



# **A Report on the Status of Chinese LGBT+ Organizations and Their Work Scope**

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# Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer: The views, opinions and interpretations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and contributors. They should not be interpreted as representing the official or unofficial views or positions of China House or other organizations and individuals surveyed in the study.



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## Key Definitions

**LGBT+:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, gender nonconforming, and queer

**NGOs:** Non-governmental organizations

**SOGI:** Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression

**SRH:** Sexual and Reproductive Health

**STDs:** Sexually Transmitted Diseases

# Introduction

Over the past several decades, LGBT+ people have experienced promising changes in China, especially with increasing acceptance in society. There are a variety of LGBT+ organizations in China with different goals and aspirations in mind, that of which includes promoting gay, lesbian, transgender rights; strengthening the LGBT+ community; promoting public visibility; and many more. LGBT+ organizations such as media outlets, NGOs, social enterprises, volunteer groups, as well as members outside of the LGBT+ community have joined together to pave a sturdy path for the Chinese LGBT+ movement.

However, due to cultural sensitivity, censorship, lack of funding, misconception from the public, and a plethora of other problems, LGBT+ organizations can find themselves struggling to stay afloat. While these organizations continue to grow and expand their influence, it is important to discuss their current status and to educate the public on the evolving LGBT+ community.

In the process of multi-sector endeavors, LGBT+ related NGOs, social enterprises, media, and volunteers who supported sexual and gender minorities have played significant roles. This report aims to shed light on the status of the above-mentioned organizations and groups by uncovering the work they do, the challenges they face; as well as discussing interesting trends, and uncovering future opportunities. In order to produce this report, both formal online interviews (with NGO staff, social activists, and supporters in this field) and online questionnaires concerning LGBT+ issues were conducted. This report also strives to bring more awareness to the current development and achievements of LGBT+ organizations in China.

# I. LGBT+NGOs in China

BY Ji Wenxuan, Liu Jinrui, Wang Siyi, Xiang Xingbei, Lin Siqi



## 1. Introduction

In the scope of this report, “LGBT+ NGOs” is defined as non-governmental organizations fighting for equality, promoting diversity, and supporting LGBT+ individuals via various means. The history of LGBT NGOs in China can be traced back to the late 1990s when LGBT+ advocates enter the public eye in China. Nowadays according to participants of the National Dialogue<sup>1</sup>, there are now over three hundred LGBT+ organizations in China and they can be found in most of the provincial capital cities. In East China, almost every city has at least one LGBT+ NGO.

Depending on sizes and regions, their work scope includes but is not limited to community development, legal and psychological support for sexual minorities, advocating for equal rights, and promoting public health. Many grassroots MSM<sup>2</sup> groups do HIV prevention and education, integrating the LGBT+ related identity into civil services.<sup>3</sup> However, complex policy issues such as advocacy for legalizing same-sex marriage are beyond the working ranges of LGBT+ NGOs in China due to the current status between NGOs and the government.

What is worth noting is, LGBT+ organizations are permitted to register in China, amongst 109 countries that permit LGBT+ registration.<sup>4</sup> However, most LGBT+ NGOs are not registered, and the level of recognition in the legal system is limited. Of those organizations that are registered, some registered as businesses, some as non-profit organizations, and some conduct different components of their programs under different legal statuses. Currently, none of the LGBT+ NGOs in China is public fund registered, which means enrolling at the Civil Affairs Bureau. Organizations that focus more on services are generally easier to register than advocacy-focused organizations, but most of them have industry and commerce registration.

This chapter will briefly introduce what LGBT+ NGOs in China do in rights promotion and supporting the LGBT+ community, then analyze obstacles they face in their daily operations.

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP, USAID (2014). *Being LGBT in Asia: China Country Report*. Bangkok.

<sup>2</sup> MSM: men who have sex with men

<sup>3</sup> Longarino, Darius. *Precarious Progress: Advocacy for the Human Rights of LGBT People in China*. New York: OutRight Action International, 2020. [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/PrecariousProgress\\_2020\\_1215.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/PrecariousProgress_2020_1215.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> “The Global State of LGBTIQ Organising: The Right to Register.” *OutRight Action International*. Last Modified August 7, 2018. <https://outrightinternational.org/righttoregister>.

## 2. What do LGBT+ NGOs do in China

### 2.1 Rights promotion

- **Fight discrimination in the workplace**

Different extents of discrimination against gender expression, sexuality, and marital status serve as a main obstacle for the LGBT+ community in the workplace. As a result, only 5.1% of the LGBT+ people disclosed their sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex status in the workplace.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, 21.2% of LGBT+ people reported experiencing negative treatment in the workplace. Besides prevalent forms of negative treatments, 5.26% of LGBT+ people have experienced more extreme forms of discrimination such as sexual harassment (2.1%), physical violence (0.4%), dismissal (8.0%), denied employment (14.3%).<sup>6</sup>

Beijing LGBT Center launched a Workplace Diversified Project in 2019, which aimed to promote anti-discrimination work in the Chinese workplace by conducting research on the diversity status of the workplace, establishing a multi-gender-friendly corporate network, conducting workplace gender-friendly training, and establishing an equality index for Chinese multi-gender companies.

For instance, Beijing LGBT Center held Advocates Roundtable<sup>7</sup> on the special day<sup>8</sup>—May 17th, 2020. Guests from fields of sexual minorities, female, disabled, and HIV/AIDS workplace anti-discrimination claimed the status quo of inequality that various social groups are suffering from in the workplace, and the progress and challenges they confront in their respective work scopes. Furthermore, there are in-depth discussions on how to build a friendly, diverse, and non-discriminatory world together under the context of intersectionality.

Beijing LGBT Center also held a sharing session<sup>9</sup> on fighting against workplace discrimination against trans gender people. During this event, two transgender individuals talked about discrimination and obstacles they faced in their workplaces. The lawyer also shared about the efforts they made to advocate rights for transgender people. For instance, they initiated a legal action to help transgender individuals modify the gender pronoun their academic credentials in 2018. At the end of 2019, they have helped nearly 40 transgender individuals to submit application forms, and many of them have successfully revised their certificates.

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<sup>5</sup> UNDP (2018). An Evidence Brief for Policy: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex(LGBTI)people's experiences in the workplace in China. <http://doc.baige.me/v/?i=R4m>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Beijing LGBT Culture, "We want to be each others 'heroes fighting against injustices" WeChat, 29 May 2020. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/aIGonFoRs1luDRXIFFeloQ>

<sup>8</sup> May 17<sup>th</sup> is when The International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, National Disability Day, and International AIDS Candlelight Memorial meets

<sup>9</sup> Beijing LBGT Culture, "Kuyu Workplace Review|Transgender who sailed through workplace" WeChat, 07 August 2020. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/MkNapWofxLtR8BHpQKBfPQ>

- **Fight against Sexual- and Gender-based Violence**

According to a report on Living Conditions of Sexual Minorities in China, verbal violence is the top 2 form of discrimination that occurs in school and family, where LGBT+ people have to deal with discrimination most frequently (56.1% and 39.6% respectively).<sup>10</sup> Additionally, physical violence is also a frequent occurrence.

Common Language, founded in 2005, is a non-profit organization in supporting Chinese LGBT+ communities suffering from discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation, sexual identity and expression (SOGI), advocating for equal rights, public awareness, and combating violence and discrimination through community empowerment, direct aid services, public education and policy advocacy.<sup>11</sup>

Common Language is the pioneer organization in the fight against gender-based violence. Common language's 'Rainbow Anti Gender-based Violence Center' provides direct service and intervention for LGBT+ survivors of gender-based violence. The center not only offers counseling, case management and support groups for LGBT+ people, but also works toward trainings for community-based organizations and direct service providers. Help seekers can reach out to the center by filling out a form that states their needs and problems, then they will be contacted within one day via telephone or online channels. Usually, legal support and social service (e.g., psychological counseling) are both available depending on needs.

Other than helping LGBT+ people directly, Common Language has produced a report<sup>12</sup> on the current situation and needs of intervention on domestic violence among LGBT+ people and offered their suggestions on policy revision in several different fields to organizations at all levels, displaying a high level of professionalism in rights promotion. The report proposes "cohabitation relationship" of the LGBT+ group in the protection scope of anti-domestic violence law to National People's Congress, and strengthening the protection of minors, especially transgender children to the State Council.

## **2.2 Supporting the LGBT+ Community**

- **Ally support to better mediate family relationship**

China is a country that values traditional culture. Some of the earliest teachings of Chinese philosophers degraded those who, regardless of sexual orientation, chose not to have children and pass on the family name.<sup>13</sup> It is a pervasive cultural notion

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<sup>10</sup> UNDP. 中国性少数群体生存状况- 基于性倾向、性别认同及性别表达的社会态度调查报告. Beijing: UNDP, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Common Language | Introduction. 'Common Language'. Last Modified, November 21, 2017. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/bfXp1pXhR5yjBRvoZVxAiA>

<sup>12</sup> What do 400 cases of LGBT domestic violence tell us? The latest study on the fifth anniversary of the anti-domestic violence law. 'Common Language'. Last Modified, March 2, 2021. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/sQ6O7wqrr7Fk5Y00CFPlcg>

<sup>13</sup> UNDP, USAID (2014). Being LGBT in Asia: China Country Report. Bangkok. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/Being%20LGBT%20in%20Asia%20China%20Country%20Report-Eng.pdf>

of filial piety to continue their family line. As a result, the word sexuality is tied with the obligation to reproduce. Under the influence of such traditional culture, the elderly is less likely to accept the LGBT+ community, resulting in family conflicts.

Many organizations aim to help mediate the LGBT+ community's family relationships. For instance, Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) China<sup>14</sup>, founded in Guangzhou on June 28, 2008, is an NGO formed by LGBT+ individuals, their parents, friends, and supporters to serve and support LGBT+ people. PFLAG China is an independent organization, named after the American organization PFLAG.

The head of PFLAG China, Shanghai, Mr. D claims that "Paternal acceptance is a difficult hurdle for China's 70 million sexual minorities to pass. Chinese parents have great expectations for their children, while sexual minorities are worried about not meeting their parents' expectations, and their disappointment will reach the peak." Whether to come out has become a tough topic for sexual minorities in China.

PFLAG China plays a crucial role in improving parent-child communication, promote family acceptance, self-identity, etc. "We hope to not only mediate family relations, but also convince our family members to support us and our community." said Mr.D.

2021 is the thirteenth year since the establishment of PFLAG China. With the encouragement of PFLAG, more and more straight allies are starting to speak out for the LGBT+ community. Most surprisingly, among all PFLAG allies, there are roughly around one thousand parents over the age of 50, who have accepted their children's sexual identity and gender expression, joined their mission, and became volunteers for LGBT+ advocacy.

- **Promoting grassroots activism in university to better educate students**

University tends to be where many students became conscious of social issues for the first time. Therefore, universities are important battlegrounds for LGBT+ NGOs to incite grassroots activism among youth. West Coast Common Heart (WCCH) LGBT League is one of many organizations that works with university students to educate the youth and destigmatize LGBT+ issues.

Promoting LGBT+ rights on campus are not an easy task. When interviewing WCCH LGBT League, they listed eleven most urgent issues that universities LGBT leagues are facing and the solutions to each of them. Among these obstacles, school administrative interventions are the hardest ones to tackle. Since promoting on-campus events need to involve not only students but also teachers and administrators of the universities. Approval of hosting rights tend to be restricted by Party Committee Propaganda Department and School Youth League Committee, who owned the final approval authority. This means that university students face many barriers when trying to hold on-campus activities.

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<sup>14</sup> PFLAG China, Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PFLAG\\_China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PFLAG_China)

WCCH LGBT League shared that students could carry out public relations projects specifically for teachers in order to alter their perceptions towards LGBT+ issues. Students can also adopt academic exchange, face-to-face interviews, private communications, and giving public speeches as avenues of grassroots activism. They believe that by accumulated efforts, the situation will become better.

Moreover, the WCCH LGBT League's board members talked about various ways of expanding their influence among university students. For instance, they tried to attract a specific group of students who enjoy reading LGBT fanfictions and interested in LGBT-related topics to join their mission. They also tried to strengthen system construction of students' organization through democratization, standardized file management, mature self-training system, and incentive mechanism. By doing so, they were able to expand their influence within the schools' institutional mechanism.

LGBT+ topics are very sensitive and highly stigmatized in China: thus, most universities' attitudes towards the LGBT+ community are along the CCP line of "don't support, don't oppose, and don't promote." The long-term practices of West Coast Communication Heart LGBT League concluded that the so-called homophobic attitudes of school leaders are fear of unfamiliar issues. If student activities can grasp the crux of the problem and create dialogue, rights promotion will eventually be successful in the university settings.

- **Hosting social activities to enhance a sense of community among LGBT+ people**

LGBT+ NGOs launched a series of activities, which enables LGBT+ community members to build a more holistic understanding of their self-identity. We Love LGBT Group, is the first LGBT+ non-profit organization in Anhui, China. It is committed to promote public-oriented multi-gender education and publicity, popularize multi-gender cultural knowledge, as well as advocate for an equal, inclusive and harmonious society. Meanwhile, the group aims to raise awareness and promotes rights and the dignity for the LGBT+ community.<sup>15</sup>

Yuran Fang, manager of We Love LGBT, mentioned that they host movie salons and seminars regularly as these activities require very low operation costs. "We show various types of films. Not all film is LBGT-themed, so that everyone can discuss the intersectionality of LGBT+ issues under different social topics".

In addition to Movie Salon, there are seminars and mental health lectures. For example, there was a seminar for sexual minorities, featuring professional guest speakers who share knowledge and experience on how to start a comfortable and loving relationship. Through the lecture, audience get to know what exactly intimacy is, further seek out the root of their psychological problems, and learn how to start,

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<sup>15</sup> China Development Brief “安徽皖爱同志小组,” NGO 信息中心 秉承草根立场，致力独立报道，促进资源分享，推动公民社会 (, <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.org.cn/org6623/>).

manage and end an intimate relationship.<sup>16</sup>

As for the seminars, We Love LGBT collaborates with LGBT+ Rights Advocacy China to discuss the statues of same-sex partnership. Since the current social climate often stigmatizes sexual minorities, compared with heterosexual couples, same-sex couples face more difficulties and resistance in the process of maintaining an intimate relationship. How to balance love, work, academics studies, relationships between family and friends are at the center of the seminar discussion. The seminar also explores how to use the existing laws and policies to protect the property and health rights of same-sex couples, and add another layer of protection.<sup>17</sup>

- **Mental Health services and helpline**

Numerous LGBT+ organizations are committed to paying attention to the mental health of sexual minorities. In 2014, the Beijing LGBT Center released the *"Chinese LGBT Mental Health Report"*. The report pointed out that among the 1653 sexual minorities surveyed, about 37% of the participants considered seeking psychological services, but 55% of them said that despite such needs, they will not choose to seek psychological counseling services. The main reasons that hinder them from seeking psychological counseling are worries about the high cost and unfriendly counseling environments.

As one of the most prominent public welfare service organizations for the LGBT+ community, Beijing LGBT Center, together with Aibai Cultural Education Center and Beijing Zhuangni Psychological Counseling Center, provide professional counseling, testing, and clinical psychological counseling services for LGBT+ people and HIV-infected people. As there are very few counselors who have comprehensive knowledge of diverse gender and sexual minorities among mental health and psychological practitioners, the Beijing LGBT Center has established the "LGBT Friendly Psychological Counselor in line with the purpose of providing quality psychological services to the LGBT community."<sup>18</sup>

In addition to training psychological counselors, in December 2015, the Beijing LGBT Center established a transgender hotline. In the past three years, it has provided more than 1,000 people from the transgender community. In March 2018, the Beijing LGBT Center collaborated with many NGOs such as Anhui Welove LGBT group and Suzhou LESGO Public Welfare Group to provide a hotline <sup>19</sup> for companionship, support, and information consultation for the transgender community for free.

- **Public health promotion + HIV testing**

In addition to mental health, Chinese LGBT+ NGOs also pay great attention to the

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<sup>16</sup> Anhui We Love LGBT Group, "10.18 心理沙龙讲座 || 亲密关系中的小技巧" WeChat, 14 October 2020. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/mNFKdF8DZBRT6xGsUZ7CLg>

<sup>17</sup> Anhui We Love LGBT Group, "01.30 获得爱的保障的一百种方式 || 亲密关系交流分享会" WeChat, 27 January 2021. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/McYRTmxWMq0qtwqpYwwGRA>

<sup>18</sup> BEIJING LGBT CENTER, BAIDU, [http://www.bjlgbtcenter.org.cn/?\\_wv=1031](http://www.bjlgbtcenter.org.cn/?_wv=1031)

<sup>19</sup> BEIJING LGBT CENTER, BAIDU, <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.org.cn/org732/>

physical health of sexual minorities. The LGBT+ community in China faces a variety of public health problems. For instance, gay men, MSM, and transgender people face a higher HIV infection rate. In addition to AIDS, other important health problems include the rapid expansion of sexually transmitted diseases, reproductive health problems of lesbians, and difficulties in obtaining sexual and reproductive health services. Health services for transgender people are particularly lacking, and safe hormone replacement therapy and gender reconstruction surgery are still expensive.

In May 2002, with the support of the Sino-British STD/AIDS Prevention and Control Project, the "Chengdu LGBT Care Group" was established and started to set up a hotline. The first domestic AIDS prevention and control project undertaken by gay people for the "LGBT community" was officially launched.

To improve the attitude of medical staff towards LGBT groups, in 2013, Chengdu Tongle cooperated with local AIDS treatment institutions to carry out anti-discrimination training for medical staff. LGBT+ people are more willing to go to sexual minority-friendly HIV testing institutions because they can at least be sure that they will not be discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. Another mile stone for public health promotion among LGBT+ community is that Beijing LGBT Center announced the provision of free HIV testing in 2015.

- **Advocacy and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Education**

To prevent sexual minorities from STD (Sexually Transmitted Disease) and other reproductive health problems, SRH education plays a significant role in informing the LGBT+ community of SRH issues. According to a study examining the relationships of school-based sexuality education, sexual knowledge, and sexual behaviors, only a half of the respondents reported having received school-based sexuality education, and a higher SRH score was found to associate with better reproductive health outcomes.<sup>20</sup> This leaves space for NGOs to better promote SRH education, especially for sexual minorities.

A famous and long-standing website named *Aibai* <sup>21</sup> is a pioneer in the field of SRH education. It was established by a gay couple in 1999. Aibai has collected and translated reading materials covering more than 10 topics, including health, AIDS, LGBT+ identity, and law, which are available for online download and free distribution in the community. In 2009, Aibai Chengdu Center, in cooperation with the United Nations Program on HIV / AIDS and the United Nations Development Program, presided over the development of the "United Nations Guidelines for HIV / AIDS intervention in emergencies" and related capacity-building projects for NGOs and medical professionals.<sup>22</sup> What's more, it has provided capacity-building training services including democratic management and rules of procedure for

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<sup>20</sup> Li, C., Cheng, Z., Wu, T. et al. 'The relationships of school-based sexuality education, sexual knowledge and sexual behaviors—a study of 18,000 Chinese college students. 'Reprod Health 14(2017), 103. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-017-0368-4>

<sup>21</sup> [www.aibai.cn](http://www.aibai.cn)

<sup>22</sup> *Aibai. Baidu Encyclopedia*. Retrieved, 28 February, 2021.

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E7%88%B1%E7%99%BD%E7%BD%91/9345219?fr=aladdin>.

Chinese LGBT+ organizations and AIDS-related organizations since 2005.

When it comes to personal health consultation, *aibai* has proposed its own Q&A forum for all individuals including heterosexual people who are undergoing sexual or reproductive health problems. Damien Lu is the host for *aibai* Q&A sessions and acts as a health professional to respond to anonymous questions. The sessions provide daily updates and advice on health issues.

### **3. Obstacles LGBT+ NGOs Face**

For decades, LGBT+ NGOs have been fighting for sexual minorities from both macro and micro levels. However, the obstacles they face are still undeniably difficult to resolve, from legitimacy, funding, and staffing, to censorship and restrictions. This section will further discuss various obstacles that LGBT+ NGOs face.

First, there is a shortage of full-time employees. Except for a few HIV-related LGBT+ organizations that receive governmental funding, most small and medium size NGOs are run by volunteers, which many are temporary volunteers. Volunteer turnovers tend to be fast, usually most short term volunteers only stays between six months to a year. The number of long term-active volunteers is too small to support NGOs' daily operations and activities. This point will be explored in greater depth in chapter 3.

Lack of funding is another major issue that nearly all LGBT+ NGOs faces. Larger NGOs like PFLAG are usually affiliated with a foundation to have legal fundraising status. Thus, excluding HIV-related organizations, the other hundreds or so LGBT organizations in China can only raise about ten million a year, which is a fraction of what other charity institutions raise.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes the money raised is classified as restricted funds, which can only be used to hold certain events with the permission of the local authorities.

Meanwhile, the lack of help from the state-owned enterprises to get funding adds up to the severity of the funding shortage LGBT+ NGOs face. Especially in the ongoing COVID epidemic in 2020/21, LGBT+ NGOs' survival is at stake due to the funds lacking from both usual fundraising activities, donations, and corporate sponsorships.

Operational restrictions and censorship from the government pose challenges to Chinese LGBT+ NGOs. Since the beginning of the COVID epidemic, the government began to restrict offline events as they runs the risk of overpopulation. Mr. D says that the 2020 PFLAG annual meeting and the Shanghai Pride Festival had both been called off this way.

It is commonly believed that big cities are more inclusive and therefore easier to

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<sup>23</sup> Hemat Mostafa Amer and Sabah E. Nady, "School Based Educational Intervention to Raise Awareness of Students about HIV/AIDS Disease," *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice* 9, no. 10 (2019): p. 67, <https://doi.org/10.5430/jnep.v9n10p67>.

host LGBT+ events, however, it is not always the case since LGBT+ activities in large cities are usually in a larger scale. Thus, they always attract more attention from both LGBT+ people and local authorities; so bigger cities also run more risks of events being cancelled. To avoid being restricted or canceled, JS, an LGBT + volunteer, says that some time LGBT+ NGOs would prefer to host events in smaller cities.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In summary, LGBT+ NGOs are growing prosperously in China despite apparent obstacles such as the lack of funding, staffing, and legitimacy issues. With a few leading organizations like the Beijing LGBT Center, PFLAG, and Common Language, NGOs help to promote equal rights for LGBT+ people and support the LGBT+ community in many ways.

Below are a few further recommendations based on the findings of this report. Firstly, fundraising is a critical issue for LGBT+ NGOs. Seeking collaboration with LGBT-friendly enterprises and enhancing information sharing between large NGOs and grassroots ones may be of help in solving it.

Secondly, the lack of human resources not only hinders the development of LGBT+ NGOs but also the Chinese LGBT+ movement at large. Therefore, grassroots activism in schools and universities is a very important realm to be tackled. This will not only help to fix the pipeline problem, but also help to eradicate ignorance and prejudice against the LGBT+ community at a young age.

What's more, promoting LGBT+ rights with feminists and other civil rights groups are an important way to expand influence. However, such collaboration should be done in an inclusive and intersectional way.

Lastly, academic research findings should be better informed to the public (e.g., the anti-domestic violence report produced by *Common Language*, the UNDP country report on LGBT+ people, or this report) so that the public can be more aware of the basic facts, status, progress, and challenges of the Chinese LGBT+ movement.



## II. Volunteers

**BY Olivia Li, Wu Jing, Xu Lixuan, Zhu Yan, Zhu Yutian**



### 1. Introduction

Volunteers are undoubtedly indispensable in the process of pushing for equal rights for the LGBT+ community. While the LGBT+ movement doesn't lack passion, there is still a large shortage of full-time workers at LGBT+ organizations. Therefore, many grassroots organizations rely on volunteers to raise money, organize events, improve publicity, and manage daily operations. However, there is little information known about these volunteers in Chinese society. Where do they come from? What kind of work have they been doing? And what motivates them to remain impassioned in the face of possible adversities? This section of the report seeks to answer these questions through data collection and analysis from a nation-wide LGBT+ volunteer survey.

The section will first briefly discuss the main research questions, as well as the methodology and limitations of the research. In addition to analyzing the research findings, this section will also investigate the challenges volunteers face.

### 2. Methodology and limitations

#### 2.1 Definition

In the scope of this report, volunteers are defined as people who offer to take part in an organization or undertake a task without necessary monetary returns. In China, volunteers play a significant role in LGBT+ organizations' operations, as most of the LGBT+ communities are facing serious problems, one of which being a lack of staff or insufficient funding. Volunteers in Chinese LGBT+ organizations are responsible for planning activities, raising funds, organizing lectures, and carrying out daily tasks.

#### 2.2 Methodology

An online survey consist of 16 questions was created to gain more insight information about volunteers working on LGBT+ causes in China. The survey was created digitally for convenience of distribution, and digitalization allowed information to be collected promptly. The data collection time lasted for about three weeks and the survey was uploaded to Zhihu, Weibo, Baidu Post Bar, Moments, and other popular Chinese social media platforms.

## 2.3 Limitations

Admittedly, there are a few limitations of the survey, one being sampling bias. It can be displayed by the geographical location section of the paper, which indicates a large population of volunteers in Shanghai. The reason for such a high population is because one of the interviewed organizations- PFLAG, helped distribute its paper to its large volunteer population. Moreover, it is very likely that the survey would have been censored on many platforms when reached a higher viewership. Therefore, while the survey was distributed on multiple social media platforms-- Zhihu, Douban, WeChat, etc.

A second limitation is non-response bias. Due to the sensitivity of the topic being researched, volunteers will likely feel uncomfortable about answering personal questions. The effects of such limitation were shown by multiple volunteers requesting the personal information and legitimacy of the research team since they feared the survey could potentially land them in trouble. Moreover, one survey response did not fill in anything beyond occupation despite submitting the survey-- which can be inferred to be a hesitation in answering more personal questions.

Despite existing limitations, this survey is still a rather successful attempt in filling the void of the lack of first-hand research on the demographic characteristics of volunteers who work for LGBT+ initiatives in China.

## 3. Research Findings and Discussions

A total of 81 respondents participated in the survey, spanning across 9 provinces in China. All of the results were deemed valid for data analysis. This section will analyze the research findings in terms of age, gender, geographical location, education, volunteering time length, motivations, recruitment channels, and responsibilities.

### 3.1 Age

<i>Age</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Under 18</i>	2	2.5%
<i>18-25</i>	49	60.5%
<i>26-30</i>	21	25.9%
<i>31-40</i>	7	8.6%
<i>41-50</i>	2	2.5%
<i>51-60</i>	0	0%
<i>Above 60</i>	0	0%

*Table 1*

As Table 1 demonstrates, the majority of Chinese volunteers were young or middle-aged. From the data, most respondents are aged between 18 to 25, followed by those aged 31 to 40. One possible reason for the age group between 18 to 25 consisting of more than half of the entire survey's population is that younger people tend to be more progressive in general society.

With the increase in exposure to the LGBT+ community on social media, literature, and media, younger generations have shown more acceptance to those who identify as different from social norms. Moreover, college students may have more time to devote to volunteer organizations than full-time workers, who must understandably worry about many more factors than a conventional college student.

### 3.2 Gender

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Male</i>	41	51.3%
<i>Female</i>	35	43.8%
<i>Other</i>	4	5.0%

*Table 2*

As can be seen from Table 2, male Chinese volunteers made up 51.3% of the survey sample, female Chinese volunteers made up 43.8% of the survey sample and the rest made up 5% of the survey sample. Male volunteers were more than 1/4 of the females, indicating a gender imbalance.

The reason for the greater number of Chinese male LGBT+ volunteers from the known data may be a sampling bias caused by the constricted distribution channel of the survey. If the questionnaire had more samples and data, the ratio of men to women might have changed.

Though the data derived from the survey may not entirely be representative of the entire population, it nevertheless has signified a noticeable gender difference. Moreover, West Coast Communication Heart LGBT League's director Mr. L has also spoken on a similar observation he made in his years of experience in managing volunteers. He mentioned that occasionally they would not have any females in the organization. A few other prominent heads of LGBT+ organizations interviewed shared a similar sentiment.

An interesting theory to be made is that many LGBT+ organizations may still be widely focused specifically on the rights of gay men. Another possible explanation could be the deep-rooted intersectional gender issue within the LGBT+ community where a male has more visibility and discursive power in society as well as the LGBT+ movement.

### 3.3 Geographical location

In terms of the locations of the volunteers, survey finds that nearly one-third of the volunteers are in Shanghai. As Yuanyuan Wang et al. wrote in *Mapping out a spectrum of the Chinese public's discrimination toward the LGBT community: results from a national survey*, "every 100 thousand RMB increase in per capita GDP led to a 6.4% decrease in discriminatory events perpetrated by heterosexuals."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it was hypothesized that survey results would indicate a larger volunteer population in regions with higher GDPs per capita such as Guangdong or Jiangsu. However, the results show that Shanghai is where most volunteers come from. Such patterns could be a result of the abundant assistance in publicity of the survey that PFLAG did in Shanghai, this result might be consisting of a sampling bias.

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Shanghai	23	28.40%	Jiangsu	2	2.50%
Zhejiang	15	18.50%	Gansu	1	1.20%
Beijing	14	17.30%	Shanxi	1	1.20%
Fujian	7	8.60%	Yunnan	1	1.20%
Guangdong	5	6.20%	Hunnan	1	1.20%
Shandong	4	4.90%	Henan	1	1.20%
Shanxi* (山西)	2	2.50%	Anhui	1	1.20%
Sichuan	2	2.50%	Abroad	1	1.20%

Table 3

<sup>24</sup> Wang, Yuanyuan, Zhishan Hu, Ke Peng, Joanne Rechdan, Yuan Yang, Lijuan Wu, Ying Xin, et al. "Mapping out a Spectrum of the Chinese Public's Discrimination toward the LGBT Community: Results from a National Survey." *BMC Public Health* 20, no. 1 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-08834-y>.

### 3.4 Education

<i>Education</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Middle school and below</i>	0	0.0%
<i>High school/professional high school</i>	4	5.0%
<i>College</i>	10	12.5%
<i>Undergraduate</i>	49	61.3%
<i>Masters degree and above</i>	17	21.3%

*Table 4*

It can be seen that more than half of the volunteers are in the undergraduate stage. According to the previous study, 62.5 % of respondents are in the 18-25 age group which proves that why there are so many people who are undergraduate or master's degree and above level. Only 5% of people are less old than 18, so, that is why there are 0% for junior middle school and only 5% for high school.

### 3.5 Volunteer Time Length

<i>Time</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Below 2 hours</i>	38	48.1%
<i>2-7 hours</i>	32	40.5%
<i>7-10 hours</i>	7	8.9%
<i>10-20 hours</i>	0	0.0%
<i>Above 20 hours but not full time</i>	2	2.5%
<i>Full time</i>	0	0.0%

*Table 5*

Among 79 participants who responded to this question, 48.1% of them spend less than two hours as volunteers; 40.5% people spend 2-7 hours as volunteers; 8.9% spend 7-10 hours as volunteers; only 2.5% spend more than 20 hours as part-time volunteers per week, and none are full-time volunteers. The most important things here is that among people who spend less than 2 hours per week, 4.5% of the people are students under 18 years old; 54% are college students between 18 and 25 years old; 32% are between 26 and 30 years old; 9.5% are between 31 and 40 years old. Those who spent more than 20 hours per week are in the 41-50 age group. According to the previous data, there are closer links between ages and the time people spend on.

### **3.6 Motivation for volunteering**

One of the most cited motivations for volunteering is the wish to help themselves and people around them. According to the survey, 88% of the LGBT+ volunteers involved in the survey belong to the LGBT+ community. Most of them mention that they want to devote their effort to this issue and promote equality and build an inclusive society.

A volunteer who identifies as a male homosexual said that if he hides in the shadow, he will not feel safe and the situation will not be changed; if he stands out and fights for their rights, the LGBT+ group can have a brighter future. There are also 14% of the volunteers who said that they have friends who are members of the LGBT+ community, and the rest of the participants has relatives of LGBT+, or they are simply interested in this issue as an ally.

Other motivations of volunteers vary from the intention of making friends who have common interests to getting more information about their academic interests. Since most of the volunteers belong to the LGBT+ community, it is no surprise that they are motivated by the hope of making new friends and finding a sense of belonging.

### **3.7 Recruitment channels**

Most of the volunteers obtain information about volunteer recruitments from websites and different social medias. For example, WeChat makes information about recruitment more accessible to volunteers in a relatively short time. One of the volunteers interviewed, who is a very influential social activist with many years of volunteering experience, mentioned that WeChat is the main communication channels for volunteer coordination. Moreover, most volunteers have joined WeChat chat groups run by LGBT+ NGOs or volunteer organizations. Such groups are used to share news, resources, activity details and recruitment information.

### **3.8 Responsibilities**

Volunteers in LGBT+ organizations are given a wide range of responsibilities. There are roles for volunteers both online and offline, depending on their physical location and availability.

A major aspect of physically volunteering is hosting offline events. Many local LGBT+ organizations in China will host events such as Pride Marches, Film Festivals, LGBT+ Seminars, and more. In this case, volunteers are responsible for organizing events, designing promotional posters, seeking out guest speakers, fundraising, securing the venue, and taking more intricate roles required.

## **4. Obstacles**

This section will discuss obstacles organizations face in recruiting and maintaining a stable pool of volunteers as well as obstacles individuals face to become volunteers.

Volunteer organizations are in short supply of funds. According to the results of our survey, a total of 46 volunteers who have worked for LGBT+ organizations identified the lack of funds as the foremost significant difficulty their organization face. The funding shortage means that LGBT+ organizations lack professional capacity to recruit, manage, and maintain their pool of volunteers.

Furthermore, the lack of funding also means that some LGBT+ organizations are unable to properly compensate their volunteers financially, thus driven away those financially underprivileged individuals who can not afford to work for free even though they are passionate about the cause.

Additionally, LGBT+ organizations also face difficulties in keeping volunteers with short-term utilitarian goals. According to Mr. L, the director of West Coast Communication Heart LGBT League, "Many people volunteer because they want to socialize and make friends. Once they found what they were looking for, they lose interests in the job." The survey results also suggest that socialization is a main motivation for many of the volunteers, it is not surprising that NGOs face high volunteer turnover rates.

For individual volunteers, obstacles such as lack of acceptance, support, and respect for their work from society also hinders their pursuits of fighting for their heart's cause.<sup>25</sup> Although there are greater steps towards acceptance of the SOGI issue in China, traditional and conservative values still dominate society. As a result, it prevents many people from becoming a volunteer. According to the survey result, more than half of the participants indicated that only the closest members of their inner circle know about their volunteering work, most of them choose to keep their volunteering activities on the down low.

## 5. Discussions and Conclusion

The current development of volunteers in LGBT+ organizations in China seems to be on a bright path. Excellent development of the Chinese LGBT+ movement is inseparable from the efforts of volunteers. PFLAG's large population of volunteers is something that would be unfathomable in China a few years ago. According to the survey, the number of volunteers being part of the LGBT+ community gives an indication that perhaps internalized homophobia has been decreasing within the community.



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<sup>25</sup> Ying Tao Zhi Jia Xi Yang Yang De Dian, "志愿者组织面临的十大问题", *Baidu Wenku*, March 15, 2021, <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/bd1ff692f11dc281e53a580216fc700aba6852d8>.

# III. LGBT+ Friendly Social Enterprises and Corporations

BY Ivy Yang, Liu Haoqu, Liu Ye, Wei Jiabao, Yang Yu

## 1.Introduction

This chapter will introduce the history and current situation of LGBT+ friendly social enterprises and corporations. As well as the challenges and opportunities these firms are facing, and how they are supporting the LGBT+ movement in China. Additionally, this chapter will outline a few experiences worth learning from social enterprises elsewhere, that can be applied to LGBT+ social enterprises in China.

### 1.1 Definition of social enterprise

Social enterprises can be seen as an organization between NGOs and commercial enterprises. In the scope of this report, social enterprises refer to those who have their own public welfare projects. Different from NGOs who rely on social or government donations for financial support, social enterprises have their commercial projects to sustain their own operations.

### 1.2 The current situation of LGBT+ social enterprises and corporations

#### ***LGBT+ social enterprise***

LGBT+ Social Enterprises refer to firms that mainly provide public services to the LGBT+ community, and they tend to make profits through their business ventures.

For example, Danlan is the most popular and influential gay website in mainland China, containing the Danlan platform, Blued dating software, magazines, and other projects. Danlan's funding mainly comes from Blued, an interest-based Social & Health Education Network. The main businesses of Blued are live streaming, advertising, membership services, etc. Danlan also has a specialized initiative dedicated to AIDS prevention, the Danlan Public Welfare Project.

LGBT+ social enterprises are supporting the LGBT+ movement in China in a variety of ways:

- Help LGBT+ people in socializing and community building :

In China, there are a lot of dating apps specifically for the LGBT+ community. Some of the famous Chinese LGBT+ dating apps are Blued, Rela, Lesdo, Aloha, etc. Users

can meet new people, look for romantic connections, and find a suitable community through these dating apps.

- Provide LGBT+ specific social services

Some LGBT+ social enterprises provide social services specifically catering to the LGBT+ community in the area of legal, recreations, and health. For instance, Johnnie Psychological Counseling Center provides psychological counseling for LGBT+ people in need of mental health and wellness support. Gay Men travel network is a company specializing in Gay travel projects to provide suitable travel activities for Gay customers.

- Create safe space

Some LGBT+ social enterprises help the LGBT+ community by providing safe spaces to relax and socialize with others from the LGBT+ community. Take ROXIE - a Lesbian bar in Shanghai, for example, most of its clientele are part of the LGBT+ community or allies. Every Friday is Ice Breaker Day when customers can enjoy a big discount and take part in social activities at ROXIE.

- Help fight discriminations

Social enterprises also contribute to anti-discriminations movements. Ruibo, an LGBT+ friendly law firm, is the first law firm in China specialized in research on same-sex marriage. In 2015, Ruibo law firm helped Sun Wenlin and his husband to ask the local civil affairs bureau to admit their marriage, which is the first Chinese gay marriage case.

- Creating friendly environment at workplace and help build LGBT+ network.

There are also social enterprises fighting to make the workplace more LGBT+ inclusive. For instance, D&I Consulting (DNIC) is a corporate advisory and training consultancy that supports the LGBT+ community and promotes LGBT+ inclusion at the workplace, which has conducted lots of LGBT+ research and provided LGBT+ training for many corporations. Another example of such an enterprise is SAP, an international technology company with a branch office in China. SAP establishes an LGBT+ employee network, PRIDE@SAP, which often organizes LGBT+ campaigns.

### ***LGBT+ Friendly corporations***

In the scope of this report, Corporate refers to domestic LGBT-friendly corporations. They are supporting the LGBT+ movement in China in a variety of ways:

- Create a zero-discrimination employment environment and empower LGBT+ people in the work place.

Many companies collaborate with LGBT+ organizations to address the issue of employment diversity through workplace training. For example, on September 2020, KPMG invited the Beijing LGBT+ Center to conduct an LGBT+ Friendly

Training. In November of the same year, Andrew, a consultant from the Big Four accounting firms, took a resume writing training course in Beijing LGBT+ center, which can be a symbol of advocating LGBT+ equality in the workplace.

- Show support for the LGBT+ community through marketing campaign:

There are lots of foreign LGBT+ friendly companies in China which are now hesitant to show their support for LGBT+ community through advertisements. However, different from foreign companies, many domestic enterprises also speak up for the LGBT+ community in a very subtle manner, such as adding rainbow elements in their advertisements. Jiang Xiaobai, a liquor company, posted an advertisement on Weibo on August 21st, 2019, featuring a rainbow and writing that "colors are not used to distinguish differences, but to make the world more colorful".

ByteDance, a famous Chinese internet company, also released an official supportive statement in March 2020. It says: "As our products and platforms spread all over the world our customers are more diverse -- gender, age, ethnicity, language, cultural background, sexual orientation, and so on."

- Sponsorship of LGBT+ Events:

Each year many companies sponsor the Shanghai Pride Festival as a way of showing support for the LGBT+ community. In 2019, there are around 100 companies including ANDAZ, BAYER, JOVA, Blue frog, etc., sponsored the Festival. Such sponsorship came in various forms such as cash donations, free products hand out, and provide event space free of charge.

## **2. Difficulties LGBT+ social enterprises face**

Despite the progress made in recent years, LGBT+ social enterprises are still facing the problem of registration, difficulties balancing between business operations and public welfare goals, social discrimination, governmental restrictions, the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as privacy and data protection issues. This chapter will explore these issues in greater depth.

### **2.1 Registration problem**

One major issue that every Chinese social enterprise is facing is that there isn't a clear legal definition of social enterprises in China. At present, social enterprises are generally registered as commercial enterprises or private non-enterprise units. Types of registration will affect the financial funding of LGBT+ social enterprises. First, commercial enterprises are not allowed to enjoy government welfare policies, such as tax reduction and operation subsidies.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the private non-enterprise unit doesn't have the right to engage in business activities, which means

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<sup>26</sup> "the Regulations on Temporary Identification of the Registration and Administration of Private Non-enterprise Units." accessed March 14, 2021, <https://baike.so.com/doc/5568767-5783944.html>.

that it will be difficult for Chinese LGBT+ social enterprise to obtain stable funding.<sup>27</sup> Both situations will increase the financial burden of LGBT+ social enterprises.

## **2.2 Conflicts between business and public welfare**

One obstacle that social enterprises are facing is balancing between their public welfare goal and their commercial practice. One of the conflicts between the two reflects on the design of projects. How a company is structured will affect the revenue and employee's salary level. Commercialized projects need to be entertainment-oriented which may generate more customers and revenue. However, public welfare projects focus more on the values of the project, which usually demonstrate more social well-being benefits in comparison.

Mr. Z, the founder of GaySpot magazine, claims that "The biggest problem for the magazine at the moment is the lack of funding. It's difficult to fully commercialize the magazine. If we want to be commercial, we will have to focus on the entertainment elements. However, since we would also like to focus on reporting serious issues it takes up the space for revenue-generating elements."

## **2.3 Social discrimination**

LGBT+ social enterprises are facing great pressure of social discrimination in China. Public attitudes towards the LGBT+ community in China maintains conservative. In such a social atmosphere, the recruitment of LGBT+ social enterprises may be affected. Working for an LGBT+ social enterprise might subject one under social pressure from friends and families as well as the public. In 2012, Geng Le, the founder of [danlan.org](http://danlan.org), lost his day job as a policeman, when his supervisor discovered the website.<sup>28</sup> It is extremely difficult for LGBT+ social enterprises to find long-term volunteers, let alone full-time employees who are immune to such social pressure.

## **2.4 Restrictions from the government**

The attitude of central governmental towards LGBT+ issues is often ambiguous. Local governmental agencies tend to interfere with the daily operation of LGBT+ social enterprises.<sup>29</sup> Ma Baoli, the founder of Blue City the parent company of Blued, mentioned that how his personal blog ([danlan.org](http://danlan.org)) has been "repeatedly shut down" in the first couple of years by authorities. Therefore, Blued has been actively avoiding conflict with authorities by obeying the government's expectations.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Wang Dingning & Wang Zhongping, November 16, 2020, Problem and Suggestion on the Development of Social Enterprise in China. Chinese Business (22), 179-180+191. doi:10.19699/j.cnki.issn2096-0298.2020.22.179.

<sup>28</sup> Gele, "Policy," Blued, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://www.blued.com/en/policy.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Eva Dou, "As Attitudes in China Begin to Shift, Gay Dating App Blued Sees Green," The Wall Street Journal (Dow Jones & Company, November 8, 2015), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-CJB-28039>.

<sup>30</sup> "China's Largest Gay-Dating App Is Transforming Society," YouTube, September 11, 2017, [https://youtu.be/xX\\_Hebeyplk](https://youtu.be/xX_Hebeyplk).

## **2.5 COVID-19**

COVID-19 made a big impact on the global economy, as well as the LGBT+ social enterprises, resulting in cancellations of certain offline activities. For example, Caution Bar has been providing sponsorship and beverage services to LGBT+ NGOs – the Beijing LGBT Center, Beijing Lesbian Center, BIE Girls– in the past. One of their activities, The Drag King Party, had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 protocols on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020<sup>31</sup>. Another example is Des and DesLink, a gay bar, which had to stop its business because of COVID-9 from January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 to January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

## **2.6 Privacy and Data protection**

There is a number of LGBT+ social enterprises are dating app companies like Blued, Rela, Lesdo, and Aloha. Unauthorized exposure of private user data is a serious concern of almost all online dating and social media apps. Lack of advanced privacy protection system makes them vulnerable and might be subject to hackers' attack. As a result, leakage of private data will lead to a trust crisis, loss of loyal users, and negative effect on company reputation, which ultimately leads the company into an undesirable circumstance.

## **3. Difficulties faced by Chinese LGBT-friendly corporations**

There is no doubt that though the entire Chinese society is not fully open-minded towards the LGBT+ community, part of it is making progress to accept sexual minorities. This includes big corporations in China that have engaged in activities in collaborations with LGBT+ NGOs such as PFLAG Shanghai.

Mr. D, who works for PFLAG Shanghai, describes one of his experiences of working with big companies in China as unprecedented. "At that time, we (PFLAG Shanghai) hosted an employment BBS and, surprisedly, many Global Top 500 companies like Ford, IBM, Schneider came to the event. Walking in the aisle in that hotel and seeing so many LGBT+ job seekers talking enthusiastically to the company representatives, I guessed they'd never had that experience of handing their resume to a company that knew their identity. That was such a wonderful and unforgettable feeling."

Still, many corporations in China cannot directly show their support for the LGBT+ community for various reasons. Some major obstacles restraining their support for the LGBT+ community are listed below.

### **3.1 Staff's opposition**

Because the majority of Chinese society holds conservative ideas on sexuality and gender identity, LGBT-friendly corporations have to care about their employee' opinions. Mr. D from PFLAG Shanghai, recalls an instance in the interview, "For example, Ford Motor, a company that would always hang LGBT+ themed posters

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<sup>31</sup> Out&Equal, "LGBTQ Employees and the COVID-19 Pandemic," Out & Equal, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://outandequal.org/covid19-lgbtq/>.

every pride month in their companies around the world, faces pushback here in China. Ford's China branch does not want to do the same, saying it is embarrassing to hang posters supporting the LGBT+ community."

### **3.2 Tension with the joint venture**

Thousands of foreign companies exist in China through joint ventures, meaning parts of their corporation's shares are held by Chinese corporations. Thus, these Chinese corporations' attitudes have to be considered. Mr. D again cites the example of Ford, "actually there's another reason why Ford does not want to publicize LGBT+ culture in their Chinese companies. They are afraid that their Chinese joint venture, Chang'an Motor, will be disturbed by it. Many of these Chinese companies are way more conservative than their foreign counterparts, so they would feel upset about their joint venture's publicization of the LGBT+ community. Companies like Ford do not want to get into trouble with their Chinese counterpart, so they just end up being silent."

## **4. Some experience worth learning**

*This chapter will introduce some experience worth learning from social enterprises elsewhere that can be applied to LGBT+ social enterprises in China:*

### **4.1 Two-way promotion of commerce and public welfare :**

This model advocates the use of "two-line integration" of the organizational model, which means make the establishment in 'public welfare' and 'business' two plates of social enterprises to achieve cooperation. In particular, LGBT+ social enterprise should take advantage of the special audiences. Taking Langli Pension Group as an example, it has two business entities, Langli Social Work Center and Langli Pension Industry Development Company<sup>32</sup>. The business sector for elderly care uses 20% of its pre-tax profits each year to subsidize public welfare projects related to aging.

### **4.2 Provide environmental dividends and improve public recognition**

From the perspective of "working ability", Canyou Group provides training for disabled employees in various positions, teaches disabled people to use computers, learn sign language, learn to write, and so on, improving the earning ability of low-income disabled people so that they have higher professional competitiveness<sup>33</sup>. One of the hallmarks of social enterprise is communitarianism. In contrast, LGBT+ social enterprises can take advantage of this to provide dividends in the work environment and the workplace, thereby enhancing the sense of LGBT+ community identity.

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<sup>32</sup> Langli, "About Langli," Porto, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://cdlangli.com/main/service>.

<sup>33</sup> canyou, "残友事业官网," 残友事业官网, accessed March 14, 2021, <http://canyou.canyousoftware.com/>.

### **4.3 Projectization of public welfare activities.**

In cooperation with the Grameen Bank from Bangladesh, Fudian Bank provides rural microfinance in Yunnan Province to help low-income female farmers open savings accounts<sup>34</sup>. The Grameen model continues to focus on the development of members and families improving quality of life, and sustainable development of the community. One benefit of projectization is that it helps to foster big corporate resources, supporting LGBT+ social enterprises that are still relatively weak and small, to achieve a win-win situation.

## **5. Conclusion**

In a nutshell, LGBT+ social enterprises participate in the LGBT+ movement in different ways. They help LGBT+ individuals to socialize and build communities, they provide LGBT-specific social services and create safe space for the LGBT+ community. There are lots of LGBT-friendly corporations taking part in this LGBT+ movement. They support the LGBT+ movements in ways such as creating a zero-discrimination employment environment and empowering LGBT+ people in the workplace; showing support for the LGBT+ community through marketing campaigns; and offering sponsorship of LGBT+ events.

Nevertheless, both social enterprises and corporations are faced with difficulties. As LGBT+ social enterprises, they have to deal with registrations, COVID-19, and restrictions from the government. LGBT+ friendly corporations also have to deal with the problems such as governmental restrictions, tension with the joint ventures, and social push backs from employees.

Despite all the present challenges, LGBT+ social enterprises and LGBT-friendly corporations could learn from other social enterprises in China to better navigate the system and resolve problems.



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34 fudian-bank., “富滇银行荣获‘2017 年度网络安全等级保护工作先进单位,’” 富滇银行, accessed March 14, 2021, <http://www.fudian-bank.com/html/fddt/content/201805084696.html>.

# IV. LGBT+ Media

## Organizations and LGBT+ Organizations' Internet-based Media Wing

BY Liu Yutong, Kwok Chun Fung, Li Jiaze, Lu Ruiyang, Wu Yongkun

### 1. Introduction

According to the 45th report released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), China's Internet is growing rapidly, after entering the 21st century. It showed that as of March 2020, the scale of Internet users in China was 904 million (largest in the world) and the Internet penetration rate reached 64.5%.<sup>35</sup> With the development of the Internet, the publicity methods of LGBT+ organizations have changed. The presence of LGBT+ organizations on the Internet can be roughly divided into the following three stages:

The first period began when the Internet gradually became widespread in China. During 1995-2006, LGBT+ organizations built websites for advertising as well as educating the public. It played an important role in de-stigmatizing sexual minorities. Meanwhile, watching LGBT-related movies on the Internet was relatively convenient at that time.

In 2006-2012, the main platform used by LGBT+ organizations during the second period was QQ. LGBT+ organizations used QQ groups to strengthen the connection between members, popularize scientific knowledge, and carry out activities. Due to its convenience and privacy, this online media is still being used today.

The third period, from 2012 to the present, was accompanied by the emergence of WeChat and Weibo, which marked the arrival of the self-media era. In an era that

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<sup>35</sup> CNNIC. "Statistical report on Internet Development in China". China Internet Network Information Center. pp. 1-14. April 2020. <<https://cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/202008/P020200827549953874912.pdf>>

the general public was free to speak up, LGBT+ organizations stood a better chance of publicity and waging large-scale Internet campaigns.

While media generally include physical and online newspapers and magazines, television, radio, billboards, telephone, the Internet, fax, and billboards, this article will specifically focus on the Internet media. In the process of accelerating positive trends, LGBT-related media and the media branch of ordinary grassroots LGBT+ organizations have made crucial contributions to building a friendly environment for LGBT+ people. This article will analyze the status of China's LGBT+ organizations' media branch and online LGBT+ media as well as the opportunities and challenges they face.

### **1.1 Online LGBT+ media**

In the scope of this report, the online LGBT+ media are defined as organizations that use different online media to propagate and lead the public to have a better understanding of sexual minorities by posting contents, organizing online programs, etc. These media organizations have attracted followers and readers all over the country. Types of LGBT+ media include news/content websites, official accounts of individuals on social media, media groups (Weibo/ WeChat/ Douban/ Zhihu), online and physical magazines, and radio stations. Below provides a few prominent examples.

Aibai.com was the earliest and most authoritative LGBT+ website that provided a large information database of LGBT+ groups. It was established in 1999 by the gay couple Keinn and Kevin who lived in Xiamen. At the beginning of the 21st century, Chinese LGBT+ individuals and groups were still living in an isolated and confused status. Aibai.com provided sexual minorities a platform to understand themselves and communicate with their own kind. aibai.com has developed numerous other services over the years, such as lectures in schools, training courses, and AIDs related services. Currently, Aibai.com has also been active on the WeChat official account.

Lesbian Talk was another form of LGBT+ media organization. It was the first non-profit broadcasting station in China that was established in 2008. It focused on different topics such as setting up programs like audiobooks of lesbian stories, LGBT+ movie salons, lesbian life sharing, lesbian fashion lifestyle, etc. Lesbian Talk started using Weibo in 2012 and has launched two new programs on Weibo. Moreover, some of its articles received 15 million reads in quantity.

Meanwhile, there were online magazines like LES+ and GaySpot. GS started publication in 2007 and was one of the most influential self-media focusing on the life of gays in China. Currently, GS publishes physical magazines, runs WeChat official accounts, and organizes training programs as well as seminars.

Along with the third period of internet development, many LGBT+ online media organizations were founded on the WeChat official account and Weibo. For

example, MayLove<sup>36</sup>, an organization focusing on sex education, was founded in 2017. MayLove has posted articles on topics like sex education as well as sexual and reproductive health education of LGBT+ people. MayLove has also conducted live lectures and lessons on such topics. Another example is The Voice of Trans, which was founded in 2019 on WeChat. It runs 6 official accounts and 3 online community groups.

Due to the rapid Internet development and the awakening of more LGBT+ people, the Chinese online LGBT+ media organizations have grown rapidly over the past few decades. Meanwhile, the diversified content LGBT+ media contained provided information from different angles, which have exerted a tremendous impact on Chinese society.

## **1.2 Media department of LGBT+ organizations**

With different agendas and priorities, the focus point of LGBT+ organizations ranged from homosexual and transgender issues, marriage and family, health and safety, to LGBT+ issue-related laws and policies.

The media department was regarded as an important part of grassroots LGBT+ organizations. Even organizations that mainly held events offline would use media accounts to improve their public visibility and publicity. They would post information about their offline events, monthly newsletter, requests for donations, and recruitment information. Besides, many of these accounts would provide comments on societal hot topics. The comment section of LGBT+ organizations' social media branch would also incite heated debates among the LGBT+ community as well as the general public.

WeChat official accounts, Weibo, Douban, QQ groups are the main social media nowadays. Since different social media contain different attributes<sup>37</sup>, LGBT+ organizations would use several media channels at the same time to propagate. For example, in the year 2020, Beijing LGBT Center has posted 80 articles on the WeChat official account and released 31 posts on Weibo. Also, they have uploaded about 20 videos on Bilibili and have posted a few articles on Zhihu.

The online media has enabled LGBT+ organizations to break traditional geographic limits and expand their work scope. Undertaking an important task in the development of the Chinese LGBT+ movement, LGBT+ organizations have shared their offline work with the public and gained more attention.

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<sup>36</sup> Maylove is an sexual educational media organization, not only focus on LGBT+ group.

<sup>37</sup> 建华 1968. "微博、微信、QQ 的区别". 360 个人图书馆. 28 Dec, 2013.

[http://www.360doc.com/content/13/1228/21/1003261\\_340865700.shtml](http://www.360doc.com/content/13/1228/21/1003261_340865700.shtml)

## 2. Challenges Faced

Despite the increasingly open environment and the growth of LGBT+ organizations, challenges from government and internet regulations are still hindering the development of LGBT+ organizations and media.

### 2.1 Media

For LGBT+ media organizations, their major problems are the lack of legitimacy and the stringently censored internet-environment.<sup>38</sup> Since December 2015, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) of China announced a rule to forbid television and web-based shows depicting topics such as alcoholism, terrorism, pornography, and abnormal sexual relationship (including homosexuality).<sup>39</sup> Many media including companies, magazines, and individuals suffered from the tightened restriction on LGBT+ content.

For instance, a homoerotic fiction author was sentenced to jail for ten years for "producing obscene publications" in November 2018.<sup>40</sup> Such punishment indicated a tightened media environment for LGBT+ content and a dimmer future for LGBT+ media since the novel and periodicals of LGBT+ were "not approved for government-issued licenses that are required of every last print publication."<sup>41</sup> According to Mr. Z, the editor of GaySpot magazine, the lack of issue number has always been a problem for them. The illegitimate nature of the magazine also prevented GaySpot from earning funds through selling the periodicals.

Besides the illegitimacy of LGBT+ media, censorship is another huge obstacle. Even today, LGBT+ contents are usually the topics under tight content control. Many LGBT+ media in China had to sacrifice their working scope—including silencing themselves, avoiding specific sensitive or erotic issues, and carefully designing the wordings of articles—in exchange for survival. In this situation, discussions about LGBT+ communities are restricted, and the information about LGBT+ communities received by the audience is limited.

As Mr. Z said during the interview: "What I insist on (GaySpot) is not something appropriate for commercial development. Articles work for commerce require the volume of hits...if an LGBT+ article has more than 100 thousand hits, it can easily be deleted or limited." As a result of the illegitimacy and pervasive censorship, access

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<sup>38</sup> Kristie Lu Stout. "Being gay in China: Does the rainbow flag fly free?" CNN. 31 Dec 2014.

<<https://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/26/world/asia/china-rainbow-flag/index.html>>

<sup>39</sup> 网易. "新规：电视剧不得出现同性恋婚外情等内容\_网易科技". 网易. 02 March, 2018.

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<sup>40</sup> 网易. 网文作者写同性恋小说被判 10 年. 网易. 19 November, 2018.

<<https://3g.163.com/local/article/E0VIINJ0044099HC.html>>

<sup>41</sup> Yin, Dave. "China's longest-surviving – and very illegal – LGBT magazine". SupChina. 28 Oct, 2019.

<<https://supchina.com/2019/10/28/chinas-longest-surviving-and-very-illegal-lgbt-magazine/>>

and validity of the information online may not be unlimited and comprehensive, respectively.

## 2.2 LGBT+ Organizations' media wing and Self-publishers

Similar to those LGBT+ media, the media departments of LGBT+ organizations and self-publishers in China were also facing severe censorship online, which further impeded the publication of LGBT+ related posts, articles, or videos. Self-publishers refer to those who publish (a piece of one's work) independently usually via social medias or other online platforms and at one's own expense.

On April 13th, 2018, Weibo announced a crackdown on LGBT+ content in response to China Internet Security Law's requirement.<sup>42</sup> The elimination action triggered Chinese web users' resistance. Most of the resistance sentiments came from those of the LGBT+ community. The hashtag #iamgay quickly earned tens of thousands of reposts and 210 million times of reading. Meanwhile, slogans such as "gays aren't scary" and "I am a gay, will you hug me?", photos of homosexual couples, and protests organized by LGBT+ organizations occurred simultaneously.<sup>43</sup> Eventually, Weibo ceased the elimination event on April 16th, 2018.

In response to this chaos, People Daily—one of the most official newspapers in China—published an article to call for embracing the sexual variety.<sup>44</sup> While the action ostensibly revealed a more open sentiment toward LGBT+ communities, it may not be the case in reality.

There are gay independent publishers on social media platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, XiaoHongShu, and Kuaishou have received warnings from the authorities since they had encouraged the untraditional notion of love and marriage. In some cases, the platform may ban their accounts directly. Douyin, for example, removed 8700 accounts accused of "promoting erotic, vulgar and fraudulent content during live-streaming" in November 2020.<sup>45</sup> Although the Chinese government did not necessarily restrict LGBT+ activities in people's private lives anymore<sup>46</sup>, the censorship can serve as a significant challenge to many self-publishers who are sexual minorities and want to introduce their lives to the general public.

Unfortunately, recent rules that "forced self-publishers, including bloggers and social media users, to apply for an official license to publish current affairs content"

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<sup>42</sup> Griffiths, James. "Can you be gay online in China? Social media companies aren't sure. CNN. 17 April, 2019. <<https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/17/tech/weibo-china-censorship-lgbt-intl>>

<sup>43</sup> Shanghaiist. "Weibo reverses ban on gay content after tens of thousands come out and protest". Medium. 16 April 2018. <<https://medium.com/shanghaiist/weibo-reverses-ban-on-gay-content-after-tens-of-thousands-come-out-and-protest-d1bc159919a8?>>

<sup>44</sup> 人民日报社. "人民日报:不一样的烟火,一样可以绽放" 人民日报. 15 April 2018.

<<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1597789036038549660&wfr=spider&for=pc>>

<sup>45</sup> Tracy Qu, Feng Coco, Xin Zhou. "TikTok's Chinese version Douyin fined for vulgar content as Beijing continues cyberspace crackdown". 08 Jan, 2021. The Star. <<https://www.thestar.com.my/tech/tech-news/2021/01/08/tiktoks-chinese-version-douyin-fined-for-vulgar-content-as-beijing-continues-cyberspace-crackdown>>

<sup>46</sup> CGTN. "LGBTQ in China: Changes and Challenges". CGTN. 22-Jan-2018.

<[https://news.cgtn.com/news/3163444d7a677a6333566d54/share\\_p.html](https://news.cgtn.com/news/3163444d7a677a6333566d54/share_p.html)>

further prevented LGBT+ media from disseminating pro-LGBT+ information.<sup>47</sup> According to Chen Xiang, the cooperation manager at PFLAG China, these rules may "reduce the number of online commentaries and information available." With such reduction, it is likely for LGBT+ communities, who are already the disadvantaged group, to further deprive of opportunities to introduce themselves; citizens might also "gradually lose a place to see things from a different perspective" if fewer people contribute the discussion.

### **3. How online media brought opportunities to China's LGBT+ movement**

Although LGBT+ media organizations and the media branch of LGBT+ organizations have been facing many difficulties in their daily operations, opportunities still exist. The main opportunities are that the media enabled the LGBT+ media organizations to spread information transparently and widely, provide a platform for public discussion, and save money for LGBT+ organizations.

The first opportunity lies in media helping the LGBT+ media organizations to break down geographical boundaries and improve visibility. Media help LGBT+ community to raise public awareness as well as improve public understanding and acceptance. With the continuous developments of science and technology, a series of new media such as WeChat and Weibo have emerged in China. In this social context, the use of media to promote LGBT+ issue awareness has been effective in providing opportunities for the LGBT+ media organizations, rendering the information transmission more effective, which would in turn help improve the public attitude towards LGBT+ groups in China.

Moreover, the comment section of LGBT+ network media has provided a platform for public discussion of LGBT+ issues, thus promoting communication and interaction within and beyond the LGBT+ community. For example, the upholding of the original judgment in the second instance of the "homophobic textbook case"<sup>48</sup> has aroused social discussion on Zhihu, a relatively LGBT-friendly forum. There have been more than 780 responses so far, most of which were relatively rational. Many of the responses were of high quality and have provided a professional perspective coming from the field of law and gender studies. Such an efficient discussion enabled people to intuitively understand the challenges faced by the LGBT+ community, which could effectively reduce discrimination against minority groups in society.

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<sup>47</sup> Qin Chen. "China's LGBTQ communities fear new internet rules will silence voices". South China Morning Post. 06 Feb, 2021. <<https://www.scmp.com/news/people-culture/gender-diversity/article/3120754/chinas-lgbtq-communities-fear-new-internet>>

<sup>48</sup>知乎."「恐同教材案」二审维持原判，法院认为「同性恋是心理障碍」表述系学术观点，不属于知识性差错，你认同吗？". 知乎. 25 Feb, 2021.

<[https://www.zhihu.com/question/446246842?utm\\_source=wechat\\_session&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_oi=949768237240573952&utm\\_content=group3\\_supplementQuestions&utm\\_campaign=shareopn](https://www.zhihu.com/question/446246842?utm_source=wechat_session&utm_medium=social&utm_oi=949768237240573952&utm_content=group3_supplementQuestions&utm_campaign=shareopn)>

Lastly, the Internet has reduced costs for the functioning of LGBT+ organizations' media branches. In modern society, the shortage of funding has been a common problem faced by LGBT+ organizations in China. However, the rapid development of "We Media" in recent years rendered it easier for LGBT+ organizations to express their voices on social media at a cheaper cost than in the past, during which they had to engender paper magazines or websites. Inferred from interviews conducted by the authors, most of the LGBT+ organizations used WeChat and Weibo to spread information and activities within their organizations at little to no cost. Therefore, the Internet has created a vital opportunity for LGBT+ organizations by reducing the cost of spreading information.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Despite the challenges of online censorships and regulations, LGBT+ media organizations and LGBT+ organizations' internet-based media wing plays essential roles in accelerating positive trends. At the same time, compared with offline promotions, they had a wider crowd audience, more flexibility and timeliness, and a better platform for public discussion. Undoubtedly, Internet media has become an important publicity channel for LGBT+ organizations and the LGBT+ community.





# Conclusion

The current status of LGBT+ organizations in China remains murky. On the one hand, organizations have indeed expanded in both influence and number. Social enterprises such as Blued are able to raise funds through their business ventures, which then in turn allow them to invest more in LGBT+ related welfare projects. PFLAG has amounted to more than 7600 volunteers throughout China. Other organizations such as Les+ and GaySpot have learned to navigate online censorship and normalize LGBT+ issues through social media, publishing both videos and articles.

The strides made by LGBT+ organizations in advocacy are reflected in the public as well. When Weibo sought to censor LGBT+ related content, netizens fought back passionately with the hashtag #iamgay, a cry of solidarity from members of the community and allies alike.

Aside from progress, LGBT+ organizations in China also face many great challenges. The governmental restrictions, as well as failure to find adequate funding, resulting in a shortage of resources and social pushback. With the multifaceted discrimination from the public and businesses, LGBT+ organizations often find themselves struggling to stay afloat.

Despite such hardships, LGTB+ organizations have quickly picked up on how to navigate their relationship with the government. Maylove was able to gain access to delivering lectures in public schools due to governmental permission, and Blued has remained online despite its seemingly unconventional idea. While government's attitude remains unclear, LGBT+ organizations have been able to expand their influence in China despite great adversities.

On the path of precarious progress, as long as groups and individuals keep working towards building a more inclusive society, drastic changes in policies will take place before long.

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