QUEER IDENTITIES AND MARGINALIZATION IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA: PROMOTING SDG5 GENDER EQUALITY AND LGBTQ+ RIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this study is to compare and analyze the identity construction and marginalization of LGBTQ+ communities in East and Southeast Asia, with a specific focus on tomboys and transgender women.

Theoretical Framework: Grounded in Queer Theory and Cognitive Dissonance Theory, the research explores how cultural, social, and political factors influence self-identification and mental health within these groups.

Method: A mixed-methods approach, incorporating a literature review and cross-cultural comparison, was employed, covering countries such as China, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand.

Results and Discussion: The findings reveal that cultural context, government policies, and religious beliefs significantly impact visibility and social acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals. The discussion highlights the importance of supportive legal frameworks and mental health resources to address marginalization.

Research Implications: The study contributes to the understanding of LGBTQ+ identities in East and Southeast Asia, offering policy recommendations that align with SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

Originality/Value: This research is one of the few studies providing a cross-cultural perspective on tomboy and transgender female identity construction in East and Southeast Asia, making it valuable for future policy development and mental health support initiatives.

Keywords: East Asia, Southeast Asia, LGBTQ+, Queer, self identify, SDG5, sustainable development goals (SDGs).

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THE GLOBAL GOALS

1 INTRODUCTION

The term 'queer' has journeyed from connotations of the strange to embody a dynamic identity within the LGBTQ+ community, heralding a critical lens in the 1990s that enriched feminist discourse and queer theory (Oksala, 2021). This scholarly evolution prompts a comparative analysis that starkly delineates the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community within Western and Eastern settings, where cultural and societal nuances shape distinct reality.

In the West, the trajectory of LGBTQ+ research, epitomised by works like those of Craig *et al.* (2015) and Asakura (2017), delves into the psychosocial aspects of LGBTQ+ lives. It investigates the influence of social support, individual autonomy, and civic engagement on youth facing non-normative gender and sexual identity. This body of research emphasises resilience and mental health within the context of broader societal acceptance. The scholarly lens shifts when it pans to the East and Southeast Asian narrative. Here, studies by Wong (2015) and Chen (2015) portray a complex tapestry where traditional cultural norms and the recognition of LGBTQ+ identities intertwine. Wong's assessment of the historical shifts in China's perception of homosexuality, together with Chen's examination of Taiwan's sham marriages, brings to light the intricacies of queer existence amid entrenched societal expectation.

The transformative role of the internet, as observed by Liang *et al.* (2022), suggests an evolving public sentiment towards LGBTQ+ communities in China, indicative of a broader regional trend towards gradual acceptance. Nonetheless, this positive shift contrasts with the relative scarcity of research probing the inner psychologies and social representations of queer individuals, particularly in digital spaces where Western counterparts have a more established presence.

Notably, the focus of LGBTQ+ research in East and Southeast Asia has predominantly centred on gay men, overshadowing the diversity within the community(Cummings, 2019; Liu, 2022; Sun & Yang, 2023). This study aims to broaden the scope, addressing the underrepresentation of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and tomboy/transgender female identities. It contends with the need for a richer dialogue that encompasses the variety within the queer

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spectra across these regions, juxtaposing their experiences with those in Western society.

In embracing this intricate fabric of identities, this research delves into the heart of East and Southeast Asian cultural legacies, exploring their influence on the development and expression of queer identities. It seeks to uncover the unique societal, familial, and institutional dynamics that shape the lives of LGBTQ+ communities within these regions. This effort is dedicated to elucidating the nuanced ways in which queer individuals navigate and negotiate their identities amidst the cultural and social landscapes of East and Southeast Asia. By focusing on this rich cultural context, this research aims to contribute to a more profound understanding of the complex mosaic of queer lives within this specific global locale, also for the SDG5 goals.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJETIVE

a) How the social environment in East and Southeast Asia affects the queer community as reflected in their lives?

To illustrate the current situation of the homosexual community in the social environment of East and South-East Asia.
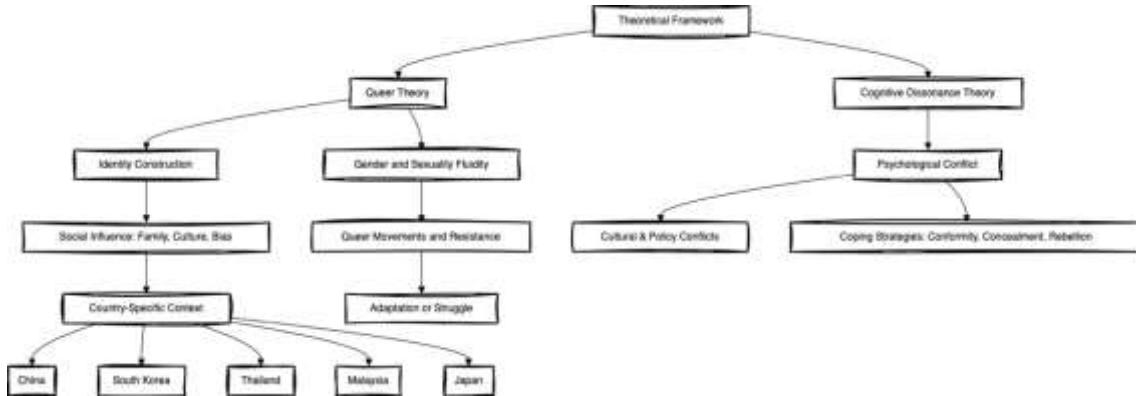
b) What are the similarities and differences in the state of being of the LGBTQ+ community in East and Southeast Asia？

To compare the similarities and differences in the survival of the LGBTQ+ community in East and Southeast Asian social environment.

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2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1

Theoritical framework

This framework offers a comprehensive approach to understanding LGBT identity formation and resistance in East and Southeast Asia. Queer Theory provides the broader socio-cultural lens to examine identity and societal pressures, while Cognitive Dissonance Theory addresses the psychological conflicts individuals face. Together, these theories allow for a nuanced analysis of how LGBT individuals navigate their identities in different cultural contexts, coping with or resisting societal and political pressures. The framework also considers the importance of country-specific differences and the role of queer movements in shaping future change.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a dual-method approach combining an integrative review and cross-cultural comparison to explore the construction and marginalization of LGBTQ+ identities in East and Southeast Asia (Souza *et al.*, 2010). This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of existing research while comparing cultural, social, and political influences across countries.

3.1 INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

The integrative review serves as the foundation of the study, synthesizing prior research on LGBTQ+ issues across the region. The key steps include:

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Search and Selection: Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reports were sourced from databases like Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus, focusing on LGBTQ+ identity, mental health, social acceptance, and policy impacts in China, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. A total of 47 references, published from 2000 to 2023, were selected based on their relevance to the intersection of cultural, social, and political factors.

Thematic Analysis: The selected literature was reviewed using thematic coding, identifying recurring themes such as homophobia, governmental policies, religious influences, societal pressures, and media representation. Commonalities and research gaps were highlighted.

Research Gaps: The review identified gaps in the literature, particularly the underrepresentation of tomboy, transgender, and lesbian identities, emphasizing the need for further research on these subgroups.

3.2 CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON

Cross-cultural comparison was employed to explore the differences and similarities in LGBTQ+ experiences across selected countries. This method provides a contextual understanding of how diverse cultural and political environments shape queer identities.

Country-Specific Analysis: Each country was analyzed based on its cultural traditions, government policies, religious influences, and societal norms. The comparison focused on factors affecting visibility, acceptance, and rights. For example, Thailand is more tolerant, while Malaysia and Singapore enforce restrictive, religiously influenced laws.

Comparative Framework: A framework was developed to compare countries on key factors like social acceptance, legal protections, and activism. For instance, China and South Korea's conservative policies were contrasted with the progressive queer movements in Thailand and Japan.

Global and Local Dynamics: The study also examined how global LGBTQ+ movements intersect with local cultural dynamics, exploring how Western queer concepts and activism have been adopted or resisted, leading to unique expressions of queer identity.

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4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 URGENT ISSUE FOR QUEER CHINA

Currently, there has not been much in-depth research on tomboy and transgender women's identity in China. There is also a difference between tomboy status in Eastern and Western countries. This is due to the social environment, cultural system and other complex factors. Craig and LaCroix (2011) mentioned in their research in China, that the term 'Tomboy' is used to describe the more masculine side of a lesbian couple. They also analysed the identity of the fake boy from multiple perspectives and proposed an identity protection function for the fake boy. Unfortunately, however, this study does not go into depth on the identity of pseudo-boys in a specific cultural context. In future studies, more focus will be given to the study of tomboy identity in the context of Chinese culture. Chen and Chen (2013) in their research introduce the development of China's lesbian community. In the article it is shown that some gay films are banned in mainland China, leading to an uneven development of lesbian culture. They mentioned the need for possible future research to look further at the impact of the Internet and other cultural activities on lesbian culture (Chen & Chen, 2013). It is commendable that the issue of the important role of role differentiation in Chinese lesbian culture is mentioned in this literature regarding the impact that popular values may have on these lesbians. Chen's research supports further in-depth exploration of the fundamental question of tomboy identity. Because of the ambiguity and uncertainty about the tomboy identity, and the question of future turnings, there is no in-depth mention in this study. The descriptions in this article are limited to lesbians presenting themselves in a certain form to be recognised by popular values. But the identity issues affecting tomboys may go far beyond that.

Engebretsen (2013) critically argued the important role that familial heteronormativity norms, marital pressures, and lesbian subjective desires for social respect and familial harmony play in the strategies that position them. The lesbians resist traditional heterosexual marriage by framing relationships as female friendships and two models of queer kinship, but these strategies are ultimately validated by heteronormative structures rather than radically altered. Zhao (2015) has reviewed Engebretsen's book, mentioned about the book offers novel perspectives on the world of urban Chinese lesbians and their communities, the introductory chapter lacks a deep understanding of queer representations and queer audiences in contemporary Chinese pop culture.

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The contrast between tomboy identity in Western countries and tomboy identity in Eastern countries can be analysed from the following studies. Finn Mackay argued that the post-transgender environment in the UK has changed a generation's stereotypes and brought minorities closer together (Mackay, 2019). In Mackay's research most focus on the butch identity, how to explain this identity, and in combination with the social cultural background. In contrast to Mackay's study and Chen's study, there are some subtle differences between Chinese tomboy identity and foreign tomboy identity. It is possible that this is due to the influence of traditional Chinese culture. This is because there is a classic saying in China: 'Chuan Zong Jie Dai', which means family tie. This reflects traditional Chinese thinking, and this thinking is gradually mapped onto the current identity of tomboys, who partly believe that dressing like a male and aspiring to be a male, can relieve the pressure that society and family place on them (Yimei, 2016). This is very different from Western thinking. Women in the West seek freedom. Starting from the first feminist movement, women advocated no more skirts and sought equality between men and women (M., 2015). There is a difference in the pursuit of tomboy identity in Eastern and Western countries. In this two research, Chen focuses on analysis of Chinese lesbians, but there is no further analysis of tomboy identity segmentation or the impact of popular culture on identity.

Also, the queer in Asia has their family pressure and social pressure. Many sexual minorities in China had to accept the issue of marrying the opposite sex (Wong, 2015, p. 735). At the same time, this research also combined relevant data, such as the HIV infection rate. In the author's view, LGBT stigma is still strong in Asia countries. The stigma associated with HIV and the dearth of comprehensive sexual education in the wider Chinese social environment presents additional obstacles to the dissemination of relevant knowledge. These challenges compound the existing societal stigma surrounding homosexuality in China, posing substantial hurdles to the dissemination of knowledge about male homosexual and male bisexual relationships (Wong, 2015, p. 736). This demonstrates that the homosexual community is still discriminated against in the Chinese social environment. In Wong's study, sexual minorities in China were analysed more comprehensively. But it is more inclined to the role of society for LGBTQ+ groups and pays less attention to the influence of popular culture on LGBTQ+.

The current online environment in China is not safe for the gay community. This is because it can be seen from previous studies that the gay community still suffers from cyberbullying on social media. Combined with some theories and data put forward

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in the previous literature (Chen, 2015), it is concluded that if we want to solve the problem from the root cause, we need to expand the queer political group. China has a large population base and many queer people. The government also needs to adjust appropriate policies to respond to the public on this issue. Last year, the Chinese government propelled relevant laws and policies that are friendly to the gay community. Despite the current state of friendly policy, some empirical data continues to show that social media platforms are unfriendly to the homosexual community (Shen, 2023). In Shen's research, he focused on the phenomenon of some restrictions on the homosexual community in China's social media. In his conclusions, he suggests that social media policymakers will only be able to relax attitudes towards homosexuality if there is a real change in the attitude of the Chinese government. This suggests that research based solely on the broader context of policy is unreliable. Future research should be based more on the feelings of the lesbian community itself and study the impact of various factors on the lesbian community, especially tomboy and transgender females.

Through a comparative analysis of previous studies, it can be concluded that the queer community in China faces multiple challenges (Stereotypes, challenges of a patriarchal society, state policy, and family pressures). For the further research, the ideology and power relationship between the tomboy identify is the important question need to be resolved. Also, the peer cross cultural research, the eastern and western cultural background impact need to be attention. The current study lacks empirical data on the internal feelings and lived experiences of the Chinese queer community, and future research should collect and analysed this data to develop a more comprehensive understanding. These research gap turn to the further research direction, which could clearly and deeply study about the LGBTQ+ community who live in China. And that could help more LGBTQ+ community to build their self-identity and express.

4.2 URGENT ISSUE FOR QUEER SOUTH KOREA AND JAPAN

South Korea and Japan's queer community relatively visible. In South Korea, some religious integration has affected the LGBTQ+ community self-express. The complicated religious integration factor became a banner to queer community (Phillips & Yi, 2020). In fact, the queer community is different in different parts of South Korea. In Seoul it is relatively more open, while in the Busan area it is relatively more conservative. In this study, attention is paid to

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the homosexual community in the marginalised areas, where the identity issues of the homosexual community may require more attention. Meanwhile, the law, social and political conservation may challenge the queer community development. Arnold (2016) argued a concept named 'Queer Social Compat', which dictates the expression of sexual difference in Korea and situates the contemporary experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly gay community, within Korea's socio-historical context. In Arnold's research, he had mentioned about how the queer community challenge the South Korea social traditional constraints. From this perspective, although South Korea's environment relatively free for LGBTQ+, the queer community still faced the self-identify and social pressure. And there are some reasons why these stresses and self-identities may develop are as follows: 1. Partisanship in South Korea, LGBTQ+ community as a political tool. However, after either party was given the right to do so, they failed to honour the corresponding promises. Lack of trust on policy by the South Korea queer community (Henry, 2018). 2.Discriminal phenomenon has always in the South Korea society (Kim, 2021). 3. The constraints of the traditional concept of the family, which is a kind of traditional yoke of moral values in the East Asia context. Meanwhile, rather than choosing to remain silent, the LGBTQ+ community in South Korea is actively involved in the queer movement to change the phenomenon. But the phenomenon of discrimination and other phenomena are still not better alleviated (Kim, 2021). Han (2016) has argued that the queer community in South Korea face to homophobia political, the homophobia political and some religious issue still need to be focused. Some of the basic rights of the queer community in Korea have been violated, which is one of the factors contributing to the identity perception dissonance of the queer community.

The fertility rate in South Korea has now reached a low point, and the problem that essentially derives from this may lie in the lack of support for women's attention and homosexuality policies, and the general problem of bullying in a male-dominated society (Cho, 2012). In some ways, the queer communities in Japan and Korea face the problem of homogeneity. Neither Japan nor South Korea have explicit laws against homosexuality. However, the lesbian community living in Japan and Korea leads a double life, i.e., they rarely

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express themselves in the public sphere. This suggests that some traditional secular morality still governs the issue of homosexual identity in the East Asia context (Fylling, 2012). 'Coming out' the thing to the queer community still a big question in South Korea and Japan, also in China. For lesbian community in this area, they also need the visible of society and the loyalty to their family. Fylling (2012) has also suggested that the traditional femininity may ace more of these challenges. Simultaneously, lesbians of heterosexual's temperament seem to be more easily visualised. Considering the identity issues of this part of the group, it may be affected as transgender women in the social context of East Asia.

'A similarly contradictory complexity governs the laws and rights for diversely gendered and sexed individuals in Japan' (Frühstück, 2020). That is mean to in Japan society environment, the queer community development stays in a complicated and paradox issue. After entering in the 21st century, Japan has also been active in promoting publications on gender identity disorder, but the initiatives here are mainly beneficial to transgender identities in the LGBTQ+ community. While homosexuals are still seen as a pathological presence in Japanese social media and mass communication channels. Thus, the Japanese government's policy favours only the rights of transgender people to live, while ignoring the rights of queer people. This has also led to the relatively slow development of the queer community in Japan as well. As Wallace (2020) suggested the queer community were limited protected by law in Japan. The urgent issue in queer Japan needs to be resolved, which is the social acceptance and the government attitude. In 2015-2016, the LGBTQ+ movement boom in Japan. Japan established the Queer Research Society and issued a bill on LGBTQ+ in 2023, but the bill still lacks human rights guarantees. Also, during this period, Japanese government officials have made discriminatory remarks against the queer community. This indirectly proves that discrimination in society is still a challenge for the queer community (Fogelberg, 2023). In terms of this shift, Japan's protections for LGBTQ+ will be relatively well developed over time. Conservative factions will gradually be outlawed by the younger generation and may be replaced by bills that are relatively more protective of the group's human rights.

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In this context, promoting the rights and interests of the LGBTQ+ community requires broader social mobilization and cultural change. The increased acceptance of gender and sexual orientation diversity among the younger generation signals that more bills protecting the human rights of this group may be enacted and enforced in the future. Although the current situation remains challenging, the queer community in South Korea and Japan is continuing to push for social openness and progress towards a more inclusive and equitable social environment through active social campaigns and advocacy efforts.

4.3 URGENT ISSUE FOR QUEER MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE

Simultaneously, the social environment varies according to government policies and cultural traditions. In Malay, the queer is affected by the politics and traditional culture (Goh, 2017). It also uses the grounded theory, collected 30 non-heteronormative Malaysian men's interview data, and analysed and interpreted their narrative. This research combined local Malaysian cultural practices and government policies to analyse the queer community in Malaysia. This was a combination of the postmodernist theory proposed by Clarke's grounded theory, combined with ideology to analysed queerness. Also, Xuan (2020) has analysed Singapore's homosexuality, based on ethics (Xuan, 2020). The queer identity is a challenge between the country's politics and the public. Having a large amount of data to integrate when going about research using rooted theory. However, there is relatively little restoration of some individuals, and if the model of narrative research is used in the future, there will be a complement to the life experiences of individuals or minority groups. In both cases, the focus was on analysis of gay's identities. There is a lack of data to support the analysis of lesbian identities, and more analysis of lesbian identities should be included in future research to ensure that the data is reliable.

The queer community is officially outlawed in both countries (Ng, 2018). In Malaysia and Singapore, the LGBTQ+ advocacy activities support by cross-border funding. Despite this, domestic resistance against transnational funding has emerged, shaping a broader discourse against Western aggression and

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Global North dominance, in which anti-LGBT sentiment is framed as part of the opposition to Western encroachment (Ng, 2018). Due to geopolitical issues, some of the rights of the LGBTQ+ community are relatively less expressed in Malaysia and Singapore. Although the LGBTQ+ community is becoming more visible between Malaysia and Singapore, despite being explicitly banned by their policies. Much of the attitude change was based on the social media development, the social media platform provides an open environment to LGBTQ+, making the public more receptive to LGBTQ+ community (Jerome *et al.*, 2021; Mokhtar *et al.*, 2019). In the heavily banned environment, some of the queer groups in Malaysia and Singapore will choose to leave their countries and go to live in new environments. Masing (2022) has argued that queer Malaysians have begun to form a new national identity that relies heavily on the internalization of Western liberal values, particularly regarding the rights and visibility of sexual orientation.

Also, in Malaysia the religion rules restricted for the homosexuality community still an issue for this community survival. Sidik and Shah (2015) has argued about the impact between the muslin belief to the gay community. Islamic law has a wide-ranging impact on the daily lives of Muslims in Malaysia, including the regulation of sexual behaviours. This has resulted in a strong prohibition of homosexual behaviour, not only at the religious level but also at the legal level. The Malaysian Government has adopted a range of measures to restrict homosexual behaviours, reflecting the official attitude held by the State towards the LGBTQ+ community. These include the use of sharia and civil law to sanction homosexual behaviours, such as fines, imprisonment and even flogging (Sidik & Shah, 2015). If as a gay muslin in Malaysia, the research also mentioned about these community has the rebellious spirit, obey and innovation behaviour reflect their mood (Goh, 2017; Sidik & Shah, 2015). The LGBTQ+ community in Malaysia also attractive to find a softly way to figure out the way in the Islamic environment.

Comparing the above studies, the social environment does have an impact on the self-identity of queer groups. And in two countries, Malaysia, and Singapore, which are in the context of non-Western culture, the queer group should find their own sense of belonging or choose to migrate. As Vallantine

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(1995) argued the way queer community opts of self-redemption, one of which is escape. Meanwhile, although the rule is not admission for LGBTQ+ legally, the society still need focus on this group mental health problem. Tan *et al.* (2021) in their research mentioned about in Singapore homophobia behaviour can made some queer people suicide or depression. It is mentioned in the study that the government may help this group if it introduces some anti-hate policies. In conclusion, the queer community in Malaysia and Singapore are still facing a lot of problems, including psychological problems, socio-environmental problems, and religious problems. In the social context of East Asia, the historical and cultural traditions of the East have always influenced the development of policies. Sexual minorities may be subject to additional pressures in this social context. There are several scholars have already considered the rights of the queer community in Malaysia and Singapore as a starting point. As an example, Tang (2019) has researched the queer female in Singapore survival rights, and it make some process for the queer community. From the perspective of humanities and social sciences, focusing on the rights and interests of sexual minorities in East Asia and Southeast Asia countries can contribute to the advancement of society to some extent.

4.4 URGENT ISSUE FOR QUEER THAILAND

Thailand's attitude towards the queer community is relatively more tolerant. As you can see from some of the films and TV episodes produced in Thailand, the country's policy is relatively relaxed. That is due to the western culture and power affect the Thailand decision (Jackson, 2013). There are a lot of splintered new identities within Thailand, and these are undoubtedly a phenomenon of Thailand's indigenization of the queer community. In Thai culture, the first thing that comes to mind when concepts such as 'gay' or 'tom' are mentioned is gender mixing. Jackson (2013) has mentioned about 'phet' conception and he also argued that 'Gender remains the core of all Thai identities, with eroticism being imagined as a secondary or derivative component'.

The identity multiply is affected by Thailand complicated country build. Turn to 21st century, Thailand queer media were rapid developed. That is due

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to Bangkok called the global centre of gender and sexual diversity (Hoang, 2018). Because of the complex political nature of Thailand, where the government has been overthrown and re-established many times since the 21st century, queer works have flourished during periods of political chaos. Although Thailand's television and film censorship has some restrictions on this type of work because of the need to help normalise perceptions of heterosexual youth, Thailand's queer culture is beyond the reach of certain powers that can control it. This also indirectly supports why Thailand has split into many new identities in terms of gender as well as sexual orientation, and even gender mixing (Hoang, 2018; Intamool, 2011; Jackson, 2013; Käng, 2011).

Although the Thailand is the first country to shooting the LGBTQ+ advertisement, the situation in the law and the Tv show is different. Meanwhile, the law still affected by the government (Sanders, 2019). Since 2012, the LGBTQ+ community in Thailand has made some progress in the fight for legal marriage rights.2022 On 15 June, the Thai Parliament passed two key proposals for the first time: a government-sponsored civil partnership bill and an opposition-sponsored marriage equality bill, as well as another draft civil partnership bill and a draft reform of the civil code, sponsored by the Democrat Party and the Cabinet. This marks a major step forward for the LGBTQ+ community in terms of marriage equality, although there is still a long way to go before full equality is achieved. These developments show positive movement towards legal recognition of same-sex marriages in Thailand, reflecting society's increased awareness of gender diversity and equal rights (Sinthuphan & Ruendhawil, 2022). The relevant bill on the protection of homosexuality in Thailand has been introduced but has not yet been passed. This is due to political, religious and issues involving the Thai ruling class.

In Thailand, the queer spaces are both influenced by the Western world but also have a localised Thai identity, especially in Bangkok (Santos & Saisuwan, 2023). Despite the queer community in Thailand relatively freedom, the depression and suicide rate in Thailand queer community still a focus question. As Wichaidit *et al.* (2023) researched, a later stage of self-identification may be a factor in depression and suicide rates. In addition, gender stigma and internalised discrimination are also priorities that need to

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be addressed. Internalised discrimination in groups is mentioned in this study, this point the phenomenon of discrimination in queer community, is still a question need to be resolved. In Wichaidit *et al.*'s reseach, the advantage is the data capacity is relatively large enough. In future research, in-depth qualitative interviews could be conducted to measure the proportion of these based on the variables mentioned in Wichaidit *et al.* (2023) study.

Hence, in Thailand queer community need to be focused is the queer self-identify, especially the transgender grow-up stage, need to be attention. Although, the queer community is more accepted in Thailand, there is still external discrimination (Aritatpokin, 2022). At the same time, the cyber-bulling, socio-bulling need to be attention. The most important in Thailand queer community, is the internal discrimination. Frequently, internal discrimination between groups goes unnoticed. In countries where it is strictly prohibited, the queer community is outwardly exporting their orientation. But in countries where there is more freedom, there is internal discrimination within the queer community, which can lead to mental health problems for some queer people. To tackle these concerns, policy implications must extend beyond the removal of censorship to encompass support for mental health services, anti-discrimination education, and the promotion of inclusive policies. Theoretical frameworks from gender and sexuality studies could provide valuable insights into these policy designs, analysing the intersectionality of race, religion, class, and regional diversity within the queer community.

In conclusion, future research should prioritise engagement with Thai scholars and community voices to eschew a Western-centric narrative. The goal is to foster an environment that not only celebrates the vibrant diversity of queer identities in Thailand but also addresses the underlying issues that challenge their well-being. A culturally sensitive, intersectional approach is key to understanding the multifaceted nature of gender, sexuality, and identity within Thailand's queer spaces.

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5 CONCLUSION

Table 1

The issue of East Asia and Southeast Asia queer community [4]

Country/Issue	Serious Homophobic	Government Policy	Religious Issue	Visibility Issue	Social Bullying	Peer Discrimination
China	·	·		·	·	
South Korea	·	·	·		·	
Japan	·	·			·	
Malaysia	·	·	·	·	·	
Singapore	·	·	·	·	·	
Thailand		·	·		·	·

The queer community in East and Southeast Asia faces various challenges, including social pressures, identity struggles, policy restrictions, and mental health issues. Cultural traditions, religious influences, and political environments impact the acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals. Thailand is relatively tolerant, blending Western influences with local culture, though internal discrimination exists. In contrast, Malaysia and Singapore impose strict laws, but visibility is supported through social media and cross-border funding. China experiences cyberbullying and social pressure, though some queer-friendly policies are in place. South Korea and Japan present complex dynamics: South Korea faces religious constraints, while Japan, despite supporting transgender rights, shows limited acceptance of homosexuality. The LGBTQ+ community responds by building identities, seeking mental health support, and influencing culture through media.

This article has delved into the diverse experiences and challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in East and Southeast Asia, highlighting the intersecting identities and marginalization within various cultural contexts. The analysis reveals that despite some progress in visibility and representation, significant social, cultural, and legal barriers persist. Homophobic behaviours, governmental policies, religious beliefs, and societal pressures continue to adversely affect the mental health and self-identification of LGBTQ+ individuals in these regions (Chen & Chen, 2013; Wong, 2015).

A critical synthesis underscores the need for comprehensive legal

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[4] Issues in the table represent more serious current problems, and the absence of labelling does not mean that there are no relevant problems.

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frameworks that protect LGBTQ+ rights, alongside the provision of mental health resources tailored to this community's unique needs (Craig & LaCroix, 2011; Jerome *et al.*, 2021). Media and internet platforms play a crucial role in fostering acceptance and representation, yet their impact is uneven across different countries (Shen, 2023). The study also points to the underrepresentation of certain identities, such as tomboys and transgender individuals, calling for more inclusive research efforts (Fung, 2021; Mackay, 2019)

Overall, the review advocates for nuanced policy interventions and further empirical exploration to enhance the well-being and rights of LGBTQ+ communities in East and Southeast Asia. Addressing these challenges requires the concerted efforts of governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and society as a whole to create an inclusive and supportive environment for all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, contributing to the development goals of SDG5 (Han, 2016; Sinthuphan & Ruendhawil, 2022).

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