and fan culture both resulted from the entertainment industry, thus constructing important aspects for representation of LGBT identities on Chinese social media. The popular cultural celebrity news did help to raise awareness of LGBT identities according to a study about celebrity gossip in identity negotiations (Shiau, 2014). The celebrities' public support for queer rights, such as marriage equality, raised public support (R. Gibson, 2018). However, Q. Wang (2015) commented that the activist side in the queer popularity phenomenon in Mainland China is nonconfrontational to the heteronormative thinking, state institutions, and entertaining for commercial profits in a market economy, blaming Mainland China's cultural industry for conveniently reducing queer performativity to performance for easy profit in celebrity fandoms. Celebrity advocates have limited impact in the Chinese fandom space (Li, 2012).

Popular culture, as a mass form of commercial entertainment, is globally consumed as well as circulated (Brooks, 2014; Danesi, 2018). Compared to popular culture, queer fan culture has become heavily commercialised or industrialised in Mainland China (Lavin et al., 2018). It was also highly commercialised in Thailand, showing queer fan culture being a global phenomenon (C. Y. Zhang & Dedman, 2021). A comparative study on the development and public environment of queer fandoms in Hongkong, Taiwan, and Mainland China found that harsher and unfriendly public policies could reduce their offline presence and drive Mainland Chinese fans online (Lavin et al., 2018). Queer fan culture consists of a range of online nonheteronormative narratives, which mostly stem from cultural works and celebrities (Lavin et al., 2018; Tian, 2020). Queer fan culture in Mainland China produces and consumes boys' love (BL) and girls' love (GL) romances featuring homosexual couples (Lavin et al., 2018; Tian, 2020). Recent studies have noted the

increasingly mainstreamed queer representations in the popular cultural and cocultural virtual spaces of Chinese-speaking countries and regions, especially in the heteropatriarchy of Mainland China (J. Zhao, 2020; S. Zhao & Ni, 2020). J. Zhao (2020) and S. Zhao and Ni (2020) argued that such representations have created virtual spaces for those who are marginalised based on their gender, sexual, and cultural identities against the heteronormative Chinese reality offline and as a space for possible queer activism organised via social media. Queer fandom participants contributed as allies in the online protest against the ban over homosexual content on Mainland China's social media (S. Liao, 2019). However, the BL culture that makes up a major part of queer fan culture was centred around idealised fictional romances of male homoeroticism, created by and for mostly heterosexual females (C.Y. Zhang, 2017; Y. Zhou et al., 2018). Projecting heterosexual desires to nonheterosexual people constitutes the female gaze and impressed J. Zhao (2020) and Zhang (2017). Such projections constructed a virtual place online for women to revolt against compulsory heterosexualisation via imaginations about queer alternative ways of life and love while satisfying their desire to gaze male bodies as sexual objects (Y. Xu & Yang, 2013; C.Y. Zhang, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this thesis contains three groups of theoretical concepts: queer theory, globalisation, and communication. As shown in Figure 3, concepts from queer theory have intersected with those from studies about globalisation. Queer theory's concept of performativity is connected with Orientalism in the global context, producing the Western-centric view on lesbian and gay right development called developmental narrative of lesbian and gay rights. The developmental narrative of lesbian and gay rights supports the progress of lesbian and gay rights as important in the universalised evolutionary trajectory based on the

Euro-American model. In the developmental narrative of lesbian and gay rights, local homosexual identities' challenges are reduced to the lack of development in Westernisation and their performative identity expressions; in addition, their representations are removed from the local context to fit into Western cosmopolitan stereotypes. Sexual citizenship is forged in the nation state's needs for free labour and for consumption in a market economy, flagging the national norms for gender/sexual performativity (D. Evans, 1993). In the global era, citizenship status includes how sexual citizens act in line with the needs for growth in the global market and for articulation of national identities (Butler, 2009a; Ong, 2005). The normative maintenance for identities performed in adherence to construct a national or collective image requires differences in action to distinguish "us" from the Other and, when enacted sexually, it increases the global disparity in citizenship rights for the sexually marginalised and gender Others. The Westernisation of sexual citizenship and its contents led the global LGBT Movement's emphasis on human rights and marriage equality, which includes the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage, even though local and global exclusions of citizenship rights based on gender, sexual, and racial differences operate in contestation between the Western and non-Western ideologies. This configuration of the global queer situation has shaped nonheteronormative identities to operate in conjunction with three identity intersections: gender identity, sexual identity, and national identity. The use of the term "national identity" instead of citizenship is an attempt to incorporate cultural and historical factors in the identity of a nation. The Chinese context highlights the two sides of neo-authoritarianism that requires an open market with political stability in response to the globalisation as discussed in the previous section about Chinese public spheres. Also, two-faced neo-authoritarianism enables nonheterosexuality to

be performed, acknowledged, communicated, and represented online and offline in Mainland China yet also silences and depoliticises it.

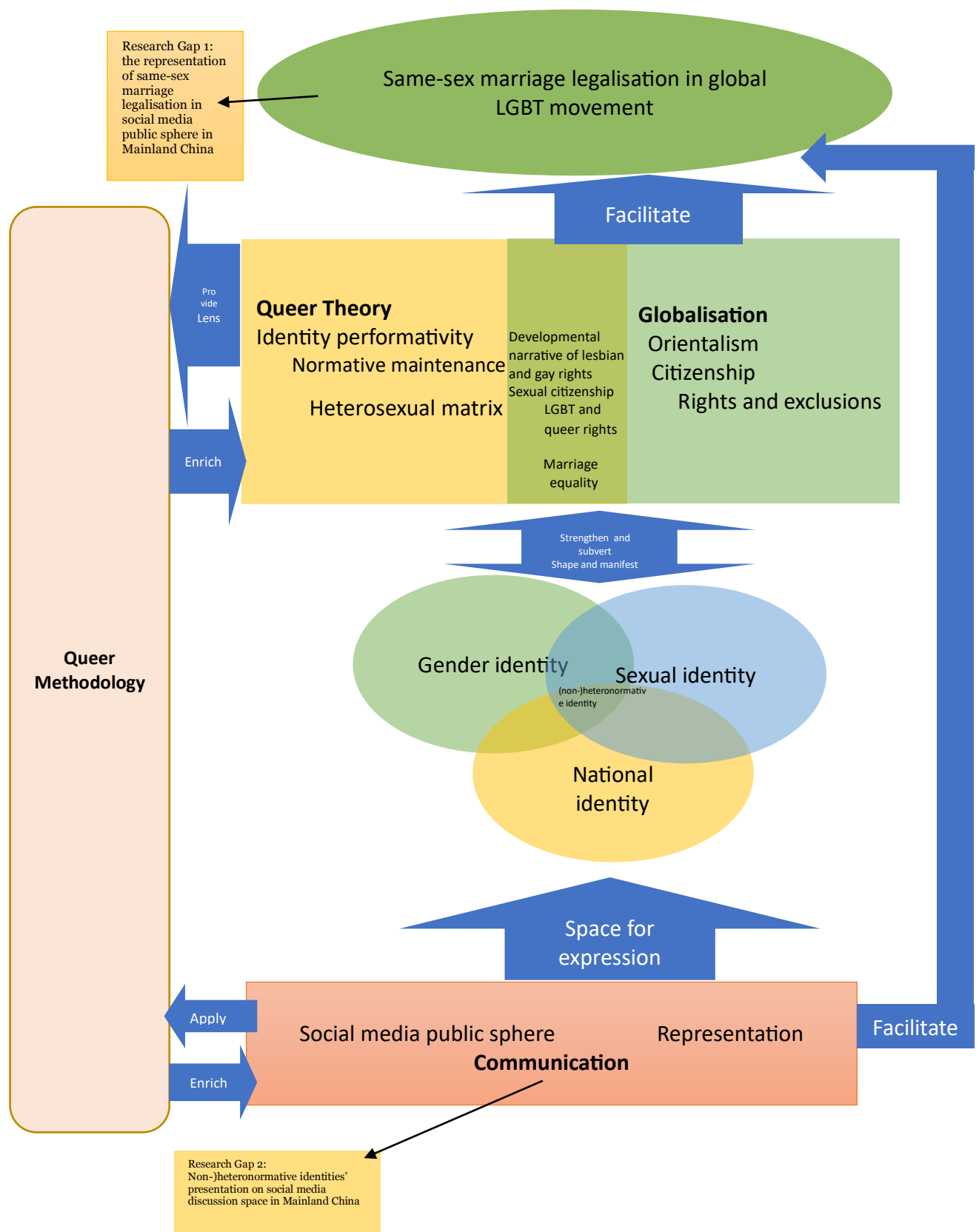
In communication studies, queer theory offers perspectives to reveal heteronormative representations and how such representations harm communities and persons, especially those with less privileged identities (Yep, 2008, 2014, 2017). Communication activities provide space for expression and representation as symbols are assigned meaning in Hall et al.'s (2012) circulation of meaning. Social media public spheres, analysed according to Dahlgren's (2005) three dimensions, influenced public opinion and facilitated the same-sex marriage legalisation. In this case, the social media public sphere on Weibo provided a valuable virtual space for opinion expression and notification of events, and identity representation about same-sex marriage legalisation although it faced a rather restrictive environment in the structural dimension. Thus, Figure 3 identifies the research gaps in the social media representations of same-sex marriage legalisation, (non)heteronormative identities, same-sex marriage legalisation, and of gender as well as sexual identities with the coappearance of national identity in the Chinese social media discussion space.

Queer methodology developed from queer theory is applied to this study to enrich queer theoretical knowledge and to answer the call for queering communication studies in order to challenge the status quo. Other more regular methodological approaches, such as the cross-cultural or culture-centred ones, were considered. The focus on LGBT and queer communities as (co)cultural groups could simplify the complex intersections of power involved with the research problem. One of the major challenges faced with LGBT and queer communities in political, legal, and economic hardship is the systematic silencing from the state, family, and community, which is more than difficulties in out-group negotiation in a nonliberal

environment. In other words, cultural differences failed to cover the challenges that they have. Another pitfall is the risk to essentialise identities, which is warned in queer theory. So, I decided to continue with queer methodology for the freedom it offers under a queer theoretical and critical lens. This freedom to use methods across the field made room for research method flexibility when conducted in difficult contexts. Its requirement for researcher reflexivity reduced the risk of bias to affect the outcome of the research. It also allowed the strategic room for queer studies to tackle the difficulties produced by homogenic heteronormativity.

Figure 3

Theoretical Framework



Conclusion

This chapter provides an academic and theoretical analysis of LGBT and queer identities and same-sex marriage legalisation in Western and non-Western, particularly the Chinese, contexts. Under the theoretical lens of queer theory, the broader concepts of sexual and gender identity, marriage, and love as well as the legal right to marry were also examined. Special attention was given to the influence of globalisation on nonheteronormative gender/sexual identities and on equal rights in sexual citizenship of the nonheteronormative. This literature review shows that the modern heteronormativity built on the social constructions of the dichotomised gender/sexual identities has been globalised from the West to the non-West, as have the subversions against heteronormativity. This chapter demonstrates heteronormativity as a global source of oppression. Struggles against heteronormative forces and institutions can risk creating new forms of normativity, as exemplified in the American campaign for marriage equality (R. Gibson, 2018; Rimmerman, 2015; Yep et al., 2003).

Based on the analysis of previous studies, I intend to cover three research gaps in this study about Chinese social media discussions about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. They are the lack of queer communication research in non-Western contexts, the need to investigate online public sphere's representation of queer topics, and the absence of an inclusive queer examination of heteronormativity on Chinese social media representations of gender and sexual identities. These are introduced in the following paragraphs.

Queer theory offers a tool kit to deconstruct heteronormativity and binary genders. It links hierarchy based on sexual identity with gender hierarchy, revealing them in the heterosexual matrix as socially constructed, unnatural, performative, and oppressing (Butler, 1990; Castro Varela et al., 2016; Yep, 2014). Yep (2014) urged

“communication teachers and scholars to interrogate and unpack the homo/heterosexual binary, disentangle and demystify the power of heteronormativity in our scholarship ...” (p. 48), stressing the necessity to queer the communication discipline in the celebration of human differences. Most of the previous queer communication studies were about LGBT and queer issues and identities in the Western and especially the American context. As mentioned in the sections above, the American approaches to LGBT and queer identities, as well as same-sex marriage legalisation, are not generalisable and transferable to other sociocultural contexts, which includes the Chinese context. More research about the non-Western context was also called upon by communication scholars (Manning et al., 2020). My study about a Chinese social media public sphere representation of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage can contribute to filling this research gap through awareness of the uniqueness of my research context and by a critical lens as borrowed from queer critics like Binnie (2004) about globalisation.

The past studies about LGBT and queer topics’ representation on Chinese social media were mostly conducted on communicative content and behaviours that were either LGBT/queer specific as in Cao and Lu’s (2014) and Shaw and Zhang’s (2018) studies or anti-homosexual/homophobic only as in X, Liu’s (2021). No study has been done to investigate the Chinese social media discussion about the topic of same-sex marriage legalisation in a welcoming public discussion space that is not prelabelled with views from the proponents or opponents as in the American scenario that was presented in R. Gibson’s (2018) analysis about Twitter and Facebook. From R. Gibson’s (2018) findings, I discovered the need to investigate more public communication spaces filled with outsiders of LGBT and queer communities in order to navigate future improvements in LGBT and queer rights’ protection. My study can contribute to filling this research gap by an analysis of the representation of

Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation in a more public social media discussion space—Weibo. The findings can be beneficial to future negotiations over same-sex relationship recognition in the Chinese social media context.

In addition, studies about Chinese LGBT and queer identities that have been done, including studies by Bao (2018), Engebretsen et al. (2015), and Q.-f. Wang (2012), were mostly about in-group communications and reflections. Past research about Chinese LGBT identities' representation on social media was mostly conducted from the activist viewpoint with the main focus on nonnormativity and its representation without mentioning identities within Butler's (1990) heterosexual matrix. The absence of an inclusive examination about heteronormativity in relation to identity representation from the queer theoretical lens has reduced the critical power of these studies, which also constituted a research gap for this study. In other words, my study offers a more holistic viewpoint by including the heteronormative identities on Chinese social media through a queer theoretical lens.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Method

This research is an investigation into a Chinese social media discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. The research questions are:

- 1) what was the landscape of the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage?
- 2) how was the legalisation of same-sex marriage represented in this Weibo discussion?
- 3) how were gender and sexual identities represented by Chinese social media users in Mainland China?

A mixed methods research (MMR) approach was used under queer methodology to answer these research questions. Quantitative and qualitative content analysis methods and interviews (n=4) were included in the research design and conducted. The sample for the content analysis contained 562 Weibo posts. This chapter introduces queer methodology, the methods designed and implemented, as well as the ethical considerations in this research.

This chapter consists of eight sections. The first section offers an overview of queer methodology and its implementation in communication studies. Ethical research design and issues about ethics in practice are discussed in the next one. The following three sections depict each method used in this study. The last but two section reflects on my positionality in this research as well as my personal experience in relation to identity. The last section is the conclusion.

Overview of Queer Methodology

Queer theoretical viewpoints have entered the field of humanities and social sciences since the end of the 20th century when scholars, mostly in America, applied a critical lens to the distinction between the normal heterosexuals and the deviant

Others (Browne & Nash, 2010; Compton et al., 2018; Ghaziani & Brim, 2019a). In this new century, concepts borrowed from queer theory, such as heteronormativity, were employed in studies about LGBT persons and communities, especially in the humanities research from which scholars of queer research developed a range of mostly qualitative research methods (Browne & Nash, 2010; Ghaziani & Brim, 2019a; Krippendorff, 2018). Descending from undefined queer theory, queer methodology is proposed by Browne and Nash (2010) as an approach to social science research based not on an exact shared understanding but on understandings within the shared viewpoints that stem from queer theory. “Queer research’ can be any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations” (Browne & Nash, 2010, p.4), which lands queer research largely among the critical studies under social constructionism. As introduced in Chapter 2, queer theorists such as Butler (1990) and Sedgwick (1990) applied social constructionist viewpoints of the social world and developed their critical analyses of sex, gender, and the norms around them. Thus, queer methodology, as developed from queer theory, has its inherent root in social constructionism. Researchers and queer theorists do not give queer methodology either a concrete definition or clear disciplinary borderlines, which signifies its rebellion against the traditional knowledge-(re)production procedures marked by taxonomic epistemology and disciplinary coherence (Rumens, 2018). As long as the research is done with a critical lens offered by queer theory, it can count as queer research, regardless of whether its methods are borrowed from other disciplines. However, queer methodology has developed shared guidelines of subversiveness, flexibility, and reflexivity for the conduction of methods in humanities and social sciences research. This section introduces these guidelines of queer methodology and how research under them should or should not be carried out.

Queer methodology critically subverts the pervasive heteronormativity in research methodologies, especially in research involving LGBT and queer issues. Scholars across academic disciplines had and, to some degree, still have the positivist habit to treat topics about the LGBT and queer identities and related issues as the invisible, the deviant, the problematic, the unfit, and even the pathologised (Browne & Nash, 2010; Gamson, 2000; Halberstam, 1998; Jagose, 1996; Rumens, 2018; Wilchins, 2004). Ghaziani and Brim (2019a) suggested a rejection to ahistorical, rigid, and binary categorisations in research under queer methodology. Gamson (2000) summed up that research guided by queer theory focuses on the deconstruction of heterosexual/homosexual as well as the male/female binaries, the denaturalisation of heteronormativity, and analysis of the literary reality and the knowledge (re)production of hierarchical sexual or gender identities. Queer theorists, like Halberstam (1998), confronted the rigid binary gender identity categories in the available methodologies when studying queer performativity that disrupts these categories.

Queer methodology welcomes flexibility in research method design to better accommodate to the needs of the investigation in a messy and complex field (Browne & Nash, 2010; Ghaziani & Brim, 2019a). It is also a critical response to rigid disciplinary boundaries and research methods confined within them (Browne & Nash, 2010; Halberstam, 1998; Rumens, 2018; Yep, 2014). Queer subjects fall between the binary labels enforced upon them by the ubiquitous heteronormativity, making them either invisible or twisted within those ready-to-use methodological approaches (Butler, 1990; Yep, 2014). Therefore, the unclearly defined queer methodology can reflect their in-between status and deconstruct the otherwise unnoticeable heteronormative power structure (Yep, 2014). Many argue that it is pragmatic for queer methodology to be open to a diversity of disciplines and their

methods but to remain loyal to none (Browne & Nash, 2010; Dadas, 2016; Halberstam, 1998; Yep, 2014). However, to reject the positivist perspective, queer methodology emphasises the value of qualitative approaches yet recognises the merits of quantitative ones. Browne and Nash (2010) noted that it is illogical to quantify subjects by assigning them to once stable but now fluid identity categories, and that queer methodology has turned to feminist qualitative tradition to analyse performativity, question normativity, and support queer ways of knowing. Nonetheless, quantification of subjects is not forbidden in applying queer methodology (Browne & Nash, 2010; Rumens, 2018). Ghaziani and Brim (2019a) highlighted the need to include quantification in queer methods. Browne (2010) queerly examined the interpretation of national survey data by examining the knowledge-creating process relating to statistics for the category “other”/ “prefer not to say” on sexual identity. She asked queer theorists not to exclude quantitative methods and overlook the strategic potentiality to achieve equality through queering and utilising statistics. Grzanka (2019) urged that quantifying tools should be designed out of respect for diversity and for persons and communities involved to enable a research to stay critical to established categories.

Queer methodology thus enables researchers to remain flexible in unstable research fields (Browne & Nash, 2010; Dadas, 2016; Halberstam, 1998; Yep, 2014). Halberstam (1998) concluded that “a queer methodology, in a way, is a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour” (p. 941). Queer methodology, with its flexibility, presents an opportunity to (re)mix methods for research in a social media context (Dadas, 2016; Markham, 2013). Markham (2013) proposed the remix of research methods as an active, cross-disciplinary, (a)synchronical, and critical approach for studying social

media. Dadas (2016) applied mixed methods to analyse Facebook group discussions on same-sex marriage in the United States by both participation in and observation of online public sphere communication while breaking the clear-cut boundary between the private and the public by perceiving them on a continuum.

Queer methodology emphasises the researcher's reflexivity by rejecting a simple neutrality of the researcher's position in research (Heckert, 2010; McDonald, 2013). As shown in previous paragraphs, queer methodology refuses the assumingly value-free researcher positionality employed in social science studies (Browne & Nash, 2010; Yep, 2014). Since queer methodology is influenced by the feminist qualitative research tradition, it has inherited the emphasis on the researcher's reflexivity in the research context (Gamson, 2000; McDonald, 2013; Rumens, 2018). Meanwhile, it somewhat disagrees with the feminist notion on essential gender or sexual identities (Heckert, 2010; McDonald, 2013), which has been widely employed in lesbian and gay minority studies (Gamson, 2000). Unlike feminist emphasis on the universal gendered experience shared by women (Leslie, 2010), queer research situates identities in the research context and acknowledges their variations in individual cases (Heckert, 2010; McDonald, 2013).

The requirement of reflexivity also addresses the Foucauldian caution about "politic of truth" (Foucault & Hurley, 1990, p. 132) in the web-like power structures for continuous oppression via knowledge production (Foucault & Hurley, 1990) through an examination of the researcher's positionality and sociocultural context. The intellectual alert to partisan ideology and other group-identity-based political affirmabilities raised caution for Ghaziani and Brim (2019b) because of their potential harm to distract researchers from the lived experiences and problems with categorisation to identity tags and limit identity categories. McDonald (2013) reflected on his own disclosure of heterosexual identity in field research on gay men

and concluded that the research is not jeopardised when the researcher and the researched hold different identities if identities are handled through the queer theoretical framework. He also pointed out the impossibility of a researcher's identities matching those of the researched because of the fluid, intersectional, and performative characteristics of the postmodern queer identity.

For communication researchers, reflexivity on researchers' positionality is especially vital during communication with participants (Gamson, 2003; Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Yep, 2014). Communication researchers, like the Foucauldian intellectuals, do not live in a vacuum but in the current "regimes of power and knowledge" (Yep, 2014, p. 46) that are under the influence of heteronormative powers. Therefore, researchers need to be reflexive to their performed identities that have fallen into heteronormativity by reinforcement of sexual and gender binaries during their research, especially when interpersonal communication is involved in the methods (Yep, 2014). Although claiming one's belongingness to a gender or sexual identity during research is not a necessity (McDonald, 2013), reflexivity requires researchers to examine their positions, be aware of the power relations' impact on the communication process, and embrace the possibilities in identity performance (Dadas, 2016; Yep, 2014). Through the realisation and examination of the researcher's positionality in the research context, the researcher can be both an outsider and insider to the researched communities, activities, and spaces (Dadas, 2016; Yep, 2014).

Since the establishment of the communication discipline, communication scholars were reluctant to come to terms with sexuality until the 1970s (Yep, 2014). Like other sociocultural researchers of sexuality, communication scholars investigated the rhetorical strategies used in lesbian and gay activism, homosexuals in mass and alternative media, and interpersonal communication and AIDS-related work until

queer theory offered a more deconstructive lens to examine gender/sex in its relation with sexuality under heteronormative power (Gamson, 2000; Yep, 2014). Not many communication studies were carried out using queer methodology, but some communication studies used queer theoretical lenses. Communication studies employing queer theorisation have been focused on identity performativity and queer reading of the media (Gamson, 2000; Yep, 2014). It has been previously discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2 that the analysis of identities' performative nature and how they were performed in different contexts has extended beyond gender/sex or sexual identities to class, ethnic, and occupational identities (Kuus, 2007; Natale-Abramo, 2014; Rottenberg, 2004). Queer reading of the media interrogates (non)normative representations, embodiment, and desire in popular culture by examining various forms of media to disturb normative identity categories (Gamson, 2000; Yep, 2014). Although being criticised for its overdependence on text-based analysis (Gamson, 2000, 2003), queer methodology has privileged scholars' tools to detect, dismantle, and dismay heteronormativity, especially regarding queer identity (Gamson, 2003). In addition, queer linguistics, initiated by Motschenbacher and Stegu (2013), employed in discourse analysis—for example, the works of Michos et al. (2022) and García-Gómez (2020)—focused on gender-related discourse constructions.

Rationale for the Adaptation of Queer Methodology

The adoption of queer methodology in this research was not entirely based on the fact that the research subjects included LGBT and queer identities but on the context and purpose of this study. This research set out to investigate social media representations about gender and sexual identities and about same-sex marriage legalisation in the Chinese social media space. In my attempts to provide a deep and authentic profile of the situation, queer methodology has become the needed

guidance that linked the theoretical framework and the field of research together because it not only recognised categories but also categorisation. This study was intended to look into and discuss the categorisations of identities (especially intersectional identities), experiences, and practices and their manifestations in a certain discussion, centred around same-sex marriage legalisation.

Practically speaking, queer methodology offers me useful gadgets for designing the research methods because of its innate flexibility, reflexivity, and ability to deconstruct norms. I positioned this research as a queer analysis of the media space, more specifically a queer analysis of the social media discussion of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage, by analysing the representations of identities on Weibo. Queer methodology allowed my research methods to escape the rigid boundaries of research disciplines and distinctions between the public and the private in the social media context. It also provided critical social constructionist viewpoints to analyse the data in depth and to detect the normative power behind various identity performances. Queer methodological emphasis on research reflexivity required me to constantly check my position in the method conduction process.

Mixed Methods Research

Queer methodology opens the opportunity for communication researchers to flexibly employ methods across disciplinary boundaries, which was discussed in the prior section. The approach to conduct research via both quantitative and qualitative methods is also consistent with what is called mixed methods research (MMR) or multimethodology (Harper, 2013). In order to better comprehend the researched, quantitative and qualitative methods ought better to be perceived as complementary (Jick, 1979). The strongest merit of MMR lies in the ability to overcome the weakness of each method by balancing it with the strengths of other methods. For instance, an

online questionnaire, online observations, and offline interviews were employed to study queer and lesbian SNS by Nip (2004), who traced the connections between online communicative behaviours and offline queer, lesbian community development through analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data (Hesse-Biber & Griffin, 2013). MMR facilitates researchers to produce nuanced knowledge in complex scenarios, especially when it comes to the marginalised and the subjugated as well as Internet-mediated communities (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Hesse-Biber & Griffin, 2013; Nip, 2004).

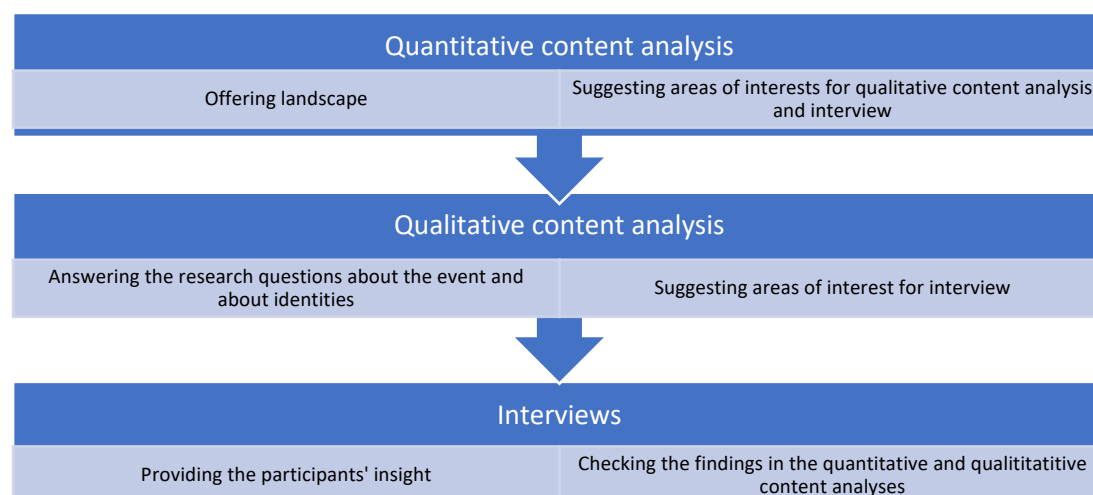
However, when used improperly, the methods used can be separated, uncooperative, and ineffective. Bryman (2007), Fielding (2012), and Mertens and Hesse-Biber (2012) suggested to position different methods in the research design as dialectical and conversational with one another. Another strategy for research design is to arrange the methods in a sequential order where the results of the former method can serve as sample for a latter method (Hesse-Biber & Griffin, 2013; Nip, 2004). This research was designed as a sequential and integrated mixed-method research under queer methodological requirements. There were three methods used in this research: first, a quantitative content analysis on the population providing references for the other two methods; second, qualitative analysis generating themes from the sample to answer the research questions and developing questions in the semistructured interview guide as well; and third, semistructured interviews checking the results from the second method. Finally, results of all three methods contributed to the research findings.

The research design is shown in Figure 4. The quantitative content analysis, although with rigid and established categories in its coding scheme, can help me to grasp the general features of the studied Weibo discussion. It offered a landscape for the studied Weibo discussion to illustrate the presence or the lack of presence of

certain topics or identities. It also provided some areas for further investigation for the qualitative methods. The qualitative content analysis allowed me to apply the queer theorisation onto the data more directly by locating themes with a queer theoretical lens. It helped me to look for more in-depth answers to research questions about legalisation of same-sex marriage and identities. Yet, qualitative content analysis can miss the intention of the communicators—here, because of its focus on queer theoretical concepts in the analysis of content, most of which was not initially created for social advocacy or with an awareness of queer theory. To get an understanding of the online participants in this particular discussion, interviews were also included in this research design. The interview questions were developed from the analytic results of the content analysis, and they were used to check them from the perspective of the participants in the studied Weibo discussion. Finally, the overall findings were reported according to different aspects of the studied Weibo discussion.

Figure 4

Research Design



Research Ethics in Theory and Practice

Research Ethics in Queer Studies

In order to be consistent with queer methodological perspectives, I took the deontological approach to research ethics. The deontological view on ethics shifts from the consequentialist focus on the increase in the sum of good or on the obedience to morality in the research to particular research methods' ethical impact in the context (Israel & Hay, 2006). In this research, considerations over ethics are given to the following two aspects: the vulnerability rooted in the nonnormative or activist identities of online discussion participants, some of whom were also involved in online activism, and the cultural and political sensitivity of this research topic in the Chinese context.

The blurry boundary between the public and the private is a challenge for researchers who collect and analyse user-generated content used in anonymous online communication (Hesse-Biber & Griffin, 2013; Markham & Buchanan, 2012). Markham and Buchanan (2012) argued the anonymous online avatars should be seen as persons in internet-based research. However, the avatars online are not protected by anonymity because of the neo-authoritarian power setting its foot into the online public spheres, which has been discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2. Thus, the nonnormative identities held by my interviewees and the online public sphere participants would be at risk if authorities intensify their censorship of them.

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, the Chinese LGBT and queer identities are vulnerable under the silencing power rooted in the cultural discourse as well as the political and legal institutions. Activists are identified as vulnerable groups by Massey University because of the nature of their work against social injustice (Massey University Human Ethics Committee [MUHEC], 2017). Engebretsen et al. (2015) found in their field study consisting of in-depth interviews and lived

experience that LGBTQ activists and their organisations are subject to the increasing neo-authoritarian restrictions in China. Taiwanese, activist, and LGBTQ identities and related issues are sensitive topics to the authorities and the public in Mainland China because they are deviant from the cisgendered, heteronormative ideal as discussed in the conclusion part of the literature review (Chapter 2). Those who challenge this ideal are faced with the risk of being the target of online bullying, albeit the authorities' interventions to reduce any kind of uncivil online expressions (Cairns & Carlson, 2016; De Seta, 2018; Engebretsen et al., 2015). Since it is a controversial topic that may be censored, I have used social media accounts applied specifically for the purpose of the research programme and taken extra precautions with my personal information.

I recognised the sensitive aspect of this research topic in the Chinese context, both politically and culturally. The sensitivity of my research topic was inherent in the range of nonnormative identities it covers as well as the heteronormativity it challenged. When the legislative authority dismisses nonnormative gender and sexual identities as identifiable through judicial and discursive power (Fei et al., 1992; X. Guo, 2007; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2016; Q.-f. Wang, 2012), individuals under such authoritarian power tend to have avoidant and negative attitudes towards nonnormative gender and sexual identities and their disturbance to heteronormative construction, such as marriage (UNDP, 2016). The Confucian tradition of avoidance and shyness towards sexuality and confrontation facilitates the level of sensitivity preserved by the Chinese public regarding the issue involving nonnormative identities (Chou, 2001; Tan, 2011).

Although it cannot be guaranteed that this research would add to the sum of good, this research implemented Kant's ethical principle that one should treat others in ways they want to be treated (Cave, 2015). No one wants to be treated with

oppression, discrimination, and denial regarding their identities. I align this research with other research under the queer theoretical framework for its attempts to deconstruct heteronormativity in the discourse. It can contribute academic understanding on Chinese online public spheres and Chinese LGBT and queer identity, which can potentially facilitate the development of Chinese LGBT and queer identities' representation in online public spheres.

Mitigation of Ethical Risks in Practice and Gaining Ethics Approval

To overcome the two ethically challenging aspects of the participants' vulnerability and the topic's sensitivity in this research, risks were managed in two areas: 1) the protection of the authors of the posts' and interviewees' on/offline identities and their privacy, and 2) the mitigation of emotional and psychological discomfort from participating in an interview. Privacy and identities of the sampled posts' authors and of the interviewees were protected by aliases and exclusion of detailed physical addresses, photos, or portraits of the users and other sensitive information in the data collected. In addition, any original online user-generated content did not appear in any publication of this study in case ill-intended readers would track back to the posts' authors. Instead, I used the English translation of the original content if it was needed for illustration.

The choice to conduct the interviews online allowed the interviewees to take part in the interview in physical settings where they felt comfortable (Hesse-Biber & Griffin, 2013; Nip, 2004). For interviewees whose identities are marginalised or stigmatised, online interviews prove to be a more considerate means of data collection where they could feel safer compared to traditional interviews (Nip, 2004). Special care was taken during the interviews to mitigate the interviewees' emotional or psychological discomforts caused by exposure to culturally sensitive and politically controversial topics. Heteronormative expressions were avoided in the interview

guide unless they were mentioned as the research context (Yep, 2014). As the interviewer, I was as neutral and friendly as possible. I introduced my institutional identity as a researcher and PhD candidate as well as my national identity as a Chinese. I did not reveal my point of view of the topic or queer identity (if queer can be considered an identity for people who choose not to perform identities in a somewhat gender-binary and heteronormative way), unless directly asked. Although this largely impersonal position allowed me to obtain more content in a spontaneous way, the neutrality also promoted honest and authentic responses from the interviewees (Fatigante & Alby, 2014). Before conducting interviews, I informed the participants that they had the right to not answer questions or withdraw from the interviews as they wished. I would not follow up on the question they denied or did not wish to answer. I was prepared to abandon a line of questioning if the interviewee verbally showed emotional or psychological discomfort. I would not probe the participants' private information unless it was shared directly in a verbal way.

The application for ethics approval from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) took about four months. From February 2018 to May 2018, I worked on refining my method design to better comply with the requirements stated in the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching & Evaluations Involving Human Participants (MUHEC, 2017). Meanwhile, I continued the discussion on the ethical implications of this research with my supervisors, Dr Fountaine at Massey University and Dr Hu from Northeast Normal University in China. After several discussions, we agreed that the risks would be unavoidable but not unmanageable. The application was approved by my supervisors and handed in for MUHEC review on May 24, 2018. I received provisional approval on June 19, 2018, after the MUHEC meeting on June 14, 2018, when several points about the research participants, means of data collection, and sampling were clarified. MUHEC was mainly concerned

about the emotional and psychological discomfort of the participants when dealing with culturally and politically controversial topics. To lessen the potential discomfort felt by interviewees, I restricted myself to probing their identification within the LGBT and queer communities. In addition, I decided to not use original posted content as illustrations in publications or reports of this research to avoid revealing the authors' on/offline identities. All updated public documents with a response to the MUHEC Meeting Outcome were uploaded on July 23, 2018, and the application was approved two days later. All data involved in this research was stored securely on a Massey University drive and my laptop hard drive. Any ill-intended access to it would not be approved.

Quantitative Content Analysis

Content analysis is broadly defined by Drisko and Maschi (2015) as “a family of research techniques for *making systematic, credible, or valid and replicable inferences from texts and other forms of communication*” (p.8, emphasis in the original). Qualitative and quantitative approaches to content analysis are robust methods to study communication content (Drisko & Maschi, 2015; Krippendorff, 2018). The qualitative approach is used to illustrate various meanings of the phenomenon in the content (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). The quantitative approach offers researchers objective descriptions of the data by employing optional definitions and mutually exclusive categories to capture certain features of the content with the use of statistics (Krippendorff, 2018; Leslie, 2010; Treadwell, 2011). As I introduced in Chapter 2, Weibo has come to be a platform for social media's public sphere expressions and plays an import role in the development of public opinions, especially when controversial topics are involved. Although limitations from the structural dimension limited its autonomy and deliberative potential, it was and still

is a leading platform for the public sphere in Mainland China. Therefore, the data was drawn from Weibo.

Quantitative content analysis has its advantages as well as disadvantages as a research method. Although positivist reliance on numbers has been criticised for overlooking the unquantifiable and the unclassifiable (Bansel, 2012; Yep, 2014), within this research, statistical descriptions and interpretations of numbers to illustrate queer issues, cultures, or group matters can be used (Browne, 2010). The use of a codebook (see Appendix A) with optional definitions and categorising rules means that the quantitative content analysis has less dependence on persons and researcher bias (Leslie, 2010). Another advantage of quantitative content analysis is the objectivity, validity, and replicability given when applying systematic rules and classifications to content (Leslie, 2010). However, complete researcher objectivity is not really possible given that any research is contextually and historically restricted when examined under a postmodernist lens (Butler, 2002; Leslie, 2010). Queer methodology requires researchers to be critical of the pervasive positivist classifications where man-made binaries have become naturalised (Browne & Nash, 2010; Yep, 2014). With this in mind, I applied quantitative content analysis with caution by limiting its use to formative, semantic aspects of the manifested content.

Data Collection of User-generated Content Online and Sampling

The data set included posts in a text (emoji included) and images on Weibo containing the selected keywords for this study and other public communication behaviours, which included all interaction functions on Weibo (reposts, comments, likes, and favourites) as reactions to the posted content. The number of reactions per post was used to determine its popularity.

The tool for data collection was a commercial crawler software that offers live streaming of the Weibo Application Programming Interface (API). Streaming API is

recommended by Rafail (2018) to gather user-generated content (UGC) that contains a stable set of keywords after comparing it to a search API in the same context. The keywords were: “Taiwanese diversity of family”, “Taiwanese marriage equality”, and “Taiwanese same-sex marriage”. These were decided after observation of the online discussions and my pilot study. Posts containing these three keywords took up 97.4% of all posts that were tracked in my pilot study by six keywords (“diversified family”, “Taiwanese marriage equality”, “Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage”, “Taiwanese law for same-sex marriage”, and “Taiwanese same-sex marriage act”) .

The six keywords were used in the pilot study, which was conducted from May 17, 2017, to May 24, 2017, to test the feasibility of the method and techniques as well as the coding tools for quantitative content analysis. Therefore, by using crawling software to collect the posts, I located discussions about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage on Weibo, regardless of whether the discussions took place under the hashtag #Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage or #not. In doing so, I intended to prevent the cluster of like-minded users’—as well as their opinions’—domination in the data collected because users holding similar opinions were found to occupy a virtual space under a tag on Weibo, making it difficult for different opinions to surface in the discussion under the same tag (Y. Song et al., 2016). In addition, hashtag tracing was found to have a higher possibility for inaccurate presentation than collecting UGC via searching keywords on Twitter (Rafail, 2018; Sunstein, 2017). I did not trace the collected posts’ links because of their possible unavailability, as advised by Krippendorff’s (2018) statistical model for representative sampling. Audios and videos were excluded, but the related posts in text and image formats were included since the posts containing videos or audios often had text descriptions of the nontextual content, and the rich media format of

audios and videos could make this data unachievable due to the limited time and resources. In addition, much research has already been done on Chinese LGBTQ-themed video and audio content (Bao, 2018; Deklerck, 2017; Tan, 2016; Wang, 2018).

The time for data collection was from 2:00 am., November 25 to 2:00 am, November 28, 2018, given the referendum's result was released to the public at 2:00 am on November 25, 2018. The exact population where the sample was drawn is unknown because of (self-)censorship, which is a common situation in research on Weibo UGC (Cairns & Carlson, 2016; M. Chen, 2016; Gleiss, 2015). In total, 5 800 posts and 113 526 comments were collected. The comments were excluded from the scope of this research for their ambiguity and for the crawler's inability to fully record and present the interactions happening in the comments.

Next, the data population was drawn from the data universe. The time frame for the population is the period from May 24, 2017, to November 27, 2018. The motivation behind such a time frame was to capture authentic representative data for the later analysis. Researchers investigating a certain news event on microblogging social media platforms usually follow the event's developments (M. Chen, 2016), collect the data after the discussion flourishes (S. Zhou & Lu, 2017), and record the discussion prior to, during, and after the event (Duguay, 2016). This eighteen-month-plus-three-day time frame was chosen because active discussions about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage and related issues, such as gender equality, human rights, and queerness, took place within this time period on Weibo. From the pilot study, it was obvious that the discussion on the topic dropped sharply three days after the news release. Also, in order to capture the data before some of them are censored, researchers studying Weibo discussions of news events often have to capture the data before it is not accessible (Cairns & Carlson, 2016; M. Chen, 2016; Gleiss, 2015). The time frame secured the richness and representativeness of the data population, so I

decided to finish the data collection after three days of the referendum results' release. In total, a data population that contained 2,289 posts was collected within the time frame, excluding auto messages. Auto messages were posts generated by the Weibo system as a result of other communication activities (for example, posting a blog on other SNS platforms or seeking advice through the commercial Q & A function on Weibo). I excluded them from the data population because of their lack of opinions. In addition, commercial advertisements were not included for their absence of relativity to the topic or the event.

To make the amount of data manageable, I decided to sample from the population. I employed statistical sampling theory to estimate the sampling size that both secures its representativeness and feasibility in later analyses. Krippendorff (2018) recommended it be used in situations such as this where each post holds varying relevance to the research topic. Comments were not sampled in this stage of the research process since the goal of the quantitative content analysis was to depict a rough set of outlines and to direct me to the samples used for later qualitative content analysis and potential interviewees. Also, content that was not in text format was not included here for the same reason.

Statistical sampling theory requires two variables—probability of least likely units in the population and the desired level of significance—to decide the sample size. First, I randomly sampled 100 posts to get an approximate probability of least likely units in the population. All posts whose content were identical to another post were sorted out in a separate Excel spreadsheet, which helped me to exclude them and reach 77 posts with their semantically distinctive content. Cautious about capturing the rich and representative sample, I assumed that they were all valuable for answering the research questions. Therefore, I reached 1.3 in 100 as the probability of least likely units. Second, I decided the desired level of significance to be 0.005,

which means the sample would have 95% certainty to catch at least one of the rare units of analysis in the whole population. Finally, the estimated sample size was 528 according to the table provided by Krippendorff (2018). Therefore, I conducted a chronological systematic sampling on the population where the posts were sorted according to their post time, and every fourth one was sampled because I needed to reflect the course of the online discussion as it went along. In total, 572 posts were sampled, yet ten posts were taken from the analysis due to being reparative, resulting the sample in the analysis being 562 posts.

Quantitative Content Analysis

According to Krippendorff (2018), it is necessary to determine three different kinds of units for content analysis. I chose to distinguish them in a syntactical approach where a post or comment was taken as a unit in the “natural” context on Weibo (Krippendorff, 2018). First, the sampling units are basic entities to be studied for the purpose of research (Krippendorff, 2018). In other words, sampling units help researchers to distinguish the data population (which, in this case, were all UGC and other public communicative behaviours on Weibo crawled by the API) from the universe made of all communicative content and behaviours on Weibo (Krippendorff, 2018; Leslie, 2010). The sampling unit in this research is each collected valid Weibo posts. Second, I needed to determine the recording/coding unit for the content analysis to operate on. Krippendorff (2018) defined a recording/coding unit as categorisable or “distinguished for separate transcription, recording or coding” (p.104). The recording/coding unit can be large or small in different research contexts (Krippendorff, 2018). The smallest meaningful recording/coding unit constitutes a unit of analysis in a content analysis (Leslie, 2010). The unit of analysis was defined as each post in the data population, since comments were ruled out because they were not sampled. The third kind of unit for content analysis is called

the context unit, which is used to set limits on the related information to be considered in the description of recording/coding units (Krippendorff, 2018). Context units cannot be coded and overlapped with the previous units (Krippendorff, 2018). In this research, context units were any news reports and Weibo posts on the topic of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage.

Quantitative content analysis has the advantage of translating the raw data into descriptive data (Drisko & Maschi, 2015; Krippendorff, 2018). Therefore, the codebook was designed to describe the text content and some technical aspects of the posts collected in order to answer the research questions. The codebook includes two parts: a coding scheme to translate the units of analysis into what Krippendorff (2018) called “data language” (p. 157) and coding instruction to offer the coder (in this case, me) the needed guidance in coding practice (see Appendix A). The former investigated how Chinese LGBT and queer identities are represented in the communicated content that is related to the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan on social media in Mainland China. The latter offered instructions, clarifications for the details, and definitions of concepts in the coding scheme, which complied with the methodological and ethical requirements stated earlier in this chapter.

The coding scheme consisted of seven sections. Section A was designed to capture the technical details of a post, which included its completeness as well as types and formats of the posted content. If they contained a hyperlink, the hashtags used were coded both as textual content and nontextual content. In the quantitative content analysis, the diversity of nontextual elements that appeared in the sampled posts were analysed. The types of nontextual elements were counted by their occurrences in the sampled posts. Repeated elements in a sampled post would be coded only once except for images that needed to be counted to code their content. Section B was

about factual information in the posted content: whether factual information was mentioned or not and, if mentioned, what it was about. As introduced in Chapter 2, the truthfulness of the facts is difficult to determine because of misinformation being prevalent on social media. When it comes to gender and LGBT topics, the various frames used to define meanings of certain identities makes it difficult to claim truth for one frame. This study does not aim to discover a hegemonic truth about same-sex marriage, gender, or sexual identities but to reveal what counts as truthful or factual in the posts in order to probe the contesting powers behind them. Therefore, the matter of truthfulness would not be included in the coding process to acknowledge the coexistence of truths in the context. However, the mentioned facts would be critically examined in later qualitative content analysis.

The first two sections can outline the technical devices and factual information employed in the sampled posts. The following two sections focused on whether national or local identities and gender or sexual identities were mentioned and, if they were, what terms were used to clarify, (dis)claim, or define them and in what context they were mentioned. Sections C and D were on gender or sexual identities and national or geo-political identities, respectively. Questions in these two sections were largely deductive in nature as they were developed with reference to the literature review in this thesis. Gender and sexual identities are viewed as performative, yet strategic essentialisation was used for identity classification, which allowed the identities of the mentioned persons in the posts to be different from other performed identities (Butler, 1990; A. Huang, 2015). The regional or national identities were distinguished by political wordings where Taiwan or Mainland China were mentioned as a region or an independent country. Section E detected and analysed the existence, authorship, and content of opinions and attitudes in the posts sampled. It also developed deductively with minor adjustments to better fit into the

context. Section F was on pop cultures and online subcultures that may indicate the source or context of the post's opinion. Section G, the final section, established the necessity for further study of the analysed post and for what reason.

The coding scheme's development was based on a subsample (n=143), which was derived from the sample population by chronological systematic sampling. I chose the size of the subsample, covering one quarter of the sample, to ensure its level of significance. I sampled every fourth post in the population, starting with the first post. I tested the questions in the coding scheme against the sampled posts' content and made a few adjustments in wording and display logics of the questions, including replacing the question in Section E on the personal versus political features of the mentioned LGBT and queer identities with a question in Section C, which asked of the context where such identities were mentioned. The coding scheme was edited and uploaded onto Qualtrics, an online survey software. The coding was conducted online through an anonymous link to the coding scheme, and a password was set to protect it from unauthorised access.

Intra-coder reliability was checked with another resampled subsample (n=143) to increase the subsample's representativeness. Chronological systematic sampling was used where every fourth unit of analysis in the sample population was collected, starting from the second one.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis with a thematic approach was applied to the data sampled. Prior to deciding on the method of analysis, I sorted analytic goals out of the research questions (Guest et al., 2012). The analytic goals included were: 1) to depict the representation of the gender and sexual identities; 2) to identify norms, models, ideas, and other sociocultural constructions involving representation of gender and sexual identities constructed and reflected by the collected content; and 3) to depict

the representation and construction about Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation. I decided on a content analysis with a thematic approach to accomplish these goals because of its suitability and feasibility. The qualitative content analysis approach was in line with the queer methodological tradition of text-based analysis in queer reading of the media (Gamson, 2000; Yep, 2014).

I chose to take a more inductive approach here. Compared to the deductive approach, the inductive one allows a focus on the data in theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Daneshvar et al., 2018; Guest et al., 2012). It also enabled me to better fulfil the three analytic goals of this research listed in the last paragraph for its strength in identifying themes based on what is said in the field (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the meantime, I drew on queer theory as the theoretical lens to study the collected content.

The posts in the sample were read and reread in the qualitative content analysis. The results from the quantitative content analysis were used for guidance in locating the posts that had content centred on certain topics of interest in this stage of the research. First, the posts were tagged with the patterns of meaning that they conveyed, and second, posts sharing the same pattern of meaning were grouped, and each group was examined for possible connections. Finally, the sample was viewed more holistically, and each post was considered as an utterance in the conversation.

Semistructured Online Interviews

The interview was designed to check the findings from the content analysis on the UGC. Interviews are useful to discover intentions, attitudes, ideas, and opinions when conducted properly (Berger, 2015). Semistructured interviews allow researchers to obtain specific information and allow them to raise spontaneous questions at the same time (Berger, 2015).

Queer researchers are usually well aware of the normative powers in their research scenarios (Gorman-Murray et al., 2010). Gorman-Murray et al. (2010) asked researchers in interview-based research to reflect critically on normativity and its influence, for “the subjectivity of the researcher in spatial terms is crucial for keeping methodological discussions alert to the dualisms that often shape understandings of these practices” (p.114). Therefore, it is necessary to remove the boundaries between insider/outsider, homosexual/heterosexual, expert/naïve, and so on. Interviews on queer-related issues can subvert the silencing power enforced upon nonconformative subjects (for example, S. Huang and Brouwer, 2018). Heckert (2010) described interviews on queer subjects as a space for queer-becoming to be voiced and developed for the interviewer and the interviewee. I decided to conduct the interviews under queer methodology to be aware of alternative identity performance, avoid heteronormative assumptions, respect the interviewee’s point of view, and consistently reflect on my position in the interviews.

Invitation and Conduction

I had planned to invite 20 people to be interviewed for this research. Three rounds of invitations (60 invitations in total) were sent to the potential interviewees with PDF copies of the Information Sheet and Consent Form via private messages on Weibo, according to their ranking in the number of reactions attracted per post in the online discussion of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage on Weibo. They were sent from November 2019, to January 2020. I only received three replies consenting to take part in the interviews. However, during the COVID-19 (abbr. for Coronavirus disease 2019) lockdown in Mainland China, one of them withdrew from taking part in the interview out of concerns over accidental coming-out during quarantine when they had to live in an apartment shared with family members. The difficulty in participant recruitment was discussed in supervision meetings, and

alternative measures were considered. After the meetings, I switched to snowball sampling for interview participant recruitment, which had to stop at the point when the contact offered by the third interviewee failed to respond after two attempts, and I made use of my former contacts in the queer cultural fandom (which contains a range of online nonheteronormative narratives in the online entertainment arena). Due to the complexities given by the Mainland state, Mainland social media platforms and their users, as introduced in previous two chapters, interviewees need to be locally based in a study about Mainland China's social media users' view of Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation. In other words, overseas users failed to qualify as interviewees because of the differences in their environment, both online and offline, from local users.

I conducted semistructured online interviews to examine the results from the prior analyses. They were also designed to probe the users' perspectives and other factors, online or offline, involved in their communicative behaviours as well as their stands related to same-sex marriage legalisation and (non)heteronormative identities. The interviews offered great depth in answering the research questions about social media representation and the public sphere from contextual, cultural, and personal perspectives, which the quantitative and qualitative content analysis could not offer. The interviewees, despite the small sample, offered insights from different backgrounds where their relation to the LGBT and queer communities varied from being active insiders to sympathetic outsiders.

Interviews were conducted via instant messaging (IM) platforms of each interviewee's choice to eliminate the interviewees' sense of insecurity and discomfort caused by the unfamiliar or untrusted communication channels. There were about ten to fifteen questions asked during each interview, which took approximately 40 minutes. There were four groups of questions for each interview, including follow-up

questions: the first group of questions on user habits; the second group on the interviewee's (dis)agreements on the results of text-based analysis and their insights about this event-based online public sphere; the third group made up of follow-up questions; and the final group of questions on the interviewee's (dis)identification of LGBTQ community and of Chinese/Taiwanese identities as well as the way they represent these two types of identity in their communication behaviours on Weibo. Follow-up questions occurred depending on the context of the interviews. However, the question schemes used in the interviews were changed slightly as the quantitative content analysis developed and more areas of interest were found.

Transcription and Analysis

Because the interviews were conducted on social media platforms, their scripts were generated and saved automatically. I converted the interview scripts into PDF documents for the interviewees to review. Each of the interviewee's consent of the release of the interview script was collected on social media after they had been reviewed. The interview script was analysed qualitatively. The interview script was also translated from Chinese into English for discussion with my supervisors. The findings in the qualitative analysis are reported in Chapters 5 to 7 to provide a richer understanding of the researched topic.

Researcher's Reflexivity and Positionality

Reflexivity is a venue to (re)examine my place as a researcher in my research context. I kept checking my position in the method design, interactions with my interviewees, and in the content analysis process. In designing methods, I had been trapped in the binary mindset where the straight majority faces the nonstraight minority, and the subcultures confront the mainstream. Then, it became questionable that the minorities' unfavourable position is a result of their being demographically

uncommon because only heteronormative cisgendered males who do not count as the demographical majority are the benefited owners of this gender-asymmetrical heteronormativity. When it comes to heteronormativity and the heterosexual matrix behind it, this straight/nonstraight and sub/main dichotomy on cultures and cultural communities broke down. Then, the taken-for-granted assumption on essentialised gender and sexual identity categories broke down with it. It became clear to me that I could not put people's words into such categories without examining what the categories are made of and how they are held in place. To conduct the examination, I needed methodological perspectives to guide me in this research. Therefore, I decided on queer methodology, although most studies about the queer did not employ it. From then, I intended to conduct this research not merely about categories but also about categorisation itself, together with its act and impact.

My perception of queer/queerness has changed, and my positionality as a researcher changed with it along the research process. As a foreigner living on an island far from home for the past seven years, I did experience the urge to know everything here and to pass as someone who was not fresh off the aeroplane. It was similar to the process that I underwent after I first decided that I was going to conduct a queer study for my PhD programme. I subscribed to several LGBT and queer or Tongzhi social media streams and accounts, read books to learn about the cultures and terms, and talked with my friends about how they viewed the gender and sexual Other. Also, similar to living in another culture, the foreigners would soon pass the honeymoon phase with the new culture and start to emphasise where they come from. By the time I naively assumed that there was not much more for me to read, I designed a rather quantitative and scientific method in order to produce the so-called "neutral" findings of my research. It contained a rather positivist coding scheme with many ready-made identity categories covering the queer alphabet, and those

categories were taken as factual and neutral, leaving no room for new information, implications, or vagueness. That research design was rejected by my supervisors for its inability to answer the research questions and its contradictions with the queer theoretical framework. Then, I gradually shifted my attention from the queer to the nonqueer, from the deviances from the mainstream norms to the mainstream norms themselves, and from the unfit to the norms for fitness. I am not overtly marginalised in terms of gender expressions yet not a well fit into the feminine side. This fluidity gave me some leverage in observing others' reactions to me as, for example, the amused looks I got when I wore a tie or the encouraging comments I received when I tried on something pink. These experiences reminded me that the studies and theories about gender and representation should not be shelved—at least, not for now. I also began to view my other identity issues in my global travels from a more critical viewpoint. Besides living in a foreign land, I have lived a neurodivergent life. Although my condition does not have a significant impact on my daily life, it was a major obstacle for me in my dealing with the immigration department of New Zealand because the number of needed documents almost doubled when I applied for a student visa. Sometimes, the symbolic indications that a minority identity bears are louder than their actual material conditions, especially when the owner is seeking global mobility.

The positionality that I arrived at in this research, especially in the interviews, was four-fold. First, I was a researcher with a set of specific questions to answer, but this did not mean that I was more objective or that being 100% objective could help to find my answers. Instead, the awareness of the researcher position helped me to interact with my interviewees more purposefully, and our conversations centred on the topic. Second, I was and am still questioning heteronormativity and the gendered performativity of identity within it. Then, I was able to connect well with my

interviewees because all of us had had experiences with the gender binary and the social norms built around heterosexual practices. Third, I am a person experienced with the power of categorisation of minorities and its consequences. The first-hand experience of how being categorised into a less privileged identity category can increase difficulty in one's treatment received from state institutions was depressing but valuable for me, as a researcher, to understand the situations for other marginalised groups and individuals. This facilitated my understanding about identities as experiences and not as abstract intellectual concepts. Lastly, I am one of the Chinese social media users who witnessed the development and growing popularity of Chinese social media platforms. Although I did not participate in the Weibo discussion that I studied, I still have knowledge about the Chinese communication style on social media, which helped in data analysis and, later on, in the interviews.

Conclusion

This is a mixed-methods research under queer methodology for answering the research questions about the Weibo discussion of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Queer methodology has been employed to connect the theoretical framework and the methods together as well as to guide the methods design and conduction. It also guided the research to be planned and carried out in an ethical manner. Three methods were used in the research design: quantitative content analysis, qualitative content analysis with a thematic approach, and interviews. The former two methods were conducted using a sample of 572 posts collected during the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan. Then ten repetitive posts sent by commercial agencies were taken out, resulting a sample of 562 posts. They offered a broad view and in-depth examination of the studied Weibo discussion. The semistructured interviews (n=4) offered insights from the online participants' points

of view. However, the lack of participants limited the extent for interviews to provide me with more findings. The findings provided by my implementation of this mixed-methods research design are included in the following chapters, Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6.

Chapter 4: The Weibo Discussion about Taiwanese Legalisation of Same-Sex Marriage

This chapter presents an overall analysis of the studied Weibo discussion to answer the first research question, namely, what the landscape — that is, the general features— of the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was like. This chapter consists of seven sections that describe different aspects of the studied Weibo discussion landscape. Participants in this Weibo discussion used various document formats in their user-generated content that were richer and more interactive than plain text, which will be introduced in the opening section. The second section concerns popular cultures and queer fan cultures in the sample, while the next section introduces the languages used in the posts. The facts mentioned in the sampled posts and how they were integrated into the opinions conveyed will be introduced in the fourth section, followed by the section which turns to the opinions themselves and probes the originality and tone of emotions expressed. The following section introduces the themes found in the qualitative content analysis results. The last section concludes this chapter.

Formats of Posts' Content

This analysis of the formats of user-generated content is essential for mapping out the landscape of this Weibo discussion. It offers an overall description of the types of content formats used by the discussion participants, how different formats functioned, and what they represented. Quantitative content analysis results show that most Weibo posts on the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage used a mix of textual and nontextual elements (see Table 1). As explained in Chapter 3, textual elements are plain words and characters, and nontextual elements are in formats other than plain text, such as hyperlinks, emojis, and images. Of the 562 posts, 440

(78.3%) contained a combination of textual and nontextual content while the rest were exclusively textual.

Format Combinations in Posts' Content

In the sample that combined content, 440 posts (78.3%) contained one or more nontextual elements in their content. An interviewee named Gar, a new media manager in an internet company, explained that the inclusion of nontextual content posted in the Weibo discussion was needed as textual content alone was vulnerable to misunderstandings on social media. Hyperlinks were one element often used alongside textual content (see Table 1).

Table 1
Formats Used in Post Content

Combinations of content formats			Frequency			Percentage		
Posts with a mix of textual and nontextual content	Textual content with a single type of nontextual element	Hyperlink	440	253	142	78.3%	45.0%	25.3%
		Emoji			68			12.1%
		Image			43			7.6%
	Textual content with hyperlink and image			77			13.7%	
	Textual content with hyperlink and emoji			68			12.1%	
	Textual content with hyperlink, image, and emoji			22			4.0%	
	Textual content with emoji and image			20			3.5%	
	Textual content only			122			21.7%	
Total			562			100%		

Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks, as the most used nontextual element in the sample, appeared in 309 posts. Within these 309 posts, most posts with hyperlinks (n=217, 70.2%) contained

hyperlinks to online addresses inside the Weibo platform (for example, see Figure 1 in Appendix B) as shown in Table 2. Fifty-one posts (16.5% of the 309 posts) had links to websites outside Weibo, and 41 posts (13.3% of the 309 posts) contained links both in and outside Weibo (see Table 2). The number of hyperlinks inside Weibo shows participants tended to stay on Weibo as the main space for discussion. This content analysis finding was confirmed by interview data, which also stressed the centrality of Weibo to the online discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage in Mainland China. One interviewee, Rock, stressed that Weibo provided a space to form more inclusive public sphere discussion compared to other Chinese social media platforms because its function was to make individual voices public and connected by hashtags. Similar to Twitter hashtags, Weibo hashtags are hyperlinks that are automatically generated by the users imputing words between two hashtag signs (“#”) and that then directs to webpages showing posts with the same hashtag in Weibo. According to interviewee Yu, the openness of Weibo has allowed it to be a platform where news and opinions about marginal groups can be circulated and expressed in Mainland China. Nonetheless, social media users often share their information and views in civic discussions with in-group members, sharing similar opinions through hyperlinks on the same platform (Sunstein, 2017), which was also confirmed in my interview with Yu.

Table 2*Posts Classified by Hyperlinks Inside and Outside Weibo*

Nature of hyperlink	Frequency	Percentage
Hyperlinks all inside of Weibo	217	70.2%
Hyperlinks all outside of Weibo	51	16.5%
Mixed	41	13.3%
Total	309	100%

However, Weibo was not the only channel for Mainland Chinese to learn about the news. In the interviews, other social media popular in Mainland China, such as QQ and WeChat, were also mentioned to offer updates on this news about same-sex marriage. In addition, the use of overseas social media platforms and communication offline contributed to the increased attention around the topic. Two interviewees, Gar and Rock, reported offline engagement with the LGBT community, and access to non-Chinese social media increased their exposure to the news of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage and their level of concern for the development of events.

Images

An image is a mute representation of the external form of real-life persons, events, things, or ideas and abstract forms (Kulvicki, 2014) inserted into a post in file formats, such as bmp, jpg, png, tif, gif, or pcx. Of the sampled 562 posts, 162 posts contained 477 images. In the 162 posts with images, only nine of them mentioned the source of the images used, which illustrated that circulation of online images was done casually by Weibo users in this discussion. When posts contained images, most contained less than three images. Table 3 shows the distribution of posts with the different number of images in them. More than half (n=83, 51.3%) of the 162 posts

with images were posted with one image. Posts that had three images represented 11.8% of the 162 posts while 11.1% (18 of 162 posts) had nine images. Smaller numbers of posts used two images, or between four and eight images.

Table 3

Number of Images in Posts with Images

Number of images	Number of posts	Percentage
1	83	51.3%
2	13	8.0%
3	19	11.8%
4	14	8.6%
5	1	0.6%
6	11	6.8%
7	2	1.2%
8	1	0.6%
9	18	11.1%
Total	162	100%

The posts containing images were classified by the types of images they contained. The images were categorised into four types: informational, promotional, both informational and promotional, and neither. Informational images were defined as those that mostly provide representations of events, persons, or objects (except those that serve promotional purposes) and representations of editorials on media (including mass and social media). For instance, Figure 2 in Appendix B shows a post with seven photos of a Taiwanese march for equal rights to marry, which were all coded as informational because they represented a real-life event. Promotional images were defined as those that mainly conveyed public support and encouragement, and personal opinions of post authors themselves, as used in the

online campaign on American social media (R. Gibson, 2018). For example, Figure 3 in Appendix B shows a post encouraging Taiwanese to join the demonstration for the equal right to marriage that was coded as a promotional image. Images that did not fit into the previous two types were classified into the category of images that are neither informational nor promotional (for example, see Figure 4 in Appendix B on page 73). Some posts had more than one type of image in them. For example, images were used to show information about the news of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage and promote support for same-sex marriage as shown in Figure 2 in Appendix B.

Table 4 shows the number of posts containing each type of image or a combination of different types of images. More than half the 162 posts ($n=95$, 58.6%) had informational images without other types of images. The presence of the informational images enriched the details in the presentation of this particular news event. Promotional images were exclusively used in 32 posts (19.8% out of the 162 posts with images). Twenty posts (12.4% of the 162 posts with images) contained both informational and promotional images. Other images that did not qualify as either informational or promotional were used in 15 posts. Of these, nine out of the 15 posts used images that were neither informational nor promotional, and, in the other six, such images were mixed with informational or promotional images.

Table 4*Use of Combinations of Images*

Type of post	Frequency	Percentage
Informational image(s) only	95	58.6%
Promotional image(s) only	32	19.8%
Both informational and promotional image(s)	20	12.4%
Image(s) that are neither promotional nor informational	9	5.6%
Informational images mixed with image(s) that are neither promotional nor informational	5	3.0%
Promotional mixed with image(s) that are neither promotional nor informational	1	0.6%
Total	162	100%

As the Taiwanese campaign for same-sex marriage was part of the global LGBT movement, symbols for pro-same-sex marriage or the LGBT movement, such as the rainbow flag, were often seen in the images. Images containing symbols for the LGBT movement, such as the rainbow flag and “love is love” slogan, were coded as promotional only when the symbols were presented as a central element in the images (for example, see the image in the middle of the second row in Figure 1 in Appendix B). Otherwise, when these symbols were portrayed as the objects held by people in the images or background decorations in the image, the images that contained them were not coded as promotional. However, as Figure 1 in Appendix B shows, global LGBT movement symbols were found in both informational and promotional images. As shown in Table 5, 80 posts, nearly half (49.4%) of the 162 posts with images, had images containing one or more symbols for pro-same-sex marriage or the LGBT movement.

Table 5*Posts Containing Images with or without Symbols for the LGBT Movement*

Posts containing images	Frequency	Percentage
With symbols for the LGBT movement	80	49.4%
Without symbols for the LGBT movement	82	50.6%
Total	162	100

Emojis

Emojis, defined as ideograms and smileys used to express emotions and concepts, were the second most popular nontextual element (V. Evans, 2017). They were further classified into three types according to the meanings they represented and how they were employed concerning the topic of this Weibo discussion. In total, 178 posts had at least one emoji in them.

As shown in Table 6, emojis representing emotions alone were the most commonly used in the sampled posts. Among the 129 posts, 110 of them contained emojis standing for emotions only, while the other 19 posts contained a mix of emojis representing emotions and other kinds of emojis. Among these posts, 89 posts (69.0%) expressed positive emotions, and 40 (31%) expressed mixed or negative emotions. Figure 1 in Appendix B shows a post where positive emotion was conveyed by the heart emoji.

The second most used were emojis standing for the pro-same-sex marriage position or the LGBT movement, such as the rainbow flag emoji (🏳️🌈) and the rainbow emoji (🌈). These symbols appeared in 32 posts (18%). Additionally, 15 posts (8.4% of the 178 posts with emoji) contained emojis of other concepts and objects.

Table 6*Posts with Emojis Classified by the Emoji Content*

Types of emoji		Frequency		Percentage	
Emojis representing emotion	Emojis representing emotion only	129	110	72.5%	61.8%
	Emojis representing emotion and symbols standing for pro-same-sex marriage or the LGBT movement		13		7.3%
	Emojis representing emotion and other objects		6		3.4%
Emojis standing for pro-same-sex marriage or the LGBT movement		32		18.0%	
Emojis representing objects that are not related to same-sex marriage, LGBT movement, or emotions only		15		8.4%	
Emojis standing for pro-same-sex marriage or the LGBT movement and objects that are not related to same-sex marriage, LGBT movement, or emotions		2		1.1%	
Total		178		100%	

Combinations of different types of emojis were less commonly used in posts than a single type of emoji. According to Table 6, 13 posts contained emojis representing emotion and symbols standing for pro-same-sex marriage or the LGBT movement, taking up 7.3% of all posts with emojis. Six posts had both emojis representing emotion and emojis representing other objects, and two had emojis standing for pro-same-sex marriage or the LGBT movement and other objects. The emojis in this particular discussion were more likely to represent emotion than to represent symbols relating to same-sex marriage or the LGBT movement.

Manifestations of Popular Culture and Queer Fan Cultures in Posts

The Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage did not happen in a vacuum. Similar to what R. Gibson (2018) found in the American social media campaign, popular cultures and fandoms manifested in the online discussion about same-sex marriage legalisation in Taiwan. Therefore, the manifestations of popular culture and queer fan culture in posts constituted a crucial aspect of the Weibo discussion landscape.

Entertaining content in popular culture and queer fan culture constituted an important element in the social media discussion landscape because entertainment is the primary gratification gained by Chinese social media users (CNNIC, 2017; Kantar, 2017). Popular and queer fan cultural references appeared often in the posts. In the context of this research, popular culture was considered as a mass form of commercial entertainment that was globally consumed in the form of cultural commodities (Brooks, 2014; Danesi, 2018). Compared to popular culture, queer fan culture is not heavily commercialised or industrialised in Mainland China (Lavin et al., 2018). Queer fan culture refers to a range of online nonheteronormative narratives, which mostly stem from cultural works and celebrities (Lavin et al., 2018; Tian, 2020). Queer fan culture in Mainland China includes the production and consumption of BL (boys' love) and GL (girls' love) love romances featuring homosexual couples (Lavin et al., 2018; Tian, 2020).

In all 562 posts sampled, 178 (31.6%) posts mentioned at least one popular cultural cocultural manifestation. Popular cultural manifestations were made in 88.8% of the posts that mentioned popular culture or queer fan culture (see Table 7). Of these 158 posts, 97 (61.4%) featured celebrities, and these celebrities all supported same-sex marriage legalisation and the LGBT movement (for example, see Figure 6 in Appendix B). Although popular cultural manifestations are known to elevate the visibility and support for LGBT identities in America and Taiwan (R. Gibson, 2018; Shiau, 2014), two interviewees expressed caution about popular cultural representations and celebrity endorsement of LGBT-related issues because of their commercial nature. Unlike the more pervasive popular cultural references, queer fan cultural references appeared in 20 posts. Among the 20 posts, 17 mentioned BL/GL works and productions made within the fandoms (see Table 7). The growing

influence of BL/GL works in the Chinese-speaking world was mentioned in three interviews.

Table 6

Posts with Popular Cultural or Queer Fan Cultural References

Popular culture or queer fan culture referred to in posts		Frequency		Percentage	
Popular culture where there are cinematic works, popular musicians, music, songs, actors, TV shows, celebrities, and other factors or persons in the entertainment arena		158		88.8%	
Queer fan culture	BL/GL works and fandom productions	20	17	11.2%	9.6%
	Anime-Comic-Games (ACG)		3		1.7%
Total		178		100%	

The findings echoed R. Gibson's (2018) conclusions about popular culture's role in the social media promotion of same-sex marriage legalisation in the United States while adding queer fan cultural manifestations specific to this research context. Additional data relating to how popular culture and queer fan culture influenced the opinions expressed in the studied Weibo discussion are represented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

Languages in Posts

Languages used in the sampled posts are part of the overall landscape of this Weibo discussion. The vast majority (n=529, 94.1%) of the posts in the sample were written in Chinese. Among the 562 sampled posts, 33 posts contained phrases and sentences in non-Chinese languages, and the most used non-Chinese language was English. English sentences and phrases appeared in 32 posts and Japanese in one post. Posts with non-Chinese names, titles, borrowed words from non-Chinese languages, and abbreviations were not coded as posts with phrases in foreign

languages but as posts in mostly Chinese languages instead, while words, phrases, and sentences in non-Chinese languages that can be otherwise written in Chinese without semantical differences were coded as usages of non-Chinese languages in the posts. Slogans from the marriage equality movements overseas and phrases in non-Chinese languages occasionally appeared in the sample (for example, see Figure 1 in Appendix B). The English language that appeared in the sample demonstrates the influence of globalisation on this Chinese social media discussion. An analysis of the interactions between globalisation, the representation of the news event, and the representation of gender and sexual identities in the studied Weibo discussion can be found in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

Facts in Posts

The facts used by the Weibo posts form another key aspect of this Weibo discussion landscape and reflect its scope and focus. Because of the content-driven nature of my study, the objectiveness of facts mentioned in the sample were coded in ways not mutually exclusive with misinformation, yet the intervention of both institutional and discursive power would be analysed in later qualitative content and analysis. As illustrated previously in Chapter 2, truthfulness is not necessary in facts' social media representation, especially in discussions over controversies about gender and sexuality (D. Anderson, 2021). In other words, the boundary between subjectivity and objectivity has been blurred online, when many "truths" of varied discourses are present in a discussion. The facts here needed to be represented as objective and factual in the posts where they were mentioned, regardless of whether they are considered so in other contexts. Therefore, expressions of personal preferences and emotions, advocating hashtags, or slogans and plots in creative works did not count as facts.

There were 434 posts (77.2%) mentioning factual information, suggesting that this was predominantly an online discussion based on information sharing. Informational rebroadcasts about the factual news event were more often used by Twitter users than conversations in discussions about controversial topics (L. Smith et al., 2013). The studied Weibo discussion shared the same focus on informational sharing with Twitter discussions about controversy.

Types of Facts

Various facts containing different sorts of information were mentioned in the posts sampled. The frequency of mentioning a type of fact exceeded the number of posts that had facts because some posts contained more than one type of fact. Information seeking is one of the main gratifications gained by Chinese social media users, as introduced in Chapter 1. Therefore, the purpose of analysing types of facts was to find out the content of facts mentioned in the sample to help map out the landscape of this Weibo discussion. The facts were categorised with a focus on gender and sexual identities as well as issues related to the LGBT movement in order to navigate the extent of the studied Weibo discussion's coverage about these topics in a local or global context.

Table 8 shows the types of facts categorised by their content and how frequently they were mentioned. Facts about the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan were by far the most frequently (64.5%) seen in the 592 mentions of types of facts. They were also the most frequently posted (67.6%) in the sampled 562 posts. Rebroadcasting this piece of news and other information about the LGBT movement online was argued in the interviews as a vital way to gain visibility by Yu and Gar. Also, Yu, as a media professional, pointed out the needed training to combat misinformation in social media outputs by the employment of accurate, neutral, and inclusive language. The second, yet drastically smaller, category was the authors'

personal experiences, which included interactions with others, actions to join public debates, their observations of the media and other people, and other daily activities. Facts about events or persons involved/related with gender equality and the LGBT movements in other countries or regions, including the legalisation of same-sex marriage, were mentioned in 42 posts; this was followed by off-topic facts, such as the Taiwanese regional election mentioned in 37 posts. Facts that focused on the LGBT movement or gender equality in Mainland China were mentioned at a low frequency in posts that included facts, which shows the discussion was more centred on the news event of the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan rather than local issues involved with the LGBT movement or gender equality. Facts about other events or persons involved/related with gender equality in Taiwan, apart from the legalisation of same-sex marriage, were mentioned in 20 posts, and those related to the LGBT movements in Taiwan, apart from the legalisation of same-sex marriage, were mentioned in 19 posts. Only ten posts mentioned positivistic and scientific facts about human sexuality or gender development. Such posts with scientific facts were also uncommon in discussions on controversies about same-sex marriage legalisation on other social media platforms, as discussed in Chapter 2. Yet, the debate over whether nature or nurture can turn one homosexual was mentioned in my interviews with An and Yu. While Yu deemed the debate was an unnecessary trap, An, my interviewee, told me that the social environment had impacts on what one could be accustomed to when nature played the determining factor for one's sexual orientation. The facts in this discussion were mostly information about the news event rather than information related to certain aspects of the news event. My interviewees considered that the spread of this news information about same-sex marriage was enlightening and uplifting for Mainland Chinese LGBT social media users. The need for unbiased information online and offline about LGBT and queer

issues as well as identities against misinformation were raised in three interviews, which will be further discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Table 7

Types of Facts Used in Posts

Facts mentioned in the posts	Frequency	Percentage
Facts about the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan	380	64.2%
Facts about the personal experiences of the post authors	56	9.6%
Facts about events or persons involved/related with gender equality and the LGBT movement in other countries or regions, including the legalisation of same-sex marriage	42	7.1%
Facts about events or persons that have nothing to do with gender equality and LGBT topics or the authors' personal experiences	37	6.3%
Facts about other events or persons involved/related with gender equality in Taiwan apart from the legalisation of same-sex marriage	20	3.4%
Facts about other events or persons involved/related with the LGBT movement in Taiwan apart from the legalisation of same-sex marriage	19	3.2%
Facts about the events or persons involved/related with the LGBT movement in Mainland China	18	3.0%
Facts about human sexuality or gender development that are scientific in the fields of psychology, biology, medical science, cosmology, or other hard sciences	10	1.7%
Facts about other events or persons involved/related with gender equality in Mainland China	9	1.5%
Total	592	100%

Facts Mixed with Opinions

In the sample, 119 (21.2%) posts mentioned facts without any accompanying opinions (see Figure 5 in Appendix B), but most of them (n=315, 56.0%) mentioned facts with one or more opinions (see Table 9). The common occurrences of facts indicate that most of the posts included facts to initiate, stimulate, or support an opinion. For example, the post in Figure 1 in Appendix B shows how facts about same-sex marriage legalisation in Taiwan led the author to express their support for marriage equality.

Table 8*Facts and Opinions in Posts*

Facts or opinions mentioned	Frequency	Percentage
Facts mentioned with opinions	315	56.0%
Facts without opinions	119	21.2%
Opinions without facts	109	19.4%
No opinion or fact mentioned	19	3.4%
Total	562	100%

Opinions in Posts

The opinions expressed in the sampled posts played a central role in the Weibo discussion of same-sex marriage. The originality and emotional tone of the opinions illustrated the overall level of participation in this Weibo discussion and the emotions expressed in it. Here, an opinion was an attitude, view, or judgement expressed about the event, affected persons/groups, and related issues, not necessarily based on objective reality. As explained earlier, opinions were expressed in the textual format (including slogans that are pro-same-sex marriage or pro-LGBT groups) and emojis (including symbols that are pro-same-sex marriage or pro-LGBT groups). The rainbow flag emoji, for instance, was coded as an expression of the authors' pro-LGBT view as it is the symbol for the global LGBT movement. Most posts (n=424, 75.4% of the 562 sampled posts) contained opinions (see Table 10).

Table 9*Opinions in Posts*

Post opinions	Frequency	Percentage
The post contains opinions	424	75.4%
The post does not contain opinions	138	24.6%
Total	562	100%

Originality of Opinions

Posts were coded on the originality of the opinions they contained. Here, the originality of the posted content does not mean the content itself is creative or unique; it signifies the posted content consisted of opinions belonging to the post author instead of a cited source. Authors who quoted opinions from such sources might hold the same opinions as expressed by the persons whose work they quoted from, yet one cannot jump to the conclusion that the authors agreed with the opinion they quoted when the authors themselves did not voice their opinions in the same post. When the source of opinions was not referred to, cited, or quoted (for example, a sentence in quotation marks but without a reference), the post was coded as containing opinions whose sources were not cited formally or clearly. The originality or otherwise of opinions helps illustrate important/key aspects of the Weibo discussion, such as how active the participants were in the gratification of self-expression and how authentic this Weibo discussion was.

Most of the 424 posts ($n=305$, 72.2%) with opinions only expressed the author's own opinions (see Table 11). Sixty of the 424 posts with opinions (14.2%) exclusively cited opinions from others while 46 posts (10.5%) had a mix of the author's own and cited opinions. Other opinions were from sources other than the post author, including artworks, songs, novels, news stories, news commentaries, interviews, the Internet users or offline public, acquaintances, families, and friends. Previous research has highlighted the lack of interest in self-expression among Chinese social media users (CNNIC, 2017; Kantar, 2017), but the quantitative content analysis results below show that most of the posts sampled here expressed the author's own opinions, showcasing that Weibo offered an active cyberspace for the discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage.

Table 10*The Originality of the Opinions*

The originality of the opinions	Frequency	Percentage
All opinions shown in the post belong to the author	305	72.2%
All opinions shown in the post belong to (a) referred, cited, or quoted source(s)	60	14.2%
The opinions are a mix of the author's own opinion and opinions of (a) referred, cited, or quoted source(s)	46	10.5%
The post contains opinions whose sources are not cited formally or clearly	13	3.1%
Total	424	100%

To locate where the cited opinions expressed in the Weibo debate about same-sex marriage came from, I looked further at all of the posts with only cited opinions (n=60) and posts with a mix of cited and original opinions (n=46) and classified them into four categories: posts with references to popular cultural celebrities and their creative works; posts with references from news, feature stories, or news commentaries; posts that refer to other Weibo users via the "@" function; and posts with references to other sources, such as acquaintances and families. As shown in Table 12, the source most referred to was pop culture celebrities or pop culture works (for example, see Figure 6 in Appendix B). These opinions tended to be pro-same-sex marriage and were circulated in the discussion by direct quotations, similar to what R. Gibson (2018) found in the American social media campaign for marriage equality where pop-cultural icons' support for the proponents raised overwhelmingly positive attitudes in same-sex marriage legalisation (R. Gibson, 2018). About one in five sampled posts, with cited opinions from a clearly stated source, referred to figures in news stories and news commentaries, showing coherency with Chinese social media users' overall preference for information (CNNIC, 2017; Kantar, 2017) and with users' habits of sharing information with other like-minded users in discussions over

controversial topics on another microblogging platform, Twitter (L. Smith et al., 2013). Another fifth of the 105 posts cited other Weibo users' opinions by the @ function, which likely aligns with users' preferences to discuss social issues with like-minded others on social media (Sunstein, 2017), particularly when the topics are controversial (L. Smith et al., 2013). This shows that the Weibo discussion of same-sex marriage attracted user clusters who were already interested in the topic and were likely to have similar opinions. In addition, 21 posts referred to opinions from sources other than the three categories discussed above.

Table 11

Sources of Cited Opinions

Source of cited opinions in posts	Frequency	Percentage
Popular cultural celebrities/works	43	40.6%
News story (not related to pop culture), feature stories (not related to pop culture), and news commentaries	21	19.8%
Other Weibo user(s) in the discussion who are not news commenters	21	19.8%
Other (including acquaintances, families, friends, Internet users, the public)	21	19.8%
Total	106	100%

The development of pan-entertainment use of social media in Mainland China blurred the distinction between the public and the private, and the factual and the fictional, as introduced in Chapter 1. The use of popular cultural icons and works as major source for opinions illustrated the impact of pan-entertainment on Weibo as social media users increasingly seek to be entertained. On the other hand, this showed the popular cultural content's influence on Mainland Chinese social media users' opinions about real-world news events. Also, with the legalised censorship where reports about sensitive content are encouraged (F. Yang, 2022), Mainland Chinese social media users could find fandom space as a safer place for the shared fan

identity, providing common ground to express content that might cause controversy out of the fandom.

Positive Tone of Opinions

As researchers and analysts, like Y. Song et al. (2016) and Kantar (2017), have established, it is essential to capture tones of emotion expressed when outlining the nature of a social media discussion. All opinions in this study were coded as positive, negative, or having mixed tones based on the emotion expressed in each post. A positive tone of opinion indicated that the author expressed a happy, optimistic, affirmative, or encouraging emotion. A negative tone did the opposite: it signified the author's unhappy, pessimistic, denying, or discouraging emotion. Most of the posts' opinions (73.1% of the 424 posts with opinion) were expressed in a positive tone (for example, see Figure 6 in Appendix B) while 19.6% of the opinions had a negative tone (for example, see Figure 7 in Appendix B), and 31 posts (7.3% of 424 posts with opinion) contained both positive and negative tones (see Table 13). It did not necessarily mean that the author had negative emotions toward the event or LGBT and queer identities. Sometimes, authors expressed negativity to other events as, for example, the post author may have written in a negative tone because the legalisation process for same-sex marriage in Taiwan was met with difficulty, as shown in Figure 7 in Appendix B. To avoid confusion in coding the post's tone with the opinions about same-sex marriage legalisation expressed in the same post, they were coded separately, and the opinions expressed about same-sex marriage legalisation are presented in Chapter 5.

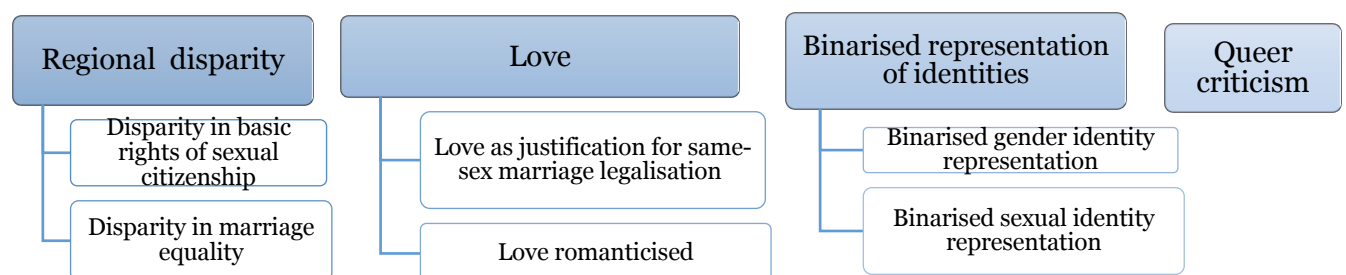
Table 12*Emotional Tones of Opinion*

Emotional tone of opinion in posts	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	310	73.1%
Negative	83	19.6%
Mixed	31	7.3%
Total	424	100%

Positive emotional tone's pervasive presence about Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation on Weibo showed Weibo public spheres' limitation in capturing the more inclusive online public opinions. The fragmented social media public spheres abstracted opinions from two opposing sides to confront one another on Weibo. Oppositions from homophobic viewpoints were gathered on another social media platform (X. Liu, 2021). This could be a result of platformisation (S. Wang, 2021) and has negatively impacted social media platforms to function as public spheres because of the decreased possibility for confrontation.

Theme Map

Four main themes were identified in the qualitative content analysis that used a thematic approach. These themes focused on the topics of global disparity, love, binarised identity representation, and queer criticism, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5*Theme Map*

Regional Disparity

The “regional disparity” theme delineated the distinction between the developed and underdeveloped worlds in Mainland China and Taiwan, based on how the legislative and administrative powers treated the nonheterosexual, queer, and female citizens. This theme featured the global disparity of LGBT and queer rights (Altman & Symons, 2016; Binnie, 2004). The disparity in basic rights of sexual citizenship included the protection of female procreational rights, the right for fair representation, and the right for expression of gender and sexual identities.

Advocacy for improvement in the Mainland China’s public education, media policies, and gender-friendly propagation were expressed in sampled posts with this theme, which will be introduced in detail in Chapter 7. Taiwan was portrayed as advanced in terms of protection for equality in sexual citizenship rights, and, occasionally, this was in comparison to Mainland China. For example, some posts contained expressions, such as “Cheers to same-sex legalisation in Taiwan”, “The ban over rainbow flag displays in the Mainland, while Taiwan passes same-sex marriage bill, really put the question about which one of them is more advanced into doubt”, and “We (Mainlanders) are far from equal rights”. The disparity in marriage equality was exemplified in posts with supportive opinion of same-sex marriage legalisation and a few posts expressing hopes and doubts about whether Mainland China would follow suit.

Love

The theme about “love” was usually identified in the sampled posts. Love in this theme referred to romantic love with sexual attention. It extended to two subthemes, one on love being a justification for same-sex marriage legalisation, which will be introduced in detail in Chapter 5, and love romanticised, depicting love as ontological and will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Binarised Representation of Identities

This qualitative content analysis with a thematic approach identifies binaries in gender and sexual identity representations. This theme identified the opposing dichotomies of male/female identities and the heterosexual/homosexual identities in their traditional stereotypes that were largely determined by pervasive heteronormativity. The range of identities outside of these binaries was often neglected in the sampled posts. Its subtheme, “binarised gender identity representation”, was about the depiction of two genders that were dichotomic in position yet, sometimes, asymmetrical in authority, introduced in detail in Chapter 6. The other subtheme, “binarised sexual identity representation”, delineated the binary inherent in the hegemonic heterosexual identity and the sympathetic homosexual identities and the binary in the “good” lesbians versus “bad” gay men, which will be introduced further in Chapter 6.

Queer Criticism

The theme “queer criticism” was identified in a few posts. With attempts to disrupt heteronormativity, some posts with this theme targeted the assumed sexual nature of a relationship in which a legal marriage or household is based. Others vocalised the voices of queer opponent views about same-sex marriage legalisation as assimilating into the heteronormativity-dominated institution of marriage in the Weibo discussion of the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. More about this theme will be introduced in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

The findings show that the Weibo discussion examined in this thesis was made up of post content in a mix of formats, of mostly original opinions, that were harmonious in tone or expression, and that concentrated on the topic of the Taiwanese

legalisation of same-sex marriage. Most posts (n=440, 78.3%) contained content featuring at least one type of nontextual element with text. Hyperlinks were the most often used nontextual element in sampled posts, and most of the hyperlinks directed users to online addresses inside of Weibo. This shows that Weibo offered a cyberspace where most of the online discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage originated from Mainland China. This discussion on Weibo was centred around the topic of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage with few posts on other topics. More than half (n=380, 67.6%) of the 562 posts in the sample consisted of one or more facts about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Usually, facts were mentioned with opinions, and most of the opinions were the post authors' original opinions, showing that Weibo users who participated in this discussion tended to express their own opinions rather than citing others. Over half (n=315, 56.0%) of the posts sampled had both opinions and facts in them, showing that facts were included to support or stimulate opinions. Furthermore, most of the opinions were expressed in a positive tone of emotion, with a few exceptions.

Influences from the global LGBT movement, and popular cultural and Chinese queer fan culture arenas were manifested in the studied Weibo discussion. The symbols and slogans in the global LGBT movement were often found in the posts sampled. Eighty of the 162 posts that contained images had images of symbols for the global LGBT movement. Occasionally, emojis representing marriage equality or the global LGBT movement appeared in the posts sampled. Often, references to popular culture, most of which were about celebrities, appeared in the posts sampled. Chinese queer fan culture was occasionally mentioned. The use of global symbols and cultural references indicates this Weibo discussion was under the influence of globalisation as well as the cultural industry, online and offline. In conclusion, the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was a topic-centred social media

discussion in this globalised era with mostly positive opinions expressed by the participants who tended to use mixed-content formats.

Chapter 5: The Representation of Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation

This chapter is structured to answer the second research question—that is, how the legalisation of same-sex marriage was represented in the Weibo discussion. This chapter probes the expressed support and criticism of same-sex marriage legalisation as a news event, which was viewed factually, legally, and culturally.

The section following this paragraph discusses how same-sex marriage was represented in regard to globalisation where the LGBT movement has promoted marriage equality across borders. It also depicts the awareness of the local Mainland China situation where the possibility for same-sex marriage legalisation in Mainland China is discussed. Then, the next section presents how the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan was represented in relation to romantic love that could be used as a justification for marriage equality. The third section presents views of the same-sex marriage legalisation discussion on Weibo from a theoretically queer viewpoint. The last section concludes this chapter.

Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation: An Advancement Overseas

As discussed in Chapter 3, the influence of globalisation has shaped modern Chinese perspectives about gender, sexuality, and marriage, particularly local LGBT movements. Therefore, it is necessary to examine same-sex marriage legalisation against the background of globalisation in order to answer the research question about the representation of same-sex marriage legalisation on Weibo. This section describes how the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was represented on Weibo, highlighting that same-sex marriage was primarily represented as a positive step consistent with progress in the Western-centric narrative for modernisation and a juristic progress in achieving equal human rights in the globalised world.

A Taiwanese Achievement in the Process of Modernisation

As the previous chapter shows, same-sex marriage was predominantly discussed on Weibo with reference to users' opinions towards the concept. In most of the posts with opinions (n=330, 77.8%), the authors expressed opinions on the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. In these 330 posts, the vast majority (300 posts, 90.9%) were mostly supportive of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage (see Table 14). Posts opposing legalisation took up 5.5% of the 330 posts, and a mixed attitude was expressed less commonly (n=12, 3.6%).

Table 13

Opinions Towards the Taiwanese Legalisation of Same-Sex Marriage

The posts with different opinions towards the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage	Frequency	Percentage
Supportive or favourable	300	90.9%
Oppositional	18	5.5%
Mixed	12	3.6%
Total	330	100%

The notion of same-sex marriage as a progress in modernisation was manifested in the views about same-sex marriage legalisation as a milestone to modernise a non-Western region, which constituted an aspect of disparity in marriage equality that belonged to the main theme of regional disparity. The supportive opinions expressed about same-sex marriage legalisation were positively aligned with Binnie's (2004) view about the "new racism" (p. 67) where LGBT-friendly policies have become a measurement of a nation's success in its development. Here, the Western world is pictured as evolutionarily further on the one-way track toward modernisation than the non-Western world (Ong, 1999). When the Western-centric Orientalist viewpoint is applied to LGBT rights, the measure of a region's level of development has shifted from punishing the local nonheterosexuals to granting them the right to marry in the

21st century (Altman & Symons, 2016; Binnie, 2004; Winter, 2018). Further, this universalisation and spread of the Western LGBT movement to the developing non-Western world is summed up by Binnie (2004) as the “developmental narrative of lesbian and gay rights” (p.73) as a “civilizing mission of modernity” (p.74). The post below contains the opinion that Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage signified a juristic advancement:

I have to give credit to the advancement in the Taiwanese legal system. The legalisation of same-sex marriage marked that Taiwan’s civil law has entered another level. Tongzhi in Taiwan can legally marry in two years at the latest, and new progress has been made in marriage equality.

The comment regarding the news event was given by the post’s author with a hyperlink to a related news report. Legalisation of same-sex marriage was regarded as a benchmark for the development of a legal system in the above example.

Adhering to this developmental narrative of LGBT rights, Taiwan was regarded as modern, Western, liberal, and more developed for closely following the Western developed countries in terms of LGBT acceptance and tolerance as well as the attempt to legalise same-sex marriage. The post below gives credit to the Democratic Movement in Taiwan during the 1990s and feminist and LGBT activists’ constant endeavours in recent times:

The legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan is not achieved by a few key figures: often, we only give credits to key events. However, this change cannot be perceived without the context of Taiwan's Democratic Movement. It cannot be perceived without acknowledgement of the mutual support between Tongzhi activist groups and [the] feminist movement or without the campus-based social activism for gender equality. In addition, it cannot be perceived without the

acknowledgement of inclusive sex education and constant lobbying activities within state institutions. Otherwise, it is unavoidable to fall into elitism here. Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was viewed in the above example as a result of the decades-long effort towards liberal social changes as a young democracy. The legalisation of same-sex marriage was presented as the result of democracy and cultural diversity as shown in the post below:

#Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage##I see Taiwan# Why did Taiwan become the first region in Asia that allows same-sex marriage? Because Taiwan is a place with diversified ideas, from the traditional Chinese culture introduced from the Mainland to the modern Western culture, they are now peacefully spread in the island. Now, the children in Taiwan grow up in this free and harmonious atmosphere, so they dare to be the first in Asia to legalise same-sex marriage. Although I don't agree with same-sex marriage, I also respect the harmless choices of others. Young people in Mainland China should also go there for a tour.

In the post above, Asia was positioned as a region where the legalisation of same-sex marriage was a necessary advancement. Therefore, the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was represented as putting Taiwan into a leading position in terms of modernisation among other Asian countries and regions. The adherence to liberal values was celebrated in the above example where Taiwan was represented as a pluralist society, and same-sex marriage legalisation was unproblematically progressive.

The developmental narrative of lesbian and gay rights was discussed in the interviews as well. In one interview, Rock commented that Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation was a milestone for LGBT rights and yet the progress towards equality had started from the Stonewall Rebellion, also called the Stonewall Riot,

placing the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage within the global LGBT movement. Yet Rock positioned same-sex marriage legalisation and the protection of Tongzhi rights in the Chinese Mainland's blueprint for development by saying:

The legislature must have talked about same-sex marriage legalisation in China's Mainland, but I believe that the reason behind their reluctance is that they are not ready because marriage is a very complicated issue in terms of institutional rules and welfare policies. Yet this is not an excuse to discriminate against their fellow countrymen ... In consideration to what some may say about 'the needs of the majority should be prioritised, so we should put such matters on the shelves', I think, the level of sex/gender education almost indicate[s] a country's level of civilisation if the country is a civil one.

Rock's words cast doubt over the developmental narrative of lesbian and gay rights while still highlighting the role of sex/gender education in the development of a nation. In the model of evolutionary modernisation, the satisfaction of the basic and usually materialistic needs of the majority is viewed as more essential and urgent than other developmental goals. The legalisation of same-sex marriage was placed on a developmental ladder for modernisation where the arrested development in a nation's modernisation could be employed as an excuse for the lack of marriage equality, as criticised by Rock.

On the other hand, optimism for Mainland China to follow the Taiwanese success in same-sex marriage was expressed. Gar, one of the interviewees, said the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage set a good example and inspired political activism for marriage equality in other Chinese-speaking regions. However, the quantitative content analysis results showed little overt support for Mainland China to follow the Taiwanese example. Less than 9% of the posts with opinions mentioned the possibility for the Mainland China to legalise same-sex marriage in the future (see

Table 15). Fifteen of the 35 posts expressed passivity and loss of hope for same-sex marriage legalisation.

Table 14

Possibility of Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation in China (PRC)

The possibility for China (PRC) to legalise same-sex marriage in the future	Frequency	Percentage
The post did not mention the possibility for China (PRC) to legalise same-sex marriage in the future	389	91.7%
The post mentioned the possibility for China (PRC) to legalise same-sex marriage in the future	35	8.3%
Total	424	100%

There was little discussion about whether Mainland China would follow the Taiwanese example on Weibo, as indicated in Table 15, although same-sex marriage legalisation was viewed positively as modern progress. The Orientalist representation places symbols for pluralist actions towards modernisation at the centre instead of local people, removing local people in news stories about social change (Alahmed, 2020). Although same-sex marriage legalisation was a positive social change as the posts represented, the Mainland Chinese people were not represented to have the agency for similar social change to be achieved locally because it was represented as a milestone on another trajectory of development—a Western one. Therefore, the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was an event more closely resembling Euro-American precedents than a successful example to follow in the Mainland Chinese context. The neo-authoritarian needs for political stability and the current heteropatriarchal reality deem same-sex marriage legalisation too risky to implement from the top down and too difficult to achieve for grassroots activism.

Meanwhile, criticism of the developmental narrative of lesbian and gay rights appeared in the first interview and three posts, all of which expressed mixed or

negative opinions about Taiwanese same-sex legalisation. Interviewee Yu said: “The international community has in fact used same-sex marriage as a differentialising sign between the binary of ‘civilisation’ and ‘barbarianism’ under the framework of human rights protection”. Similar reflections were made in several posts, one of which criticised the event of same-sex marriage legalisation as a showcase of Western liberalism’s impact:

... It’s time to reconsider the hypercritics of Western liberalism and democracy, when same-sex marriage is legalised in Taiwan. Any social institution has its flaws, so ideologies shouldn’t be prioritised ...

The post above exhibited a mostly negative opinion of same-sex marriage legalisation, indicating it as a flawed development under Western ideologies that were rejected in this post. A more cynical view and criticism of the overly simple replication of same-sex marriage legalisation from Western precedents was expressed in the following post:

... However, the legalisation of gay marriage seems to be an inevitable historical trend because in this era when the rest of the world is looking up to the developed countries, such as European countries and the United States, young democracies (for example, Taiwan) often want to show their "level of civilisation" and “social progress” in various ways. Especially for a region like Taiwan where international publicity is extremely limited, the legalisation of same-sex marriage is undoubtedly the best channel to showcase Taiwan. Therefore, the Interpretation of Constitution may not be a victory of the LGBT movement but a tacit policy adjustment made to follow this trend and to gain votes from the Tongzhi population ...

The same-sex legalisation achieved by the judicial ruling was seen by this author as a signal to demonstrate Taiwan as a close follower of a trend initiated by the West. As

argued above, Taiwan has further confirmed its place in the list of developed and civilised democracies measured by their similarity to the developed Western world with its legalisation of same-sex marriage. Same-sex marriage legalisation was therefore a political gesture and a showcase for modernisation according to Western sensibilities. The justification for same-sex marriage legalisation was questioned when these sensibilities were doubted.

A Juristic Victory of Human Rights

Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was represented as juristic progress since 98.0% (n=294) of the posts with supportive opinions towards the event (n=300) mentioned marriage as a legal construct. The representation of same-sex marriage legalisation as juristic progress was prominent in these 294 posts, which constituted more than half (52.3%) of the sampled 562 posts.

Marriage or equal access to marriage was often presented in the posts as an abstract concept, independent of sociocultural contexts and lived experiences. The universalisation of sexual citizenship and its rights claims caused abstraction of both the citizen as a context-free liberal self and their rights as a natural entitlement (Sabsay, 2012). Such abstraction is welcomed by online slacktivism whose supporters try to evade consequences for their appreciation of liberal values in authoritarian states (Morozov, 2011). Expressions about the legalisation of same-sex marriage conveyed this context-free abstracted sexual citizenship rights claims as far as they could on Weibo, yet they were still unrelated to challenges faced by the oppressed in the contemporary heteropatriarchy. Here, same-sex marriage as a juristic victory of human rights displayed the view on same-sex legalisation as a means to protect equal human rights in access to marriage within national or regional borders, which constituted an aspect of the subtheme about disparity in marriage equality. The legal ground, based on equal constitutional rights, was used to indicate public support for

same-sex marriage in the global LGBT movement in United States through arguing that each person should be given equal access to marriage (R. Gibson, 2018). The post below showed viewpoints on marriage:

Taiwan's 'same-sex marriage' is about to be legalised, and the relevant laws have been revised and the preliminary review has been completed. The law respects individuals' personal choice as much as possible, which is great!

The post suggests that same-sex legalisation offered legal protection to individuals' choices on marriage, given that marriage should be legally accessible to all. It also suggested that marriage should be a manifestation of personal choice guarded by state law, which ignored the cultural and social aspects of marriage. The use of law as a protection for individual marital rights overlooked the fact that same-sex marital rights were forbidden by law.

Marriage was mostly represented in the 424 posts with opinions as a legal institution, which contributed to the general support of the event. The support rate for Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was obtained by dividing the number of posts with supportive opinions in each column by the total number of posts with each type of opinions on the nature of marriage or without any opinions regarding the nature of marriage. In the 424 posts with opinions, 84.7% mentioned opinions about marriage as a legal institution while 13.9% did not mention the nature of marriage at all, and six posts (1.4%) contain opinions about marriage as a cultural construct (see Table 16).

Table 15*The Nature of Marriage Represented in the Posts with Opinions*

The nature of marriage	Frequency	Percentage
It contains opinions about marriage as a legal institution	359	84.7%
It does not mention the nature of marriage at all	59	13.9%
It contains opinions about marriage as a cultural construct	6	1.4%
Total	424	100%

Interviewees reported same-sex marriage abstractedly within the juristic background, seeing it either as a human right or a legal gesture to support homosexuals, compared to the more detailed reports about marital life in general. For example, Yu talked about the annoying in-laws in marital life and offered rather academic comments about same-sex marriage. In the interview, Yu said: “Marriage institution at the present day contains many unstated yet daily practised privileges, and this kind of privileges put those who are legally single at a disadvantaged position, when it came to the topic about equal access to love-based marriage.”

The content analysis findings show that the support for Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation was slightly higher than average (70.8%) in posts viewing marriage as a legal institution while it was lower in posts with views on marriage as a cultural construct and in posts that did not mention the nature of marriage at all (see Table 17). When the concept of marriage was taken out of the courtroom, the support for same-sex marriage declined. The juristic changes of law risked opposition in public opinions as the first interviewee, Yu, said: “Same-sex marriage in Taiwan was passed juristically prior to the change of mainstream opinion. This cannot count as an adherence to a healthy developmental logic.”

Table 16

*Arguments for Taiwanese Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation in Posts
with/without Opinions on the Nature of Marriage*

The nature of marriage	Support rate of the Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation (the percentage of posts with supportive opinion to the event in posts with different opinions on the nature of marriage)
It contains opinions about marriage as a legal institution	76.1%
It does not mention the nature of marriage at all	40.7%
It contains opinions about marriage as a cultural construct	50.0%
Average support rate	70.8%

Same-sex marriage becoming legal was viewed as a juristic victory and was widely celebrated for its achievement in human rights protection in the studied Weibo discussion. However, the popular view of marriage as a legal construct in relation to same-sex marriage had the tendency to overlook the social and cultural challenges to the status quo imposed by same-sex marriage legalisation. It also indicated that the discussion rarely touched on the everyday practice of marriage in the local context, which resulted in same-sex marriages' abstract representation. Thus, this Weibo discussion was largely limited to the celebration of a judicial progress.

Taiwanese Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation as a Victory of Love

American social media users employed romantic love as marriage's necessary foundation to justify their support for the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the United States (R. Gibson, 2018). Despite the very different cultural and political contexts, the use of romantic love as a justification for legalising same-sex marriage was also common in this Weibo discussion. It became a theme in the qualitative content analysis with a thematic approach. Romantic love was mentioned in 144 of

the sampled 562 posts. A little more than one in four posts (25.6%) contained the phrase “love (Ai)”, “romantic love (AiQing)”, “relationship (GanQing)”, or the heart emoji (“❤️”). The following section establishes how same-sex marriage was represented as an embodiment of love-based marriage, and how love and love-based marriage was used to justify pro-same-sex-marriage arguments. It also shows the limitations of employing the concept of romantic love as the major justification to support same-sex marriage with opinions expressed that love was not the sole precondition for marriage.

Same-sex marriage legalisation was supported for the sake of romantic love, which resulted in same-sex marriage sometimes being represented as an embodiment of love-based marriage. Quantitative content analysis shows the prevalence of romance as marriage’s precondition and how the ideal of love-based marriage proliferated in the discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage on Weibo. Marriage was represented with romantic love as a precondition in 77 posts (see Table 18). However, more than two-thirds of the posts (80.4% in 424 posts with opinions) did not mention any precondition for marriage (see Table 18).

Table 17

The Precondition of Marriage Represented in the Posts with Opinions

The precondition of marriage	Frequency	Percentage
It does not mention the precondition of marriage	341	80.4%
It contains opinions about romantic love/mutual attraction as the precondition of marriage	77	18.2%
It contains opinions about the functions of procreation and family/social duty as the precondition of marriage	4	0.9%
It contains opinions about something else as the precondition of marriage	2	0.5%
Total	424	100%

The arguments for Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage were obtained by dividing the number of supporting posts by the total number of posts with each type of different opinions on the precondition of marriage or without any opinions regarding the subject. The posts where marriage's precondition was not mentioned exhibited a slightly less supportive attitude to Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation than the average while the posts that represent love as a marriage precondition showed a more supportive attitude to Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation than the average (see Table 19). Posts including the traditional opinions about the functions of procreation and family/social duty as the precondition or motivation for marriage were drastically less supportive of Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation. This interpretation is borne out by interviewee An, who emphasised marital duties, such as child-rearing, and was not personally supportive of same-sex marriage legalisation, also saying the public, especially the older population, was not about to accept a childless marriage. However, somewhat contradictorily, the same interviewee also said that an ideal marriage should be love-based, and procreation should be optional.

Table 18

Arguments for Taiwanese Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation in Posts with Different Views about the Precondition of Marriage

The precondition/motivation for marriage	Support rate of the Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation (the percentage of posts with both supportive opinion to the event in posts with different opinions on the precondition of marriage)
It does not mention the precondition/motivation for marriage	68.9%
It contains opinions about romantic love/mutual attraction as the precondition/motivation for marriage	79.2%
It contains opinions about the functions of procreation and family/social duty as the precondition/motivation for marriage	50.0%
It contains opinions about something else as the precondition/motivation for marriage	100.0%
Average support rate	70.8%

A belief in love-based marriage, linked with more supportive opinions about same-sex marriage legalisation, was not a prominent presence in the studied Weibo discussion, although support for Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation dominated the discussion. On the other hand, the traditional preconditions or functions of marriage were associated with less support for the Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation in posts where they were mentioned. This is likely because Confucianism and public policies, reproduction, and care and education of children used to be—and, to some extent, are still—the core functions of marriage and family in the Chinese tradition (Hildebrandt, 2018). The traditional functions of marriage, such as procreation and child-rearing, were often referred to in the anti-same-sex-marriage propaganda in Taiwanese social media sites (Ye, 2017). Therefore, posts with mentions of child-rearing-related topics could exhibit support for traditional

preconditions of marriage without explicit statements about the precondition of marriage. Only 36 posts in the posts with opinions (n=424) mention children or children's education, and half of those posts showed a supportive attitude to Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation (see Table 20). In the 388 posts without a mention of children or children's education, support for Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation was more likely to be found (see Table 20).

Table 19

Children or Children's Education Mentioned in Posts with Opinions

Children or children's education	Frequency	Percentage	Support rate of the Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation (posts with supportive opinion to the event/posts with(out) mentions of children or children's education)
The post did not mention children or children's education	388	91.5%	72.7%
The post mentioned children or children's education	36	8.5%	50.0%
Total/Average support rate	424	100%	70.8%

The support rate for Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was obtained by dividing the number of posts with supportive opinions that also were with or without mention of children or children's education by the number of posts that were with or without mentions of children or children's education. The 36 posts that mentioned child-rearing or children have a support rate for same-sex marriage legalisation of 50.0%, which was 20.8% lower than the average (see Table 21). The posts that did not

mention children or their education showed a slightly higher than average support for same-sex marriage legalisation.

Table 20

Arguments for Taiwanese Same-Sex Marriage Legalisation in Posts with or without Mention of Children or Children's Education

Children or children's education	Support rate of the Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation (posts with supportive opinion to the event while (not) mentioning children or children's education/posts with(out) mentions of children or children's education)
The post did not mention children or children's education	72.7%
The post mentioned children or children's education	50.0%
Average support rate	70.8%

The quantitative content analysis results show that mention of love as a precondition of marriage generally occurred in posts with supportive opinions of Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation. Same-sex marriage was mostly taken as an embodiment of romantic love in the proponents' posts. In that sense, same-sex marriage legalisation signified the victory of romantic love over gendered reproduction as the precondition of marriage where same-sex marriage was represented as an embodiment of romantic love, such as:

Taiwan's same-sex marriage is legal. In the eyes of Brother Zhilin [a celebrity psychologist], it represents the progress of an era. True love is not based on gender. Every love deserves to be blessed, whether it is heterosexual or homosexual. Love knows no boundaries, no race, no age, and no gender.

The post above also treated same-sex marriage as a result and embodiment of romantic love. The author's support for the event stemmed from the appreciation for

true love against all odds. Love and the freedom to love were used in justification of the author's support for same-sex marriage. Representing same-sex marriage as an embodiment of love offered a rationale for the proponents' support for the event. "Love as justification for same-sex marriage legalisation" as a sub-theme was found in the qualitative content analysis. The globalisation of gay rights and the LGBT movement has led to the civil-right frame of same-sex marriage that originated in the United States, where love-based marriage must be available to all, spreading to Asian countries, regardless of local sensibilities, according to Binnie (2004). American social media users employed romantic love as marriage's necessary foundation to justify their support for the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the United States (R. Gibson, 2018). The use of romantic love as justification for same-sex marriage was also common in this Weibo discussion, as shown in the following example:

... Love in any form deserves respect. Congratulations to Taiwan for becoming the first region where homo [marriage or love] is legalised in Asia! ...

The sentimentalisation of homosexual relationships as a form of love justified the supportive attitude of same-sex marriage in the post above. Here, the celebration of love promoted support for same-sex marriage legalisation as love is a common ground for both heterosexual and homosexual couples. That Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation's initial success was based on romantic love's fundamental role in marriage is salient in the example below:

When love wins the world, love is universal gravitation, the same tacit understanding, no need to define, when love wins the world, nothing can replace it, nothing, love will be there! Taiwan became the first region in China and the first region in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage. Taiwan made a ruling on the constitutional interpretation of same-sex marriage on Wednesday. The justice declared that the 'Civil Code' prohibits same-sex marriage clauses as

unconstitutional. After learning this news, I am very excited and happy for Taiwan. Watching the Tongzhi community of NYU [New York University] in the MV (Music Video) bravely speak out for love, the eyes and gestures are full of love! It doesn't matter what is the result; you and I hold the qualification to love each other which is the same! True love has nothing to do with gender. I hope that society can be more tolerant of this group because #love wins# Thank you to all those who speak out for LGBT! [*Here, same-sex marriage* Original English phrases are underlined.]

This post praised love almost as an entity without limits, which was further embodied in Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. The legal access to marriage was viewed in the above post as “the qualification to love” because marriage was perceived as embodying romantic love.

The quantitative content analysis results show posts about romantic love were more likely to have opinions in them, but the opinions were more likely to be cited. The originality of opinions in posts with opinions and mentions of romantic love was lower than average in the sample. In the studied Weibo discussion, most posts that mentioned romantic love contained opinions. Of these 144 posts, 131 posts (90.1%) were with opinions. Of the 131 posts with opinions and mention of romantic love, 80 posts (61.1%) showed original opinions of the authors while 72.2% of posts contained the authors' original opinions in all 424 posts with opinions. The cited opinions showed the influence of popular culture in the studied Weibo discussion. Here is an example:

Taiwanese same-sex marriage is legal. Tsai Jolin [a popular singing artist]'s "What about the Different" is inspired by the true story of a homosexual couple and wrote a song describing the universal love ...

In the post above, same-sex marriage legalisation was related to a song based on a story about a homosexual couple's love. The "universal love" shared between homosexual and nonhomosexual couples became the rationale behind same-sex marriage legalisation. It was expressed in many posts about love that same-sex marriage legalisation was the promotion for love regardless of gender. When the referendum votes forbade same-sex marriage to be legalised under the Civil Code, it was taken as the state's failure to recognise love. Here is an example:

"Taiwanese marriage equality" bill was failed, a disappointment, as love should not be based on gender differences.

In the post above, the disappointment of voting results for the referendum came from the assumption of love being marriage's precondition instead of gender norms.

Romantic love was used to justify legalisation of same-sex marriage in the studied discussion, which was similar in the American online campaign for same-sex marriage (R. Gibson, 2018). However, support stemming from romantic love as marriage's foundation was not expressed in the majority of the posts sampled, indicating romantic love failed to justify same-sex marriage legalisation for most participants in the studied discussion.

Queer Views on the Taiwanese Legalisation of Same-Sex Marriage

Queer theoretical views about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage are centred on the criticism about heteronormativity and homonormativity. They showed the proponents' views about subversion of heteronormative marital norms and the criticism of same-sex marriage legalisation for its creation of new oppressions and hierarchies. The rareness of queer views was caused by heteronormative and homonormative silencing as well as the sociopolitical heteronormative power in the context. Queer theory exposes the constructed nature of identities as well as the material and symbolic order founded upon them, as introduced in Chapter 2.

Mainland China has a pervasive heteronormativity where heterosexuality remains as the default—combined with heteropatriarchal male supremacist traditions—in its official and unofficial orders, which makes them difficult to be challenged by queer theory. The homonormative needs for essentialised identities to gather homosexuals out of economic reasons and for the depoliticisation of these identities to stay legal makes queer theory, with its constructionist viewpoints, unwelcome in the neo-authoritarian Mainland China. Same-sex legalisation was represented occasionally as subversion to heteronormative marriage, which is introduced in the following section, and queer criticism of same-sex marriage legalisation is introduced in the next section.

Marriage as Degendered/Desexualised

The quantitative content analysis results reveal that marriage in this studied Weibo discussion was treated mostly as a legal concept (as shown in Table 16) that seemed to be detached from its overt heteronormative social function because the law was presented to be neutral, fair, and just. Yet, marriage in Mainland China is heavily loaded with heteronormative and heteropatriarchal functions, such as procreation, child-rearing, and caretaking, in the legal sense (X. Guo, 2007; Young, 2005). As concluded in the literature review in Chapter 2, marriage in Mainland China is a construction of heteropatriarchy, confined within its heteronormative boundaries with an emphasis on premodern Confucian values of patrilineage and its sustenance. The discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage offered a chance for Weibo users to question the universality of marriage as a heteronormative legal construction. The theme “queering heteronormative marriage”, identified in my qualitative content analysis with a thematic approach, is about the deconstruction of marriage as a heteronormative institution via queer theory to free marriage from the confines and limitations of heteronormativity and its violence by de-gendering its

foundations and de-sexualising its functions. Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage challenged the heteronormative norms of marriage and increased diversity. Queer views emerged in the posts mentioning marriage and the diversity of families.

One post explained the deconstructionist support for same-sex marriage:

... Marriage equality is an important manifestation of social tolerance and civilisation ... the more diverse and tolerant the society is and the higher the level of humanistic care and civilisation is ...

The preservation and advocacy for diversity were used here to justify the legalisation of same-sex marriage as social progress, which echoed Yep's (2014) call to rethink the differences in society and cultures.

The heteronormative boundaries of present-day marriage as a legal and social construct were contested in some posts when the discussion targeted the assumed sexual nature of a relationship where a legal marriage or household is based. The , Bill for Diversified Family Formation (Draft) had been proposed in Taiwan during the advocacy for the same-sex marriage bill (Jian, 2012). Although the proposal failed, its attempt to de-sexualize and de-gender marriage was approved in this post:

I am all for families that do not regard reproduction as their ultimate end. People who live more comfortably together, in fact, most of them are not husbands and wives. //@MXZ_we_dont_crash_ever: Wow//@ljtz: This is similar to the idea of the diversity of families in Taiwan, everyone has the opportunity to form a family that suits them.

This post painted a form of marriage or household formation that does not require sexual relations as its precondition, yet this was the only post with explicit support for a de-sexualised and de-gendered marriage or household formation.

Queer Criticism of Same-Sex Marriage

There were a few voices of queer criticism in the Weibo discussion of the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Similar to their American counterparts who worried that same-sex marriage, if legalised, would facilitate the rise of conservative homonormativity (R. Gibson, 2018; Robinson, 2005), “queer criticism of same-sex marriage” was identified as a theme in the studied Weibo discussion. The sampled posts with this theme were more developed in their arguments, although there were far fewer related to this theme compared to the number of posts with other themes. They expressed the fear of same-sex marriage legalisation overshadowing other more radical agendas in the local LGBT movement, worrying about the introduction of homonormative policing into queer lives and, more importantly, the increasingly narrowed space to deconstruct marriage as well as to present marriage as a problematic institution. Here is an example of such queer criticism of same-sex marriage:

... When this "victory" is regarded as the victory of the affirmative movement, can we breathe a sigh of satisfaction? I think we have to think about the legalisation of same-sex marriage, what kind of marriage institution does Tongzhi enter? There is no doubt that it is a "one-to-one heteronormative" marriage institution. ... The meaning of "one-to-one heteronormative" marriage remains unchanged, and the legalisation of same-sex marriage just conceals the problems of the "one-to-one heteronormative" marriage institution. ... Because the legalisation of same-sex marriage has created a marriage model for sexual minorities, it implies that other sexual minorities still face discrimination and exclusion. ... Also, how should bisexuals enter marriages? ... Therefore, the legalisation of same-sex marriage seems to be a big event that makes Tongzhi

happy but is the success and failure of the affirmative movement separated by the legalisation of same-sex marriage?

Interestingly, the concept of same-sex marriage and Tongzhi marriage was used interchangeably in this argument for a queer deconstruction of marriage. Here, Tongzhi was synonymous with homosexuals. Bisexuality was presented as unfit in both traditional marriage and same-sex marriage because the latter was now reserved for homosexuals. The above post argued the limits of focusing on same-sex marriage legalisation as a milestone in the LGBT movement because marriage as a sociocultural institution has been immersed in heteronormativity. The author argued that advocating for same-sex marriage legalisation distracted from the aim of the LGBT movement for equality for all. The first interviewee, Yu, was also critical of hetero/homonormativity, especially the stereotypical representations of homonormative homosexual life.

Another concern over same-sex marriage legalisation came from the criticism of marriage's patriarchal nature, as shown in the following post:

Because the LGBT movement ignores "females", it has its natural limitations. It is easy to let females to be taken advantages of, for gay men will start to have reproductive surrogacy after they get married. This is harmful to us. What needs to be done is to abolish marriage and implement flexible alliances such as the cohabitation mechanism.

In the post above, marriage was presented as a patriarchal institution that exploited females via reproduction. The legalisation of same-sex marriage had the possibility to facilitate such exploitation of women's bodies by its legitimization of male homosexuals' needs for reproduction. Therefore, the need for total abolishment of marriage was made at the end of the sampled post. In the interviews, marriage was viewed as a vehicle for patriarchy by some of the interviewees. The first interviewee,

Yu, expressed queer scepticism towards marriage, saying it was a site for patriarchy and for privileges where the married have power over the unmarried. Two other interviewees denied romantic love as marriage's precondition out of concern about the social institution of marriage being heteropatriarchal and serving the continuance of patrilineage within families.

Conclusion

The legalisation of same-sex marriage was the central topic in the studied Weibo discussion, but it was discussed without much depth. This Weibo discussion provided a space for the participants to express their opinions on same-sex marriage legalisation. The support for same-sex marriage legalisation stemmed from a progressive narrative where same-sex marriage legalisation played a role in modernisation and the juristic protection of human rights in the globalised context. A closer look reveals that romantic love was employed to rationalise support for same-sex marriage legalisation. Similar to R. Gibson's (2018) findings in the American case, queer views about same-sex marriage legalisation were divided into supportive opinions on marriage being queered by it and critical opinions about its presence in the global LGBT movement.

The discussion overwhelmingly supported Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation, although queer criticism about same-sex marriage was identified as a theme as well as mentioned in the interviews. However, according to the quantitative content analysis, Mainland China's legalisation of same-sex marriage in the foreseeable future was rarely mentioned despite the overwhelming support for same-sex marriage legalisation. Facts about local situations of gender equality and LGBT issues were hardly mentioned, as shown in the quantitative content analysis, although posts that mentioned local LGBT activism showed the most support for the event.

The welcoming attitude toward same-sex legalisation was not accompanied by complex conversations in the studied Weibo discussion regarding the issue; instead, it showed simplistic views about marriage. The support for Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was rooted in the conceptualisation and representation of marriage in this Weibo discussion. Marriage in the sampled posts was represented as either an abstract legal construct or as a romantic ideal based on love. Marriage was mostly represented as a legal construct that should be accessible to all citizens, which raised support for marriage equality. Posts that mentioned marriage in a Chinese traditional cultural context or personal sense tended to include less support for same-sex marriage legalisation. Although romantic love was not trusted as a solid base for a marriage to work and last according to all interviewees, it was portrayed in some of the sampled posts as marriage's primary precondition. These posts had a higher support rate for same-sex marriage. Conceptually, love in same-sex relationships tended to be represented in my sampled posts adhering to a romantic ideal that transcended heteronormativity in mainstream Chinese lives, leading to support for marriage equality. However, the overindulgence of romantic love showed a tendency to demean and diminish sexual identities in the qualitative content analysis with a thematic approach.

The findings suggest that support for same-sex marriage legalisation was widely expressed yet taken lightly in the Weibo discussion about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. This Weibo discussion did not become the forum for discussion of queer marriage, sexuality, or gender, neither was it a place to deconstruct or question the interconnectedness among them. Instead, overall support for same-sex legalisation appeared superficial, and the participants' interest in further discussion about same-sex marriage generally did not lead to offline activism for marriage equality.

Chapter 6: The Representation of Gender and Sexual Identities

This chapter presents an analysis of the studied Weibo discussion to answer the research question of how gender and sexual identities were represented in the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Findings from the quantitative content analysis, the qualitative content analysis, and the analysis of the interview transcripts are presented here.

Since the research was undertaken under queer methodology, the rationale for employing established identity categories and a quantitative approach in the analysis were offered earlier in this thesis in the methodology in Chapter 3. As already noted, the use of identity categories and quantitative methods are often frowned upon by queer researchers, like Gamson (2000), Halberstam (1998), and Browne and Nash (2010). However, quantification of subjects is not forbidden in applying queer methodology (Browne & Nash, 2010; Rumens, 2018), and the strategic potential to achieve equality through queering and utilising statistics is explored, employed, and valued by some researchers (Browne, 2010). Therefore, it was deemed desirable for this study to code identities into categories to see what identities were or were not mentioned, how they were mentioned, and how the established categories caught or failed to catch the mentioned identities, especially gender and sexual identities. An identity was coded into a particular category only when expressed literally and explicitly with no room for implication or ambiguity. There were only a few exceptions with nonheterosexual identities named inaccurately, and they were coded literally, such as homosexual identity given to men who have sex with men without cultural context, but still coded as homosexual for identity categorisation.

This chapter consists of four sections that together describe different aspects of the Weibo discussion's representation of gender and sexual identities. First, the limited range of gender and sexual identities expressed in the Weibo discussion are

introduced, followed by the section on the representation of heteronormative gender and sexual identities. Then, the third section presents findings about the diversity, visibility, and intersectionality of opinions expressed about nonheteronormative identities. The final section offers a conclusion to the chapter, suggesting the representation of gender and sexual identities reflects both submission to, and rebellion against, the heteronormative norms as well as heteronormative expressions.

The Limited Representation of Gender and Sexual Identities

This section presents two sets of findings to help answer the research question about the representation of gender and sexual identities, related to the visibility of gender and sexual identities in the sampled posts, and the post authors' personal point of view from which gender and sexual identities were mentioned. These two aspects provide an overall insight into the presence and nature of gender and sexual identities in the Weibo discussion about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage.

How these non-heteronormative identities were represented is an essential part of the research question about how gender and sexual identities were represented in the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. This section presents the qualitative and quantitative results about the visibility of these identities in the Weibo discussion, their representation in relation to gender binaries and hegemonic heteronormativity, how they were represented in popular culture and queer fandoms, and their intersection with nation identity.

The Gender and Sexual Identities Mentioned in Posts

The visibility of gender and sexual identity in the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was surprisingly limited given the topic of discussion. In total, only a few posts (n=13, 2.3%) included the author's own

gender and sexual identities with most of the gender and sexual identities discussed relating to other people's identities. Further discussion about the post author's own disclosures of their own sexual or gender identities is made in the section following this one. Of the sampled 562 posts, 265 posts (47.2%) explicitly mentioned at least one type of gender or sexual identity with 35 posts (13.3% of the sampled posts) mentioning gender and sexual identities in the same post. More than half the 265 posts (n=134, 50.4%) mentioned the gender identities with sexual identities when they were of persons other than the post authors. The overall low presence of sexual and gender identities could be affected by the users' self-censorship to avoid controversy that could either trigger the Weibo censorship mechanics to have the posts removed or to attract too much attention to have the post authors persecuted. Also, users might have attempted to post censored content with sexual and gender identities in them but failed. On the other hand, the depoliticised homonormativity also requires low profiling nonheteronormative identities to maintain the status quo and same-sex marriage legalisation aimed to at least destroy parts of it. The absence of influential LGBT activism and feasible local strategies for same-sex marriage legalisation made identity-based rights claims unrelated to the Mainland China context, which downplayed identity.

Gender identities were mentioned less often than sexual identities, both in self-references and in references to others. Less than one quarter of the overall posts (n=134, 23.8%) mentioned other people's gender identities (see Table 22). The legalisation of Taiwanese same-sex marriage did not stimulate discussion about gender and gender norms.

Table 21*Mention of Other People's Gender Identities*

Others' gender identity in posts	Frequency	Percentage
The post did not mention others' gender identity	428	76.2%
The post mentioned others' gender identity	134	23.8%
Total	562	100%

Sexual identities were more visible than gender identities as other people's sexual identities were mentioned in 36.8% of sampled posts compared to other people's gender identities (23.8%; see Table 23). Together, these findings suggest that the event of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was discussed more in relation to sexual identities than gender identities. Same-sex relationship or same-sex marriage was often discussed in the arena of sexuality.

Table 22*Mention of Other People's Sexual Identities*

Sexual identity mentioned or not	Frequency	Percentage
The post did not mention sexual identities of others	355	63.2%
The post mentioned sexual identities of others	207	36.8%
Total	562	100%

The Limited Personal Point of View: Few Coming-out Posts

Gender and sexual identities were represented with few personal disclosures of gender and sexual identities by the post authors themselves. Only 13 posts (2.3%) out of 562 contained disclosures of the writer's own orientations with the vast majority of the 562 posts (97.7% n=549) making no reference to the author's own gender or sexual identification.

There were no gender identity disclosures without mention of the post author's own sexual identity. The two references to personal gender identity were about female identity: one author said they identified as a lesbian, and the other said they did not identify as a lesbian. Thirteen posts contained information on personal self-disclosures of sexual identities. Nine of the 13 posts disclosing nonheterosexual identities contained confirmation of a specific nonheterosexual identity (see Table 24). Homosexual identity as plainly "homosexual" was mentioned in nine of the 13 self-disclosures here with seven of them aligning themselves with this identity. For instance, one author wrote: "#IAmHmosexual# Born this way, I have to protect my equal rights!!!". Tongzhi, as homosexual and bisexual, was brought up and confirmed in one self-disclosure on sexual identity. Other sexual identities that appeared in the self-disclosures were "les" (short for lesbian), "LGBT", and "TONGZHI, not to deny my identification". Among the three of them, the last one was claimed, and the other two were disclaimed.

Table 23

Categories of Sexual Identity Self-Disclosed in Posts

Sexual and gender identities self-disclosed in posts	Posts that claimed the mentioned identities of the author	Posts that disclaimed the mentioned identities of the author	Total frequency	Percentage
Homosexual but not titled as Tongzhi	7	2	9	69.2%
Other	1	2	3	23.1%
Tongzhi as homosexual and bisexual	1	0	1	7.7%
Total frequency	9	4	13	100%

The possible reasons behind the rare disclosure of one's own gender and sexual identities were explored in my interviews. The four interviewees were asked about

whether such disclosures could support one's opinions and about the perceived risks of coming out online. Three of the four interviewees denied their sexual or gender identities' determining impact on their stands about same-sex marriage. However, Gar offered the opposite opinion. Gar said that it was unnecessary to stress sexual identities in the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage since equality to him was "to be like everyone else and it is not needed to be high profiled, just like no heterosexual person would yell 'I am heterosexual'". In addition, according to Yu, self-disclosure of one's nonheterosexual identity on social media could risk accidentally coming out to acquaintances because they might be among the followers of the same social media account. Their concerns are reasonable because family and workplace discriminations were reported as major factors impacting Mainland Chinese LGBT and queer lives (UNDP, 2016), and coming out was not often prioritised in nonheteronormative persons' identity development (Wang, 2012, 2023).

The Heteronormative Identities

Heteronormative gender and sexual identities mentioned in the discussion included male/female identities in the gender binary and the heterosexual identity that derives from the gender binary, as queer theorists like Butler (1990) and Yep et al. (2003) have argued. The visibility of these identities in the Weibo discussion of same sex marriage and the hegemony of heteronormativity in this debate are analysed here. The representation of heteronormative gender and sexual identities denoted the presence of heteronormativity—a vital part of the discussion—in the Weibo discussion about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage.

The Popular Gender Binary and Rarely Mentioned Heterosexual Identity

As already noted in Table 22, 134 posts (23.8%) mentioned at least one type of gender identity. These posts contained 196 identity references in total. Of these 196 references to gender identity, 167 (85.2%) mentioned female and male identities with 29 (14.8%) mentioning identities outside the gender binary (see Table 25). This illustrates that the male/female gender binary was popular in the representation of gender identities in the Weibo discussion on same-sex marriage.

Table 24

Terms Used to Represent Other People's Gender Identities

Gender identity categories		Frequency		Percentage	
Binary gender identities	Male	167	86	85.2%	43.9%
	Female		81		41.3%
Nonbinary gender identities		29		14.8%	
Total		196		100%	

The male/female identities often coappeared in posts mentioning them. Of these 134 posts, 113 posts mentioned male/female identities. Fifty-four posts mentioned both female and male identities in the same post (see Table 26), and 43 of these 54 posts (79.6%) also mentioned marriage, which showed the recognition of marriage often as a gendered social institution in the studied Weibo discussion. Twenty-seven posts mentioned female identity alone, and 32 posts mentioned the male identity alone, showing that the male identity was slightly more likely to be mentioned alone.

Table 25*Male and/or Female Gender Identities Mentioned*

Gender identity categories	Frequency	Percentage
Male and female	54	47.8%
Male only	32	28.3%
Female only	27	23.9%
Total	113	100%

The heteronormative identities include not only the binary male/female gender identities but also the heterosexual identity supported by gender binary according to queer theorists such as Butler's (1990) and Yep et al.'s (2003) analyses of heteronormativity. Of the 212 posts that mentioned sexual identities, only 22 posts (10.4%) explicitly mentioned heterosexual identity, and none disclosed the post authors' own sexual identities. As shown in Table 27, most of the explicit mentions of heterosexual identity coappeared with sexual identities relating to homosexuality, such as homosexuals, same-sex partners, and Tongzhi. The homosexual and heterosexual identities were represented as presumably opposed to one another in their coappearances. For instance, one post questioned "why heterosexuals are opposed to same-sex marriage legalisation, when the homosexuals did not object to opposite-sex marriage legalisation?" The heterosexual identity in this discussion about same-sex marriage was presented as the homosexual identity's opposition. It was often presented as a better alternative compared to the homosexual identity. More about the representation of heterosexual identity is discussed in the next section.

Table 26*The Heterosexual Identity with or without Non-Heterosexual Identities*

Sexual identity categories	Frequency	Percentage
Heterosexual identity mentioned with identities relating to homosexuality	19	86.4%
Heterosexual identity mentioned without identities relating to homosexuality	3	13.6%
Total	22	100%

The Hegemonic Heteronormativity in the Representation of Heterosexual Identity and Gender Binary

The few references to heterosexual identity in the sample might not lessen the influence of heteronormativity in the studied Weibo discussion as it often presented as taken for granted. For instance, the heterosexual identity was implied by the representation of the heteronormative gender binary and by the expressions of traditional gender roles. It was also supported and manifested in stereotypical representations. However, a few posts criticised the discriminatory and patriarchal practice of the hegemonic heteronormativity.

The Hegemonic Heterosexual Identity. A qualitative content analysis was undertaken on the sampled posts mentioning gender and sexual identities. The representation of the hegemonic heterosexual identity constituted a part of the subtheme about the binarised representation of sexual identities that belonged to the main theme about binaries in identity representation. The heterosexual identity in many posts in the sample was widely assumed in the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Compared to nonheterosexual identities, heterosexual identities were not overt but present in heteronormative assumptions. For example, one post said her mother expressed support for same-sex relationships by saying, “it would be like having two daughters (if you were

homosexual)”. Although heterosexual identity was not explicitly given to the mother in the above example, most of the readers, including myself, would infer from the context that the mentioned persons with kinship titles were heterosexual and in a heteronormative relationship if not specified otherwise.

The heterosexual identity was represented in a privileged position as the default sexual identity for all. A heterosexual majority was represented as undoubtedly universal. For instance, a post commented on the failure to include same-sex marriage in the Civil Code after the Taiwanese referendum voting results came out on November 24, 2018, by saying:

This referendum voting results proved that the majority of Taiwanese cannot accept the homosexual. Although ‘marriage equality’ is a relatively neutral name for the bill, it is only supported by 30% of the votes, while nearly 70% of the votes agreed with the bill ‘marriage should be restricted between one male and one female’. It ended up like this in Taiwan, a much more liberal society. What can be expected for the Mainland?

The post above stated that the heterosexual majority did not welcome the homosexuals by voting against same-sex marriage in Taiwan. The majority position of the heterosexual identity was explicitly written in this post. Sometimes, heterosexual identity was represented as the majority in an implied manner, as shown in the following example:

... They [the homosexuals] are born this way. They are not against nature or attention-seeking. In fact, biologists have proven homosexuality practised among bonobo and dolphins. Taiwan has legalised same-sex marriage, and Japan published LGBT-friendly textbooks, but some people openly stand for discrimination. Nobody can forever be mainstream, and we should not turn a cold shoulder to others’ loss of freedom.

In the above post, homosexuals were addressed in the third-person pronoun and the assumed heterosexual identity in the first-person pronoun. The homosexual identity was implied as the Other and the deviant, and the inability to always be in the mainstream in all aspects of life, even for the heterosexuals, justified empathy for the homosexuals. The rationale behind the acceptance for homosexuality lay in its naturalisation in the post above. Heterosexuality, on the other hand, was already natural by implication. The reliance on scientific evidence for explanations of homosexuality, as shown in this example, demonstrates an effort to promote tolerance of homosexuality by showing that the nonheteronormative life is not a willing choice (Bennett, 2014).

The heterosexual identity was also portrayed as primary when it appeared with the homosexual identity or other nonheterosexual identities. One is not only presumed to be heterosexual and to act in ways adhering to heteronormative norms, as discussed in the paragraph above, but also assumed to mainly perform heterosexuality, both sexually and socially, while performing homosexuality and homosexual identity as secondary. For example, in a post denying the homosexual identity of any agency or equality, the author wrote:

The so-called 'homosexual' or 'bisexual' is currently a kind of self-identification, ... Also, stop saying that gay men cannot have sex with women. This is the distortion done by fictional works to homosexuals Everyone says that wives of gay men are women who marry homosexuals, so if the gay men whom they marry really cannot have sex with women, how did wives of gay men get AIDS? Is it transferred via blood contact? How do they have their children? By lab-work? A wife of a gay man could have been living a sexless life, and then accidentally found out that she was scammed?...

The author argued that heterosexual identity is acquired by sexual activity between the opposite sexes and, once acquired, becomes stable. In contrast, the homosexual and bisexual identities were described as being gained via self-identification and disproven by assumed pervasive heterosexual intercourse. As long as heterosexual activities were performed, heterosexual identities were secured for their participants. However, nonheterosexual activities could not be performed to determine their participants' sexual identities. In other words, nonheterosexual identities were demeaned in terms of identity performativity when only heterosexual identity can be gained through heteronormative performativity. This simplistic view of sexual identity's performativity placed any nonheterosexual identity or its performativity in a secondary or inferior position. Heterosexual identity was truer as the primary default of human sexual identity as shown in the example above.

Stereotypical Female Supporters Versus Male Commenters.

Male/female gender binary is supported by compulsory heterosexuality that normalises gendered persons' behaviours by heteronormative standards while reinforcing compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 1993). It was not surprising to find that binary gender identities appeared in over half of the posts where heterosexual identity was mentioned. Of the 22 posts that mentioned heterosexual identity, 12 posts (54.6%) also mentioned male or female identities in the gender binary, and the rest of the ten posts (45.4%) did not contain gender identities (see Table 28). Most posts mentioned heterosexual identity with gender identities, and they generally did not mention homosexual identity with gender identities. Male and female identities were mentioned with heterosexual identity in four of the 22 posts: one mentioned male heterosexual identity, two mentioned female heterosexual identity, and one post mentioned both. Although only a very small number of posts explicitly mentioned

heterosexual identity with gender, the presentations of males and females with stereotypical heteronormative gender roles appeared in the 22 posts.

Table 27

Appearances of Gender Identities in Posts Mentioning Heterosexual Identity

Gender identity categories	Frequency	Percentage
Male or female identity	12	54.6%
None	10	45.4%
Total	22	100%

The differences in the representation of male and female gender identities reflected their different roles in the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage and the context in which they appeared. According to the qualitative content analysis, the subtheme about binary gender representation illustrated stereotypical female supporters versus male commenters in posted content about gender and sexual identities in the sample. Females were more likely to be represented as supporters of same-sex marriage, showing their support online and offline, while males appeared more as analysts of the news event. Females in the posts were also represented as showing compassion towards same-sex couples or LGBT communities. Their support for Taiwanese same-sex marriage was often active, as shown in the following example of a mother expressing outrage to a priest against same-sex marriage:

A priest said that the state's faults were made in recent years, and one of them was same-sex marriage legalisation. A mother heard it and headed out with her daughter, saying the priest was psycho. The priest was left in shock.

The mother in the above example expressed her support for same-sex marriage legalisation by walking out on the religious service with her child and becoming angry when she heard the priest's words against same-sex marriage.

In addition to referring to common gendered roles, such as this mother's traditional feminine trait of having a sense of compassion for the legalisation of same-sex partners, the Weibo discussion also featured female celebrities in the public sphere who employed their celebrity status to support same-sex marriage. The support of female celebrities for same-sex marriage was referenced in a handful of posts' references to popular culture. Credit was given to female celebrities' support for Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Female celebrities in popular culture received good feedback for their supportive actions and works, as shown in the following post:

Taiwan has become the first region in Asia where same-sex marriage is legal! At this time, we need a "We are one" by the divas. Cai Jianya, Zhang Huimei, Lin Yilian, Na Ying, Xiao S, A-Lin Huang Liling, Elva Hsiao, Rainie Yang, Jolin Tsai, Wang Xinling, Tian Fuzhen, Lin Youjia, Xin and others in the Taiwanese entertainment industry as many as 200+ people speak out in this song! ...

The female celebrities were represented as allies in advocating marriage equality in a favourable light. Because the support of female celebrities was widely spread in the sampled posts, their male counterparts were overshadowed, as shown in the example above. Although male singers like Lin Youjia and Xin also took part in the production of the song "We are One", they were not in the spotlight and were overlooked in the example above.

On the other hand, young and unmarried females who were not celebrities were mostly discredited as opinion givers in the discussion by the authors of the posts about Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation, as shown in the example below. As also shown in the following post, young and unmarried women's opinions were framed as unimportant:

Talking about homosexuality-related topics on the Internet is very tiring ...

Girls should not always talk about gay besties ...

The author discredited young females' friendship with gay men and their support for them. Also, the author chose to refer to them as young and apparently unmarried females as "girls", which further demeaned their intellect and judgement as decision makers because of lack of knowledge linked with a young age in the local Chinese cultural context.

The male authors often positioned themselves as rational commenters, critics, and advice givers, armed with facts and intellect. When referred to, they were opinion givers. As shown in the following example, the author, although the initiator of the conversation, wrote more of a husband's insights than her own:

Today, I watched the 'Manager's pod broadcast', and I was surprised by the foul language of some Internet users in Taiwan. I sighed and told my husband that even though the law already allowed same-sex marriage, people still think like it never did. My husband said that a society with a heavy collective view like East Asia basically cannot accept this kind of things such as same-sex marriage, because people are unwilling to be regarded as one of them [the nonheterosexuals]. Foreigners have individualism, which is an attitude, something like "I don't care what you would do to me" ... Sadly, I think that Taiwan's new bill will remain impractical for years to come ...

This example shows how males were portrayed mainly in relation to the public sphere topics. When mentioned in a private setting, the husband still spoke of public issues, such as the nation and culture, while attempting to keep their neutral stand and to give an impersonal analysis. The male gender stereotype of being rational, well informed, and intelligent was presented in his expressed opinions.

Criticism of Heteronormativity

Criticism of heteronormativity that targeted the state-sponsored heteropatriarchy was made in a few sampled posts. These posts expressed radical feminist critique of heteronormativity existing in, and reinforced by, Mainland China's state policies in contrast to more progressive Taiwanese legalisation of same sex marriage. They also stressed the heteropatriarchal practices of the Mainland Chinese government and legislation by claiming connections among heteronormative laws, state censorship to eliminate lesbian communities on social media, and state-sponsored propagation for a steady birth rate and for the sustainability of the patriarchal heterosexual family structure. For example, the oppression of females by Mainland Chinese policies and other governmental actions were listed in this post, which refers to the closure of RELA, a popular social media platform for lesbians:

#RELA##RELA# Taiwan's same-sex marriage bill is passed now, Article 14 of the Marriage Law, Rela's being blocked, Zhejiang Youth League Committee having established a Dating Department, and the second-child policy, all of those are slowly suffocating women: your homosexuality is not allowed, you have to marry, to have a second child, to serve a man, to never ask for a betrothal money. Divorce is not allowed even faced with domestic violence, and when a man owes money to someone, his woman has to pay it back. The dark night for women is coming. Rela is just a start. The main purpose is to force women to marry and have children, serve the whole family, sacrifice for a lifetime, and obey the four wifely virtues.

As alluded to by the author of the above post, the sexist Confucian tradition has partially entered the contemporary narrative of Chinese nationalism in China's Mainland (Y. Guo, 2004). This tradition was reflected by this author's antagonised reference to the Confucian standard of womanhood, including obedience to her father

before marriage, and her husband during married life and her sons in widowhood, and also the four virtues for females—physical charm, propriety in speech, conformity to rules, and efficiency in needlework. The contrast was indirectly made between Mainland China state policies that strengthened the heteropatriarchal function of marriage as means for population growth for a nation state and as a familial site to exploit women, and the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage where marriage had become an equally accessible institution for all. At the end of the post, the author revealed her agony about the compulsory heterosexualisation process facilitated by the heteropatriarchal state power and how it harms Chinese women. “Rela” mentioned in the post above was banned in Mainland China when same-sex marriage was supported by Taiwanese Supreme Court judges.

The post below shows a contrast between state policies about marriage by the administrative powers on both sides of the Taiwanese Strait:

A very gentle voice tells this story, but it seemed even sadder. I know that it may be more difficult to gain marriage equality at this time of encouraging second children. But I hope Taiwan can do it ❤️ Let us have some hope.

This post illustrates the author’s belief that state power in Mainland China implements heteropatriarchal policies that confine marriage within heteronormativity. The above post contrasted the achievement of marriage equality and the state promotion of the “second-child policy” since marriage is closely linked with procreation in a heteropatriarchal context. The promotion of the second-child policy was interpreted by this author as the state’s signal to further limit marriage and gender to serve heteropatriarchy. Similar to the example prior to this one, the author framed the legalisation of same-sex marriage as a rebellion against the heteropatriarchal power of the Mainland Chinese state. The few posts that focused

on state policies of heteropatriarchy in this Weibo discussion confirmed Nagel's (1998) argument that the procreational function of heteronormative marriage was essential for the heteropatriarchal nation-state to sustain itself. Yu, one of the interviewees, mentioned their view that the state was heteropatriarchal, which shows that the sampled authors' beliefs about the Chinese Mainland state as heteropatriarchal was upheld by other participants in this Weibo discussion. The next post below makes a more obvious contrast between the Taiwanese and Chinese conditions in gender equality:

I went onto Instagram and saw that my Taiwanese friend was signing up for the second stage of the referendum on marriage equality, and we do not have reproductive freedom. Gender equality is still a rarely mentioned topic, so ironic.

In the post above, freedom in procreation was situated as a basic right in terms of gender equality. This post voiced dissent against the state propaganda and policy implementations that restricted how many children a woman should have. Mainland China promoted a second-child policy in an attempt to lessen the burden on the future of the welfare system (D. Tang, 2018).

These posts illustrate their authors' beliefs that state administration and legislation play a part in constructing the heteropatriarchy in China's Mainland. A few participants in the studied Weibo discussion made connections between gender, sexual identity, and procreation in Mainland China, although feminist activism is suppressed by the state (J. Li & Li, 2017). Such posts voiced the institutionalised, legalised, and normalised victimisation of females by compulsory heterosexualisation (Yuval-Davis, 1997). The appearance of such criticism, albeit in a very small number of posts, shows that a link between sexism, compulsory heterosexualisation, and heteropatriarchy is understood to exist by at least some contributors to this online

discussion of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Some women and nonheterosexuals realised and were recognised as victims of compulsory heterosexualisation and heteropatriarchy sponsored by the state, but the scant appearance of these views suggests that most authors either did not recognise or share these views or were unwilling to express them publicly on social media because feminist activism can lead to persecutions by the state (J. Li & Li, 2017).

The Nonheteronormative Gender and Sexual Identities

Nonheteronormative gender and sexual identities include all gender and sexual identities except male/female identities in the gender binary and the heterosexual identity. Two interviewees pointed out that the Weibo discussion about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage provided a virtual space for the representation of various nonheteronormative gender and sexual identities. For Yu, it was more about how the homophobic or antihomosexual expressions on Weibo actually offered Tongzhi a chance to reflect and rethink their identities and identifications although it was not what they intended to do. For Gar, this Weibo discussion provided a place for resistance, no matter how small, to the symbolic extinction of LGBT identities, for “it is better to make a weak voice than to be silenced”.

The Visibility of Nonheteronormative Identities

This section describes the range of nonheteronormative identities that appeared in the sampled posts, their overall visibility, and the visibility of each identity category. It reports how often nonheteronormative identities were mentioned and what kind of nonheteronormative identities were indicated in the sampled posts by references to quantitative and qualitative results.

The Rare Mentions of Nonheteronormative Gender Identities. Of the 196 mentions of gender identity of persons other than the author's own, 29 posts (14.8%) mentioned gender identities outside the male and female identity binary (see Table 25). Because some of them mentioned more than one type of nonbinary gender identity, the frequency of these identities added up to 33. Table 29 lists the types of nonheteronormative gender identities mentioned in the sample. There were 16 mentions of LGBT identity, comprising over half of the mentioned identities. Transgender identity was mentioned in nine posts (17%). As both sexual and gender minorities share the same Chinese term (XingShaoShu), mentions of this term were coded both as gender identity and sexual identity, and queer identity, an identity against heteronormativity, appeared in two posts. In the Chinese language, the third-person pronouns are gendered, but "ta/tamen" (meaning "it/they" in pinyin, the Romanisation of Chinese characters) was found in two posts to signify ungendered third person(s). Secondary and tertiary gender was mentioned once where the primary gender is the male gender by implication and the female and nonbinary genders are named as the secondary and tertiary. Fujoshi (FuNü or "spoiled/corrupted girl"), as an identity for women who like the queer fan culture or the BL culture, was mentioned once. These gender identities outside the heteronormative borders were represented in a small number of posts.

Table 28*Mentions of the Nonheteronormative Gender Identities*

Nonheteronormative gender identities	Frequency	Percentage
LGBT as a collective	16	55.1%
Transgender	9	17.2%
Sexual/gender minority	2	6.9%
Queer	2	6.9%
Ta/Tamen	2	6.9%
Secondary gender and tertiary gender	1	3.5%
Fujoshi	1	3.5%
Total	33	100%

The Disproportionate Representations of Nonheterosexual Identities.

Unlike heterosexual identity, nonheteronormative sexual identities were found in more than one third (39.2%) of the 260 mentions of sexual identities of persons other than the authors. However, the frequency of each sexual identity's appearance was disproportionate in these posts. Among the sexual identity categories, homosexual identity, labelled as "homosexual", was the most common (n=102, 39.2%; see Table 30). Tongzhi was mentioned in 92 posts (35.4%) while same-sex partners were mentioned in 26 of the 260 mentions of sexual identity (see Table 30). Bisexual identity was mentioned in three posts (1.1%; see Table 30). There were 34 posts mentioning sexual identities coded as "other" (outside the content analysis categories set up according to past research). There were various sexual identities and from different discourses. For example, imported identities used in the international LGBT movement and the gay rights movement, such as gay and lesbian/les, were more frequently mentioned than local identities such as Jiyou ("gay buddies"). "Minority group" and "sexual minority" were each mentioned in four posts, respectively. The

legal term “participants in same-sex marriages” and the legal and cultural term “husbands” were each mentioned in one post. The studied Weibo discussion covered mostly sexual identities involved with homosexuality, and the scientific term “homosexual” was most commonly used by the post authors in the sample. This demonstrates that homosexuality, as well as the identities indicating homosexuality, was one of the main focuses in the studied discussion about same-sex marriage legalisation.

The disproportionate representation of nonheteronormative gender and sexual identities could be a result of the heterosexual/homosexual binary manifested in the heterosexual matrix where sexual subject choices in the gender/sex binary determined sexual identities (Butler, 1990). In my interview with her, An limited the participants of same-sex marriage to homosexuals. Thus, sexual identities out of the heterosexual/homosexual binary tended to be overlooked by Weibo users in the studied discussion, along with nonbinary gender identities.

Table 29 *Categorised Communicative Terms Conveying Nonheteronormative Sexual Identities in Posts*

Sexual identity categories	Frequency	Percentage
Homosexual but not titled as Tongzhi or same-sex couples/partners	102	39.2%
Tongzhi	92	35.4%
Same-sex couples/partners	26	10.0%
LGBT	18	6.9%
Gay	4	1.5%
Minority group	4	1.5%
Sexual minority	4	1.5%
Bisexual but not titled as Tongzhi	3	1.3%
Lesbian/les	2	0.7%
Homosexual family and heterosexual family	1	0.4%
Husbands (as in husband and husband)	1	0.4%
Jiyou	1	0.4%
Les sisters	1	0.4%
Participants in same-sex marriages	1	0.4%
Total	260	100%

The Representation of Nonheterosexual Identities in and out of Gender Binary

Nonheterosexual identities were mentioned in 204 of the 562 sampled posts. They were unlikely to coappear with gender identities in posts. Table 31 shows that 38.7% (n=79) of the 204 posts mentioned gender and nonheterosexual identities in the same post while 61.3% of the 204 posts mentioned nonheterosexual identities without mentioning gender identities. There were 23 posts (11.3%) that mentioned nonbinary gender identities, showing the low visibility of such identities. The male/female binary gender identity was mentioned in 56 posts (27.4%) of the posts mentioning nonheterosexual identities. Compared to posts mentioning heterosexual identities, posts mentioning nonheterosexual identities tended not to contain binary gender identities. Although the homosexual identity was most frequently mentioned

among sexual identities, binary gendered homosexual identities were rarely mentioned. Most posts that mentioned nonheteronormative identities with gender identities did not label them explicitly with genders.

Table 30 *Appearance of Gender Identities in Posts Mentioning Nonheterosexual Identities*

Gender identity categories		Frequency		Percentage	
None		125		61.3%%	
Gender identities	Binary gender identities	79	56	38.7%	27.4%
	Nonbinary gender identities		23		11.3%
Total		204		100%	

In the studied Weibo discussion, nonheterosexual identities were depicted from different perspectives from which they were supported or opposed. The following sections introduce how they were represented with compassion, with gendered scrutiny, and with a romantic filter.

Nonheterosexual Receivers of Sympathy The representation of hegemonic heterosexual versus homosexual receivers of sympathy was manifested in the subtheme about binary in sexual identity representation. Homosexual identity, although characterised differently for males and females, was represented in many posts as a source of vulnerability while the heterosexual identity was represented with a stronger position with less depowering issues related to it, in line with Nielsen et al.'s (2000) finding that homosexualisation of the male gender was depowering. Homosexual identity or other nonheterosexual identities in my studied Weibo discussion, for males especially, were represented as depowering, marginalising, and victimising. Because of their disadvantaged status, the nonheterosexuals were often reduced to the object of compassion and sympathy by participants in the Weibo

discussion of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Here is an example of a representation of a homosexual victim:

... Do you know ‘Brother’ Leslie Cheung? Considering his appearance, talents, or character, he was second to no one, and he was a darling in and out of the entertainment industry, but when he admitted that he was gay, his life changed forever. He was still the same but only received cold shoulders. Didn't it finally cause the depression that took his life? ... [Note: “Brother” Leslie Cheung was a famous Hong Kong actor and singer in the 1980s and 1990s, and he openly came out as bisexual a few years before he committed suicide because of depression.]

The author conveyed pity and sympathy toward the homosexual Other, a well-known actor and singer. The nonheterosexual victim here was portrayed as initially having fame, talent, and glamour, only to be contrasted with his death after his declaration of his nonheterosexual identity. It was interesting that Cheung actually came out as bisexual, but the post above portrayed him as a homosexual. This narrative otherises the homosexual identity as the subject of sympathy. The pitiful homosexual Other was quick to arouse the Weibo user’s empathy, even in gossip. Here is an example where Taiwanese idol, actor, and singer Aaron Yan became more likeable to the author after being implicated in a scandal linked to homosexuality:

To be honest, I have heard Aaron Yan in the past two days. I felt indifferent to him, but now I like him. I feel pity that he was outed during the Taiwan Marriage Law equality election ...

Yan’s image in this author’s mind shifted to become more likable when the rumours about his alleged homosexuality aroused the author to pity him out of affection.

Similar to their male counterparts, female homosexuals were sometimes represented as vulnerable and mentally disturbed in this Weibo discussion of

Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Female homosexuals were also linked to mental distress and suicide, as shown in the following example about [describe Ellen]:

【Ellen fell 】 #Ellen# Last wish to revisit Taiwan with her wife to register #at17#Ellen fell off a building in Happy Valley yesterday (August 5th) and died at the age of 32. The talented Ellen was confirmed to suffer from bipolar disorder and demophobia in 2014....

The author coupled the mental illness with the celebrity being lesbian and her suicide, resulting in a rather gloomy portrayal of a homosexual's life. Similar to the post about Cheung, this post about a female nonheterosexual singer who committed suicide also mentioned mental disorders.

The LGBT identity was represented as the subject of compassion and sympathy. The discussion of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage provided a virtual space on Weibo to express empathy towards nonheterosexuals. Here is an example:

Come on~ Taiwan's same-sex marriage is legalised, and Mainland China would do the same in the not-so-far-away future. I hope that Chinese society will become more and more tolerant of LGBT. It's really sad to see the reason for the rejection of the application for the Super Topic. I am not a lesbian, but I am a BL fan ... The Taiwan news came out, and I cried with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I was very happy and, on the other hand, I wondered when same-sex marriage could be legal in Mainland China. I hope that LGBT can have happiness. [Note: Super Topic is an online topic-oriented, semi-open discussion forum]

The author disclaimed lesbian identity but sympathised with LGBT persons and communities in the Chinese Mainland, hoping that the heteropatriarchal state would

somehow grant same-sex couples the right to marry. The author did, however, personally identify with queer fandom where young women appreciate the queer mimics of heterosexual power disparity between the masculine role and the feminine role in a romantic relationship.

“Good” Lesbians Versus “Bad” Gay Men. The “good” lesbians versus “bad” gay men was identified as an illustration of the binary in identity representation in the qualitative content analysis of the posted content collected for this studied Weibo discussion. Similar to patterns in the United Kingdom in the 1980s (A. Smith, 1994), “good” lesbian and “bad” gay men were frequently seen in representations of homosexuals in this Weibo discussion of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage when male and female homosexual identities coappeared in posts, albeit with a slightly different set of binarised gender stereotypes. Traditional positive feminine stereotypes tend to be transferred onto lesbian women (A. 1), including love, loyalty, and other family-oriented virtues that are developed from, and beneficial to, the private sphere, and this was also true in my studied Weibo discussion. Homosexual male identity, on the other hand, was more visible than homosexual female identity (see Table 30), but gay men were represented in a less favourable light and with narrower intersectionality. The negative representations of gay men included references to them as rule-breaking, promiscuous perverts (A. Smith, 1994). Nonheterosexual male celebrities were sometimes at the centre of scandals in the studied Weibo discussion, as shown in the following post about a popular singer and actor and one of his alleged boyfriends who was called B:

@WanSiJi: The reason why boyfriend B released the news is to explain the whole story. After Yan’s news went public yesterday, it can easily be interpreted by the public that open relationships are common in the Tongzhi community, especially at this time when the referendum on marriage equality is about to be

achieved. This event hurt the rights that Tongzhi have been fighting for many years. The victims are all innocent. I hope that this matter will not affect the Taiwanese referendum. I wish marriage equality to be gained across the ocean!

The author of the above post expressed concern over nonhomonormative sexual relationship impacts on the public reputation of the homosexual community and, consequently, on public support for same-sex marriage legalisation. A male celebrity's alleged open relationship in the above example violated moral standards where only monogamous relationships were acceptable and monogamous marriage was ideal. In addition to being immoral, they were mentioned as HIV/AIDS carriers in the few posts that mentioned HIV and raised associated public health concerns, as shown below:

#Global Tongzhi News# [Will legalisation of same-sex marriage attract AIDS patients to Taiwan? Taiwan authorities' responses]. Those who oppose the homosexuals may also know that ignorance is the root of fear! Recently, Taiwan has circulated a series of pictures and texts on LINE [a popular social media application in Taiwan], saying that 80% of men who have sex with men are infected with HIV. After the legalisation of same-sex marriage, it will attract AIDS patients from all over the world to enter Taiwan. After 2 years, the cost of treatment for AIDS Health insurance is paid in full, which may create chaos of "homosexuals marrying for free medicine". Taiwan's Center for Disease Control (CDC) stated that unsafe sex can spread AIDS, and it can also happen between heterosexuals. Stable medication treatment can avoid more infections. The changes in the AIDS epidemic are not closely related to the legalisation of same marriages and refute these pictures and texts as inconsistent with the facts. The CDC stated that after the legalisation of same-sex marriage, homosexuals from all over the world will not come to marry in Taiwan, enjoy free AIDS drugs, and

increase medical expenditures. At present, the CDC is discussing amendments to open the life-long prohibition of blood donation in male-to-male sex and change it to a five-year postponement of blood donation. @CharlesSunCEO @Rabbit2016

The post reported concern about the possibility of an increase in medical insurance for HIV carriers because of the increasing number of male homosexual immigrants entering Taiwan after the legalisation of same-sex marriage. In contrast, no lesbian or nonheterosexual women were mentioned in a post with HIV/AIDS.

Males, regardless of their sexual identities, were portrayed as privileged and even calculated in their marriages with heterosexuals or women who confirmed their heterosexuality out of social norms. Previously, the results show that the structural oppression of women was pointed out in some posts yet was not accompanied by accusations against heterosexual men for their oppression against women within heteronormative marriage. Nonheterosexual men were held accountable for their possible participation in heteronormative marriage, as shown in the following post:

... Taiwan implemented the legalisation of same-sex marriage. What happened? 80% of same-sex couples registered are women, and only 20% are gay men. One can imagine how many straight wives of gay men are there ...

The lack of male applicants in same-sex marriage registration was considered the result of gay men's pervasive practice to marry women by the author of the post above. In my interview with An, she explained how news about more lesbians registering for same-sex marriage than gay men made her understand and develop empathy for lesbians. In addition, more mentions of female homosexuals were made in the Weibo discussion as major applicants of same-sex marriage, as shown in the following post:

Hmm, this is the result of Taiwan's opening of same-sex marriage application.

Almost all the registered couples are women.

Homosexual women were represented as most of the participants for same-sex marriage compared to their male counterparts in the above post.

The "bad gay men" trope also appeared in posts on the topic of procreation. The heteropatriarchal role of the mother who gives birth to the next generation of the family was hardly ever represented as a victim of heterosexual men (even in the criticism of heteropatriarchy), but motherhood was victimised when the men were not heterosexual, as shown in the following post:

... Procreation fanatics and hetero-male supremacists have diverse sexual orientations. The most stupid are fools who say, 'The homos' love is true' and 'willing to be a straight wife for gays'..[Note: procreation-fanatics (FanZhiAi literally meaning the cancer of procreation) and hetero-male supremacist (ZhiNanAi) literally meaning the cancer of heterosexual male are online slang terms.]

The post above expressed a strong view against males who deprived women through procreation and sexist norms, regardless of their sexual identity. It contains warnings against the over-romanticising of male homosexuality and the sympathetic views about male homosexuals. Males, especially homosexual ones, were portrayed as privileged in their marriages with women, as shown in the following post:

... The LGBT movement ignores the term 'female' and has its inherent limitations. It is easy to be used by others against women, and gay men will start to find reproduction surrogacy after they get married ...

The common ground shared by feminism and LGBT activism was attacked by the author of the post above. Nonheterosexual male identity was here represented as

being in a difficult and complex situation, blamed for the male privileges given by heteropatriarchy and for failure to perform the required heterosexuality.

Female homosexuals were portrayed with richer intersectionality than male homosexuals and in a more positive light. The lesbians were not only women who love women but also daughters, lovers, wives, singers, activists, celebrities, and even priests, as shown in the following post about a celebrity singer named Ellen:

They had a loving long-distance relationship for 7 years. During this period, they were separated. When Ellen was suffering from bipolar disorder, although Xiaoyu in Taiwan, she still silently cared for Ellen. In two years, she wrote 700 love letters to Ellen which moved Ellen deeply. In 2016 they decided to get married in Canada ... Ellen said in a media interview that two women are most important in her life. The first is her wife Yu Jingping (Xiaoyu), and the second is her mother ... In 2017, when Lu Kaitong won the “Best Arranger Award” at the 28th Taiwan Popular Music Awards, she came out on stage and thanked her wife ...

The lesbian couple in the above post engaged with LGBT activism across the private/public sphere boundaries, while male activists were represented as solely focused on public sphere campaigns in the Weibo posts sampled. For example, a few posts wrote “gay writer Bai Xianrong supports same-sex marriage” by referring to his written statement about marriage equality and on human rights without mentioning his personal life.

Nonheterosexual Identities Diminished by Romantic Love. Love in this Weibo discussion refers to the connection between people where the need for fidelity, sexuality, and companionship are fulfilled in a romantic relationship based on free choice and adhering to individualistic and liberal values. Such idealisation of love resembles the independent, monogamous, romantic, free-chosen, and love-based

marital ideal developed by Western romanticism in the early 20th century (Coontz, 2005; Lin, 2007; Lee, 2006). The need to pursue love confirming the romantic ideal offers common ground for heterosexual allies and nonheterosexuals in the studied Weibo discussion. The subtheme “love romanticised” was identified to describe nonheterosexual identities being transcended or overwhelmed by romantic love in the qualitative content analysis. Homosexual identities, in particular, were linked in my findings with the romantic ideal for the brave pursuit of love, as shown in the following post:

A kid asks mom: ‘what is the homosexual?’, and the mom said: ‘Men and women are like the two poles of a magnet. There are mostly opposite sexes attracting each other, but, in some cases, people in the same side of the pole are in love with one another. In those cases, they need to overcome a lot of difficulties to embrace each other’. The road is still long ahead 🌈 #TaiwaneseMarriageEquality# Come on

Here, sexual identities were diminished by ontological romantic love in the post above through the reduction of heterosexual and homosexual identities to sexual attractions without the complexity of social context. This post also downplayed the sufferings of the nonheterosexual by positioning romantic love as most important.

The quantitative content analysis results found that nonheteronormative identities were less often mentioned and favoured in this Weibo discussion than the legalisation of same-sex marriage itself. It was not only the result of marriage being reduced to a predominantly legal construction, as discussed in Chapter 5, but also because of the tendency in this Weibo discussion to detach sexual and gender performativity from identities. Some posts deconstructed sexual identity and refused identity politics based on the primary force of love, as the following example shows:

Taiwanese legalisation of homosexuality #Taiwan has become the first region in Asia where same-sex marriage is legal! We want our children to know that in the future if two boys or two girls are together, they are not Tongzhi, but they are just lovers; I hope our children will know that in the future two males or two females will marry. They do not enter same-sex marriages. It is just marriages!!! True love does not depend upon genders; all love is equal and should be respected by everyone!

The author used “lover” to cover heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual identities. The romantic love was shown as the common ground shared among holders of all sexual identities and, thus, the specific situations faced by nonheterosexuals were overlooked while the monogamous love ideal was universalised.

The Influences of Popular Culture and Queer Fandom Culture on the Representation of LGBT Identities

The previous section delineates how gender binary impacted on the representation of nonheteronormative identities. As Weibo users tend to be entertainment seekers, as discussed in Chapter 2, how the two entertainment-oriented cultures—popular culture and queer fan culture—represented nonheteronormative identities is highly valuable in answering the research question about the representation of gender and sexual identities. Popular culture and queer fandom cultural expressions were mostly supportive and positive of nonheterosexual persons and identities, as previous sections show. This positive influence was recognised both in the content analysis and in the interviews. Although popular culture and queer fandoms rarely provided space for representations of nonheterosexuality in the Chinese cyber world, the participants in the studied Weibo discussion still reproduced heteronormativity in the imagined queer mimics of their user-generated content. Interviewee Yu suggested this might be due to the

internalised heteronormativity, saying that these imagined mainstream lifestyles for the homosexuals was “about self-castration and re-engraving the norms of heteropatriarchy”.

Cultural Challenges to Heteronormativity from Popular Culture and Queer Fandom. Popular culture celebrities raised the visibility of same-sex marriage and LGBT identities in general, employing imported slogans and symbols, such as “love is love” and the rainbow flag. In the interviews, three of four interviewees agreed these symbols and slogans were open signs of one’s affiliation with pro-LGBT-movement values. As Yu said, “If there are such symbols in a person’s nickname, I usually regard it as a sexual-minority-related person, at least a sexual-minority-friendly person, someone who is more daring to make it public”. Yet the more heteronormative interviewee, An, did not comment on the rainbow flag symbol as a signifier to show specific nonheteronormative identities, though she agreed that it could express support for the LGBT population.

Queer fandom was another cultural domain for the representation of nonheterosexuality in my sample. The occasional references to queer fandom were found in 20 posts during the quantitative content analysis. The topic of the queer fandom was subsequently explored in the interviews. Interviewee Rock regarded BL fandom and its expression as products of the now highly commercialised cultural industry. Since space for nonheteronormative expressions are limited in the Chinese-speaking world, queer fandom has the function of fostering activism among the previously oppressed groups and communities, such as females and Tongzhi. Rock also argued that cocultural fandoms like ACG (Anime-Comic-Games) and BL were built up with endorsements from Tongzhi, gays, and other formerly marginalised minorities, adding that “I think they are very good. They even play a role in giving young passers-by a good impression of the Tongzhi community”. The most

heteronormative interviewee, An, agreed that the BL fandom and the spread of its works and arts did facilitate and enhance the visibility of “the homo group (Tongxing Qunti)”. These positive claims about BL association with male homoeroticism posed imaginative challenges to the compulsory and hegemonic heterosexuality. However, these cultural manifestations also confirm the heteronormative mainstream to a certain extent, which is discussed in the following section.

Cultural Confirmation to Heteronormativity from Popular Culture and Queer Fandom. The interviewees commented on popular cultural promotions for LGBT movement goals, including same-sex marriage and visibility of nonheteronormative identities, but doubts were also cast over the effect of these cultural promotions by Yu. Yu thought the increasing popularity of pro-LGBT symbols in popular culture was simply the result of in-group members of the LGBT community echoing each other on social media. Thus, the reach of popular cultural pro-LGBT promotions to the public was seen as questionable if occurring in an echo chamber created by like-minded clusters on social media. Unlike Rock, Yu was cautious about the support for sexual and gender minorities from the popular cultural arena because of its commercialism in a capitalistic global cultural industry. He then hoped the private sector would take social responsibility for the promotion of LGBT human rights by supporting pro-LGBT popular cultural celebrities if more liberal media policies of the state could make it feasible. Q. Wang (2015) commented that the activist side of the queer popular cultural phenomenon in China’s Mainland had been silenced by heteropatriarchal political authority, blaming the Mainland Chinese cultural industry for conveniently reducing queer performativity to performance for easy profit in the celebrity fandoms. Q. Wang’s (2015) concerns were consistent with comments made by Yu but were in contrast to the views of Rock.

Queer fandom cultural expressions were captured in the quantitative content analysis results presented in Chapter 4. In addition, and as previously explained in my methodology in Chapter 3, because queer fan culture had been highly discussed in the first three interviews, I invited a BL fan who followed the news about same-sex marriage legalisation in Taiwan to participate in my study. The fourth interviewee, An, had been a fujoshi (FuNü or “spoiled/corrupted girl”) and member of BL fandom for many years. She fit into the BL fans’ profile, described by Rock as where “Fan-arts and BL comics may be things that accompanied them in their teenage years, providing comfort ...” and cultivating their friendliness to Tongzhi. However, An explained that she was attracted to/drawn in by the heteronormativity in the BL landscape. She worried that the popularity of BL texts could threaten what she saw as a compulsory heterosexualisation process for teenagers because the imagined nonheterosexual relationship between males questioned the ubiquity and essentiality of the heterosexual identity. As she put it:

Sexual orientation is innate. Some people have seen such BL works and begin forcing people around them to change their sexual orientations. This is very bad ... some young people ... without any distinguishing ability and no perception of their own sexual orientation are more likely to be affected.

An, the interviewee said, “I think it is natural, but the environment also has an impact ...” as the factors behind homosexuality, and then she confirmed her belief that heterosexual identity was determined by natural factors under some external impacts. As previously argued in Chapter 6, the binary representation of heterosexual/homosexual identities and the rigid dichotomy of human sexual identity runs the risk of dehumanising the owners of their sexual identity. An did not believe that the state would grant full marriage equality to nonheterosexual couples who, in her words, were “homos (Tongxing)” in order to maintain the current stable

heteronormative status quo. An's words confirmed the "born this way" rhetoric for homosexual identities. An stated that settings of an LGBT-friendly alternative universe in fictions were written to better develop the plot. The BL works are disassociated from real-life nonheterosexual lives and from queer subversion of heteronormativity (Tian, 2020; Y. Zhou et al., 2018).

The Representation of Nonheteronormative Identities at an Intersection with National Identity

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, intersection with national identity is unavoidable for nonheteronormative identities that exist in various geographical, political, and cultural contexts (Altman & Symons, 2016; Binnie, 2004; L. Chan, 2017; X. Guo, 2007). Since the nation is heteropatriarchal, as depicted in Chapter 2, nonheteronormative identities were sometimes oppressed by national identity and sometimes conflicted with it, as this section illustrates. The portrayal of the nonheteronormative, mostly the homosexual, identity at an intersection with Chinese national identity offers an important aspect in the answer to the research question about the representation of gender and sexual identities, enriching it with local perspectives that extend our understanding of how socially mediated discussions might vary based on context and culture.

Avoidance of Controversies about Regional Politics. The dispute over China's and Taiwan's identities is political in nature. Therefore, during content analysis coding, words indicating China's or Taiwan's political identity, such as "country", "state", "Taiwan", or "China", were considered as identity signs while words for Chinese cultural identity, such as "Chinese" (which is shared by the Taiwanese) without political implications, was mentioned in 13.7% (n=77) of the posts in the sample (see Table 32). In these 77 posts, slightly more than half (51.9%, n=40) mentioned China as the "country" or "PRC" while 37.7% (n=29) mentioned the "Mainland" (see Table

32). Clearly, the political and legislative role of the Mainland Chinese state was not an explicit part of this online discussion of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage even though it was an event of political nature.

Table 31

Mainland China's Identity

Mainland China (not) mentioned		Frequency	Percentage
The post did not mention China or the Mainland		485	86.3%
The post mentioned China or the Mainland	It mentions China as PRC (People's Republic of China) or the country	40	7.1%
	It mentions the Mainland	29	5.2%
	Both	7	01.3%
	Other	1	0.1%
Total		562	100%

The limited political framing of the Weibo discussion of Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation is particularly well shown in that the controversial topic of Taiwanese political identity did not become the centre of this discussion. Taiwan's regional or national identities were coded by political wordings where Taiwan was mentioned as a region or an independent country (see Table 33). Most sampled posts (n=426, 75.8%) mentioned Taiwan without a specific political identity. Some posts (n=92., 16.3%) mentioned Taiwan as a region while 13 posts (5.3%) mentioned it as a country. Thirty posts did not mention Taiwan. This suggests that most post authors in this discussion avoided the controversy of Taiwanese political identity, and, those who did not, mostly supported the "One China Policy" in the content that they posted. In my interviews, Yu and Gar said Taiwanese political identity was irrelevant to them in a discussion about same-sex marriage legalisation while Rock placed great importance on the controversy over Taiwan's political belongingness and believed it

offered a chance for Chinese Mainlanders to reflect on their national identity. However, most posts did not touch on the topic of national identity. The restrictive censorship made it impossible to have a reflection about Chinese national identity in relation to the geo-political tension between Taiwan and Mainland China on social media. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Mainland Chinese official representation of the Chinese national identity is heteronormative in its policies, leaving no room for homonationalism. Homonationalism was irrelevant in the Mainland China context because of the state's elusive and ignorant attitude to nonheteronormativity. The absence of homonationalist content lessened the presence of national identity as well.

Table 32

Taiwan's Identity

Taiwan's identity expressed in posts	Frequency	Percentage
Neither as a country or region	426	75.8%
As a region	92	16.3%
Taiwan not mentioned	30	5.3%
As a country	13	4.5%
Both	1	0.2%
Total	562	100%

Homosexual Identity in Mainland China: Against State Oppression.

The portrayal of Mainland Chinese homosexual identity as against state oppression was found in the qualitative content analysis after reading and rereading of posts mentioning both Taiwanese/Chinese identities and nonheteronormative identities. The Mainland Chinese state normalises heterosexuality and heterosexualised gender binary in a heteropatriarchal manner to sustain the privileges of heterosexual males as discussed previously. Three interviewees confirmed that state censorship limited the visibility of homosexuals on Mainland Chinese social media and decreased the Chinese public's access to LGBT-friendly information, but An denied that state

censorship had negative effects on online discussions about LGBT identities and blamed the older generation's conservative mindset for the current difficulties faced by LGBT persons and groups in Mainland China. On the other hand, state censorship of nonheterosexual media content had reduced the depth of the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage, as reported by Gar, and the discussion about such a topic on overseas social media platforms was more thoroughly discussed and presented. In the posts that cover the theme about disparity, state censorship in Mainland China was regarded as silencing the homosexual identity online to reduce its visibility. Thus, the need for a fair representation of nonheterosexual identities, especially the homosexual identity, was proposed in the sampled posts.

With the emphasis on Confucian values where male heirs possess both symbolic as well as practical significance in the continuance of the family and the Chinese state (Y. Guo, 2004), heteropatriarchy with nationalist emphasis on procreation constructs the opposition between Chineseness and nonheteronormativity. Nonheteronormativity thus becomes the cultural nationalism's Other, as the following post shows:

#Iamgay# While Taiwan, officially known as a province, celebrates the legalisation of same-sex marriage, the Mainland has banned homosexuals/homosexuality in daylight. It is so sad that such a minority cannot be tolerated in a great country. It is extremely sad.

The post positioned homosexuals as a minority against the Mainland Chinese authorities and their discriminative policies. With the demonstrations against the official threat to eliminate all representations of homosexuality on Chinese social media and streaming sites in Mainland China (S. Liao, 2019), the event of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was referred to by the activists online as a good

example for successful Westernisation and modernisation. The Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage also made a sharp contrast between how homosexuals were treated by the two official authorities in Taiwan and in Mainland China. The contrast was sharpened when a post author pointed out that Taiwan as a province can make marriage equality come true, and China's Mainland, as a country with more resources, cannot tolerate the presentation of homosexual identity or homosexuality. The contrast between a developed queer-friendly Taiwan and a queer-unfriendly, patriarchal Chinese Mainland is sharpened when it is framed within the Western-centric developmental narrative of lesbian and gay rights, as shown in the following example:

In 2017, Taiwan passed a same-sex marriage bill, and the Mainland banned online programmes from showing abnormal sexual relationships such as homosexuality. The gap in development between them was a century wide. The post author placed Mainland China's ban on online representation of homosexuality as a socially backward policy, resulting in its being left behind by the now progressive Taiwan.

Apparently inspired by the event of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage, a few posts called for offline activist actions to challenge and change the heteropatriarchal status quo by improving democracy. The value of grassroots dissent was stressed in those posts while the hope for achieving a civil society with less inequality was expressed in others, as stated in the following post:

Whenever something happens, you can always hear a voice like 'why do we care about it?' ... And speaking out is the first step to liberate your mind. You need to tell others that you are not a slave. You pass the message onto others and enlighten the people around you. Only until the day when we realise that we are not born to kneel, will we be qualified to fight for democracy for the rights of

more people. Marriage equality in Taiwan is not a big gift that popped out all of a sudden. It was the pride parade year after year, the legislative sit-in protests, the street activism, and the support and endeavour from public figures, one after another ...

The post above recognised the potentiality in the online public sphere for the liberation of the mind and activist actions offline. However, the post did stress the offline communication in the liberation for people to unlearn heteronormativity and to initiate social change in Mainland China.

Mainland: Backward and Developing in Modernisation. The representation of Mainland China as backward and developing in modernisation was from the theme about regional disparity that emerged in the qualitative content analysis. Adhering to the developmental narrative of LGBT rights, Taiwan, with its proximity to Western developed countries in terms of LGBT acceptance, tolerance, and attempts to legalise same-sex marriage, was regarded as modern, Western, liberal, and developed. The Chinese Mainland, on the other hand, was portrayed as oriental, developing, traditional, authoritarian, and in need of modernisation, as shown in the following post:

As for China, it still bans Rela, Zank software, and oppresses gay activities. They want to make this issue invisible. If the public does not know about Tongzhi, how can they understand (about Tongzhi issues)? If China stagnates in its development, I think even without the United States and Japan [interfering on Taiwan's regional politics], Taiwan will not want to return to the motherland. In a word, in China, this road is long and hindered #Rela# [Note: Rela and Zank are social media platforms for female and male nonheterosexuals in Mainland China, faced with closing down because of state censorship from time to time]

The post above had taken the local progress in the LGBT movement as signs of national development. Thus, it stated the urgent need for Mainland China to become more liberal and developed by lifting its heavy censorship on nonheteronormative identities. Taiwan was seen as more developed in comparison.

Approaches for further development to better the situation in China's Mainland were proposed in sampled posts about activism: the legal approach and the educational approach. The post quoted below advocated the legal protection for all nonheteronormative individuals in Mainland China.

... This post expresses support for the [legalisation of same-sex marriage] and opposes discrimination against homosexuals and transgenders. No matter how those people appeal, how to issue death threats to homosexuals and transgenders, Chinese law will safeguard the legal rights of homosexuals and transgender citizens and protect their safety ... We should unite to oppose discrimination based on all gender, sexual orientation, and gender self-identification. I support the legalisation of same-sex marriage. Public opinion is also a weapon. Civilisation will defeat barbarism. The rainbow flag never falls.

The holy spirits are with you!

The post above advocated for legal protection against discriminative verbal violence in the name of human civilisation. In this post, the judicial institutions in China's Mainland were portrayed as protectors of LGBT human rights. The author called for the gender and sexual Other, oppressed by the hegemony of heteronormativity, to unite for civilisation's triumph.

Another approach present in the sample was educational where LGBT-friendly sex education was presented as playing a crucial role in the protection of nonheteronormative identities. Credit was given to the Taiwanese liberal sex education with a focus on gender equality by one post that stated:

Taiwan can be successful in achieving marriage equality and its progress in gender equality, with its sex education playing a big part.

Liberal sex education in public schools was also identified as a necessary measure toward a more inclusive social and legal environment in Mainland China's future, as shown in the following example:

...The [Mainland 's] mainstream media should not mislead young people without any thought. Let them know that there are many different individuals in this world and let them learn how to respect differences. What harm can that do? If you were educated about love and equality since you were a child, would you still have the prejudices you have today?

In the above post, educational improvement was called upon to reduce prejudice. The mainstream media was blamed for misleading the young through its failure to offer representations of diversity. Public sex education was to cultivate the younger generation to learn about love and equality so that prejudices about identity differences could be reduced.

Opinions about Nonheteronormative Identities

Less than one quarter (n=100, 23.6%) of posts with opinions showed attitudes to LGBT and queer persons or identities (see Table 34), which reflects the low profile of LGBT and queer identities in China, both online and offline (Engebretsen et al., 2015; Y. Yang, 2019).

Table 33*Existence of Opinions about LGBT and Queer Persons or Identities*

Opinion towards LGBTQ persons or identities	Frequency	Percentage
The post expressed opinions on topics other than LGBTQ persons or identities	324	76.4%
The post expressed opinions on LGBTQ persons or identities	100	23.6%
Total	424	100%

If the author expressed an opinion about one or more LGBT and queer identities, the attitude was far more likely to be positive than negative (see Table 35). Among the 100 posts with opinions toward LGBT and queer identities, 87 of them showed supportive or favourable attitudes (for example, see Figure 8 in Appendix B) while six posts contained discouraging or antagonistic opinions. Seven posts mentioned both positive and negative opinions. A little more than 20 per cent of the 157 posts with reference to popular culture supported nonheteronormative identities.

Table 34*Opinions towards LGBT and Queer Persons or Identities in Posts*

The posts contained different opinions towards LGBTQ persons or identities	Frequency	Percentage
Supportive or favourable	87	87.0%
Mixed	7	7.0%
Discouraging or antagonistic	6	6.0%
Total	100	100%

The nonheteronormative identities of others were classified according to the settings in which they were mentioned in the posts. The romantic or marital setting was private and nonpolitical whereas the human rights setting was public and political. In the former setting, sexual identity was treated as a personal and private matter involved with romantic relationships and partners, marriage, weddings (for

example, see Figure 8 in Appendix B), or the formation of a nuclear family. In the latter, sexual identity was more of a public and political matter related to activism, pro-human-rights movements, equal right to access to marriage, and freedom of speech (for example, see Figure 9 in Appendix B). Most of the 208 posts that mentioned nonheterosexual, nonconfirmative, and/or noncisgender identities mentioned them in the human rights setting (n=160, 77.0%), sometimes combined with references to a romantic or marital setting (n=26, 12.5%; see Table 36). Just eight posts (3.8% of the 208 posts that mentioned nonheterosexual, nonconfirmative, and/or noncisgender identities) mentioned them in the romantic or marital setting alone (see Table 36), which showed coherency to the presentation of marriage as a legal construct that is recognised in the public arena.

According to Table 36, nonheteronormative identities were more likely to be supported in the post authors' expressed opinions when mentioned in the romantic settings. Half of those identities were supported in marital and romantic settings. Yet, when they were mentioned in the human rights setting, they were slightly more supportive than average. The mentions of self-claimed nonheterosexual, nonconfirmative, and/or noncisgender identities were also coded into these two settings; all of them were expressed in the human rights setting, and two of them expressed supportive or favourable opinions to nonheteronormative persons and identities.

Table 35

Nonheterosexual, Nonconfirmative, and/or Noncisgender Identities of Other People Mentioned in the Romantic/Marital Setting or the Human Rights Setting

Settings where nonheterosexual, nonconfirmative, and/or noncisgender identities mentioned in the posts	Frequency	Percentage	Support rate of the nonheteronormative identities (the percentage of posts with both supportive and favourable opinions to the nonheteronormative identities /posts mentioning them in different settings)
It mentions nonheterosexual, nonconfirmative, and/or noncisgender identities in the human rights setting	160	77.0%	42.5%
Both settings	26	12.5%	46.2%
It mentioned nonheterosexual, nonconfirmative, and/or noncisgender identities in neither romantic nor human rights settings	14	6.7%	14.3%
It mentions nonheterosexual, nonconfirmative, and/or noncisgender identities in the romantic or marital setting	8	3.8%	50.0%
Total/Average support rate	208	100%	41.4%

A little over half (n=108, 51.9%) of the 208 posts that mentioned nonheteronormative identities did not include any opinions about these identities, resulting in a low average support rate for nonheteronormative identities. Although most posts that showed opinions toward nonheteronormative identities held supportive opinions to them as shown in Table 35 on p. 156, the supportive or favourable opinions for nonheteronormative identities were uncommon (n=86, 15.3%) in the sample of 562 posts. The major part of this Weibo discussion stayed

silent regarding opinions about nonheteronormative identities, although, once mentioned, supportive or favourable opinions were likely to be shown.

Conclusion

The limited and unbalanced representations of different kinds of gender and sexual identities showed the tension for and against heteronormativity with posted content that depicted these identities in ways to confirm, reveal, or challenge the heteronormative status quo. The general presence of gender and sexual identities was low in the Weibo discussions of same-sex marriage legalisation with 266 posts (47.3% of the sampled 562 posts) mentioning them, and with self-disclosures of gender and sexual identities rare. The visibility of different gender and sexual identities was unbalanced with gender and sexual identity categories mentioned at rather different frequencies in the sampled posts. Gender identities failed to be at the forefront of the studied Weibo discussion, appearing in less than one quarter of the sample. In addition, gender identities represented in the studied Weibo discussion were mostly binary male and female identities, and gender-stereotypical representations of male and female sexual identities were found in the sampled posts. As written in the sampled posts, females tended to be supporters and males were likely to give comments in this Weibo discussion. Most mentions of gender and sexual identities were given to sexual identities, especially the homosexual identity. Other identities, including nonbinary gender identities and the bisexual identity, were underrepresented in the studied Weibo discussion compared to homosexual identities, although a diverse range was mentioned at low frequencies. Participants in the studied Weibo discussion seemingly preferred not to post opinions about nonheteronormative identities as opinions about them appeared in less than one quarter of all posts that contained opinions.

The gender and sexual identities in the Weibo discussion were represented in submission to and rebellion against heteronormativity. The hegemonic heteronormativity manifested in the representation of unsaid yet privileged heterosexual identity and popular gender binary. Identities outside heteronormative binaries tended to become otherised, pitied, and de-essentialised because of the hegemony of heteronormativity. The complicated geo-political issues about Taiwan and Mainland China were mostly overlooked in this Weibo discussion, and the Chinese national identity was rarely brought up. At the intersection with national identity, nonheteronormative identities were the target for state censorship when the nation or the state of China was mentioned. However, the nonheteronormative identities were represented with criticism about the current status quo. Radical feminist criticisms were occasionally spotted, revealing the heteropatriarchal nature of the state, LGBT-related news, and popular international cultural works. In addition, sometimes they could offer limited yet valuable virtual space for the nonheteronormative identities to gain visibility in the online public sphere discussions. Popular culture and queer fandoms allowed activist voices to support the nonheteronormative against the hegemonic heteronormativity in the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage.

Few negative opinions about nonheteronormative identities existed in the sampled posts. Most opinions expressed about the nonheteronormative identities were supportive and favourable, although not many posts contained opinions about them. As the state reinforced stricter Internet censorship, activist demands for fair representation and inclusive sex education were mentioned by some participants within the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese same-sex marriage. The representations of gender and sexual identities were limited, and the frames where they were depicted in the sampled posts were varied and fragmented. The

confrontation of heteronormativity was not present in the studied Weibo discussion in most of the sampled posts because heteronormativity was not actively criticised. Besides the heteronormative stereotyping, gender and sexual identities were represented in relation to radical feminist criticism, LGBT activism, and liberal values. As for the nonheteronormative identities in particular, a shared image for a unified LGBT or queer identity did not emerge in the Weibo discussion about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage, although most opinions about them were positive °

Chapter 7: Discussion

The findings are discussed in relation to previous studies and theories with a research-question-focused structure. The Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage has similarities and differences with other discussions on social media. It also fits into some theoretical concepts to a certain degree although none of them can fully capture the entire Weibo discussion. However, the theoretical concepts and lenses offered connections that linked the studied Weibo discussion with broader social and historical constructions in the age of globalisation as well as in the Mainland China sociopolitical context.

The Harmonious and Limited Public Sphere Discussion Online

This section discusses my findings in relation to the first research question regarding the landscape of the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Theories about public sphere and previous research on online public sphere behaviours were involved to discuss the landscape of this Weibo discussion from a theoretical point of view.

A Fragmented Online Public Sphere with Homophily

This Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage had features belonging to a public sphere discussion on social media of China's Mainland. It was captured on a social media platform that was the centre stage of the Mainland Chinese online discussion about this topic, and the Chinese language was used in the vast majority of posts in the sample. The platform offered a virtual space for participants to voice their opinions and, importantly, users used it in this way, making it an online public sphere discussion. Although this Weibo discussion could function as one of the fragmented public spheres on Weibo, neither the Habermasian model of public sphere (Habermas, 1989) nor the model of an agonistic deliberative

public sphere proposed by Mouffe (1999) can be applied to it. This Weibo discussion, like many others on Weibo, could form a public sphere but a rather limited one in terms of the production of actionable political agreement due to the limitations in the structural dimension that make it difficult for influential posts to reach large-scale of online audience. Because of such limitations, the Weibo discussion also fails to become a public sphere where contesting opinions from different sides are expressed. The lack of conflicting opinions facilitated one-sided opinion expressions in the discussion over Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. The general emotional tones were found to be overwhelmingly positive. Opinions towards nonheteronormative identities and same-sex marriage legalisation were mostly supportive and favourable. It seems that Weibo users were mostly very positive about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage as well as LGBT and queer identities.

This Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage had been a limited online public sphere where the voices of same-sex proponents and LGBT movement supporters were repetitively echoed in posts. The abundance of supporters resembled clusters of users sharing similar values, beliefs, and interests that tend to occupy their own virtual discussion spaces based on homophily (Sunstein, 2017). In these virtual spaces, known as like-minded clusters, “members of some groups want to wall themselves off from most or all others simply in order to maintain a degree of comfort and possibly a way of life” (Sunstein, 2017, p. 63).

After the quantitative content analysis, it seemed that most of the opinions posted about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage still came from a cluster of marriage equality supporters. For example, post authors in my sample tended to use weblinks within Weibo than links to other websites. The sensitiveness of the topic about same-sex marriage could also discourage social media users from posting their

opinions (L. Smith et al., 2013), which reduced the diversity of opinions posted and silenced users who might have differences in opinions about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. The cluster of users sharing homophily could express strong yet similar opinions about public issues on social media, as found by Y. Song et al. (2016) on a Weibo discussion about food safety. Similarly, the Weibo users in the studied discussion may also be motivated by homophily to post their support for same-sex marriage legalisation. Sunstein (2017) observed that members in like-minded clusters formed homogenous and more extreme opinions by “mostly hearing more and louder echoes of their own voices” (p. 66) on Facebook and Twitter. Hyperlinks are used to facilitate such within-cluster opinion expressions (L. Smith et al., 2013), which explains the often-seen hyperlinks to online addresses within the Weibo platform in my sampled posts. Microblog (for example, Twitter) users are less likely to debate with their opponents over controversial topics than to express their opinions to members within their own clusters (L. Smith et al., 2013), leading the discussion to be uncritical, less productive, and harmful for the development of deliberative public spheres (Y. Song et al., 2016). According to my quantitative content analysis findings, criticisms of same-sex marriage and LGBT and queer identities rarely appeared in the sampled posts.

When the like-minded cluster with positive opinions takes over Weibo, it can become so pervasive that a spiral of silence could be created by its supporters on Weibo, which is similar to Facebook discussions on same-sex marriage (R. Gibson, 2018). In the studied Weibo discussion, Weibo users with objections to Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage might refrain from voicing their disapproval of the opinions held by the presumed majority on Weibo. However, American opponents tended to employ moral frames and legal regulations into their social media discussion of same-sex marriage (R. Gibson, 2018), and the few Chinese opponents in

this studied Weibo discussion showed similarities with their British opponents in the press in their neutral tone employment of scientific facts and of seemingly logical rationales (Jowett, 2014, 2017).

A Weibo Discussion under Global Influences

The Internet offers a channel for international news about LGBT and queer communities and opinions about such news to audiences from where such news is difficult to cover via traditional media outlets. Access to overseas online cyberspace brought the event of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage to their attention, as reported by interviewees Rock and Gar. According to Yu, the news about same-sex marriage legalisation had always been an attention grabber on Weibo. The actual act of importing or smuggling the queer news across the Great Firewall not only requires certain privileges but also awareness and participation in LGBT and queer activism. As a result, the liberal pro-same-sex marriage news stories, symbols, and opinions are more often taken across borders to where heteropatriarchal order has a strong presence. Rainbows, rainbow flags, and other symbols standing for pro-same-sex marriage or the LGBT movement appeared in nearly one quarter of the posts that had emojis in their content. Global symbols for the LGBT movement travelled to non-Western areas of the world, carrying part of the original message for social equality and part of the Euro-American-centric view where modernisation is the synonym for Westernisation (Binnie, 2004). Slogans from the marriage equality movements overseas and phrases written in non-Chinese languages appeared occasionally in the sampled posts. It was interesting to find out that English was the most frequently used foreign language used in the posts. Luo (2016) stated that speaking English was a characteristic of Chinese homonormativity, which is reflected in the use of English in my sampled posts. The English language in this case became one of the symbols for a Western-originated movement.

Popular culture, especially celebrities, provided this Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage an important source of opinions. Popular cultural celebrity figures have brought the LGBT symbols and queer performances into Mainland China (C. Li, 2012). Although popular cultural utilisation of the queer image is usually for profit in the Chinese entertainment industry (Q. Wang, 2015), my study found that popular cultural icons and works did invoke Weibo users' interest to participate in an LGBT-related discussion. Cocultural fandom fictional works based on social media can offer ethical frameworks to form activist campaigns with real-world impacts (Hinck, 2016). Moreover, some of the entertainment-seeking Weibo users, as they were profiled by L. Xu (2017), were exposed to the news about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage through news about their beloved celebrities, which helps to increase visibility for the LGBT and queer community and their issues.

Popular culture produced and encouraged the expression of proponents' opinions on the subjects of same-sex marriage and LGBT and queer identities, similar to what R. Gibson (2018) found in the strategies used by the proponents of the American marriage equality campaign. Almost all opinions in the sampled posts with popular cultural references were supportive of same-sex marriage legalisation in Taiwan. The posts that cited opinions from popular cultural references were more likely to be supportive of LGBT and queer identities than those that did not. However, when I looked at the bigger picture, posts with popular cultural references showed only a little more support for same-sex marriage legalisation in Taiwan when compared to any other random post. Also, only a little more than one fifth of the posts with references to popular culture supported LGBT and queer identities. Most posts that referred to popular culture did not have opinions about LGBT and queer identities. The celebrities, songs, movies, and shows did not appear to have the same amount of

power to influence the opinions of Chinese social media users as they had in the American social media campaign for marriage equality (R. Gibson, 2018).

The commercialised popular culture or fan culture cannot offer much help to LGBT activism or to marriage equality in China's Mainland, contrary to what some of my interviewees expected. Fans who communicate and behave in certain ways in favour of their fandom construct their performative fan identity, according to Hills's (2002) study on fan culture. In other words, fans must speak out for the person or the thing that their fandom is found on in order to become fans. It is easy to assume fans of a celebrity would embrace the values advocated by their idol. Nonetheless, many fans of the celebrities, actors, singers, or artists who were related to the Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation did not voice their own opinions about the event or LGBT and queer identities on Weibo, even when they joined in the discussion about it. The quantitative content analysis shows some references to popular culture supported LGBT and queer identities. This reflects how LGBT-related issues are treated in Mainland China's popular culture industry. Although its importance is valued by activists (Engebretsen et al., 2015), "pop, it seems clear, cannot automatically become a queer political medium" (Q. Wang, 2015, p. 170). This draws consumers of popular culture products and fans for certain celebrities to view queerness as apolitical and fashionable (Q. Wang, 2015), echoing the essential consumerist role of a modern sexual citizen (D. Evans, 1993).

Chinese queer fandom cultural references were found in a few posts. As a product of low-end globalisation, Chinese queer fan culture has offered a valuable space for fictional nonheteronormative content sharing and creation (Lavin et al., 2018). The Chinese queer fandom was stated as a potential place to foster online queer awareness in Mainland China in previous studies (Tian, 2020; J. Zhao, 2020). Although some interviewees expected it to become a place for non-heteronormative

expressions, An, an interviewee and fan in Chinese queer fandom, expressed worries for the potential of such expressions to spread homosexuality to teenagers. In fact, the content of fictional male homosexual romances in this fandom can be highly heteronormative by allocations of masculinity/femininity to the masculine/feminine roles in their plots (Y. Zhou et al., 2018). As a culture created by and for females who are mostly heterosexual, the impact of compulsory heterosexualisation is reflected in the BL fandom and its work. The Chinese queer fandom and its works embody more of a confirmation of the heteronormative power than a subversion against heteronormativity. The projection of heterosexual desires to nonheterosexual objects constitutes the other side of the female gaze (J. Zhao, 2020). However, based on evidence from my interview with An and the little presence of queer fandom in the studied Weibo discussion, this female gaze to nonheterosexual male objects fails to motivate fans to a deeper commitment to real lived lives outside of heteronormative boundaries.

Both the global symbols and cultural references had limited presence in the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation, and their influence was not strong enough to widely proliferate the activist liberal values behind them. The symbols used in the global LGBT movement entered this Weibo discussion together with English words and phrases, showcasing the influence of globalisation. Yet the frequency of their appearances was relatively moderate, considering the topic in this discussion is an achievement in the global LGBT movement. Also, LGBT activists who are concerned about China, like Engebretsen et al. (2015), hope that more cultural activists' presence in Chinese popular culture would facilitate the LGBT and queer identities as well as issues in LGBT and queer communities to gain wider visibility and acceptance. However, currently, popular culture and its products have failed to do so. Almost every popular cultural reference with opinions of LGBT and queer

identities or of same-sex marriage legalisation in Taiwan were supportive and welcoming, but many did not contain any opinions related to the two subjects. Future studies can investigate further into how queered gender and sexual identities are produced and reproduced by the participants in mass popular culture and other cultures in contemporary China's Mainland.

The globalisation of homophobic discourses also showed up. A small number of posts mentioning misinformation about human sexuality and sexist prejudices appeared here. Yet, the political homophobia indicating the damage of homosexuality to the Chineseness as found by X. Liu (2021) in anti-gay in-group posts about Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation on Baidu Tieba (a Chinese online forum run by Chinese technology company, Baidu) was absent in my studied Weibo representation of the same event. However, the worry over such damage showed up in Taiwanese social media discussion among in-group members of an anti-same-sex-marriage organisation (Ye, 2017). This showed that political homophobia did not enjoy a strong presence in my studied, more public Weibo discussion, suggesting homophobic discourses tend not to seek more public presence on Mainland China social media.

Same-sex Marriage Legalisation Supported by the Civil Rights Frame

This section discusses my findings in relation to the second research question of how the legalisation of same-sex marriage was represented in the Weibo discussion. The findings were discussed with reference to the civil rights frame of same-sex marriage and to the Western-centric view on lesbian and gay rights in order to probe into the reasons behind the widely expressed support for same-sex marriage legalisation.

The Civil Rights Frame of Same-Sex Marriage Represented on Weibo

The civil rights frame of same-sex marriage was initially employed in the juristic debate over whether or not to legalise same-sex marriage in the United States by scholars such as Hohengarten (1994), Sunstein (1994), and Weitzman (1974). Within this frame, marriage is positioned as a legal institution that should be accessible to all, regardless of the genders of the two participants within a marriage, for two reasons: all people have an equal constitutional right to pursue individual happiness as long as it does not cause any major harm to the state's interest and marriage, which ought to be love based, and it is essential to one's pursuit of individual happiness (Goldberg-Hiller, 2002; Hohengarten, 1994; Sunstein, 1994). The first reason forms the legal ground of the civil rights frame of same-sex marriage, and the second reason forms the cultural ground of the civil rights frame of same-sex marriage.

This legal ground based on equal constitutional rights was used to raise public support for same-sex marriage in the global LGBT movement, arguing that each person should be given equal access to marriage (R. Gibson, 2018). This proved to be appealing to social media users in the United States, Britain, and Taiwan, who were mostly in their 20s and successful in gaining support from social media users who had not voiced their opinions before (R. Gibson, 2018; Harding, 2006; Ye, 2017). The same message seems to be convincing to Weibo users, most of whom, according to L. Xu's (2017) survey results, were in their 20s and 30s. In my sampled posts, nearly half of them positioned marriage as a legal construct, which should be accessible to everyone. Those posts were more supportive of the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage than posts where marriage is positioned as a cultural construct. Also, the vast majority of LGBT and queer identities appeared in the human rights context where equal access to marriage is perceived as a legal right according to my findings

of the quantitative content analysis. The idea that one should have the right to decide whom they marry has been widely ingrained into young people's minds since the 1950s (Schneider, 2014), which was reflected by the overwhelmingly supportive attitude for marriage equality in this Weibo discussion.

The legalisation of same-sex marriage was represented as a development in Taiwan's modernisation process, which was extended from the civil rights frame of same-sex marriage. The same-sex marriage legalisation enabled equality in the legal access to marriage, which has been the measurement of a region's level of development from a Western-centric viewpoint (Binnie, 2004). The vast majority of the discussion expressing opinions about same-sex marriage showed support for same-sex marriage legalisation. The support also stemmed from an understanding of same-sex marriage legalisation as a signifier for a region's level of development on an evolutionary, one-way track of modernisation where the Western is positioned as a model to follow (Binnie, 2004; Ong, 1999). Same-sex marriage legalisation has become a ticket to join the developed Western world.

Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation was usually celebrated as an overseas and locally unrelated social progress in the global LGBT movement in the studied Weibo discussion. The Taiwanese example, where marriage equality was protected by the Constitution, was hard to relate to Mainland China because the Marital Law in Mainland China regulated and maintained marriage as a heteronormative legal construct with clauses focusing on child-rearing and elder-caring obligations (Kohtz, 2019). Although it was often expressed by authors of my sampled posts, the support for same-sex marriage in Taiwan, based on the supposed equal access to marriage as an undeniable legal right given by the Constitution, is not strong enough to produce a substantial social demand for Mainland China to follow. Few posts in the sample were looking forward to the possibility for the Chinese government to legalise same-

sex marriage nationwide, and most of their authors did not think it realistic to expect marriage equality from their government. Hildebrandt (2011), although optimistic about the possibility for the Mainland Chinese government to legalise same-sex marriage, stated that the Chinese government's legal recognition of same-sex marriage was unlikely to be gained through civic engagement or LGBT activism and that marriage equality would be more likely to be granted to same-sex couples by the state. Hildebrandt's (2011) depowering of local people's agency is similar to the news representations of the local Egyptians in Arab Spring (Alahmed, 2020). The universalisation of seemingly context-free understandings of citizenship and its alleged sexual rights based on the Euro-American model has discouraged people in other cultural and political contexts to voice their own versions of equality. To put it in a more radical way, the concept of sexual citizenship sexualised non-Western citizenships through orientalism (Sabsay, 2012). In my study, the Mainland Chinese contextual factors failed to gain enough strategic attention for the Weibo users to open up possibilities for improvement. Instead, the Taiwanese success depowered their local agency since Taiwan is drastically more akin to the West than to Mainland China. Orientalism was internalised here. Same-sex marriage legalisation and the current Mainland China legislature were pictured as incompatible.

In addition, the underlying Western presumption that love-based marriage is an irreplaceable part of individual happiness (Coontz, 2005; R. Gibson, 2018) failed to appeal as strongly and widely to Chinese social media users as to Westerners. Few of the sampled posts agreed with the idea that romantic love or mutual attraction should be the precondition to a marriage, and those posts showed more support for same-sex marriage legalisation in Taiwan than other posts. The Weibo users in this specific online discussion appeared to be far less interested in the precondition for one to enter wedlock compared to the high level of consensus on love as marriage's

irreplaceable precondition held by their American counterparts as found by researchers studying the marriage equality movement online (R. Gibson, 2018). For the American Twitter or Facebook users, “love is love” is the slogan for marriage equality, which indicates love can be a major root for supporting same-sex marriage, but, for the Chinese Weibo users, what they have in mind is perhaps the question “what is love?”. Chinese lesbian and gay individuals in Taiwan and Hong Kong were more interested in the possibility for having a recognised family, likely with children, and for extending kinship networks as compared to their Japanese counterparts, showing that the love-based marriage ideal has not triumphed over familial values in the Chinese lesbian and gay population (D. T.-S. Tang et al., 2020).

The emphasis on romantic love did not become influential in the support for same-sex marriage in this Weibo discussion. Actually, posts with opinions did not mention any precondition for marriage, and they showed an only slightly lower degree of support for same-sex marriage legalisation in Taiwan than posts that mentioned it. The rationale used by American social media users was that LGB couples should have the same access to marriage enjoyed by their heterosexual counterparts as moulded in the Western marriage ideal (R. Gibson, 2018). This rationale seems less convincing to the Chinese who do not value marriage as an irreplaceable or prime relationship to satisfy both mental and sexual intimacy in general. The Western marriage ideal was not widely accepted by Weibo users in their discussion of Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation, which is illustrated by heterosexual identities being rarely mentioned in the sampled posts.

Furthermore, I suggest that the Confucian cultural emphasis on marriage as a procreational site for male heirs possibly lowered the posts’ authors’ support for Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation in my sample. The symbolic value for procreation of male heirs to sustain patrilineage according to Confucian values has

more or less been internalised by Chinese people regardless of their gender and sexual identities (Chow & Cheng, 2010; Hildebrandt, 2019). The findings of the quantitative content analysis show that the references to the Confucian emphasis on procreation as an obligation in a post was associated with reduced support for same-sex marriage legalisation.

From the above discussion, the civil rights frame of same-sex marriage is not fully applicable to the Chinese case. The fitness of this ready-made American civil rights frame of same-sex marriage to this Chinese context is an awkward and difficult one due to its lack of sociocultural support. The Weibo users in this discussion of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage did not buy into the Western marriage ideal featuring love-based marriage as an essential part for one's happiness in life. Although they perceive marriage equality as legally important, they presented a low expectation for it to be achieved in Mainland China. The findings indicate that the Western-centric approaches to marriage equality and other goals in the LGBT movement fail to produce the same effects in local non-Western settings. More studies about LGBT and queer issues in such settings need to be conducted in the future to help establish the extent to which these differences exist and to aid the struggles of the nonheteronormative lives around the world.

The Civil Rights Frame of Same-Sex Marriage Accepted Slackly on Weibo

Most of the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage showed support for same-sex marriage and happiness regarding Taiwanese progress to make it legal since most posts with opinions showed positive emotions. However, they did not actively engage in further discussion about sexual identity, gender, marriage, as well as the political or cultural implications that the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage would have. This appeared to be the result of

slacktivism practised by participants in this specific Weibo discussion, which likely also reflects the limitations of social media discussions in fostering social change in Mainland China.

The pervasive yet half-hearted acceptance of the civil rights frame of same-sex marriage in my study facilitated positivity (in terms of emotional expressions) and the lack of conflicts in the discussion over Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Here, the lack of conflicts not only means the discussion being civil but also means the discussion being one sided as opinions of opponents for Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation were rarely seen. Slacktivism, defined by Halupka (2014) as “the simplification of online participatory processes: online petitions, content sharing, social buttons (e.g., Facebook’s ‘Like’ button), etc.” (p. 115), which requires little commitment or effort, offers an explanation for the Weibo users’ aloofness in their discussions over the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Slacktivism is not able to foster deliberative online public discussions to achieve social change or even promote empathy for the marginalised and the stigmatised in social media users’ minds (Morozov, 2011). Slacktivists express their political preferences online by posting, reposting, liking, disliking, and commenting on posts or tweets, not because of their commitment or faith in a certain political agenda but because of peer pressure, self-promotion, and habitual social media use (Halupka, 2014; Morozov, 2011). In my research, the most used types of hyperlinks were from inside the Weibo platform and referred to hashtags, other users, and other posts. Often, slacktivists in a non-Western authoritarian state may present themselves on social media as supporters for a greater cause, such as democracy and freedom, which is strongly sentimentalised and glorified by Western media (Morozov, 2011). By such online engagements, the risks in pursuing such a cause offline are eliminated for online slacktivists, and the necessity to take offline actions can be ignored if much of their

attention is online for a long time (Morozov, 2011). Halupka (2014) declared that “simplified forms of engagement and solidarity are detrimental to the engagement culture, as they encourage apathy and normalize easy (read: ineffective) political participation” (p. 117).

Slacktivism can climb over the Great Firewall, and my study found further evidence of this. Mou et al. (2013) found that Chinese university students who actively participated in political discussions on online forums and social networking sites (SNS) rarely carried on with their passion to join any offline political actions. In my quantitative content analysis, it was found that participants in the Weibo discussion about the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan were disinterested not only in Mainland China’s possibility to follow suit but also in the local events or persons related to the LGBT movement or gender equality in Mainland China. Only a few posts mentioned queer views about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. The lack of in-depth discussion about same-sex marriage prevented the event from being widely understood in queer theoretical perspectives, a point reinforced by my interviewees. Few mentions of facts about any event or persons were involved with the LGBT movement or gender equality in China’s Mainland. The narcissistic ends of slacktivist engagements prevent social media users from actually caring to prepare themselves for making a difference (Morozov, 2011). With regard to marriage equality, the LGBT population is most affected by it and, thus, ought to attract much more attention in discussions about same-sex marriage legalisation. Nonetheless, some posts with opinions had opinions about LGBT and queer persons or identities. Instead of a disapproving look, most of the sampled Weibo post authors simply looked away from the LGBT population, their struggles, and related social issues.

Love as justification for same-sex marriage legalisation as a subtheme describes how romantic love and the equal right to have marriage based upon love were argued

to justify support for same-sex marriage. However, the proportion of original opinions was lower in posts where romantic love was mentioned with opinions. The relatively lower presence of originality in opinions mentioning romantic love indicates the influence of slacktivism. It was not surprising to see slacktivism's stronger presence on love-related topics in a discussion about same-sex marriage since love-based marriage was and, to a certain extent still is, an imported Western ideal that has close connections to liberal values. Similar to Morozov's (2011) study of social media slacktivists in Eastern Europe, the majority of social media users in China's Mainland shares similar profiles for being younger, entertainment-seeking city residents who have spent most of their lives under the strong influence of globalisation (CNNIC, 2020; L. Xu, 2017). These social media users easily accepted slogans and symbols featuring romantic love for marriage equality, but they were unlikely to articulate their own views on the topic since it required more commitment, consideration, and analysis to do so.

Slacktivism gives explained why most of the Weibo users were supportive of same-sex marriage in Taiwan yet appeared disinterested in further discussion on the matter. It seems that this Weibo discussion, mostly led by slacktivism, has failed the deliberative function of an online public sphere. On the other hand, slacktivism has the potential to gather support beyond borders for political progress in areas that are neglected by traditional politicians and activists (Dennis, 2019). A more neutral view on slacktivism is offered by Penney (2015), who found that slacktivist activities in support of marriage equality in the United States did not decrease nor increase the offline political participation to show their support, which means that slacktivism did not distract people from civic engagement offline. In addition, slacktivist actions helped to promote visibility for marginalised, disadvantaged, overlooked, and even stigmatised identities while facilitating the owners of those identities to unite under

shared concerns (Dennis, 2019; Penney, 2015; Y. Wu et al., 2018). The general welcoming attitude to the Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation covered by most post authors in the sample sent out a positive signal to Chinese LGBT activists. Marriage equality achieved (at least partially) across the Taiwan Strait in 2018 possibly encouraged the LGBT and queer communities in Mainland China. Same-sex marriage was proposed later in 2019 and declined by the state in January 2020, causing public attention to marriage equality and homosexuality like never before (Baculinao, 2020). More than two million people went onto the governmental website asking for amendments in the Marital Law to allow two citizens to marry regardless of their genders, and Weibo has become a site to motivate these actions (Baculinao, 2020). Now, more investigation and consideration are required to find out whether to classify Weibo users posting their support for Taiwanese same-sex marriage merely as slacktivists because online activism promoting marriage equality has real political influence in Mainland China. Another possible explanation for the drastic difference between local online activism and commitments to support the Taiwanese is the different political systems. Taking a partisan stand attracted a large part of Facebook comments under a Taiwanese official's post about the same-sex marriage bill (P.-H. Wang, 2020). The construction of an agreeable definition for marriage also appeared as vital in the Taiwanese case because disagreements that led to opposition over the same-sex marriage bill could affect voting choices in the Taiwanese political ecology (P.-H. Wang, 2020). In contrast, disagreements over the same set of topics cannot create direct political consequences in Mainland China with the decreasing power of online public spheres (F. Yang, 2022), resulting in Mainland China's social media users' aloofness regarding the topic.

Gender and Sexual Identities Neglected and Voiced

This section focuses on the discussion of findings in relation to the third research question about how gender and sexual identities were represented in the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Queer theoretical tools and previous studies on Chinese nonheterosexual identities are applied in this section to investigate the possible rationale behind the absence of representation or the representation of gender and sexual identities, especially those out of heteronormative boundaries. This section looks deeper into more localised approaches for the fair and inclusive representations of different gender and sexual identities.

The Limited Visibility for Gender and Sexual Identities

Gender and sexual identities were largely underrepresented in the overall depiction of same-sex marriage legalisation as a positive human rights advancement instead of an LGBT-specific event. The demands for improvement in online visibility of nonheteronormative identities had been occasionally posted in the studied Weibo discussion. However, the frequency of different types of gender and sexual identities mentioned was rather erratic. The strong association between the homosexual identity and same-sex marriage led to the homosexual identity being the most frequently mentioned compared to other gender and sexual identities. This suggests the popularity of a homosexual parody to the heterosexual matrix proposed by Butler (1990) where the prescribed gender and the object of desire determines one's sexual identity. This led to the understanding of same-sex marriage being largely reserved for homosexuals, which overlooks the complex realities of marriage and of sexuality by indulging in simplified binaries. The queer theoretical critics about binarism in identities can be further addressed in future studies about public online discussions to better facilitate both the academic and activist work in diversity promotion.

In most sampled posts with opinions, the posts' authors expressed opinions about the event of the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage without mentioning any opinions on LGBT and queer identities. Gaining support from the heterosexual and cisgender public in the United States based on the common belief in love-based marriage and on the democratic tradition rather than on the scientific differences in human sexualities proved to be effective (R. Gibson, 2018). Instead of framing same-sex marriage as an exclusive LGB issue, LGB identities were downplayed in social media campaigns for the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in the United States to appeal to the general public on beliefs about love and equality (R. Gibson, 2018). The downplaying of LGBT and queer identities was pervasive in the sampled posts as well. Not many posts mentioned homosexual identities, and three posts mentioned bisexual identities. Meanwhile, the Western ideal of love-based marriage did not effectively motivate pro-same-sex marriage Weibo users in this discussion to bring up cisgender and heterosexual identities in order to evoke empathy for the marriage equality movement. Such reluctance has addressed the need for more localised and inclusive framing of same-sex marriage that includes the appeals of marriage strong enough to generate public empathy for those who were unable to marry, especially in non-Western or nonliberal contexts.

Previous studies indicated that depoliticised homonormativity prevented the gender and sexual identities of those who do not fit with mainstream norms to enter political discussions in China (Engebretsen et al., 2015; D. Wong, 2007; Q. Wang, 2015). The neo-authoritarian context of Mainland China has fostered the depoliticising of voices that conflict with the need to remain politically stable as a heteropatriarchy because nonheteronormative identities' representation disturbs the naturalised homogeny of the heteronormativity. Nevertheless, the neo-authoritarian requirement for economic growth in an open market has left room for these identities

to be shown and voiced via commercial platforms, such as social media, and over nonpolitical topics. My study confirms this depoliticisation of LGBT and queer identities. The Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was related to the nonheteronormative identities, yet they were not represented as sexual dissidents whose deviant behaviours challenged gender norms. Although most LGBT and queer identities were mentioned in the human rights context, Tongzhi, as a blanket term that originated in the LGBT movement in Hong Kong without specified sexual orientations, was far less popular than the nonpolitical term “homosexual” in the sampled posts. Survey data analysis has indicated that attempts to replace Tongzhi with homosexual would not increase public acceptance for nonheterosexual identities (Lau et al., 2017). The homonormative depoliticisation of the identity terms can benefit little to the promotion of social acceptance because homonormativity’s tendency is to construct the nonheteronormative as active consumers in their newly found sexual citizenship (D. Evans, 1993) that hardly challenges the status quo, such as the heteropatriarchy in a neo-authoritarian state.

Homonormativity also erodes the solidarity between LGB members and trans or queer members in the LGBT and queer alliance (Aiello et al., 2013). If homosexuals who are pushed by the state or the market to represent their sexual identity in ways adhering to homonormativity (S. Huang & Brouwer, 2018; Luo, 2016), it risks making trans or queer identities even less visible in Mainland China. This seems to be the case in my study too. The gender and sexual identities beyond the male/female gender binary and hetero/homo binaries were hardly represented in the Weibo discussion I studied. The very existence of in-between and nonessential identities, such as trans identity, androgynous, and gender fluid, can deconstruct both naturalised heteronormativity and nonpolitical homonormativity (Wilchins, 2004), which potentially displeases the opponents and some proponents of same-sex

marriage legalisation (R. Gibson, 2018). The threats to the binaries in representations about gender and sexual identities posed by these in-between identities were unwelcomed for triggering more controversies in the already contentious topic in this Weibo discussion where identity binaries were overwhelmingly represented.

It is ironic that LGBT and queer identities were avoided by most participants in a discussion about a news event closely related to the LGBT and queer population. Nevertheless, visibility for their identities is essential for Chinese LGBT and queer communities (Q.-f.. Wang 2012) and for activists within them (Y. Yang, 2019). Both the state power and the family suppress the voices of Chinese LGBT and queer communities and individuals in communicated content on public as well as private spheres by reinforcing censorship and internalised homonormativity. My interview with Yu confirmed that the concerns of accidental coming out to offline acquaintances prevented at least some people from coming out online. The nonheterosexual and nonbinary gender identities can hardly reach the general public while there is censorship over LGBT-related representations online and offline (S. Liao, 2019; Y. Yang, 2019). Without visibility, other Weibo users hardly perceived the event in much relation to the global LGBT movement that achieved equality for LGBT people by uniting them under shared identity tags. While Chinese homonormativity tries to erase the needs for LGBT communities to publicly unite under any political causes, including marriage equality, Chou (2001) proposed an alternative strategy—that is, to restrict homosexual or bisexual identities within the private familial sphere with minimum sexual hints or affections shown in order to avoid conflicts with traditional Confucian values in his “coming-home” model of identity negotiation. In fact, Chou (2001) was not supportive of expressing any sign of sexual identity openly under powerful Confucian manifestations of heteronormativity where heterosexuality is considered as underlying, unsaid, and unchallenged by default. The effects of the

heteronormative silencing power were obvious in my study as there were only nine cases of self-claims of sexual identities in the sampled posts. The lack of LGB individuals' first-person perspectives and their life experiences is not going to produce a result similar to the American promotional campaign of same-sex marriage where the voices from LGB persons with their real-life love stories once promoted empathy among heterosexual social media users and gained wide acceptance of same-sex marriage on social media (R. Gibson, 2018). It is noticeable that the use of personal coming out stories online can create visibility and, thus, generate support for activist goals against censorship (S. Liao, 2019). The lack of voices from LGB individuals would make it more difficult for the other Weibo users in Mainland China to develop commitment for marriage equality, which poses an obstacle for activism for same-sex marriage legalisation. However, local Chinese LGBT activists and their movement were still covered in the posts' content, although at a low frequency. Such coverage increased the proponents' voice on the topic of the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. When facts about events or persons involved with or related to LGBT movements in Mainland China were mentioned, the support for the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was significantly higher than posts with facts about other topics. This suggests that although there is a reluctance in the Chinese LGBT and queer community to tell their stories openly online, the potential power to create changes in doing so is promising for online activism and human rights promotion.

Representations of Gender and Sexual Identities in the Global Era against/for Heteronormativity

As shown in the Chapter 6, diverse local and global terms were found to address nonheterosexual or gender nonconformative identities in this study. Homosexual as an identity tag was found to be the most popular in the posts sampled. Although it was unwelcomed by some homosexuals themselves for its clinical implication of

homosexuality as being mentally unhealthy (D. Wong, 2011; 2016), it was still widely used in the more public online discussion space with less users from the LGBT and queer community, such as the studied Weibo discussion. Tongzhi was mentioned in one third of the sampled posts as well. Inspired by Western gay rights movements, local activists in Hong Kong and Mainland China promoted equal rights for their communities by advocating Tongzhi as a universal nonheterosexual and, later, gender nonconformative identity to avoid local and imported pathological and stigmatising identity tags (Bao, 2018; D. Wong, 2011; Chou, 2000). However, Tongzhi as a supposed universal identity has not achieved this goal to cover other nonheteronormative identities (Lau et al. 2017; D. Wong, 2011). Additionally, Tongzhi, with its political undertone, probably limits its popularity due to the depoliticised homonormativity (Binnie, 2004; Luo, 2016; Rofel, 2007). While the progressive Tongzhi identity has been standing against heteronormativity in Chinese-speaking countries and regions since the 1990s, it seems that it has gradually become outdated for young social media users in this age of globalisation. On the other hand, LGBT as an imported identity label symbolising the united alliance among the nonheterosexuals and gender nonconforming was not commonly used in this Weibo discussion. Other identities, such as queer, trans, gay, and lesbian, were occasionally mentioned, showing that the global LGBT and queer movement has introduced these identities to Mainland China. The local terms used to address the nonheterosexual or the gender nonconformative, such as “wondering man” (piaopiao) as found by Wei (2007), were not mentioned in the sampled posts.

The nonheteronormative identities were represented at their intersections with the national identity. Heteropatriarchy manifested in the state policies was criticised in a few posts that support lesbians, echoing Nagel’s (1998) argument about the state’s oppression of women through compulsory heterosexualisation. The

procreational sexuality that is performed heterosexually is valued by the state in its promoted form of sexual citizenship for providing free wage labour, especially in the developing world (D. Evans, 1993). The use of state power to achieve the procreative end of sexuality has resulted in heteropatriarchal policies, which were criticised in this Weibo discussion. This indicates that sexuality is not merely perceived as procreative in Mainland Chinese social media, but national policies still prioritise procreative sexuality that is achieved by performing heterosexuality. The sole focus on procreational sexuality has resulted in the public's neglectful attitude to homosexuality in China (Y.-h. Li, 1998), which can explain the reluctance for the Mainland Chinese government to address issues involving homosexuality, such as same-sex marriage. State policies, like censorship of homosexuality on social media, were also under protest when the homosexual identity intersected with national identity in the Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Although the overt activist or protest posts were few in the sampled posts, the revelation of heteronormativity's harm to nonheteronormative identities was valuable in the Weibo discussion of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. It offers an example of heteronormativity and norms around gender performativity being set in state policies of different countries that confirms the argument about materialisation of gender norms (Butler, 1993). Such a revelation indicated the cross-cultural existence of heteronormativity and its harms, and queer theory being subversive and reflective of real-world phenomena.

The representation of gender and sexual identities mostly follows the rigid binary scheme where male/female gender identities and heterosexual/homosexual identities were treated as two mutually exclusive opposites, and a person must belong to one or the other. Gender identities, almost exclusively featuring binary genders, were mentioned in 195 posts. Transgender or trans were rarely mentioned. The genders

fell into the strict male/female dichotomy, leaving little room for fluid or queer gender identities to construct gender as performative (Butler, 1990). The heterosexual matrix, where sex, gender, and desire are forced to be interlinked in adherence to the male/female dichotomy and heteronormativity, created the intelligibility among sex, gender, and the gender of one's sexual partner (Butler, 1990). As the gender of one's sexual partner was used to construct sexual identities (Foucault, 1978), the heterosexual matrix actually interlinked sex, gender, and sexual identity with intelligibility (Butler, 1990). This implies that heterosexual identity is the default and ubiquitous, yet heterosexual identity usually remains unstated and invisible so that it is in an unquestionable position since people cannot criticise something whose name is unsaid (Butler, 1990; Rich, 1983). In the posts, the heterosexual identity was more likely to be implied by kinship title, marital status, and other cultural or contextual factors, and it was presented as the mainstream. Male/female identities were presented in the traditional stereotypes, even for male and female homosexual identities. The logic of the heterosexual matrix can work for essentialised homosexual identity as well when the heteronormative rule for desire of the opposite gender is replaced by the rule to desire the same gender (Butler, 1990), still leaving little room to explore the performativity of identity. This Weibo discussion was unable to undermine the essentialisation of gender and sexual identities in their binarised categorises. What the impact of same-sex marriage legalisation in Taiwan would have for those who do not confirm with gender binary or with the essentialisation of gender and sexual identities remains unmentioned.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This Weibo discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was a topic-centred public discussion on Chinese social media with one-sided opinions produced and hardly anything about heteronormativity, gender, and sexual identities as well as the local LGBT issues. The studied Weibo discussion was also found to be greatly influenced by globalisation, especially the global LGBT movement, although it took place on a Chinese Mainland social media platform. However, this studied social media discussion also reflected its Chinese cultural and political context.

The findings show that this Weibo discussion offered a major online public sphere in Mainland China for the social media representation about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Its posts had a mix of formats afforded on Weibo and concentrated on the topic of the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage. Weibo's easy accessibility and inclusiveness enabled its central position for the discussion about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage on Mainland China's social media. The hyperlinks directed to in-site links showed that participants in this discussion employed Weibo as the major social media space to be informed and voice their opinions, but this Weibo discussion did not become an active virtual discussion space with opinions from diverse sources. Although disappointing, the findings implicate the failure for Mainland China's social media to be an effective communication channel for queer subversion making social progress, as had been expected by scholars, such as Bao (2018) and Engebretsen et al. (2015). The findings about lack of depth and commitment in Weibo public spheres echo Sunstein's (2017) concerns about social media's users' lack of critical thinking about the content that they receive as well as Morozov's (2011) warning against slacktivism in authoritarian states, which is not surprising given Mainland China's neo-authoritarian background.

Most of the facts and opinions presented in this studied Weibo discussion were about the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage as a news event, yet limited aspects of this event were explored in the Weibo discussion. This Weibo discussion did not become the site for discussion of queer marriage, sexuality, or gender, neither was it the site to deconstruct or question the interconnectedness among them. The cultural aspects of marriage and the impact that same-sex marriage would have on them were not discussed because marriage in this particular Weibo public sphere was mostly presented as a legal construct to which equal access should be granted by law. Identities, including sexual, gender, and national identities, were not frequently mentioned for the controversy that surrounds them. Gender identities beyond the male/female binary were rarely mentioned and neither were sexual identities out of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. The homosexual identity was the most frequently mentioned among different gender and sexual identities while other nonheteronormative identities were rarely mentioned. The homosexual identity was represented as the less privileged opposition to the heterosexual identity in a binary relation. The heteronormative stereotyping and assumptions were found in the representations of gender and sexual identities. Butler's (1990) heterosexual matrix has found its homosexual parody in this study where same-sex marriage is sexualised and restrictively granted to homosexual persons by Weibo users. The logic shared similar naturalising of gender/sex that creates desire toward a certain part of the gender binary. In this case, a homosexual desire has replaced the original heterosexual one, constructing a heterosexual/homosexual binary. As the original heterosexual matrix oppressed people who are out of the heteronormative borders, its homosexual parody can harm the visibility and identification of nonhomosexuals in the larger LGBT and queer community.

This Weibo public sphere's representations about Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage showed few opposing opinions but contained overwhelmingly positive opinions in terms of emotional tones. The support for Taiwanese same-sex marriage legalisation was widely expressed in sampled posts while opposing opinions were rarely seen. If the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage was mentioned in a post with an opinion, it was mostly supported. Opinions about LGBT and queer persons or identities followed the same pattern: once they were shown in a post, they were most likely to be supported or favoured. Same-sex marriage was associated with romantic love and, thus, was represented as the embodiment of love. Its legalisation became a victory for love-based marriage. Also, legalisation of same-sex marriage was portrayed as a progress in modernisation and a juridical achievement in human rights protection. The nonheteronormative identities were mostly mentioned in association with human rights and, usually, romantic love or marriage was brought up in the same post as well. However, the connections among the human right to marry, the importance of love-based marriage for individuals' happiness, and the legislative obligation of the state to protect equality in the pursuit of individuals' happiness were presented as broken in the studied Weibo discussion. The civil rights frame for same-sex marriage failed to be accepted fully, and identity politics for marriage equality therefore hardly had any place on Weibo in this discussion because marriage had not been universally recognised as based on romantic love. Future studies about same-sex marriage or queer rights in Mainland China could investigate the Chinese cultural and social norms of family and practice of marriage to better understand the needs of the locals.

The queer theoretical perspectives were far from the centre of the studied Weibo discussion, suggesting that queer theory in Mainland China was mostly disregarded. The heteronormative manifestations in assumptions about these identities'

performativity lacked scrutiny in this social media discussion about same-sex marriage, which is similar to the American scenario reported by R. Gibson (2018). The lack of critical views about the heteronormative assumptions has shaped the discussion about same-sex marriage into a discussion about same-sex couples' commitment to the modern ideal of love-based marriage and their success in gaining legal recognition. However, state policies involving procreation, marriage, and divorce were occasionally criticised in the studied Weibo discussion, showing that the reinforcement of gender norms supporting heteronormativity was noticed at the national level by some Weibo users. This confirms the argument made by Butler (1993, 1997) about the materialisation of gender performativity that is under heteronormative maintenance by legislation and other political institutions to ensure a neutral heterosexual family ideal. Instead of focusing on queer topics, future communication studies could investigate heteronormativity and its manifestations, including family ideals across cultures.

The globalisation of the America-originated LGBT movement has influenced the social media discussion about LGBT-themed topics, witnessed by the presence of the civil rights frame of same-sex marriage. However, the influence of globalisation has failed to encourage political demands similar to the Euro-American ones for LGBT rights in a non-Western context, confirming the existence of the global disparity of LGBT rights and inclusion (Altman & Symons, 2016; Binnie, 2004). The employment of homosexual rights as a political bargaining chip on the international stage by the Global North has led to simplification of the challenges faced by the nonheteronormative lives in different places in the Global South (Sabsay, 2012)—in this case, a simplified representation of same-sex marriage or marriage in general. Due to differences in the cultural understanding about love, marriage, and family, justifications for same-sex marriage legalisation should vary in different cultural

contexts to raise public support. However, the global campaign for same-sex marriage has been either done in the Western context (Winter, 2018) or in an attempt to copy the success in the West in other parts of the world (Altman & Symons, 2016; D. T.-S. Tang et al., 2020). This study finds that the application of generalised Western concepts about such issues into the Chinese or other non-Western contexts should be done with caution when it comes to online discussions in public spheres. For activists or anyone wanting to foster a deliberative social media discussion about controversial matters, the complexity of the local should be acknowledged in the era of globalisation to avoid slacktivism to distract the attention from reality. Future communication studies about non-Western online public spheres could take the offline world and the participants' motivations to go online into consideration.

The low presence of LGBT and queer identities highlighted the need to raise their visibility online if they wish to promote social changes such as same-sex marriage legalisation. Previously, state censorship was heavily blamed for Mainland China's social media platforms, such as Weibo, and their failure to become a site for activism (Bao, 2018; Engebretsen et al., 2015; Lavin et al., 2018), but this study shows that nonpolitical factors, such as the entertainment use of social media, also have some negative impacts on raising awareness and activism for LGBT and queer visibility in China's Mainland. The sexual citizenship status of LGBT and queer persons still suffers from political pressures from the Mainland Chinese neo-authoritarianism, while having limited space for public sphere expressions and representations.

Another problem of sexual citizenship is its universality in the global context. Sexual citizenship originated in the Euro-American context (D. Evans, 1993) and deployed in Orientalist state policies by the Global North (Binnie, 2004; Sabsay, 2012), which made its promises into abstract acultural concepts unable to be implemented in non-Westernised contexts as shown in the findings. My findings

show that online support for the context-free universalisation of sexual citizenship and its content are not helpful to produce meaningful actions for equality in a non-Western context. However, this study finds some silver lining in queer online representation in Mainland China. The queer Weibo users' active fight against misinformation and misrepresentation in their posts shows their efforts to use Weibo as a channel for visibility and publicity. The shared Chinese background helped Taiwanese LGBT and queer cultural manifestations to be easily received by the Mainland Chinese audience. Also, LGBT-related news and popular cultural works from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas sometimes offer valuable chances for the nonheteronormative identities to gain visibility in online discussions even if it is limited and censored. Future studies could look into transnational cocultural representations LGBT-themed content and their influence.

This study has some limitations but also generated some suggestions for further research. One limitation of this study lies in data collection. There were so few interviews because of a lack of participants, resulting in limited coverage of participants from more varied backgrounds, which has weakened the inclusiveness of the data and the generalisability of the findings. My difficulty in interviewee recruitment is a valuable lesson for future research about sensitive or taboo topics, especially under a major crisis when people's lives undergo changes that may increase through risks associated with such interviews. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic forced one potential interviewee to live with family members during quarantine, and they refused to participate out of fear of causing familial conflicts. The lesson for future studies is to recruit interview participants via more personal communication channels when possible.

Another area of concern is the volume and inclusiveness of the data. Data collection of the Weibo posts was finished three days after the referendum on same-

sex marriage in Taiwan. Therefore, this timing meant possibly fewer and less various posts in the Weibo discussion due to reluctance by some social media users to post their unpopular opinions on a controversial topic. The exclusion of comments and interactions under each post failed to describe the studied Weibo discussion in Dahlgren's (2005) interactional dimension of online public spheres. Future studies on Weibo and other microblogging social media platforms could include data that is gathered over a longer time period and could also include the comments.

This study showed that offline contextual factors can influence the research method and the findings themselves, especially when the subject is treated very differently around the globe. It is noticeable that the knowledge of and past success against heteronormativity have been mostly achieved in the Western world, but the harm and violence of heteronormativity is very much present in the contemporary, globalised digital age. This study finds the multiple factors, political and non-political alike, in the way of LGBT and queer identities' fair representations and the representations of their related issues in the Mainland scenario, and the needed yet rare exposure of heterosexuality as well as its homogeny. My findings suggest that academic efforts to articulate local forms of heteronormativity in previously less studied contexts are needed for the Global South because the power of globalisation cannot effectively help people and communities that are not given citizenship rights unless their situations are better analysed internationally and academically. Thus, this study contributes to the needed knowledge about nonheteronormativity and its representations against the local and global tensions in non-Western social media public spheres.

Chapter 9: Reflection

As someone who lives outside the LGBT community, to conduct LGBT-related research was more like an exploration at first. However, it was an exploration taken somewhere close to home and, sometimes, even at home. The quest for knowledge about other people and culture gradually became a discovery about our own kind and what we are accustomed to. The use of plural pronouns here is intended to suggest that an individual can act and live in very distinctive manners from their cultural norms, but a large group of people often conforms to certain norms.

However close the intellectual journey has been, translation was problematic because I dealt with issues about gender, sexuality, and marriage, all of which are concepts that have been well established prior to modern-day globalisation. This led to differences in vocabulary and cultural interpretations of these concepts, which added difficulty for translation. Although the modern-day Chinese versions of these concepts have been influenced by their Western counterparts, explaining the Chinese understanding of them was quite a hard task, especially the Chinese heteronormativity. It was quite a complex phenomenon, both in the ancient and contemporary times. On one end, sexuality is closely related to hedonism in the Chinese context while on the other, it is a matter of grave importance when marriage or procreation is involved. Although the term “marriage” can be translatable at the lexicological level to English, some of the sociocultural details were difficult to translate. Another challenge was the trap of standard models. Modern ideas of law, democracy, gender/sex, national identity, sexuality, and marriage have been influenced by the impact of colonialism, resulting in the disproportionate power distribution between the Global North and the Global South in the development of these concepts. In this case, I had to be aware of the conceptual terms I used and in which ways they applied to the Chinese situation.

I think that the difficulty in the public recognition of same-sex marriage legalisation or marriage equality in the Chinese cultural context is rooted in the difficulty translating such a culturally profound concept of “marriage”. Without a full examination of the value of marriage in the Chinese context and a process to communicate such a value to the public, the legalisation of same-sex marriage is unlikely to be widely accepted in people’s daily lives. Instead, the act of legalising same-sex marriage risks becoming a merely political gesture for showcasing modernisation according to Western standards. At best, it may lead to improvements in the lives for some LGB individuals. At worst, it may cause radical conservative groups to unite and worsen the living conditions of the marginalised. In the Taiwanese case, the judicial ruling in 2017 became a somewhat hollow victory after the family-value-oriented groups joined together to pass the referendums against it. Although abolished in January 2022, the practical obstacles for same-sex couples in child adoption existed for more than two years after the bill about same-sex union was passed in Taiwan (Davidson, 2022). Today, the term “marriage” is still legally reserved for heterosexual couples in terms of the Civil Code in Taiwan as well as other Chinese societies. Offspring, with their kinship connections, has been a debated issue for both opponents and proponents of same-sex marriage, just like in any discussion concerning marriage. In the Chinese context, it is hard to separate procreation from marriage. It was not surprising to see the rights to legal adoption and joint custody becoming the central topics in the same-sex marriage debate in Taiwan. The focus was different from the once-debated same-sex parenting in other cultures. The focus was about who can be qualified in the continuance of the family, which is both physical and symbolic, instead of what forms of parenting are good for the children. When marriage cannot be detached from its function to carry on the family via procreation, same-sex marriage, although treated equally in the court of law, can

have difficulties in receiving the same level of respect outside of the courtroom. Although the economic and productional needs for a traditional patriarchal family with as many sons as possible has mostly declined with welfare policies and industrialisation, the psychological need for a “traditional family” is still strong in Taiwan as is the fear of the disruptive same-sex marriage. In addition, homonormativity is developing in line with commercialism and traditional values. I think this Chinese homonormativity might help to develop future campaigns for same-sex marriage legalisation in Mainland China. To present a model Chinese family with children and a middle-class lifestyle with same-sex parents will not challenge the assumed function of marriage in the Chinese culture but, rather, will reinforce it. There is a long way to go before all forms of human intimacies are freed from power and other restrictions. Before then, I think that individuals should be more critical about marriage and the myths surrounding it.

I believe that we want to return to a safe past, in an imagined time and place in an enhanced history, for a sense of security and belongingness, especially in times of uncertainties. The allure of a national cultural ideal of some form of heteronormative family life does come through. Transnational religious groups made great efforts to make sure that same-sex couples could not enjoy some of the marital rights reserved for heterosexual marriage in Taiwan. From living with Chinese Christians, I have seen on YouTube how Chinese clergymen encourage gender stereotypes around the world, including New Zealand. Marriage, home, and family are not social facts or legal entities in these institutions but social imaginations that share faiths and goals for life. Any conversation about family or marriage is inevitably emotional and sometimes fanatical because of the images that people are taught about them. At the end of the day, it is not about love or the right to love but about security that is usually gained through competition not cooperation by the capitalist assumption of

limited resources. In the case of the human struggle for equality, however, people must cooperate to see past the differences and to achieve their goals. Marriage equality for me seems more than equal access to marriage. It should include freedom to terminate marriages, freedom to (de)sexualise marriages, freedom to remain unmarried, and freedom to customise marriages. Thus, marriage can transform from a human reproduction site to a human expression site where humans can be fully valued for their humanity.

I used to and still do find weddings, marriage, and being gendered alienating. Growing up in a small town in northeast China, weddings of my relatives were fascinating to me. Basically, they were ceremonies for the bride to leave her old home for a new one and for the groom to take a wife to his home. There were games, feasts, gift exchanges, blessings, happy families, and coming babies. When I was a teenager, they puzzled me. If everyone was supposed to get married one day, why did people still celebrate a predestined event? If not, why were celebrations reserved for those who married? Why was the unmarried status, as presumably a result of an equally respectable choice, not celebrated? Why did people encourage one life decision and not the other? Why did the brides seem happy—in those uncomfortable rental dresses—to enter an unfamiliar home, given newly-wed wives were responsible for most chores according to my limited observations? Why should I as a teenage girl at that time view the brides as successful images of my future self, given the perceived personal gains were negative in that situation? I thought most people would have asked the same questions, but, as I grew up, I found quite the opposite—almost a dead silence when the alternatives were brought up in conversations. Now, I realise that it was supposed to be alienating since the process of heterosexualisation is done by the alienation of our bodies, breaking them into functional parts to serve the ends of the powerful discourse to prove a myth and to win an impossible case in front of

the invisible judge. I did not become queer by confirmation of any identity but by asking questions about the unqueer, the normal, and the common. I did not make any announcement. I do not want to be simply labelled queer for some of my looks or for the research topic that I chose. Instead, I want to question and, hopefully, to disrupt heteronormativity and other oppressing constructions by my words and actions. Personally, I have tried to live an authentic life—a life with many questions but very few answers, yet it is important to raise questions and to genuinely attempt to find answers.

As a person with a slight disability or with a place under the neurodivergent umbrella, the institutional power works through words to my body, which made me empathic with those who are marked and processed to fit into the system made for others to achieve a better position than them. The pressure to fit into a certain social order is universal in the modern world, but the rules for the norms favour certain groups and hurt others. The struggle of the unfit is constantly happening inside of their minds and out on the street because the words, images, and rituals tend to exclude and disempower them. In my study, the power of the powerful, the mainstream heterosexuals and males, is pervasive with their names almost hidden. In my life, I found that although people are reluctant to talk about disabilities, the institutional hurdles and systematic exclusions exist in many parts of the world, including China and New Zealand. The threat is never about a discussion but about the silence when the topic is about those who are constructed as some kind of minority.

To be fair, I personally received kindness from others throughout my life. I am not on a victim stand. The ableism still presents somewhere in my mind and sometimes in my words, just like heteronormativity was immersed in some parts of the discussion I studied. However, the awareness to spot the internal depriving ideology

is vital for me and for others who live outside of normality. To reduce the reinforcement for it in communication is a step towards a better world where differences of human bodies and what they do will not be judged against an unfair normality. Since the outbreak of the recent global pandemic, the importance of treating those who are different fairly has become more salient than before because the othered bodies cannot be silenced in a life-threatening crisis. From social media, I witnessed females, Tongzhi, the displaced, and the poor help one another to survive a difficult time. Although not all their stories were recognised in the official media outlets, their deeds were remembered and archived in cyberspace, which contained their voices and stories. Social media did not empower them unless they first empowered themselves. Communication for the queer, the unfit, the non-Westerner, and the in-betweens is more about finding voices of their own on their own than giving voices to them.

Looking back, I chose to conduct this research on the topic of the Weibo discussion of the Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage, not because I am Chinese or female or queer or disabled but because I am a person who has doubts about the norms and presumed labels that regulate us all. In other words, the reason behind my choice of research topic is the shared curiosity coupled with the desire for alternatives that can help people, including myself, to fully live this life in our unique human bodies.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Codebook

Part 1. Coding instruction

Section a: Preparation

Before you start coding the coding procedure, please make sure that you have the following:

- Access to the Coding Sheet on Qualtrics (hyperlink here)
- Access to the data set
- Ability to complete the coding sheet on your own
- Ability to understand the data
- Ability to understand the Codebook
- Willingness to participate in this coding procedure

Section b: Unit of analysis

We only code and analysis units of analysis in this content analysis.

Only the posted content in textual formats is the unit of analysis, here. Videos, images and audios are not the focus of this this content analysis. Reposted content contained in a post is seen as the background or proof for the author's opinions. Links or hyperlinks may lead us to interesting content. However, the content which they lead us to is not a unit of analysis.

Section c: Assistance for answering the coding sheet questions

Please note that practical instructions are *Italianised* in the coding sheet and that defined terms are underlined in their definitions.

A. Completeness and elements of the post

Question I

When a post is incomplete, it often have an abrupt ending with the last sentence unable to syntactically intact.

Question II

Please note the following definitions:

Informational images mostly provide representations of events, persons, objects (except those that serve promotional purposes) and representations of editorials on media (including mass and social media).

Promotional images mainly convey public support and encouragement, and personal opinions of the posts' authors themselves.

Emoji, emoticon and sticker some of the posts contain elements of emoji, emoticon and sticker for the expression of emotions and representation of other concepts. Here are the definitions of emoji, emoticon and sticker:

Emoji are ideograms and smileys used in electronic messages and web pages. Emoji exist in various genres, including facial expressions, common objects, places and types of weather, and animals.

An emoticon is a pictorial representation of a facial expression using punctuation marks, numbers and letters, usually written to express a person's feelings or mood.

A sticker is an image, often illustrated with text serves as meme to entertain or express positions, opinions or emotions in an informal manner.

Ref: Emoji Retrieved from <http://clearlyexplained.com/emojis/index.html>

Ref: Text Emoticons Retrieved from <https://www.piliapp.com/emoticon/>

Question III

Please note that symbols represent emotion, state, country, movement, ideology or beliefs, e.g.  represents China, PRC.

Question IV

Please note that a post may contain hyperlink(s) to another online address.

B. Factual information

Please note that when the post represents something in an objective and neutral manner, e.g. a list of all countries which legalized same-sex marriage.

C. Gender and sexual identity

Gender is the social constructed identity which is given to most individuals according to their sexes assigned at birth. Gender identities are binary and asymmetrical in patriarchal societies, such as the Chinese society.

Gender and sexual identities are viewed as performative here. They are “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being” (p. 33), as Butler (1990) stated in Gender Trouble. We employ an approach of strategic essentialization to identity classification and we recognize the identities of the mentioned persons in the posts can be far from their “true” identities or other performed identities.

We must be careful not to make implications based upon stereotypes and binary mindset, so please code under the following guidelines:

- when content (in the case, identity) is expressed with explicitness or explicitly expressed, the content is mentioned in a direct, outspoken manner leaving no room for implication or ambiguity.
- when the unlisted term used to tag a gender or sexual identity appeared, please choose option Other and fill in the text fill next to it.
- When Tongzhi is mentioned in a romantic relationship, same-sex marriage or same-sex civil partnership, it indicates a non-heterosexual identity.
- one's sexual activity or choice of fashion cannot signify their sexual or gender identities and that expressions on opinion or attitude do not signify identities, either.

D. Regional and national identity

The Chinese or Taiwanese identities are more of political nature, here.

E. Opinion and attitude

An opinion is an attitude, view or judgement formed about the event, affected-persons/groups and related issues, not necessarily based on objective reality. It can be expressed in many formats, e.g. text (including contain slogan that are pro-same-sex marriage or pro-LGBT groups), emoji, emoticons and stickers (including contain symbols that are pro-same-sex marriage or pro-LGBT groups),

Question XX

Please note that when the author of the post verbally mentions the reference of the content or use direct quotations, there is opinions shown in the post belong to (a) clearly referred, cited or quoted source(s).

Please note that when there is a repost involved, the reposted content cannot count as opinions shown in the post belong to (a) clearly referred, cited or quoted source(s). because it is considered as the context, background or proof for the author's opinions.

Question XXIX

Please note that words and abbreviations that do not have a Chinese counterpart (like WIFI, NBA, LGBT) cannot be count as non-Chinese words and phrases.

Question XXVI

Please note that when something is depicted as politicalized (in some cases, even in need of radical public actions) and political instead of personal, it is a political and public matter.

Please note that when something is depicted as depoliticalized (in some cases, even commercialized) and personal instead of political, it is a personal and private matter.

Question XXXI

Reproduction of the next generation, access to reproductive technology and services, continuance of the bloodline, concerns over the school curriculum, morality of the youth or family education etc. all counts as opinions about children or children's education。

F: Sub-cultures and pop-cultures

Please note the following definition on ACG culture:

“ ACG fandom. among other categories of Chinese fan culture, dates back to the early consumption of the imported Japanese animations in the 1980s and 1990s. The Chinese fan culture developed as a cultural re-appropriation of foreign media products such as Japanese fiction, animation, manga, and films” (p.3122), especially after the video-sharing website Bilibili gained popularity among youngsters in China (Yin & Xie, 2018).

Ref: Yin Yiyi, & Xie Zhuoxiao. (2018). The Bounded Embodiment of Fandom in China: Recovering Shifting Media Experiences and Fan Participation Through an Oral History of Animation-Comics-Games Lovers. *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION*, 12, 3317–3334.

Please note the following definition on BL or 耽美(sub-)culture:

耽美 (danmei) or boys' love (BL) is a genre of male-male romance created mainly by and for women that fantasizes male androphilic romance and eroticism which manifests in many formats including (cyber-)fiction, manga, anime, games, audio drama, MV, songs, and cosplay. Although originated in and heavily influenced by Japanese yaoi (denotes: no climax, no point, no meaning) manga (which is male homo-erotic comics with little or no storylines for females), Chinese danmei has developed its own cultural and sub-cultural fandoms, preferences and creative works, which is adherent yet playful, sarcastic, even rebellious towards heteronormativity by parodies and subversive works against homo-social-homosexual distinction and compulsory heterosexuality among fictional characters and real-life celebrities.

Ref: John Wei. (2014). Queer encounters between Iron Man and Chinese boys' love fandom. *Transformative Works and Cultures* , Vol 17 (2014).

Ref : Zhao, J. J., Yang, L., & Lavin, M. (2017). Boys' love, cosplay, and androgynous idols : queer fan cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Baltimore, Maryland : Project Muse, 2017.

G. Further study necessity

Please note that the last question is optional.

Part 2. Coding Scheme

A. Completeness and elements of the post

I. What is the number of the post?

II. Is it complete and intact? *If the post is not complete and intact, do not code.*

☐ 1. Yes (1)

☐ 2. No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If I. Is it complete and intact? If the post is not complete and intact, do not code. = 2. No

III. Does the post contain any of the following elements?

☐

1. Hyperlink (1)

☐

2. Emoji (2)

☐

3. Emoticon (3)

☐

4. Image (4)

☐

5. None (5)

Display This Question:

If II. Does the post contain any of the following elements? = 4. image

How many images?

☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐ 6☐ 7☐ 8☐ 9

Display This Question:

If II. Does the post contain any of the following elements? = 4. image

Are symbols for the LGBT Movement included in the post's image(a)?

- ☐ 1. Yes (1)
- ☐ 2. No (2)

Display This Question:

If II. Does the post contain any of the following elements? = 4. image

Does the post have image(s) that are informational, promotional or neither?

- ☐ Informational
- ☐ Promotional
- ☐ Neither

Display This Question:

If II. Does the post contain any of the following elements? = 2. Emoji

Or II. Does the post contain any of the following elements? = 3. Emoticon

IV. What does the emoji or emoticon represent? *Please choose as many as applicable.*

☐

1, They are symbols standing for the People's Republic of China (PRC). (1)

☐

2. They are symbols standing for Taiwan. (2)

☐

3.They are symbols standing for pro-same-sex marriage or the LGBT movement. (3)

☐

4. They are symbols representing emotion. (4)

☐

5. Other (5)

Display This Question:

If III. What does the emoji or emoticon represent? Please choose as many as applicable. = 4. They are symbols representing emotion.

V. Do the emoji, emoticon and sticker show positive or negative emotion in general? *Please choose one only.*

☐

1. Positive (1)

☐

2. Negative (2)

☐

3. Mixed (3)

Display This Question:

If II. Does the post contain any of the following elements? = 1. Hyperlink

VI. Are those hyperlinks to an address outside of Sina Weibo or inside of Sina Weibo? *Please choose one only.*

- ☐ 1. They are all inside of Sina Weibo (1)
- ☐ 2. They are all outside of Sina Weibo (2)
- ☐ 3. Mixed (3)

B. Factual information

VII. Does the post contain factual information?

- ☐ 1. Yes (1)
- ☐ 2. No (2)

Display This Question:

If VI. Does the post contain factual information? = 1. Yes

VIII. If the answer to question VI is “yes”, does the factual information cover any of the following? *Please choose as many as applicable.*

☐

1. Facts about the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan.

☐

2. Facts about other events or persons involved/related with LGBT movements in Taiwan apart from the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

☐

3. Facts about other events or persons involved/related with gender equality in Taiwan apart from the legalisation of same-sex marriage

☐

4. Facts about the events or persons involved/related with LGBT movements in the Mainland , China.

☐

5. Facts about other events or persons involved/related with gender equality in the Mainland , China.

☐

6. Facts about events or persons involved/related with gender equality and LGBT movements in other countries or regions including the legalisation of same-sex marriage

☐

7. Facts about human sexuality or gender development that are scientific in the fields of psychology, biology, medical science, cosmology or other hard science.

☐

8. Facts about the personal experience of the post authors

☐

9. Facts about events or persons that have nothing to do with gender equality and LGBT topics. (10)

C. Gender and sexual identity

IX. Does the post mention explicitly at least one gender identity of person(s) other than the author's own?

☐ 1. Yes (1)

☐ 2. No (2)

Display This Question:

If IX. Does the post mention explicitly at least one gender identity of person(s) other than t... = 1. Yes

X. Which of the gender identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post?

Please choose as many as applicable.

- ☐ 1. Female (1)
 - ☐ 2. Male (2)
 - ☐ 3. Female-to-male (FTM) transgender persons (3)
 - ☐ 4. Male-to-female(MTF) transgender persons (4)
 - ☐ 5. Transgender persons without stating their gender (5)
 - ☐ 6. Cis-gendered female (7)
 - ☐ 7. Cis-gendered male (8)
 - ☐ 8. Tongzhi as gender non-confirmative whose gender-related performativity or expressions does not follow the traditional gender binary (9)
 - ☐ 9. Other: (10) _____
-

XI. Does the post mention explicitly at least one sexual identity of person(s) other than the author's own?

- ☐ 1. Yes (1)
- ☐ 2. No (2)

Display This Question:

If XI. Does the post mention explicitly at least one sexual identity of person(s) other than the... = 1. Yes

Q14 XII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post? *Please choose as many as applicable.*

- ☐ 1. Homosexual but not titled as Tongzhi or same-sex couples/partners (1)
 - ☐ 2. Bisexual but not titled as Tongzhi (2)
 - ☐ 3. Heterosexual (3)
 - ☐ 4. Tongzhi as non-heterosexual (4)
 - ☐ 5. Tongzhi as exclusively homosexual (5)
 - ☐ 6. Tongzhi clearly stated as sexually non-confirmative whose sexuality does not follow the mainstream or traditional norms (including 'scientific and essentialized' sexual identity categories, monogamy, gendered roles and procreation...) (6)
 - ☐ 7. Tongzhi whose sexual orientations or sexuality are not specified (7)
 - ☐ 8. Same-sex couples/partners (9)
 - ☐ 9. Other: (10) _____
-

Display This Question:

If XII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post... = 1.
Homosexual but not titled as Tongzhi or same-sex couples/partners

Or XII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post... = 2.
Bisexual but not titled as Tongzhi

Or XII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post... = 4.
Tongzhi as non-heterosexual

Or XII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post... = 5.
Tongzhi as exclusively homosexual

Or XII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post... = 6.
Tongzhi clearly stated as sexually non-confirmative whose sexuality does not follow the mainstream or traditional norms (including 'scientific and essentialized' sexual identity categories, monogamy, gendered roles and procreation...)

Or XII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post... = 7.
Tongzhi whose sexual orientations or sexuality are not specified

Or XII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post... =

Or X. Which of the gender identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post?... = 3.
Female-to-male (FTM) transgender persons

Or X. Which of the gender identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post?... = 4.
Male-to-female(MTF) transgender persons

Or X. Which of the gender identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post?... = 5.
Transgender persons without stating their gender

Or X. Which of the gender identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post?... = 8.
Tongzhi as gender non-confirmative whose gender-related performativity or expressions does not follow the traditional gender binary

Or X. Which of the gender identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post?... 9.
Other: Is Not Empty

Or IX. Which of the gender identity categories of others are mentioned by the author in the post?... = 9.
Other:

Invalid Logic [Click Here to Edit Logic](#)

XIII. Does these non-heterosexual, non-confirmative and/or non-cis-gender identities mentioned in *the romantic or marital context* (with references to romantic relationships

and partners, marriage, wedding or the formation of a nuclear family) or *the human-right context* (with references to activist, pro-human-right movements, equal right to access to marriage and freedom of speech)?

- ☐ 1. It mentions them in the romantic or marital context. (1)
 - ☐ 2. It mentions them in the human-right context. (2)
 - ☐ 3. Both (3)
 - ☐ 4. Neither (4)
-

XIV. Does the post's author disclose their gender or sexual identity?

- ☐ 1. Yes (1)
 - ☐ 2. No (2)
-

Display This Question:

If XIV. Does the post's author disclose their gender or sexual identity? = 1. Yes

XV. Which of the gender identity categories of the author's are mentioned by the author to claim or disclaim their sexual identities? Please choose one only.

- ☐ 1. Female (1)
 - ☐ 2. Male (2)
 - ☐ 3. Female-to-male (FTM) transgender persons (3)
 - ☐ 4. Male-to-female(MTF) transgender persons (4)
 - ☐ 5. Transgender persons without stating their gender (5)
 - ☐ 6. The author only discloses sexual identity. (6)
 - ☐ 7. Cis-gendered female (7)
 - ☐ 8. Cis-gendered male (8)
 - ☐ 9. Other (9) _____
-

Display This Question:

*If XV. Which of the gender identity categories of the author's are mentioned by the author to cla... != 6.
The author only discloses sexual identity.*

And XIV. Does the post's author disclose their gender or sexual identity? = 1. Yes

XVI. Does the author claim or disclaim the mentioned gender identity categories as their own?

- ☐ 1. The author *claims* the mentioned gender identity categories as their own. (2)
- ☐ 2. The author *disclaims* the mentioned gender identity categories as their own. (4)

Display This Question:

If XIV. Does the post's author disclose their gender or sexual identity? = 1. Yes

XVII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author to claim or disclaim their sexual identities? Please choose one only.

- ☐ 1. Homosexual but not titled as Tongzhi (1)
- ☐ 2. Bisexual but not titled as Tongzhi (2)
- ☐ 3. Heterosexual (3)
- ☐ 4. Tongzhi as homosexual and bisexual (4)
- ☐ 5. The author only discloses gender identity. (5)
- ☐ 6. Other (6) _____

Display This Question:

If XV. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author to claim... != 5. The author only discloses gender identity.

And XIV Does the post's author disclose their gender or sexual identity? = 1. Yes

Q48 XVIII. Does the author claim or disclaim the mentioned sexual identity categories as their own?

- ☐ 1. The author *claims* the mentioned sexual identity categories as their own. (1)
 - ☐ 2. The author *disclaims* the mentioned sexual identity categories as their own. (2)
-

Display This Question:

If XIV. Does the post's author disclose their gender or sexual identity? = 1. Yes

*And XV. Which of the gender identity categories of the author's are mentioned by the author to cla... = 3.
Female-to-male (FTM) transgender persons*

*Or XV. Which of the gender identity categories of the author's are mentioned by the author to cla... = 4.
Male-to-female(MTF) transgender persons*

*Or XV. Which of the gender identity categories of the author's are mentioned by the author to cla... = 5.
Transgender persons without stating their gender*

*Or XV. Which of the gender identity categories of the author's are mentioned by the author to cla... = 9.
Other*

*And XVI. Does the author claim or disclaim the mentioned gender identity categories as their own? = 1. The
author claims the mentioned gender identity categories as their own.*

*Or XVII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author to claim... = 1.
Homosexual but not titled as Tongzhi*

*Or XVII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author to claim... = 2.
Bisexual but not titled as Tongzhi*

*Or XVII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author to claim... = 4.
Tongzhi as homosexual and bisexual*

*Or XVII. Which of the sexual identity categories of others are mentioned by the author to claim... = 6.
Other*

*And XVIII. Does the author claim or disclaim the mentioned sexual identity categories as their own? = 1.
The author claims the mentioned sexual identity categories as their own.*

XIX Does these non-heterosexual, non-confirmative and/or non-cis-gender identities mentioned in the romantic or marital setting (with references to romantic relationships and partners, marriage, wedding or the formation of a nuclear family) or the human-right

setting (with references to activist, pro-humanright movements, equal right to access to marriage and freedom of speech)?

- ☐ 1. It mentions them in the romantic or marital setting. (1)
- ☐ 2. It mentions them in the human-right setting. (2)
- ☐ 3. Both (3)
- ☐ 4. Neither (4)

D. Regional and national identity

XX. Does the post mention China or the Mainland (e.g. 中国, 中方, 中华人民共和国, 中国大陆, 大陆 etc.)?

- ☐ 1. Yes (1)
- ☐ 2. No (2)

Display This Question:

If XVIII. Does the post mention China or the Mainland (e.g. 中国, 中方, 中华人民共和国, 中国大陆, 大陆 etc.)?... = 1. Yes

XXI. How China is mentioned? *Please choose one only.*

- ☐ 1. It mentions China's Mainland . (1)
 - ☐ 2. It mentions China as PRC (People's Republic of China) or the country. (2)
 - ☐ 3. Neither (3)
 - ☐ 4. Both (4)
-

XXII. Does the post mention Taiwan (e.g.: 台湾, 台方, “中华民国”, “民国”, 中华民国, 民国 etc.)?

- ☐ 1. Yes (1)
 - ☐ 2. No (2)
-

Display This Question:

If XXII. Does the post mention Taiwan (e.g.: 台湾, 台方, “中华民国”, “民国”, 中华民国, 民国 etc.)?... = 1. Yes

XXIII. How Taiwan is mentioned?

Please choose one only.

- ☐ 1. It mentions Taiwan as an independent country including POC (Republic of China). (1)
- ☐ 2. It mentions Taiwan as a (PRC) region. (3)
- ☐ 3. Neither (2)
- ☐ 4. Both (4)

E. Opinion and attitude

XXIV. Does the post include any opinion or attitude ?

- ☐ 1. Yes (1)
- ☐ 2. No (2)

Skip To: End of Block If XXII. Does the post include any opinion or attitude ? = 2. No

Display This Question:

If XXIV. Does the post include any opinion or attitude ? = 1. Yes

XXV. Do the opinions belong to the post's author or to someone else?

- ☐ 1. Yes, all opinions shown in the post belong to the author (1)
 - ☐ 2. No, all opinions shown in the post belong to (a) clearly referred, cited or quoted source(s). (2)
 - ☐ 3. Both, the opinions are a mix of the author's own opinion and opinions of (a) clearly referred, cited or quoted source(s). (3)
 - ☐ 4. Unclear, the post contains opinions whose sources are not cited formally or clearly. (4)
-

Display This Question:

If XXIV. Does the post include any opinion or attitude ? = 1. Yes

XXVI. What tone does the post convey in general?

- ☐ 1. Mostly negative . (1)
 - ☐ 2. Mostly positive. (2)
 - ☐ 3. Mixed (3)
-

XXVII. Does the post show any opinion or attitude towards the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan?

☐ 1. Yes (1)

☐ 2. No (2)

Display This Question:

*If XXV. Does the post show any opinion or attitude towards the legalisation of same-sex marriage i... = 1.
Yes*

XXVIII. What tone of attitudes or opinions does the post convey towards the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan?

☐ 1. Mostly discouraging or antagonistic (1)

☐ 2. Mostly supportive or favourable (2)

☐ 3. Mixed (3)

XXIV. Does the post express an opinion or attitude towards LGBTQ persons or identities?

☐ 1. Yes (1)

☐ 2. No (2)

Display This Question:

If XXIV. Does the post express an opinion or attitude towards LGBTQ persons or identities? = 1. Yes

XXX. What type of attitudes does the post convey toward LGBTQ persons or identities?

- ☐ 1. Mostly discouraging or antagonistic (1)
 - ☐ 2. Mostly supportive or favourable (2)
 - ☐ 3. Mixed (3)
-

XXXI. Does it contain phrases or words which are not written in the Chinese language?

- ☐ 1. Yes (1)
 - ☐ 2. No (2)
-

XXXII. Does the post contain an opinion about marriage in its nature/roots as a legal institution to which everyone should have access or a cultural construction upon which the norms in our culture should be reflected?

- ☐ 1. It contains opinions about marriage as a legal institution. (1)
 - ☐ 2. It contains opinions about marriage as a cultural construction. (2)
 - ☐ 3. It contains opinions about marriage as both. (3)
 - ☐ 4. It contains opinions about marriage as neither. (4)
 - ☐ 5. It does not mention the nature/roots of marriage at all. (5)
-

XXXIII. Does the post contain an opinion about romantic love /mutual attraction or the functions of procreation and family/social duty as the precondition/motivation of marriage?

- ☐ 1. It contains opinions about romantic love /mutual attraction as the precondition/motivation of marriage. (1)
- ☐ 2. It contains opinions about the functions of procreation and family/social duty as the precondition/motivation of marriage. (2)
- ☐ 3. It contains opinions about both. (3)
- ☐ 4. It contains opinions about neither, (4)
- ☐ 5. It does not mention the precondition/motivation of marriage. (5)

XXXIV. Does the post mention the possibility for China (PRC) to legalize same-sex marriage in the future?

☐ 1. Yes (1)

☐ 2. No (2)

XXXV. Does it mention children or children's education?

☐ 1. Yes (1)

☐ 2. No (2)

F: Sub-cultures and pop-cultures XXXVI. Which of the following sub-cultures or pop cultures does the post make a reference to?

- ☐ 1. ACG (Anime-Comic -Games) fan (sub-) cultures
- ☐ 2. the pop culture where there are cinematic works, popular musicians, music, songs, actors, TV shows and other factors or persons in the entertainment arena
- ☐ 3. BL/耽美 (sub-) culture
- ☐ 4. None

XXXVI-I. Does the post mostly feature one or more popular cultural celebrities?

- ☐ 1. Yes (1)
- ☐ 2. No (2)

XXXVI-I-I. Which of the following type(s) of content is mentioned?

- ☐ 1. Intellectual properties or cultural works
- ☐ 2. The event of Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage
- ☐ 3. BL/耽美 (sub-) culture

G. Further study necessity

XXXVII. Does this post deserve further study for any reason?

☐ 1. Yes (1)

☐ 2. No (2)

Display This Question:

If I. Does this post deserve further study for any reason? = 1. Yes

XXXVIII. Please type the reason here (optional).

End of Block: Section c: coder's reflection of the post' content

Appendix B: Posts Snapshots

Figure 1

#Legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan# Judges from Taiwan's Council of Grand Justices ruled that the current civil law banning same sex marriage is unconstitutional and that the legislature has two years to either amend the law or create a new law! if no action is taken by the legislature within that period of time, same-sex couples can access to their marriages according to this ruling's intention. Best news I have heard of this year! Congratulations to Taiwan for becoming the first region in Asia to legalise same-sex marriage, Love wins [originally in English]! ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️



Figure 2

[#Legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan#](#) [NEWS: Asia's first!] Taiwan pass bill to protect same-sex marital right! [Judges from Taiwan's Council of Grand Justices ruled that the current civil law banning same sex marriage is unconstitutional and that the legislature has two years to either amend the law or create a new law! if no action is taken by the legislature within that time, same-sex couples can access to their marriages according to this ruling's intention. This confirms the legal protection of same-sex marriage. In the Qingdao East Street outside, people who had been waiting for this ruling cheered in tears and Tongzhi couples kissed to celebrate. (Pictures from: Fyn Media) @Charlse @tuz@sunnychong



Figure 3

Watched the broadcast with stream service just now❤️ the Judges made their Ruling to protect the freedom to marry. Congrats to Taiwan's advancement in achieving equal rights❤️



[Note: the text in the image saying “meeting at 15:30 in the Legislation Building—‘the world is watching Taiwanese legalisation of same-sex marriage’ on the left and “Another battle in the Legislation Building for equal rights-24/05”with the logo of organisation of publication and its name “Little Bee For Marriage Equality”]

Figure 4

[#I only wanna move into your heart#Day 100#](#)

Today, Judges in Taiwan announced, “the Civil Law is unconstitutional to exclude same-sex marriage”.

It is exiting news. On this 100th day, I finally can say,
“[#RUIWEN#](#), come to Taiwan and get married!”

🌈 hope all the love on earth be treasured without
regrets 🌈

Will support you in the rest of life, please shine!

[#Turtle-WANG Bowen; EricLIN Jianhui \[music\]#](#)



Figure 5

May 25, 2017 [originally in English]- After Taiwan’s judicial department declared their ruling, “same-sex couples have the right to legally marry”, supporters hugged and cried outside of the courthouse, Taipei, China. Taiwan’s judicial department explained that same-sex marriage is not accessible in the current structure of laws and regulations in Taiwan, and that the parliament has two years to amend or enact laws addressing to same-sex unions. Taiwan is to become the first region in Asia to legalise same-sex marriage. Photo by Tityne Su



Figure 6

I have picture from Tian Shanni, these three babies are so loving ❤️

Qingfeng's powerful writing style😂

Cheering for Taiwan Marriage Equality Referendum on the 24th  WuQingfeng



Figure 7

American Supreme Court announced same-sex marriage legal. Out of curiosity, I followed related topics and a year later, Taiwan declared to legalize same-sex marriage. Last year's Vice documentary on transgender evoked my thoughts on this subject. From then, I followed Taiwanese, Thailand and Hong Kong for articles and films on this subject. When more and more related discussions and films on this sort of topics appears in China, I thought the Rainbow is going to be accepted, yet it seems I expected too much from the current situation.



Figure 8

[#Taiwanese same-sex marriage# A girlfriend knelt down with a white veil to propose, and the other partner moved to tears and shouted, "I do!"] Taiwanese lesbian lovers @BBDiax recently released a proposal video that moved many people. When Amber knelt down and proposed, she vowed "I am willing to obey as your wife who is loyal to you and love you. Will you marry me?" The scene was warm and touching, and it also made her lover Huan cry and said, "I do". Video source: [BBDiax](#)

 BBDiax snap video



Figure 9

Taiwan legalized the same-sex marriage
Germany passed same-sex marriage bill
And today
Our state institution announced
Homosexual as an abnormal sexual relationship

Appendix C: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Interviews (Sample)



School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Massey University, Private Bag 11 222,

Palmerston North 4442

Representations of LGBTQ Identities on Chinese Social Media during Taiwanese Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher Introduction

My name is Xiao, Fei. I am a Chinese student studying a PhD in Communication at the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Massey Business School, Massey University, New Zealand. You have been invited to take part in my PhD research project, which aims to describe and interpret the representation of Taiwanese legalization of same-sex marriage on Weibo discussion and of identities of gender and sexual minorities in that discussion.

Project Description and Invitation

This research is going to study LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning) identities and the event of Taiwanese legalization of same-sex marriage represented on Chinese social media by looking into how gender/sexual identities are performed and how related social constructions are conceived in online public sphere discussions. The research questions are how the event of Taiwanese legalization of same-sex marriage is discussed and how the LGBTQ identities are represented in the communicated content in this discussion on social media in China's Mainland . Content analysis and semi-structured interviews will be employed.

You are invited to take part in an interview with me. It is your choice whether or not you participate. If you want to take part now, but change your mind later, you can withdraw from the research within 2 weeks after your signing of the Authority for Release Transcript form.

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form on the last page of this document. You will be given a copy of both Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form to keep.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

I have invited you because you have unique views about the online discussion of Taiwanese legalization of same-sex marriage on Weibo and on Chinese social media platforms in general.

Foreseeable risks, adverse-effects and discomforts that you may encounter by taking part in this research are minimal, but it could include mild emotional or psychological discomforts caused by exposure to culturally sensitive and legally controversial topics.

Project Procedures

If you would like to participate, please contact me via email: feixiao910@gmail.com before 18/03/2020.

If I do not hear from you, I will send you a reminder of this invitation within a week.

If you participate, I will interview you. This interview will be conducted on IM online application at a time of your convenience. The interview will take about 60-90 minutes and approximately 15 questions will be asked. The questions asked are centred around the research question. It will be a semi-structured interview, which means that follow-up questions will be asked to clarify understanding.

If you participate, I will not probe your private information, such as sexual orientation, unless it is shared directly in a verbal way. I am prepared to abandon a line of questions if you verbally show emotional or psychological discomfort. You also have the right to decline questions you do not wish to answer but still take part in the interviews.

If you participate, I will ask you about your observation, opinions and evaluation of the online discussion of Taiwanese legalization of same-sex marriage on Weibo.

The interviews will be recorded in text or audio format depending on the communication platforms used. All audio content will be transformed into text automatically via Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) technology with manual correction afterwards. Then, the transcript of your interview will be sent to you for your review via email with a copy of the Authority for Release Transcript form. You will have two-weeks' time to review the transcript of your interview, make clarifications concerning the transcript's content, and to consider whether to sign the Authority for Release Transcript form. If you do not sign the Authority for Release Transcript form after two weeks of receiving it, it will be assumed that you would have declined the transcript to be used in reports and publications arising from the research. The transcript of your interview will not be used in the text-based analysis or any other forms of analysis for this research project or any subsequent publications without you signing the Authority for Release Transcript form using an alias/name of your choice.

Data Management

All information provided to me, the researcher, is completely confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this research stated on page 1. It will not be possible to identify individuals in any dataset or report from the research. Alias will be used to protect your online and offline identity. Information on detailed physical addresses, phone numbers, portraits or profile pictures of you will be excluded. During the transcription review procedure, you will be allowed to amend your answers to the interview questions on your transcript. Your original online user-generated content will not appear in any publication of this study. All data involved in this research will be stored securely. Any access to it will be limited for academic purposes only. The signed copies of the Participant Consent Form in Pdf format will be stored in a memory stick and kept in a box in the steel cabinet in my co-supervisor's office. The Authority for the Release Transcript form and the transcripts of the interviews, as well as on-/offline identities of the participants, will be stored securely on my Massey H drive and my laptop hard drive. I will share with you the summary of the project findings via email once it is concluded if you participate.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question(s);*
- withdraw from the research (within 2 weeks after your signing of the Authority for Release Transcript form);*
- ask any questions about the research at any time during participation;*
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;*
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;*
- use an alias/my social media username instead of my real name in participation in this research;*
- make clarifications and amendments on the content of my answers to interview questions on the transcript.*

Project Contacts

If you want further information or have any question about this research, you can contact Fei Xiao via email Fei.Xiao.3@uni.massey.ac.nz/feixiao910@gmail.com Weibo account MsBEING as well as post to Fei Xiao, School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North 4442 or you can contact my supervisor Dr. S. Fountaine via email S.L.Fountaine@massey.ac.nz. Please note that Dr. Fountaine can only reply to emails written in English.

Compulsory Statements

1. APPLICATIONS TO A REGIONAL HEALTH & DISABILITY ETHICS COMMITTEE

Use the approval statement from the relevant Health & Disability Ethics Committee:

2. MUHEC APPLICATIONS

The following statement is compulsory and MUST be included:

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 18/28 If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald Harrison (Acting Chair), Massey University Human Ethics

Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email
humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz