

**The Negotiation between Heteronormative
Urban Public Space and the Homosexual Life
of Chinese Post-90s Urban Gay Men**

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Summary

This research thesis clarifies the negotiation process of Chinese young homosexual males between the heteronormative urban public space and their homosexual identity by focusing on their daily practice in space. Based on an empirical study in the city of Guangzhou, this research adopts methods of in-depth interview and photography. Post-90s urban gay men have higher acceptance towards homosexual identity and lower acceptance towards conducting homosexual behaviour or visiting homosexual place in urban public space. They have different levels of awareness towards the heteronormativity of the urban public space. They also notice the suppression brought by such heteronormativity to their identity cognition pathway. As a compromise, they instead satisfy homosexual needs in an understated way to avoid identity exposure. Meanwhile, they transform part of homosexual social life to the relatively free and less heteronormative digital space that is more private and accessible for their group. Also, they value the geographical space such as restaurants, cafes, malls and squares, as it provides public places to develop online connections. Besides, concepts like “gay cruising” “gay neighbourhood” and “space for performance” in western research are discussed in the condition associated with the reality of China.

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Theoretical Framework	6
2.1 The pathway of homosexual identity development	6
2.2 Homosexual identity in China.....	9
2.3 Urban public space.....	10
2.4 The heteronormativity of urban public space.....	13
2.5 Assumptions.....	18
3. Methodology	20
3.1 Study population and location.....	20
3.2 Research methods.....	22
3.3 Data collection	24
3.4 Ethical issues.....	25
3.5 Data analysis	25
4. Result	28
4.1 Homosexual identity	28
4.2 Urban public space.....	34
4.3 Negotiation.....	41
4.4 Space utilisation	47
4.5 Consequences.....	52
5. Conclusion	57
6. References	64

1. Introduction

In China, topics related to the impact of rapid urbanisation have been under heated discussion in the field of urban and economic geography for decades. However, discussions mostly focus on either economic-related topics or mainstream social groups, such as infrastructure, housing, gentrification, urban village, government-led industrial structure upgrade, the contradiction between expanding urban space and shrinking agricultural land (Gao et al., 2011; He & Liu, 2010; He, Qian & Deng, 2011; Lan, 2005; Liu, Li & Xu, 2007; Peng & Zhao, 2010; Song, 2011; Wei & Yan, 2005; Yan, Zhou & Yan, 2011; Yu et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2006; Zhou et al., 2016). There has been ignorance on marginal social groups, especially sexual minorities, including their utilisation of urban public space and the impact of unfriendly urban space on their cognition pathway. Actually, in China, the sexual minority is not only neglected in the field of urban geography but also discriminated in many other aspects. Take homosexual as an example, although homosexuality has been decriminalised since 1997 (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China [CPR], 1997) and has been declassified as a mental illness since 2001 (Chinese Society of Psychiatry [CSP], 2001), the Chinese government still holds an attitude of “no approval; no disapproval; no promotion” up to date. Homosexuality is legal in China, but that is all; there is no same-sex marriage, no adoption, no more legal protection. Due to the rapid legalisation of same-sex marriage in plenty of foreign countries, people, especially young people, are more tolerant of homosexuals in recent years. Moreover, homosexual topics are brought to the public via social media, but still, stay as “subculture” and “unofficial” (Yang, 2019). Therefore, most homosexual people stay as invisible in urban space, experience self-oppression to prevent identity exposure. LGBTQ events, sexual minority social movements and sex education are limited as well.

Generally, this situation is understandable considering the economic and social achievement that China has gained during the past 40 years of Reform and Opening Era. On the one hand, from 1978 on, China has been exploring its way to reform the economic system, mainly by reducing governmental control on economic activities as well as attracting foreign investments from more developed countries and regions. These strategies created new industries, numerous factories and jobs, attracted a large population to settle in the city, expanded the urban area and increased the number of cities, which further resulted to quick urbanisation nationwide, especially the eastern part that is near the coastline and has better infrastructures. According to the census statistics, the population of city surpassed that of rural area in 2011 for the first time in the history of China, which is also the year that the urbanisation rate reached over

50% (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2017).

On the other hand, the societal aspect of urban space is less mentioned than the economic one. Topics like migration, ethnic and ethnicity, segregation, refugee and social minority are heated in the West but not very much in China. Political ideology is undoubtedly a critical reason since socialism in China regards all people as one and believes that demographic differences could not undermine their unity as proletariats. However, demographic characteristics and traditional culture do play some roles. For instance, among all 56 ethnics, Han Ethnic takes up 91% of China's population, while the rest 55 share only 9% (NBS, 2010). Such a mismatch is more severe in eastern China. Ethnic minorities are clustered in provinces with inland border. They have fewer contacts with the eastern part, especially more prominent cities. Besides, Confucianism has been the dominated culture in China even before the foundation of the People's Republic of China (1949). It has already become a fundamental component of Chinese traditional culture. As a way of life and a system of social and ethical philosophy, Confucianism emphasises filial piety and obedience (even royalty) and denies one's value for being different from others in his collective (i.e. family, neighbourhood, company, classroom, school) (Ruan, 2019). It also regards homosexuality as a violation of conventional societal values (such as breaking the yin-yang harmony of the heterosexual relationship, cheating on family integrity, and disturbing social order) (Hsieh et al., 2011; Tang, Lai, & Chung, 1997). Such dogma of Confucianism is one of the reasons why homosexuality in China is typically perceived as taboo (Wong & Tang, 2004). These negative factors resulted in the incompleteness of self-cognition and personality at the micro-level, as well as the fear of expression and the ignorance of people's social needs at the macro-level (Ruan, 2019).

The inequality status of homosexuality has manifestations not only on gay people's social status but also Chinese academia. According to the researcher's search on the statistical data of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), over 50% of homosexuality-related scientific literature is about HIV, AIDS and other biological or psychological topics such as contaminated blood and acquired immunodeficiency (Cai et al., 2005; Ding et al., 2010; Lu et al., 2003; Qu et al., 2002; She et al., 2012; Wang & Wen, 2002; Zhang et al., 2001; Zhang et al., 2013). Furthermore, only less than 10% of the literature is under the subject of humanities and sociology, not to mention that it is even less discussed in urban geography (Gao & Jia, 2008; Li, 2002; Liu & Wang, 2011; Luo, 2007; Wang, 2011; Wei, 2007; Yu, Yang & Yu, 2005). Homosexuals, together with other sexual minorities, is similarly invisible in the field of urban geography in China, just like their current situation in urban geographical space.

Another social group under an awkward situation in Chinese academia is post-90s. It is difficult to trace back the origin of this term, but such division is an imitation of sociologists who divided every ten years as a generation for their sociological research after World War II. Pos-90s refers to people who were born between 1990 and 1999 (including); it is a generation that has been labelled by not only other generations but also themselves. Post-90s have been under heated discussion since the 2000s when society began to focus on their globalised thoughts, their strong sense of individuality and shortage of stress resistance.

Nowadays, post-90s is no longer a generation of younger students only. Their ages vary from 21 to 30, which means they are already creating social values in their ways. They are taking up more social responsibility, influencing the development pathway of this country in a deeper way. However, based on the researcher's search on China Academic Journal Network Publishing Database (CAJD), the current study on post-90s has not caught up yet. Although there is around 8,000 literature studies on post-90s in the field of humanities and sociology, over 50% of them is about post-90s university and college students (Chen & Zhang, 2011; Wan & Zeng, 2012; Wang, 2011; Zhang, Wen & Jin, 2009) and their "ideological and political education" (Zeng, 2016), an education that aims at building up student's communist political ideology, patriotism and social values (Hu, 2010; Liang, 2008; Mei & Luo, 2016; Zhao, 2013). Besides, the very few studies on post-90s' sexuality do not have a separated category but merged into the category of 'mental health', which only takes up less than 4% of CNKI literature.

As discussed above, the leak of the humanistic perspective in the study field of urban space and young homosexual in China is a noticeable research gap, and it brings inspiration to this research.

Firstly, it is known that urban public space has impacts on citizens and vice versa (Neal, 2010; Yousefi & Fardi, 2016). On the one hand, different citizens adopt different behaviours in urban public space; a citizen also behaves differently in different kinds of urban public space. Such differences could be positive encouragements or negative limitations. For example, a sexual minority might feel safer to express their sexuality like other heterosexual people, when they are walking in friendly neighbourhoods (Gorman-Murray & Waitt, 2009; Irazábal & Huerta, 2016). The native citizen might avoid visiting a supermarket or park located on a street where refugee and immigration are more clustered (Krivo et al., 2013; Sharkey & Faber, 2014). These impacts are usually intertwined, and citizen's behaviour, therefore, is a complicated result of several encouragements and limitations (Hubbard, Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2015).

On the other hand, it is citizens who keep a city functioning and decide the

atmosphere of each street, neighbourhood and the whole city (Estrada-Grajales, Foth, & Mitchell, 2018; Minas, & Enroth, 2015). Citizen's daily life in the urban area, including events like parade and festival, are shaping the vibe and the appearance of a city. As for the young homosexual urban male, the study population of this research, their behaviours are usually consequences of negotiation with urban public space. In their homosexual life, they have to deal with the needs of homosexuality expression in public space (Bell & Binnie, 2004). Considering homosexuality is not widely accepted, supported or protected by traditional culture or existing law in China, homosexual people are experiencing a conflict between their sexuality and the intolerant urban public space. Therefore, studying their negotiations is helpful for understanding how those double-sided impacts are formed and represented.

Secondly, post-90s is an interesting and suitable social group to study in research that focuses on the contradiction and negotiation between the Chinese sexual minority and urban public space. Due to the rapid globalisation process of China since 1978, post-90s becomes the first generation that has been working or studying in bigger cities, most of them only know a booming urban China for their memory and prefer to label themselves as open-minded and more of a sense of individuality. However, like the rest of Chinese, they live with the Confucianism-dominated culture that sets heteronormativity as a prerequisite and emphasises harmony, filial piety and loyalty. Such a strange contradiction makes them the most representative social group for this research topic. Besides, with age varied from 21 to 30, post-90s is acquiring the highest education and is the most energetic age group among Chinese working labour, comparing to other generations. Since this research is about sexual minority's negotiation in heteronormative urban environments, post-90s urban gay men are chosen as they witness most of the double-sided impacts between urban public space and citizen.

Therefore, the main research question of this research would be: How do post-90s urban gay men negotiate their homosexual identity through daily practices in urban public space in the city of Guangzhou, China? To comprehensively answer that question, several sub research questions are followed: How do they recognise their homosexual identity and social status? How do they make use of urban public space in homosexual life? Based on their understanding of urban public space and its heteronormativity, how do they negotiate with it by daily practice? What strategies do they apply as consequences of their negotiation, and how do they decide?

This study would apply qualitative methods, including in-depth interview and photography, to collect research data. As shown, these sub research questions would target on three aspects of this research: post-90s' homosexual identity, the homosexual life in urban public space, negotiations and consequences. The interview would then

be designed based on these four topics. Participants would discuss their experience of self-cognition, evaluate their social status and the heteronormativity of public space base on daily observations, describe their choice of homosexual place and activity, and explain their consequences of negotiation in urban public space. They would take pictures of a public place and talk about homosexual-related experience there, together with their feelings and choices, to draw a clearer picture of the negotiation in the heteronormative urban public space.

The theoretical framework would be discussed in the following contents. It mainly focuses on the pathway of homosexual identity development, homosexual identity in China, urban public space and the heteronormativity of urban public space. Several assumptions would be proposed then. In the methodology part, selection of research place and population, together with empirical research methods, processes of data collection and data analysis, would be introduced in detail. Results and conclusions of this research would be presented in the last two chapters.

2. Theoretical Framework

Both the study population and the research topic are not frequently discussed in China until recent years, not to mention that neither of them is familiar to foreign researchers. To better understand the contexts of post-90s Chinese urban gay men and their utilisation of geographical space, also to better explain the theories behind research questions, detailed introduction is needed. This chapter focuses on building up a comprehensive theoretical framework, clearing the related theories of research questions, describing the development of the research field and explaining assumptions. In the following contents, the relevant studies of homosexual identity development pathway and the homosexual identity in China will be first addressed. A discussion of urban public space and the heteronormative social environment will then be introduced. Last but not least, assumptions would be placed with supports from existing literature.

2.1 The pathway of homosexual identity development

There are already a series of models that contain various developmental stages and aim at organising and interpreting the development pathways of gay men's identity formation (Ruan, 2019). For example, Cass (1979) proposed a six-stage model (See Table 2.1), which was further explored and summarised by Troiden (1989) and Brady and Busse (1994), who came up with a four-stage (See Table 2.2) and a two-stage model (See Table 2.3). These models held a similar belief on how individuals develop their attempts on homosexual identity, which usually progresses with such an order: self-awareness, sexual experience, self-labelling, self-disclosure and self-adoption (Ruan, 2019). Such progression is dominated by a personal desire to keep one's self-cognition consistent with the environment he lives in (Cass, 1979).

Due to the linear and unidirectional process of identity formation they summarised, these models then were regarded as over-simplified on the identity transition process and criticised as incomprehensive (Taylor, 1999). More recent studies then began to focus on the variation in individual experiences which do not firmly follow the order of self-identity attempts pathway observed by former researchers (Ruan, 2019). For instance, it has been suggested that due to the differences among individuals such as social contacts and social integrations with other homosexual males, together with self-oppression on sexual activity (Savin-Williams, 1998) and psychological functioning (Rosario et al., 2001), the trajectory of one's developmental process could be divergent from the others' (Cass, 1996). Besides, an individual adopts various responses to resolve dissonance (between ingroup norms and the individual's feelings) and distress (derived from the fear of being found out and rejected) in each stage (Hsieh et al., 2011). Among these, responses such as social contacts with other gay men can help the

individual move towards greater openness and self-acceptance, while negative experiences push identity formation towards self-oppression, resulting in the avoidance of other gay men (Hsieh et al., 2011).

Table 2.1 Six-stage model of Cass (1979)

Name of the Stage	Explanations on Each Stage
Identity Confusion	One begins to have a conscious awareness that homosexuality has relevance to self and his behaviour. His perception of behaviour is at odds with the self-perception as homosexual and others' view of him as heterosexual. Such awareness may lead to effective incongruency, which will further result in experiences of confusion and turmoil.
Identity Comparison	One has a greater acceptance of self as potentially homosexual. Previous confusion and turmoil are considerably reduced. One begins to examine the broader implications of that tentative commitment and to handle the social alienation.
Identity Tolerance	One's commitment, which turns the self-image further away from "heterosexual" and more towards "homosexual?", is increased and commonly expressed in the statement "I probably am a homosexual."
Identity Acceptance	One continues and increases contacts with other homosexuals. It allows him to feel the impact of those features of the subculture that validate and "normalise" homosexuality as an identity and a way of life.
Identity Pride	One's awareness of the differences that exist between one's concept of self as being totally acceptable as a homosexual and society's rejection of this concept arises.
Identity Synthesis	One discovers that there are heterosexual others who accept his/her homosexual identity in the same way as one does. One alters his/her previous philosophy that separates heterosexuals and homosexuals as "them and us" and achieves greater congruency.

Furthermore, most of the existing researches mentioned above has focused only on the psychological aspect of variation but neglected the social aspect (Ruan, 2019). This research gap gives inspiration to one of the research objectives of this thesis, which is to emphasise the implication of social and cultural contexts. In this way, both sociological and psychological perspectives are integrated to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the changing gay identity formation. More particularly, since the identity formation is a continuous evolutionary process (Lichtwarek-Aschoff et al., 2008), it is so complicated that its social context cannot be overlooked, especially

when the studied social context here contains a deep integration of globalisation process and relatively conservative Confucian values (Ruan, 2019). Thus, this research would focus more on impacts of socio-cultural environment on an individual’s homosexual identity cognition pathway. By studying their daily practice, negotiation and identity strategy in urban public space, this research aims at describing the representation of the contradiction between globalised values and Confucian values of post-90s urban gay men.

Table 2.2 Four-stage model of Troiden (1989)

Name of the Stage	Explanations on Each Stage
Sensitisation	Homosexuals do not see homosexuality as personally relevant and assume they are heterosexual if they think about their sexual status at all. Also, childhood experiences sensitise homosexuals to subsequent self-definition as homosexual.
Identity Confusion	Homosexuals begin to personalise homosexuality typically during their adolescence. This thought is dissonant with previously held self-images and leads to inner turmoil and uncertainty surrounding their ambiguous sexual status.
Identity Assumption	Usually happens during homosexuals’ late adolescence when they define, as well as present themselves as homosexuals to others (at least to other homosexuals).
Identity Commitment	Homosexuals adopt homosexuality as a way of life. The main characteristics of this stage are self-acceptance and comfort with the homosexual identity and role.

Table 2.3 Two-stage model of Brady and Busse (1994)

Name of the Stage	Difference between Stages
Stage 1: The combination of the first three stages of Cass’s (1979) model: (Identity acceptance, Identity pride, Identity tolerance)	Whether or not individuals resolved coherent self-identities as homosexuals and have a sense of where they belong as homosexuals.
Stage 2: The combination of the last three stages of Cass’s (1979) model: (Identity confusion, Identity comparison, Identity synthesis)	

2.2 Homosexual identity in China

It seems that the conflict between traditional cultural values and LGBT rights has been rising in China since 2001 when China got access to WTO and speed up its globalisation process (Lee, 2016). On the one hand, Confucianism is still the dominant culture in China (Yao, 2000), which has lasted for nearly two thousand years. Rooted in Chinese culture and nurtured by Confucius (the founder of Confucianism) and Confucians (people who believe in the teachings of Confucius) (Yao, 2000), it can be understood as a way of life or a system of social and ethical philosophy rather than a religion (Ruan, 2019). For Confucianism, the affirmation of accepted values and norms of behaviour in primary social institutions and fundamental human relationships is one of its principles and tasks (Berling, 1982). Ideas or creeds like “sacrificing humble individuals, achieving great collective”, “filial piety”, “submissiveness to parents even if it requires self-sacrificing” and “citizens submit to their political rulers, sons submit to their fathers, wives submit to their husbands” are classic contents of such values and norms (Fung, 2014). It is so deeply embedded in the subconscious of Chinese people that the guarantee of people’s obedience towards them is not only based on laws nowadays but also on tacit social norms (Jensen, 1997). On the other hand, with the country’s process of rapid globalisation, Chinese LGBT people have become more open towards their self-identity and has been fighting for equal rights under the inspiration of global LGBT identity movements, which are assumed to be highly universalised in West (Hildebrandt, 2012).

As a social and ethical philosophy system, Confucianism has been influencing the way Chinese people develop their social identity, organise their daily life and cope with their interpersonal relationship (Bell, 2010) for thousands of years. As a social group that has been labelled with unique functions of thinking and behaviour (Li & Zheng, 2013), gay people in China have been involved in the contradiction between homosexual subculture and Confucianism-dominated culture (Liu, 2012). Fundamentally, this contradiction is caused by two social identifications – filial piety and loyalty (Hwang, 1999). Written and edited by Confucius’ students and regarded as the most important legacy of Confucius (King & Bond, 1985; Lau, 2000), *The Confucian Analects* argued that there should be *Three Hierarchies* in a society: citizens submit to their political rulers, sons submit to their fathers, wives submit to their husbands (Fung, 2014). Extended from that, Confucians then proposed *The Five Cardinal Relationship*: between ruler and minister, between father and son, between husband and wife, between brothers, and between friends (Ho, 1995). With such principles, Confucianism further developed the concept of filial piety and loyalty (Hwang, 1999) to set up a series of guidelines, which is different from the Western individualistic patterns (King & Bond, 1985), for people to identify themselves and

organise social behaviour both at home and in public (Ruan, 2019). Specifically, the central contradiction Chinese gay men are facing with is parents' demand for marriage and producing offspring and their negative attitudes and responses derived by the homosexual identity and the unfriendly status quo of China (Liu, 2012). For instance, a gay man who positively accepted his homosexual identity may be facing with the demand from his parents, requiring him to get married and have his child(ren) before his 30. He may suffer from the dilemma due to the unwillingness on neither violating his parents nor getting into a heterosexual marriage (since same-sex marriage is still illegal in China).

Other theories are also found in literature. Bedford and Hwang (2003) and Ho (1993) mentioned relational identity and collective identity. The former refers to an identity defined by a person's significant social relationships. From a Confucian perspective, individuals realise their identities by the cognition of their interpersonal relationships (Ruan, 2019). The latter refers to an identity defined by membership in the reference group to which that individual belongs. Within the group, individuals are not regarded as separate beings but members of large groups, which is quite different from the Western pattern that defines everyone independently (Ruan, 2019).

2.3 Urban public space

The Oxford English Dictionary's definitions of the term "public", as an adjective, include: "open to general observation, view, or knowledge; existing, performed, or carried out without concealment, so that all may see or hear" "open or available to all members of a community, or all who are legally or properly qualified (as by payment); not restricted to the private use of a particular person or group; (i.e. of a service, amenity) provided by the local or central government for the community and supported by rates or taxes" "authorised by, serving, or representing, the community; carried out or made on behalf of the community by the government or State" "easily seen, conspicuous, prominent" (Oxford English Dictionary [OED], 2019). Meanwhile, "In general, and in most of the senses", the word "public" means "the opposite of private" (OED, 2019). The distinction between them exists in several aspects of society, politics and economy, ultimately affecting the city and its inhabitants (Lopes, 2015). In cultural and social terms, this distinction determines the routines of daily life and is crucial in the relations between self and other, such as individual and society (Arendt, 1958; Madanipour, 2003). By seeing the public as the "in-between space which facilitates co-presence and regulates interpersonal relations" (Madanipour, 2003), everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody (Arendt, 1958).

There are more than a few definitions when it comes to the phrase "public space". The appearance of the term was in the article *Private and Public Spaces* written by Charles Madge in 1950, which was followed by Hannah Arendt later in her book *The*

Human Condition in 1958. Within a few decades, the term “public space” has been understood and analysed differently by theorists and scholars, and therefore kept enriching its meanings from various aspects. Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) defined public space as “areas of a neighbourhood to which persons have legal access and can visually observe,” including streets and sidewalks, parks, places of public accommodation, public buildings and the public sectors of its private buildings. Fyfe and Bannister’s (1996) also agreed that public space is space that generally people have unrestricted access and right of way. Atkinson (2003) argued that “this problematises the notion of public or citizenry whose membership of a geographical area is based on rights of universal access.” Tonnelat (2010) also proposed that “public space needs to be understood ... rather as a space accessible to the public.”

Low and Smith (2006) understood public space as a broader concept, by the inclusion of the “range of social locations offered by the street, the park, the media, the Internet, the shopping mall, the United Nations, national governments, and local neighbourhoods. Public space envelops the palpable tension between place, experience at all scales in daily life, and the seeming spacelessness of the Internet, popular opinion, and global institutions and economy.”

Amin (2008) understood public spaces such as parks, streets, plazas as the symbol of the collection’s well-being; the place where citizens encounter and create cultures; the field where the city leaders realise their political and social governance goals; and the vital space for public political game and negotiation. Goffman (1963) and Lofland (1998) emphasised that public space is the place to encounter and interact with strangers. These encounters could create new possibilities for the construction of social relations as well as cultural significances. Lu and Qian (2019) agreed that public space is a required field for members of society to gather together, to produce social interaction and to build up social relations; it also plays a significant role on shaping social life in urban areas.

Meanwhile, public space is traditionally differentiated from private space in terms of access rules, sources and nature of control over entry to space, individual and collective behaviour, and rules of use (Low & Smith, 2006). Therefore, looking at the public-private distinction is a way of understanding the urban social and spatial organisation (Madanipour, 1999). According to Miller (2007):

“We tend to think of public space as having certain essential and obvious characteristics. We believe it is publicly owned, the opposite of private space. We believe it is open and accessible to everyone, where no one can be turned away.”

In China, some scholars regarded urban public space as open space or outdoor space. For example, in the textbook *Theories of Urban Planning* edited by Li (2001),

urban public space refers to the outdoor space that is offered for the daily activities and social life of citizens, which includes places such as streets, squares and plazas, outdoor fields of residential areas, parks. Public space can further be divided into open space and dedicated space. The former includes Places such as streets, squares and plazas, parking lots, green space, parks, while the latter includes places like arena and stadium. Also, in his book *The Systematic Construction of Urban Public Space*, Peng Wang (2002) agreed that urban public space refers to open space that exists between one urban building to another and is the open place for public communications among citizens. He also emphasised that urban public space is the crucial space for human beings to conduct physical and informational interactions; the place where a city displays its image – the place that could be regarded as the “living room” and “showcase” of a city; the critical carrier of urban ecology.

Some scholars argued that it is the artificiality, the human-made attribute of the public space, that makes it different from urban open space. Zhao (2001) argued that urban public space is an urban open space dominated by artificial factors. This definition was agreed by other scholars like Zhao and Zhang (2001) and Zhou (2005).

Therefore, the urban public space in this paper could refer to physical space that is publicly owned and has social and civic functions no matter whom it belongs to. It is the open space that is artificialized by city managers or citizens themselves, offering places for citizens to conduct certain social activities and interactions. It could also include the “third places”, places that are neither working places nor private dwellings, such as bars, book stores and cafés (Banerjee, 2001; Oldenburg, 1999). Correspondently, it could be narrowed down as in the responsibility for local government public-space services, referring specifically to state-owned parks, civic space and most ordinary streets and squares (de Magalhães, 2010).

Kohn (2004) emphasised three core components when proposing his definition of public space: ownership, accessibility and intersubjectivity. In his opinions, ideal public space must meet all three characteristics simultaneously: public ownership, equal accessibility and enough social interaction. Chen and Ye (2009) had a systematic review on the development of urban public space theory in the West and argued that accessibility is the fundamental attribute of the theory. The concept concluded the accessibility not only on a physical space level but also on a social significance one, which means accepting citizens from different social classes, races and communities, as well as allowing all kinds of social activities to take place.

As for the classification of public spaces, both Goodsell (2003) and Newman (1972) had well-known proposals. Goodsell (2003) focused more on the broader social and political features of public space, while Newman (1972) referenced the different definitions of “public” and “private” to illustrate his (See Table 2.4 and Table 2.5).

Table 2.4 Goodsell’s (2003) classification of public space

Types of Public Spaces	Concepts
The generic definition of public space	A space-time continuum for connected and interactive political discourse
Place-bound public space	The above consisting of face-to-face interaction in a single physical location
Electronic public space	The above achieved at dispersed geographic locations through information technology
Extended public space	The above when broadcast by television, radio, Internet, or other means
The pure definition of democratic public space	The above when open to all, unrestricted as to conduct, and unconditional as to participation
The practical definition of democratic public space	The above when public access is encouraged, the status of state authority is muted, barriers between governors and governed are minimised, staging is arranged by the people as well as officials, and conditions conducive to deliberation are fostered

Table 2.5 Newman’s (1972) classification of public space

Types of Public Spaces	Examples
Public open space	Parks and plazas.
Semi-private open spaces	Those where a limited number of people use the space but where the ordinary public would generally not be welcomed. Examples include courtyards to houses or flats and communal gardens and play spaces.
Semi-public open spaces	Spaces with limited opening times to the public or be generally accessed and used by particular groups within society, such as school playgrounds.
Private spaces	Spaces not accessible to the public.

2.4 The heteronormativity of urban public space

Before the concept of heteronormativity is popularised, scholars like Adrienne Rich (1980), Monique Wittig (1992) and Gayle Rubin (1984) have already had their arguments on this topic. Rich (1980) introduced the notion of “compulsory heterosexuality” – an obligatory assumption that all romantic relationships exist only between opposite sex – in order to challenge the absence of lesbian existence from most scholarly feminist literature. She later introduced eight characteristics in which male power has demonstrated the suppression of female sexuality, which were “to deny women their own sexuality” “to force male sexuality upon women” “to command or exploit women’s labour to control their produce” “to control or rob women of their

children” “to confine women physically and prevent their movement” “to use women as objects in male transactions” “to cramp women’s creativeness” and “to withhold attainment of knowledge”. Together with Wittig (1992), they argued that as an ideological construct, heterosexuality is unnatural and taken-for-granted, as well as responsible for shaping the acknowledged understandings of sexuality. Wittig (1992) also pointed out that it is the political regime that instigates the society to regard women as “sexual beings” that are unable to survive without male intervention.

Rubin (1984) also mentioned the “natural order”: an order that allows people to make sense of their “predicaments by imposing master schemes (symbols) of order upon the world”. He then made more descriptions on the term, demonstrating that for the majority – the heterosexuals – it is natural to fall in love with the opposite sex, to have family and children, to know and understand the differences between men and women easily by their instincts, to acknowledge that “the lynchpin of morality is ‘proper’ sexual conduct.” Furthermore, the sexual minority (i.e. homosexuality) which appears or arise outside of those symbols are regarded as threats to the personal security of the majority and must be either explained away or expelled.

The term “heteronormativity” was coined by Michael Warner (1993) in his book *Fear of a Queer Planet*. In his opinions, heteronormativity is “as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society would not exist.” Same as Rich (1980), he held the belief that the institution of heterosexuality is often understood as a product of nature and the standard for social arrangements. It is based on the taken-for-granted binary division of gender, sets itself as the primary organising concept for everyday life and ensures its organisation in everything from gender to marriage to be the standard for all social–sexual relations (Ingraham & Saunders, 2016). Furthermore, he argued that the logic of the original order is widely and deeply embedded in social institutions around the world, and queer movements are not only aiming at tolerance or equal status for themselves but also challenges towards such institutions.

Chrys Ingraham (1994, 2009) also developed the concept of heterosexuality by advancing the theory of “heterosexual imaginary”. She described it as a belief system, “a way of thinking that incorporates romantic and sacred notions about heterosexuality while closing off critical consciousness about how the institution of heterosexuality operates” (Ingraham & Saunders, 2016). She also had critical evaluations on institutionalised heterosexuality. It is not only “a biological given or form of sexuality or sexual orientation”, but also “a highly regulated, organised, and ritualised set of social processes and practices”; it causes social hierarchies such as gender, race, class and (dis)ability that the heterosexual imaginary conceals from view (Ingraham &

Saunders, 2016). Wei (2010) developed his opinions from Warner (1993) and Ingraham (1994), illustrating that heteronormativity not only presumes the different standards of sexual roles and sexual relationships among male and female but also regards heterosexual relationship as a superior relationship than the homosexual one. He pointed out that homosexuals are one of the victims of such a traditional sexual ideology.

Chouinard and Grant (1996) mentioned that heterosexuality is privileged as the only authentic, pure and natural sexuality. Johnson (2002) added that “heterosexual relationships are legitimately public, and deserving of recognition; same-sex relationships are not.” Weeks (1989) mentioned that heterosexuality is invented and normalised through the work of those so-called “sex experts” such as health practitioners, therapists, social workers and educationalists. Hubbard (2008) argued that “the stigmatisation (and even criminalisation) of homosexuality seems to encourage a furtive use of space among non-heterosexuals, who may deny their sexuality except when in closeted or safe spaces.”

Furthermore, Gruszczynska (2009) argued that the production of heteronormative public space is “a performative act naturalised through repetition and regulation”. Together with Valentine (1993), Gruszczynska (2009) gave further examples on the forms of repetition acted by heterosexuals, which included “couples kissing and holding hands in the streets and on public transport”, “advertisements and window displays which present images of contented nuclear families”, “music and movies to other mainstream culture products articulating heterosexual desires that fill shopping malls, bars and restaurants”. Bristow (1989) claimed that due to the presumed heterosexuality, heterosexuals always have their freedom to display or perform their sexuality in public, and those “sexual dissidents” are only allowed “to be gay in specific places and spaces”.

There is already literature that focuses on sexual minorities, especially gay people’s urban space (Adler & Brenner, 1992; Brickell, 2000; Browne & Bakshi, 2011; Doan, 2007; Doan & Higgins, 2011; Frye et al., 2014; Hanhardt, 2013; Kirby & Hay, 1997; Sibalis, 2004; Skeggs et al., 2004). Their utilisation of such space can be roughly divided into three categories: gay neighbourhood, space for performances and gay cruising.

Gay neighbourhood refers to neighbourhoods that are formed or built by sexual minorities who voluntarily gather together and the spaces they create for their consumption. A gay neighbourhood often contains several sexual-minority-oriented amenities and establishments, such as nightclubs, bars, pubs, restaurants and bathhouses. This kind of space relies heavily on homosexuals who are financially advanced (mainly middle class white gay men [Adamson, 2017]) and are capable of building up social environments and consumption spaces for their needs. Famous homosexual neighbourhoods exist in San Francisco, Toronto, London, Paris,

Amsterdam, Berlin and many other Western metropolitans. There are various focuses of gay neighbourhood study: Manuel Castells (1983) focused on the gender predominance of gay men in the creation of gay neighbourhood. Myslik (1996) and McKinnon (2015) focused on functions of gay neighbourhoods as both safe places and sites of resistance. Moran (2007), Valverde and Cirak (2003) focused on the policing and security issues of the gay neighbourhood, including the self-policing in both businesses and community events as well as the extension of commercialisation of security services. Doan and Higgins (2011), Ruting (2008) and Sibalis (2004) focused on the commercial venues of the gay neighbourhood as well as the economic and social impacts brought by the gentrification of it. Huysentruyt, Meier & Dewaele (2015) focused on the level of contribution on inclusion and visibility a gay neighbourhood creates for its resident. Nash & Gorman-Murray (2014) investigated gay villages in Toronto and Sydney to understand the “shifting sexual and gendered landscapes of major cities in the global North”. Ekenhorst and van Aalst (2019) also focused on the in/exclusion of the nightlife of lesbian space in Amsterdam and explain its decline upon a better standing of the lived experiences of young lesbians.

Space for performances usually includes places such as ballrooms, pride parades, drag queen performances. It allows sexual minorities to display and perform their cultures and identities dramatically and deliberately and has become an important stage for their cultural communications and interactions with the heterosexual majority (Daems, 2014). Drissel (2017) demonstrated the strategies marchers apply in the Northern Ireland pride parade to “contest and reclaim heteronormative public spaces”. Enguix (2009) studied the pride parade in Madrid, Spain, to “approach the mechanisms used for entitlement” and how “public space has been re-appropriated and re-signified by sexual dissidents”. Brickwell (2000) also studied the pride parade in New Zealand to “investigate the complexities of the relationships between heterosexuality, homosexuality and the public and private spheres”. Markwell and Waitt (2009) argued for the importance of taking spatiality seriously in order to “understand the crucial role gay pride parades play in processes of social change surrounding sexuality”. Lambert (2009) and Waitt (2003) explored the oppressiveness that many gay men suffer from in their “everyday meaning and practices of sports” and how sexual minorities represent identities via “rupture stereotypes of heteronormativity in sports” in the Gay Games.

Gay cruising is a kind of space that allows homosexual males to gather and offers them places for short-time sex temporarily. Typical cruising space includes places such as public toilets, beaches, parks, swimming pools. Brown (2008) studied how homoerotic cruising is enacted and performed with “both human and non-human bodies” to provide a new approach for the study field. Bullock (2004) challenged the typically gay-male-focused definition of cruising and develops a typology of lesbian cruising.

Qian (2014, 2017, 2018) focused on the cruising behaviour in People's Park in Guangzhou, examines relationships between public space, cruising behaviour and construction of gay subjectivity there.

While most researches focused on Western sexual minorities, these categories conclude their situations better than that in Asian countries, especially countries that are dominated by another system of cultural values, for example, China. In China, homosexuality is a topic that the government and many people are avoiding (Yang, 2013). Homosexual marriage can neither be legally (Wang, 2018) nor culturally accepted (Yang, 2013). Together with other political and cultural reasons, therefore, it is barely possible for Chinese gay people to create a homosexual neighbourhood; most pride parades and public homosexual performances are also forbidden. However, officially, homosexuality is no longer illegal since 1997 or regarded as a mental disease in China since 2001 (CPR, 1997; CSP, 2001). Such an ambiguous status gives gay cruising rooms to breathe. From the late 1980s on, Chinese gay men gather in parks or public toilets, meeting other homosexuals or seeking temporary sexual partners.

Besides geographical space, sexual minorities also utilise digital space for their social life in recent decades due to the rapid development of the Internet. For homosexual males, some of their daily practices, such as making new friends, looking for sex partners and maintaining homosexual relationships, can be transferred from geographical space to digital one such as gay social media. Some researchers noticed and studied on the usage and meaning of digital space for homosexual males and other sexual minorities. Dishman (1997) clarified the relationship between online and offline gay community by examining "the formation, process, and outcomes of gay communities on the Internet". Tudor (2012) focused on the possible concept reconfigure of public and private concerning sexuality and sexual identity brought by innovations such as smartphones and GPS techniques. Bumgarner (2013) paid attention to the impact of mobile applications on gay bars by questioning the negative influences from the former to the latter and argued that digital space is used "as a means of augmenting the experience" of geographical space. Roth (2016) studied the digital forms of cartography via applications such as Grindr and Scruff, to investigate how much have they influence the "historically longstanding notions of queer interconnectivity". Cassidy and Wang (2018) focused on Chinese diaspora of Australia and their usage of LINE (a social chat application) to examine the mediational function of the application on their "new social and cultural environments" as well as their experiences "within other platforms central to the broader GLBT community". Shaw and Zhang (2018) focused on influences of social media development within Chinese cyberspace on the queer documentary filmmaking process, including its "production, promotion and consumption".

2.5 Assumptions

Before conducting empirical research with specific qualitative methodologies, this paper builds on the social status of China as well as previous literature support in order to make assumptions about the research topics. The assumed public spaces' utilisation pattern of the study population will be examined during the empirical research and then compared with the real pattern which will be obtained after data analysis, to come up with a more comprehensive utilisation pattern.

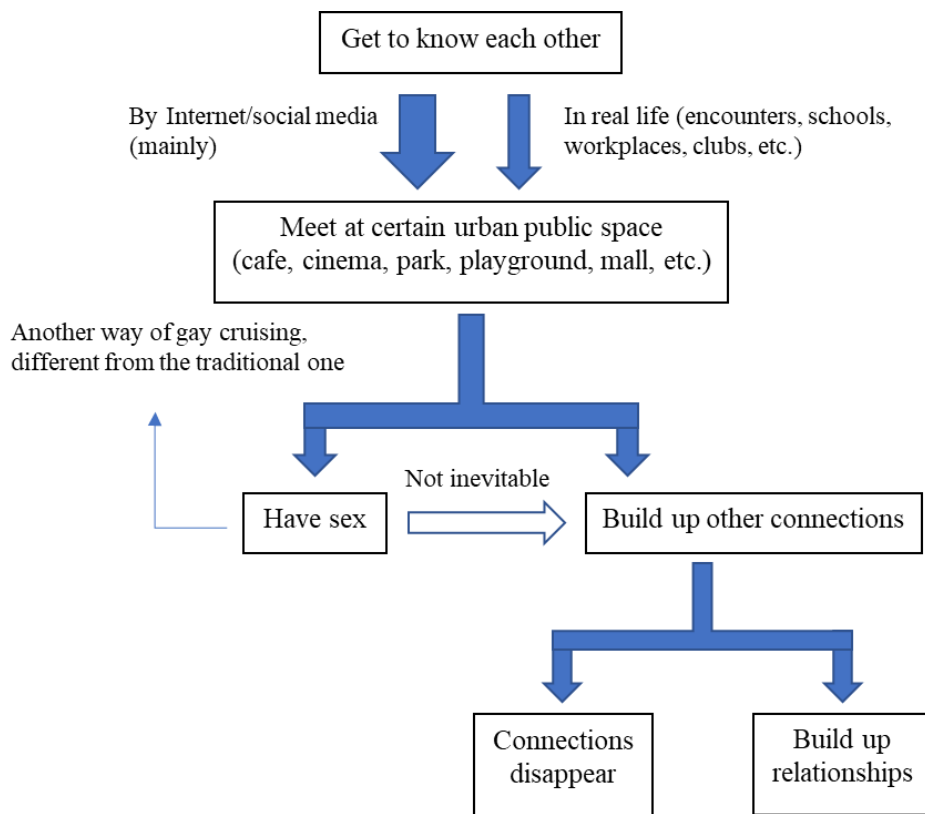
The first assumption is that some frequently observed patterns of public spaces' utilisation in Western countries may not be easily found or frequently discussed here in China. This assumption comes from the fact that homosexuality is on a disadvantaged status, which restrains homosexuals from proudly making announcements of their sexuality or other radical behaviours such as gay people gathering to build a homosexual neighbourhood or hold a pride parade with the approval from the government (Wang, 2018). The disadvantaged status is directly caused by the unclear attitudes from the authority (Wang, 2018), but there is also the relatively conservative Confucian culture as the root cause. On the other hand, this disadvantaged social environment may negatively encourage homosexual males to temporarily express their sexual desires in a public place for a short period (Qian, 2014), which could be gay cruising in places such as public toilets parks and alleys.

The second assumption is that post-90s may rely heavily on digital space, such as social media applications, to build up homosexual relationships within private groups, which may weaken the importance of geographical space in their homosexual life and reduce negotiation with the heteronormative urban public space. According to the latest data from China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), there are 829 million "netizens" (people who are accessible to and are used to use the Internet) in China, while 99% of them also use the Internet by phones. Among them, with the percentage of 26.8%, post-90s are the doubtless majority in number. Moreover, social media usage is the fourth most critical online activities of them (CNNIC, 2019). Meanwhile, there are also 1.52 million homosexual users on same-sex social media in China, while 90% of them are gay men and nearly 50% of them are post-90s. Among these post-90s gay men, 50% of them are active on the biggest APP called Blued, and nearly 50% are active on the second biggest one called "Aloha" (Benpaode KK, 2017). Based on real-time locations of users, same-sex social media applications offer post-90s platforms to express the homosexual identity, to encounter other members of the private groups, to form subcultures with individual preferences, and also to transfer online activity to social communication in geographical space. By greeting with texts or audio messages, sending selfies or pictures, video chatting, together with other functions of the applications (such as live show, user searching filters, user maps, posting and sharing,

reposting, matching, or even accommodation renting and HIV test), many gay men nowadays tend to build up relationships through social media applications. This does not mean that real places are not necessary anymore, but there could be a reasonable assumption that their utilisation of geographical space in their homosexual life is partly moved to digital space. Relatively, the negotiation with the heteronormative urban public space may also be partly skipped or neglected. Whether this is indeed happening as well as the reason behind is still to be examined.

Based on assumptions mentioned above, this research comes up with the assumed pattern of the relation build-up process of urban post-90s gay men (See Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 The assumed pattern of the relationship build-up process of urban post-90s gay men in Guangzhou, China



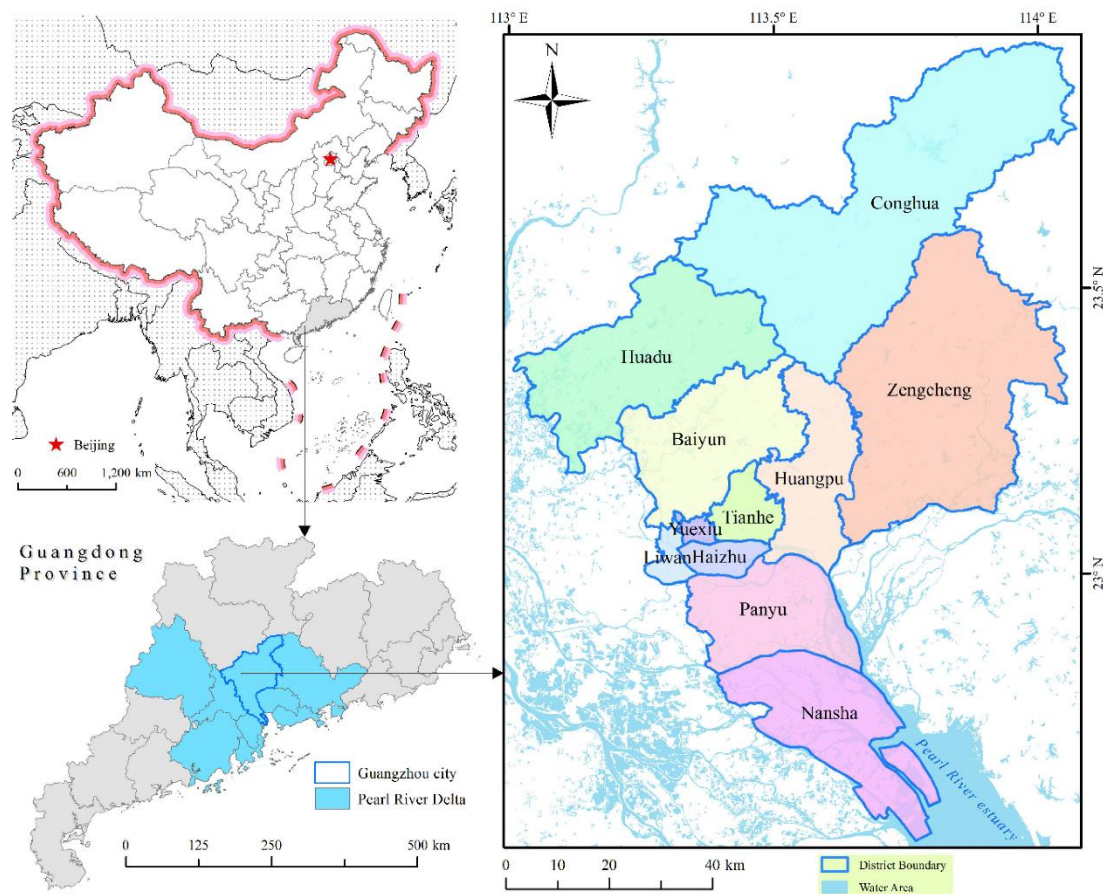
3. Methodology

3.1 Study population and location

The study population and location are both specific. Firstly, the study population is post-90s urban gay men. Generally, post-90s refers to people who were born in the 1990s. Expressly, in this research, the study population refers to Chinese homosexual males who were born between the year 1990 to 1999 (including), have been in Guangzhou for more than six months or have left Guangzhou for no more than six months.

Secondly, this research is conducted in the city of Guangzhou, China. The study site is selected based on three standards: a relatively developed city that actively participates in the globalisation process in China; a prosperous city that attracts a large number of post-90s to study, work and live in; a city that is easier for the researcher to recruit enough participants.

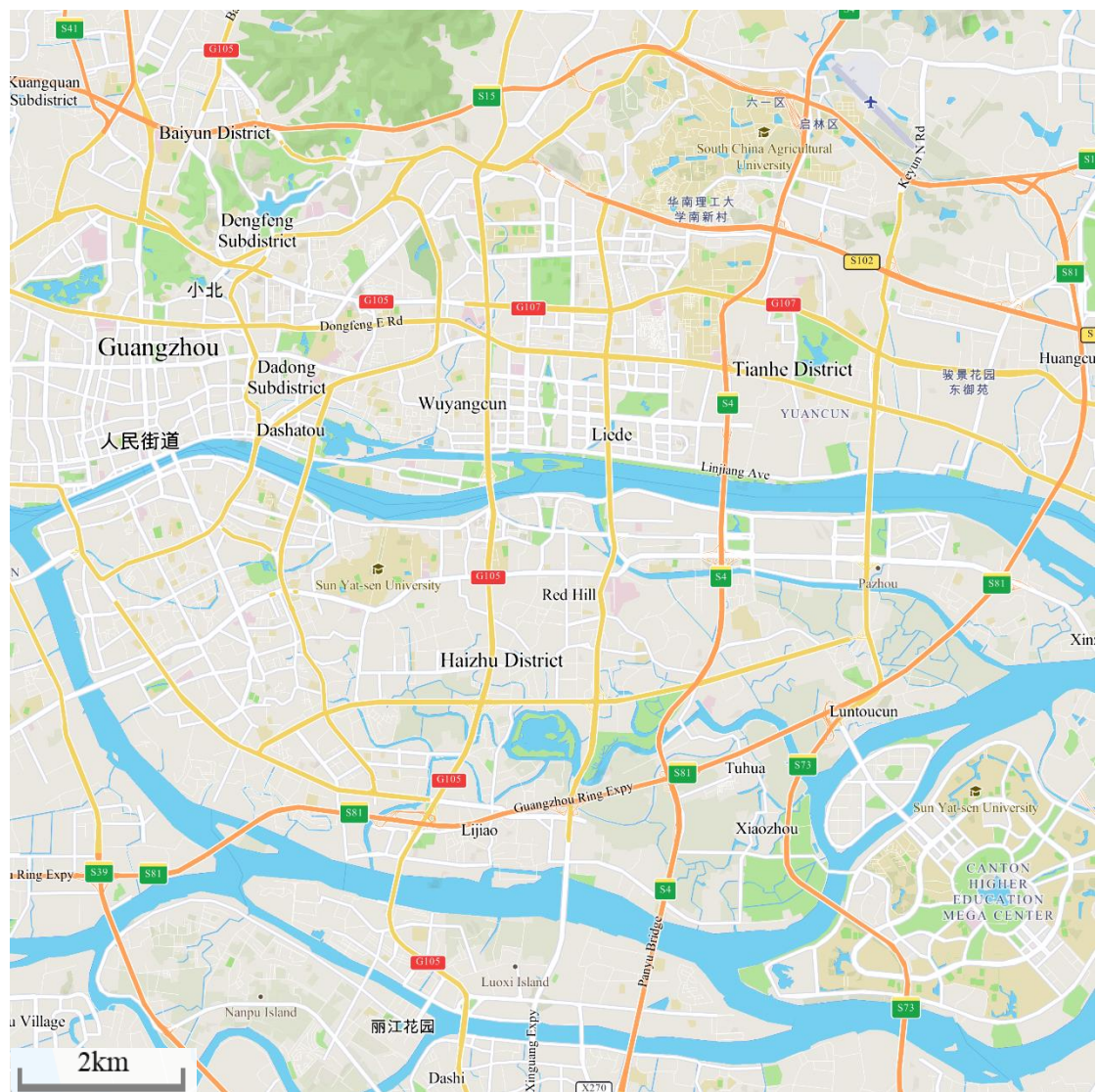
Figure 3.1 Map of Guangzhou (Cui et al., 2020)



Guangzhou (Figure 3.1, figure 3.2) is the capital city of Guangdong Province, located in the centre of Pearl River Delta, South China, and is near to Hong Kong, Macao and Shenzhen. Guangzhou has been the centre of administrative, political,

military, economic, cultural, scientific and educational centre of South China since the Qin Dynasty (200BC). Since Reform and Opening Era in 1978, Guangzhou has been leading economic growth in mainland China, and its GDP per capita is comparable to Spain since 2015 (Wang, 2016). As an international port city with a keen commercial culture, Guangzhou keeps exploring its globalisation pathway by developing export-oriented manufactures, attracting foreign banks and professionalising international financial services. Seemingly, Guangzhou embraces foreign cultures and values with an open mind. Besides holding various official events and exhibitions (such as the 16th Asian Games, Fortune Global Forum and Guangzhou International Light Festival), the government of Guangzhou (unlike Beijing) prefers to create tolerant atmosphere by avoiding unnecessary interventions towards cultural communications and activities, which allows different religions, ethnic groups and social groups to coexist.

Figure 3.2 Map of Guangzhou City Area



Despite that large population is a common characteristic for most Chinese cities, the number of that in Guangzhou still ranks high. Alongside native residents, a large number of the migrant population seeks opportunities to work or study in the expanding city. According to the official census data (Guangzhou Statistics Bureau [GSB], 2019) and statistics from some city labs (Yicai, 2019), the permanent population of Guangzhou is nearly 15 million, composed of over 9 million native residents and over 5 million migrants who come from both inside and outside of China. Compared to Beijing and Shanghai, Guangzhou has a more significant percentage of the post-90s population (42.4%), which ranks second in the country, only after Shenzhen.

Furthermore, Guangzhou is the city where the researcher has spent four years for a bachelor degree, which means that there are lots of interpersonal relationships that can be utilised as resources during participant recruitment. For example, friends, previous university classmates and professors, previous intern colleagues and contacts in some LGBT NGOs.

3.2 Research methods

This research focuses on the negotiation of post-90s urban gay men in Guangzhou, China. Specifically, this research aims to find out how they negotiate their homosexual identity through their daily practices in urban public space. To accurately collect research data, photography and in-depth interviews were applied as data collection methods. On the one hand, interviewees are required to take a picture of urban public space that they have been to and had homosexual-related experiences. They bring it to the interviews and discuss it with the researcher about the place, their experiences and feelings. On the other hand, several in-depth interviews were conducted in the city. Multiple languages and dialects were used during the interview section.

Research data was collected from 22nd November to 3rd December in the year of 2019. Informal network and advertisement were used as main participant recruitment methods. Firstly, considering the researcher himself is also an urban gay man who used to live in Guangzhou for years, his network was used to recruit participants. The researcher contacted his post-90s gay male friends in Guangzhou with an introduction of the research project, seeking their interests to participate in. Secondly, an online advertisement with basic information of the project and interview requirements was posted on the researcher's social media accounts such as Weibo (one of the most popular social media platforms in China; the Chinese version of Twitter) and WeChat (the most popular online chatting application in China; functioning like the combination of WhatsApp and Instagram). Several friends of the researcher's also volunteered to help by reposting the advertisement. Meanwhile, the researcher asked some community KOLs (key opinion leader) and NGOs for help on Weibo, who spread the information to more potential participants that the informal network could not reach.

This research focuses on post-90s gay men in China, which is a social group that is considered marginal in socio-cultural context. Besides, the research topics are about negotiations, self-cognitions and experiences, which are also sensitive and therefore, more suitable to be coped with qualitative methods, like interviews, to dig deeper in stories while taking good care of participants' feelings. Also, to answer research questions, collected data must consist of participants' opinions, views and other subjective information. In order to help the researcher gain more comprehensive pictures of that, interviews are conducted so that participants could unfold their stories and opinions from their perspectives. Furthermore, interviews are conducted in languages or dialects that participants are more familiar with or comfortable to speak. There are plenty of migrants in Guangzhou who come from regions that speak different languages or dialects. Conducting interviews in their mother language is helpful to provoke more useful information and more precise expressions. Taking this as well as the researcher's language skills into consideration, Mandarin (the official language of China), English (participants might be used to some English phrases), Cantonese (the native dialect of Guangzhou) and Chaoshan Dialect (one of the most spoken dialects in Guangzhou, which is also the mother language of the researcher) are chosen.

Photography was also applied. As mentioned above, participants discuss the pictures they took during interviews with the researcher, and share their homosexual experiences and feelings in those space. There are several reasons for applying this method in the research. Firstly, it is an easy task for participants but would bring rich information to interviews, including their personality, preference, logic, observation mode and reaction mode, which is valuable on analysing how they are influenced by urban public space and its heteronormativity. With this information, the researcher is capable of continuing interviews more targeted and effective. Secondly, to answer the main research question of how the study population negotiate in urban public space, it is essential to explain and display how space looks like. For those who are not familiar with China or Chinese cities, their impressions and presumptions of Chinese urban public space might be lack of comprehension or biased. Photography is a straightforward tool that directly shows the audience how space looks like and how people is living in it. By attaching pictures to the research thesis, not only readers would get a more unobstructed view of the space, but also the stories could be told in a more understanding way. Thirdly, since this kind of story is always easy for participants to tell in detail, this section is set as the third part of the interview (only after opening questions and the section of homosexual identity development). In this way, the researcher can further build up rapport with interviewees, which could smooth the interview process and potentially help the researcher gain more valuable data to answer research questions better.

3.3 Data collection

Range from 42 minutes to 87 minutes, 20 interviews are conducted for this research in total, which was initially planned as around 15. The most important reason for this modification is that new information was still popping up. Besides, more people contacted the researcher and showed their strong interests when several interviews were already conducted, which cheered the researcher up to continue collecting valuable data with more interviews.

All interviews are conducted under instructions from an interview guide, which is designed by the researcher and derived from related literature and theories discussed previously in the theoretical framework section. Most questions in the interview guide are asked and answered, except those irrelevant ones to some interviewees according to their status and experiences (i.e. questions about experiences of hanging out with boyfriends are left out from interviewees who claim in the beginning that they never have one). On the other hand, further questions are asked if there is interesting information in their previous answers which they did not explain more details. Meanwhile, probes are used to establish rapport and provoke more detailed information.

To ensure interviews to be conducted smoothly without missing any essential questions or carrying unnecessary ones, the interview guide was revised multiple times with suggestions from different people, including the researcher, the supervisor and pre-interviewees who volunteered to the pilot test section. Revises includes deleting irrelevant questions, specifying vague questions, categorising questions by topics, organising topics coherently and logically. The final interview guide consists of 6 sections, which are opening questions, homosexual identity development, urban public space and its heteronormativity, negotiations, homosexual life patterns and closing questions. An introduction is read before each interview, including research objectives, research focus, basic information of the researcher, the length of the interview, the available language(s) and the topics, followed by several ethical issues.

All interviews are audio-recorded as the research acquired confirmation and approval from each participant. All pictures are seemingly collected under the same premise. A laptop and a telephone are used for the audio record so that each interview has at least two records. In this way, potential interruptions caused by technical problems such as battery off or excessive noises could be avoided.

The transcription process begins as soon as the first interview was done to assure that detail information could be captured as much as possible. The transcription of the first interview is manually conducted, which is instead time and energy-consuming and therefore, ineffective. The rest interviews are transcribed by Xunfeitingjian (an online transcription platform that supports Chinese) and further manually revised by the researcher. After that, textual data is analysed before translated rather than the other

way round to keep native phrases, slangs and Internet languages in original languages. In this way, more obscure and subtle information of the answers remains so that they could be precisely analysed. Besides, with 20 textual documents and around 300 pages of texts in total, it is much more convenient to analyse the data with Chinese than English for the researcher.

3.4 Ethical issues

Ethical issues are carefully handled in this research, not only because it is a qualitative one, but also because most discussions are related to sensitive topics there. During participant recruitment, necessary information of the research project and the researcher are both introduced to all potential interviewees. Besides, it is clarified that all information acquired from participants would only be used for analysis in this research and would not be accessed by anyone irrelevant to this research. Also, all real names of people mentioned during interviews would be replaced by nicknames to ensure the anonymity of the study participants. Based on all these premises, potential participants are then asked to confirm three things. Firstly, he has noticed and understand the whole project. Secondly, he permits the researcher to collect data in a way that they both acknowledged. Thirdly, his participation is voluntary.

Before the interview begins, the researcher emphasises the recording method, the usage and access of research data, the anonymity and confidentiality again to the participant and made sure he has no further questions. During the interviews, questions are asked with rational logic, objective expression and neutral wording. Personal feelings or subjective opinions from the researcher are avoided as much as possible in all the questions, probes and supplementary notes. Meanwhile, response to emotional problems are prepared to better react to the possible negative feelings of the interviewees. For example, some participants show their distress, depression and inferiority when discussing topics like coming out, self-oppression, family oppressions and social discriminations. The researcher, therefore, pauses the interviews and cheers them up with a positive tone and friendly attitude. Contact details of several counselling associations and NGOs that focus on homosexual issues are also prepared in case some participants need professional advice or help that the researcher could not offer as an interviewer.

3.5 Data analysis

The approach to qualitative data analysis in this research broadly follows the principles of grounded theory, which is based on an inductive approach. The grounded theory provides a set of flexible guidelines and a process for textual data analysis that is well suited to understanding human behaviour and identifying social processes and cultural norms (Hennink et al., 2020).

As mentioned above, data preparation before analysis process mainly includes transcription and anonymisation. Textual data was then coded with NVivo 12, professional software for qualitative material coding. Seven diverse transcripts are selected to create an initial codebook. A few codes are later divided, merged, added, deleted or revised according to the rest of the data. Deductive and inductive codes are both created according to the interview guide and the collected data, which completes the whole codebook with opinions from literature, the researcher and participants. Finally, 252 codes are created under seven topics.

Data then was analysed following the process of description, comparison, categorisation and conceptualisation. A thick description (Table 3.1) is firstly developed to describe particular behaviours, processes, broader topics and their contexts mentioned by participants during interviews. The depth, breadth, context and nuance of each is summarised from textual data to build up a detailed description of aspects of each issue. The comparison further refines these issues by clarifying differences from one another and identifying the links among them. Categorisation then groups codes with similar attributes into broad categories that collectively represent a broader concept of issues. Finally, with the process of conceptualisation, data is brought to a more abstract level by being considered as a whole and developed into theories.

Table 3.1 A thick description of the topic ‘homosexual identity’

Aspect	Meaning	Discussion	Related aspect
Being in love	A Participant’s attitudes toward being in love, regardless of his relationship status	Necessity; hope; how much does he believe; how it would develop	Acceptance Self-cognition process
Acceptance	A participant’s attitudes toward being a gay male, regardless of his self-cognition status	How much has a participant accepted this identity so far; influencing factors; what does it bring	Self-cognition process Come out status Characteristic Social status Urban public space utilization prediction
Self-cognition process	The process of a participant discovers his homosexual identity and how he has been dealing with it	When he had special feelings to other males; when he knew the concept of homosexuality; how did he feel; how did his feelings changed or maintained and why;	Being in love Acceptance Come out status Urban public space utilization prediction
Come out status	To whom a participant has and has not come out to	Different strategies he applies to different people (i.e. friends, family, colleagues); further plans of coming out; why	Acceptance Self-cognition process Come out status

4. Result

Before a detailed introduction of topics, the basic information of each participant is presented here to provide a clear first view (see Table 4.1). Among all 20 participants, nine of them are under (including) 25 years old, eleven of them are above (excluding) 25. Four of them are master students; twelve of them have bachelor degrees; three of them are university students; one of them has a college degree. Six of them are students, fifteen of them are at work (1 of them is having a part-time master programme, so he is both a student and a worker). Interviewees work in various industries, from traditional ones like education, finance, automotive manufacturing and real estate, to emerging ones like Internet operation and new media. Two of them are from Guangzhou; twelve of them are from other cities of Guangdong Province; six of them are from other provinces. Seven of them are from bigger cities like Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Zhuhai, thirteen of them are from smaller cities or towns.

4.1 Homosexual identity

Many participants have positive attitudes towards their homosexual identity. For them, it is common for everyone to have multiple identities, and homosexuality is a regular one of them. They claim their high or full acceptance, with some of them directly showing their proud of it, some of them questioning others who do not think so, and some of them mentioning they have been self-accepted for a long time. They also are aware of the different experience brought by homosexuality, believe that no matter positive or negative the experience is, it offers opportunities to live another kind of life. These participants are experiencing the stage of identity pride (Cass, 1979) or are in the transition period between identity pride and identity synthesis (Cass, 1979).

Bao (Interviewee 18, Internet operation, 25): I accept. There is nothing not to take. As they said, it's natural; it's 'born this way'. This is you; this is part of you. Why don't you accept it? Why not?

Alex (Interviewee 7, freelance, 25): I think my life is full of possibilities, which makes me feel quite challenging... To be honest, compared to the heterosexual life that is all about getting married and having children, you know, the life that can be seen through by one glance, I think being a homosexual brings my life a lot more uncertainties, which is quite challenging.

Interviewer: And also are possibilities?

Alex: yes.

Table 4.1 Basic information of each interviewee

Number	Nickname	Age	Education	Occupation	Hometown
1	Potato	22	undergraduate in reading	student	Chengdu, Sichuan Province
2	Egg	24	postgraduate in reading	student	Shantou, Guangdong
3	Tree	24	postgraduate in reading	student	Henan Province
4	Jelly	27	undergraduate	sales	Chaozhou, Guangdong Province
5	Chris	24	undergraduate	doctor	Shenzhen, Guangdong Province
6	Echo	26	postgraduate in reading	student	Shenzhen, Guangdong Province
7	Alex	25	college	freelance	Guangzhou, Guangdong Province
8	Bingo	29	undergraduate	software engineer	Maoming, Guangdong Province
9	Minister	26	undergraduate	administration	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
10	Patchouli	26	undergraduate	consultant	Shaoguan, Guangdong Province
11	Senshi	22	undergraduate in reading	student	Jingzhou, Hubei Province
12	Tio	28	undergraduate	engineer	Shaoyang, Hunan Province
13	Biscuit	27	undergraduate	finance	Dongguan, Guangdong Province
14	Soka	22	undergraduate in reading	student	Jieyang, Guangdong Province
15	Moon	30	postgraduate in reading	project manager	Guangzhou, Guangdong Province
16	Panda	27	undergraduate	advertisement	Jieyang, Guangdong Province
17	Yuanyi	23	undergraduate	real estate	Hengyang, Hunan Province
18	Bao	25	undergraduate	Internet operation	Zhuhai, Guangdong Province
19	Edison	30	undergraduate	media	Shaoguan, Guangdong Province
20	Ryan	26	undergraduate	automotive manufacturing	Chaozhou, Guangdong Province

A few participants also claim they do not care about the concept of homosexuality or even doubt about its necessity of existence. According to Chris (interviewee 5, doctor, 24) and Echo (interviewee 6, student, 26), they do not want to define themselves as a certain kind of people. In their opinions, people should not stick on a label or identity, or derived values or behaviours upon that, and homosexual is one of those labels. They

regard themselves as homosexual males, but they believe that one's current sexuality can only mean his current status. As long as "something's changed", he may put himself into another category.

Meanwhile, there are also several participants claiming that they feel the same as a heterosexual when thinking of their sexuality. Seemingly, they regard it only as a label, but that is all. They do not think their life is or should be different due to their homosexuality. According to the six-stage model of homosexual identity development pathway proposed by Cass(1979), these participants have already come to the last stage, identity synthesis, which means they are capable of jumping out of the binary sexual category of "them and us" and achieve greater congruency.

There also are a few participants agree that their identity cognition is less developed. They are either exploring or hiding, and some of them directly express the negative effect of family and social environment on their identity acceptance. In their opinions, being a homosexual is yet a clear pathway for them to leap forward; there are still puzzles from both the outside world and the inner self waiting for them to solve.

Tio (Interviewee 12, engineer, 28): There is still one problem that remains unsolved: I haven't figured out how to complete this pathway, or how to arrive at the destination. I don't know how to complete my life more gently.

Interviewer: But at present, you can live with your homosexuality?

Tio: Yes, I can.

Senshi (Interviewee 11, student, 22): Actually, the family is an essential factor that makes me wish I am not this kind of person. Actually, in China, marriage may come quite early, so my parents sometimes talk about that. And my grandparents also wish me to get married sooner and have a child. I was brought up by grandparents, so if you are saying that I cannot realise their wishes, that makes me disappointed with myself.

As for their come out status, most participants are at a similar level: they only come out to a specific group of people they know, such as good friends and classmates. These are the two groups that participants would like to show their homosexuality to most likely. However, several participants have not come out to anyone yet except other homosexuals they meet. See Table 4.2 for their come out status as well as relationship status.

Table4.2 Relationship status and the come out status of each interviewee

Number	Nickname	Relationship status	Come out status						
			In general	To parents	To other families	To classmate	To colleague	To good friend	
1	Potato	boyfriend	partly	yes	not mentioned	no	not mentioned	yes	
2	Egg	single	partly	no	partly	no	not mentioned	yes	
3	Tree	single	partly	no	no	no	not mentioned	yes	
4	Jelly	single	partly	no	no	not mentioned	yes	yes	
5	Chris	single	partly	no	no	not mentioned	not mentioned	yes	
6	Echo	dating	partly	no	no	not mentioned	not mentioned	yes	
7	Alex	single	partly	no	no	not mentioned	not mentioned	yes	
8	Bingo	boyfriend	no	no	no	no	no	no	
9	Minister	boyfriend	partly	no	no	not mentioned	not mentioned	yes	
10	Patchouli	boyfriend	partly	no	no	no	no	yes	
11	Senshi	boyfriend	partly	no	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned	yes	
12	Tio	single	no	no	no	no	no	no	
13	Biscuit	single	no	no	no	no	no	no	
14	Soka	single	partly	no	no	yes	not mentioned	yes	
15	Moon	single	partly	partly	partly	not mentioned	no	yes	
16	Panda	boyfriend	partly	no	partly	not mentioned	partly	yes	
17	Yuanyi	single	partly	no	no	no	not mentioned	yes	
18	Bao	single	partly	no	not mentioned	yes	no	yes	
19	Edison	boyfriend	partly	no	no	not mentioned	yes	yes	
20	Ryan	boyfriend	partly	no	partly	not mentioned	not mentioned	yes	

Besides the individual level of identity cognition opinions, questions about their cognition of the whole social group are also asked. Almost every participant uses positive phrases to describe the characteristic of their social group. In their opinions, post-90s is a brave, careless, open-minded group of people with a stronger sense of individuality. Post-90s urban gay men prefer to realise their life goals regardless of the unfriendly social rejection of their homosexuality. Some of them are already in the process of self-awareness, exploring needs with a high or full acceptance of homosexual identity. Besides, they begin to doubt the necessity of the category of sexuality, with some of them claiming that there is no actual difference between heterosexual and homosexual people. Also, like their discussion of individual identity cognition, some participants mentioned the effect of social stress again, saying that post-90s gay men are under double social pressure as being a post-90s and a gay male.

Patchouli (Interviewee 10, consultant, 26): I think post-90s might be more individual, comparing to post-80s. Because post-80s are carrying a heavy burden of the family. Whenever they say something, their first reaction will always be 'how my family will think', they always consider the needs of family.

Moon (Interviewee 15, project manager, 30): I think we are more open-minded. And when it comes to the discussion of rights, choices and lifestyle, we tend to be more assertive... I've met some post-80s or post-70s, and they tend to hide... that results in more marriage fraud cases.

Echo (interviewee 6, student, 26): There is already part of us that are self-awaken, which means they are almost finished of self-cognition process. Actually, there are a lot of us being aware of who we are and what kind of life we want, but they still cannot break away from the social environment, or let's say, they cannot get away from other's gaze.

Another interesting finding is that fewer participants show positive attitudes when discussing the social status of the social group. They tend to believe that their social status is getting better in recent years, but the circumstances are still unsatisfying in general. Also, some participants claim that the solidification of social class is more an essential factor that influences their social status, rather than sexuality. Besides, the ability of hardworking or even appearance is more crucial. Furthermore, it is incomplete to discuss the social status of the social group exclusively as a whole, neglecting the subtle inner differences in many aspects like occupation, education, wealth, reputation and so on. They emphasise the difference among each individual and refuse to outline themselves with flat descriptions that may aggravate stereotypes.

Soka (Interviewee 14, student, 22): I think Internet celebrity has considerable social status, and I mean the economic aspect. I remember something like Survivor theory, says those who can survive and speak out online are standing 'on top of the pyramid'. However, I think most of us are ordinary, we are on average, and this is the real condition. But most people get to know about us by only the 'online survivors', so they don't understand the truth.

Edison (Interviewee 19, media, 30): I feel like (our social status) is the same as others. There are not many differences.

Interviewer: But there are still differences? Is that what you mean?

Edison: Well, considering the current circumstance in mainland China, our social status is more about your wealth and stuff like that. For me, I don't think we are very different from heterosexuals from this perspective.

Participants also express concerns on predictions of their future social status. Although some of them believe that it would be better in the future, most participants are failed to demonstrate predictions with detailed examples or convincing explanations, unlike those who are less positive about the social environment. For the latter, their argument mainly focuses on three aspects. Firstly, political suppression. The Socialist ideology of China is intolerant, at least extremely cautious, to non-mainstream cultures like the sex industry and sexual minority. Such a characteristic is fundamental for communism and Communist Party of China, which makes it barely possible to change in a short period. In a politically dominated country, media is controlled by polity like many other important industries, and it is impossible to speak for a non-mainstream social group directly. Secondly, media regulation. In recent years, especially from 2012 on, regulations on both traditional media (i.e. TV, movie) and social media (i.e. WeChat, Weibo) have become much more strict and unfriendly towards LGBTQ people. For homosexual topics, it is impossible to have an open discussion or formal publication of artwork on traditional media. Homosexual-related posts (i.e. texts, images, videos, articles, debates, comments) are under strict control or limitation on social media utilising keyword censorship, forward and comment restriction, deletion and so on. Thirdly, the ageing population and conservative, traditional culture. Affected by One Child Policy and the increasing unwillingness of having children (one of the impacts of the economic boom and the rise of female education level), China is rapidly shifting to an ageing society. Elderly people with more conservative thoughts have been adding burdens to homosexuals: they are more likely to have prejudice and discrimination towards gay people, refuse to admit their existence, claim the exclusive correctness of heterosexuality and use Confucianism-dominated culture to support such opinions. On the other hand, homosexual young men under the cultural pressure have to deal with

their aged parents or even grandparents on cultural values such as filial piety that is emphasised by Confucianism (Hwang, 1999).

Echo (interviewee 6, student, 26): It's about our ideology. Our country has always been rejecting non-mainstream cultures.

Edison (Interviewee 19, media, 30): They say the circumstance is getting more opened and better, but if you look into details you'll find more control... there are information and behaviours that are available to be discussed freely five or ten years ago but not now. Pictures, texts and videos, once they are posted, they'll be "Hexie (a network buzzword in Chinese, meaning "being blocked"))".

Moon (Interviewee 15, project manager, 30): You know, nowadays China has an ageing population, right? ... In such circumstance, our space will be further suppressed.

4.2 Urban public space

In the second part of the interview, participants are asked to talk about pictures of urban public space they have been to, as well as experiences and feelings. Following are discussions of places they visit and activities they conduct, together with standards of choice and reasons. It is also in this part that the urban public space in Guangzhou, China can be presented from *their* perspectives, and their negotiation of spatial discourse can be observed.

Most places and activities mentioned are demand-oriented, meaning in their homosexual life, participants' utilisation of urban public space is mostly derived from needs. These places and activities can be roughly divided into two categories: for leisure and entertainment, such as restaurant, cinema, mall, cafe, concert hall, museum and gallery, bar, KTV(karaoke), park, square, amusement park, Internet cafe, playing mah-jong, spa; for work or study: library and bookstore (Figure 4.1). It is then directly supplemented by many participants that they do not think they would visit different places or conduct different activities simply because of their homosexuality, not to mention some of them even question the existence of space that is exclusive for gay community in Guangzhou. They may or may not act differently when hanging out with gay friends or boyfriends, but sexuality is not taken into serious consideration while making decisions. The only subtle difference on the choice of place and activity is that some of them prefer dark places with fewer people around during dates, considering these places are more convenient for intimate behaviours like holding hands and kissing.



Figure 4.1 Book store, taken by Moon (Interviewee 15, project manager, 30)

Correspondently, their standards tend to be more about personal preference. Despite contemporary needs, most participants also prefer to visit places that are more attractive, stylish, comfortable and convenient to access, as well as activities that allow them to have real communication and create memories. Meanwhile, some of them prefer quieter places with fewer passer-by or attentions. Besides the convenience for intimate actions that is previously mentioned, another reason is that they feel safer and freer to have homosexual-related topics with friends there. Some participants conclude these reasons as a desire for a less heteronormative vibe:

Panda (Interviewee16, advertisement, 27): When you are surrounded by people with traditional thoughts, you seem to be a weirdo. But when there are more young

people around you... I mean young people with a sense of fashion and an open mind... you won't think so. Those who think you are a weirdo might be treated like a weirdo in this case... In such an environment, I feel more comfortable.

Here, most participants show a subtle contradiction of them making choices on places to visit: they emphasise interests and personality on the one hand, claiming that their activities should not be differentiated in their homosexual life. Contrarily, they subconsciously act in understatement, avoiding their homosexual identity from being exposed to strangers in public on the other hand. One may argue that there is a gap between pretending as a heterosexual and showing homosexuality without any scruples since he might just happen to be an understated person trying to address as less attention as possible, or not have typical characteristics that would leak out his sexuality from the appearance. However, some participants did mention that they make specific changes in body movements or language on purpose, to cover their homosexual identity in public space, and they are aware of that.

Ryan (Interviewee 20, automotive manufacturing, 26): I took this picture (Figure 4.2) when I was wandering with my boyfriend after dinner. It's a library behind a shopping mall, and there are office buildings and banks around... there was a stage in front of the library with loud music playing and people hanging around. So we went closer and saw these colourful lights and projected images... We took some pictures and videos... So after this picture was taken, we wandered to a square, and there were few people, so we held hands and kissed. We didn't do that in front of the library because it's not acceptable for everyone.

Yuanyi (Interviewee 17, real estate, 23): This is the subway (Figure 4.3). You can regard it as a common scene in the subway. Most of the time, when I hang out, I take the subway...

Interviewer: What did you do there?

Yuanyi: We were just talking.

Interviewer: With so many people around, what did you talk about?

Yuanyi: Something about daily life, I guess. And something about my relationship stuff, but in an understated way. I avoided words that are related to gay, you know, words that make people think I am gay. For example, I didn't say "my boyfriend", I said "my partner".



Figure 4.2 Library and front space, taken by Ryan (Interviewee 20, automotive manufacturing, 26)



Figure 4.3 Subway, taken by Yuanyi (Interviewee 17, real estate, 23)

Another finding is that participants have various levels of understandings towards the heteronormativity of urban public space. Some of them, especially those who are older, less educated or with less acceptance on their homosexual identity, acknowledge and get used to such heteronormativity and obey the social norms and values it derives. During interviews, these participants unconsciously use the word “normal” for many times when describing places, activities or other objects. For example, they use “normal place” to illustrate that they do not visit gay bars; they use “normal body movements” to emphasise that they do not hold hands or kiss when hanging out with homosexual males; they use “normal couple” “normal people” “normal life” to refer heterosexual couple, people and their life. They also report experiences of being discriminated or are coping with self-cognition issues, but they tend to have a sense of pity and unfair for it and live with that, refusing to take further reactions on such dissatisfaction.

Contrarily, those who have a stronger awareness of the heteronormativity in urban public space prefer to challenge the social norms to achieve a higher level of identity cognition. They are more likely to ignore potential attention and discrimination from passer-by, colleagues or classmates, believing feelings and needs of themselves deserve respect and care. Instead of words like “normal” or “regular”, they prefer to use “common” and “ordinary” to refer to heterosexuals or other sexualities. In their opinions, urban public space is already heteronormative, but it does not mean that it would be solid forever, and they do not have to obey it. It is more important to claim rights in a way, either violent or gentle, and it is more meaningful to involve others with their behaviours.

Tio (Interviewee 12, engineer, 28): They (homosexuals) are also normal people, and I think they are even better than normal people. And if so, then why would I say no to my (homosexual) identity?

Alex (Interviewee 7, freelance, 25): Like you said, kissing ... usually, those normal people wouldn't kiss in public unless it's a special occasion, right?

Although the study population has to deal with the heteronormativity of urban space in daily life, some participants can still find places that are less heteronormative, or at least friendly enough to tolerant their homosexuality and homosexual behaviours. These places might have other functions and are not built exclusively for the sexual minority. Still, their properties or utilisation makes them possible for gay people to naturally express the homosexuality without heavy mental burdens and therefore, can offer a different kind of experience and feeling to them.

Tio is from a small city and works as an engineer in Guangzhou. His favourite gym is SuperMonkey (See Figure 4.4). He saw posts on WeChat from his gay friends and wondered why it is so attractive to gay people. He found that place enjoyable after a visit and decided to gym only there. He noticed that the gym is not exclusively for gay because he saw heterosexual girls and heterosexual male coaches there. He said he does not care if others know he is gay, and he feels free to talk about homosexual-related topics. He said he has encountered many gay men there who are fearless to come out with each other directly. There are two reasons why he feels comfortable there. Firstly, many gay men are visiting this gym, which makes him feel company by similar kind of people. Secondly, all coaches are young people with an open mind, welcoming customers with every sexuality, and he even heard that the founder of this gym is also gay. In his opinions, this gym is the most comfortable place for him to relax and be himself. He believes that it is more like a homonormative space than a heteronormative one.



Figure 4.4 Gym, taken by Tio (Interviewee 12, engineer, 28)

Panda works in an advertisement company and has a boyfriend for years. He considers his office as the most relaxing public space to express his sexuality. He mostly makes gay friends in the company, ranging from clients, colleagues to subordinates. Panda also feels free to talk about homosexual topics in the office with others. He admits that he feels restricted to have intimate actions with his boyfriend in other public space, but they can do that there. Since he is usually busy in the office, his boyfriend comes by to visit him from time to time, waiting for Panda to get off work or bring him some snacks. He does not feel heteronormativity in this place at all, but a “subtle balance” space instead. His colleagues also believe that people who think homosexuality is unacceptable are too conservative, which is also an encouragement for Panda to be himself in the office.

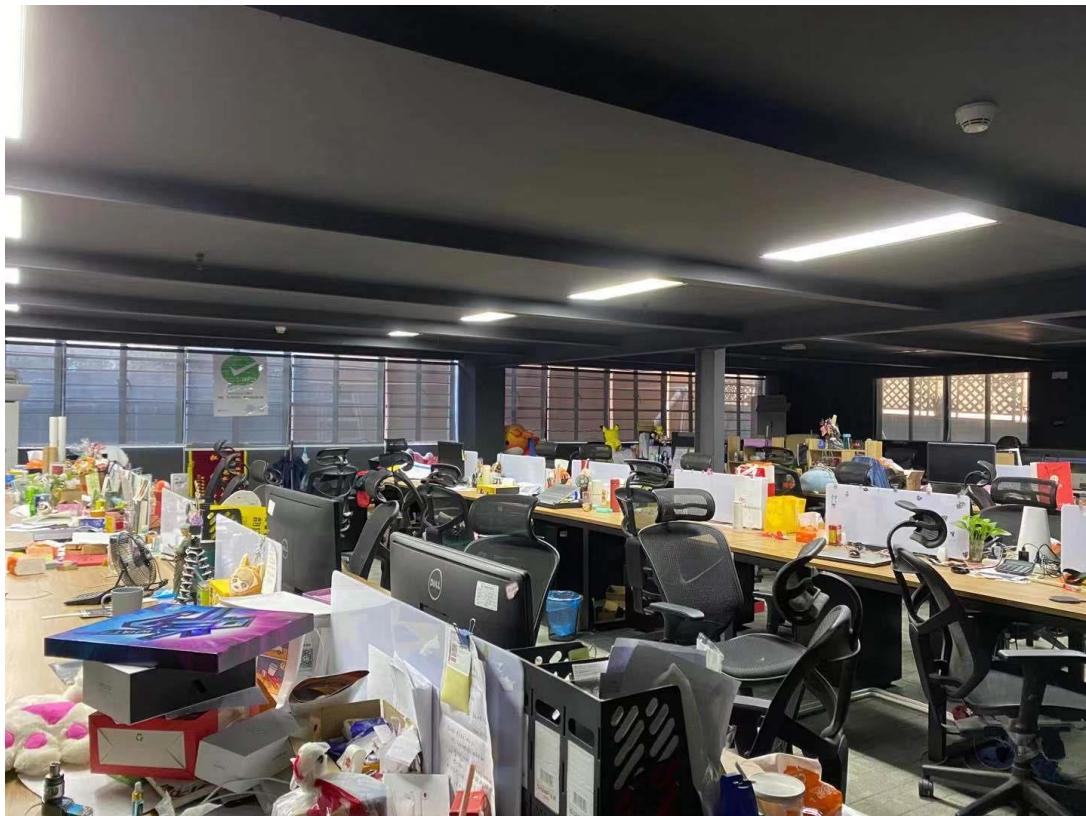


Figure 4.5 Office, taken by Panda (Interviewee16, advertisement, 27)

However, such tolerant places are not opened to every citizen and therefore are more like semi-public space (Newman, 1972) rather than public space. The gym and office mentioned by interviewees are opened to specific clients, members and workers, who are the critical creator of such a gay-friendly atmosphere. In other words, the existence of such space cannot directly reduce the heteronormativity of urban public space but is more like an understated mediation for homosexuals who are less capable of fighting against the unfriendly social environment directly.

4.3 Negotiation

As a gay male, one might leak out his homosexuality in public space by specific behaviours such as kissing another male or by visiting certain public places such as gay bars. How should one make his decisions of what to do and where to go in his homosexual life? How does he feel about public space differently when he is along, with heterosexuals and with homosexuals? How would these decisions and differences influence him and also the space he visits? These are the daily negotiation that the study population of this research is facing. Although most of them might already have got used to such a life pattern and developed mechanisms to cope with it, this negotiation is still affecting their life and values in many aspects, and meanwhile, shaping the urban public space. Therefore, it is crucial to clarify the process and consequence of such negotiations, in order to figure out how post-90s urban gay men develop their homosexual identity through their daily practices and what does it have to do with the urban public space they live in.

Several behaviours in public were firstly discussed with participants, including holding hands, kissing, bending an arm on other's shoulder, feeding food when dining in restaurants, wearing couple suits (meaning two homosexual males wear suits with same or similar patterns or colours to indicate their intimate relationship) and having sex in public. Their attitudes towards such behaviours are various, which can be categorised as unacceptable, passively acceptable and actively acceptable.

Most of their attitudes towards homosexual behaviour in public fall in the category of unacceptable, yet their reasons are not all homosexuality-related. For example, when it comes to the public behaviour of kissing another male, participants are more likely to have negative feelings, such as being awkward or uncomfortable. However, they claim that it is more because they consider kissing as a private behaviour that people, regardless of their sexualities, should not do in public at all. They also claim that they dislike the behaviour itself only because they are shy or prefer not to leave an impression of showing off in public. Besides kissing, behaviours like having sex in public are also out of their list for sexually unrelated reasons such as illegality and feeling unethical or ashamed for it.

On the other hand, the homosexuality-related reasons for them to not act intimately in public are mainly the fear of being spotted and judged, or the seldom observed similar behaviours by other gay men. It is interesting to notice that participants are used to identify themselves by comparing their behaviours and values with others around. Regardless of their difference in self-cognition status, they tend to make decisions after careful observation of others in public space and eliminating potential discrimination. Here, the conservativeness of socio-cultural environments forces them to sacrifice needs to fit in the majority, and further results in more unfriendly urban public space.

Potato (Interviewee 1, student, 22): As for kissing, (I) might not do that. I mean, I won't do that on streets even if I am straight. I think it has nothing to do with sexuality, for me, kissing in public is like showing off... They are expecting others to say "wow, they are really into each other", stuff like that. But for me, holding hands is already enough.

Interviewer: This is interesting.

Potato: Is it? Well, people have different thoughts. Some of them are willing to show it out, but others are living with a different culture. European may kiss on streets and think it's common, but for me, that's off my needs.

Moon (Interviewee 15, project manager, 30): I, myself, have no guts to (kiss) in public space, with a feeling of all eyes on me. Plus I've been in Guangzhou for years, yet I didn't see any homosexuals having intimate behaviours in public... This is quite a pity for me...

Interviewer: Other behaviours are also out of your list?

Moon: You mean public sex in changing rooms? I think it'd better not. Not even for homosexuals, heterosexuals shouldn't do that either.

Interviewer: You think this is another level?

Moon: Yeah, it's about legality.

The rest of participants tend to passively accept homosexual behaviours in public, which means they do not honestly or exclusively follow the desire of having intimate behaviours, but building their decisions more on the external environment. For instance, they only have intimate behaviours when their partners ask so, when the atmosphere of space is less heteronormative or when behaviours are vague enough for them to make excuses. These attitudes are frequently seen in the discussion of feeding food in a restaurant, wearing couple suits and holding hands in public. Take holding hands as an example, many participants claim that this is one thing they would do in public, but they have their ways: some say they do that when walking in quiet alleys rather than busy sidewalks; some say they worry much less when they travel to other cities where no one recognises them; some say it does not have to be "finger lanced" and holding one or two fingers only gets them less uncomfortable attention from others.

Patchouli (Interviewee 10, consultant, 26): Of course, I would hold his hand in a cinema... and when we are at somewhere with fewer people, I am more likely to hold his hand, too.

Egg (Interviewee 2, student, 24): There was only once. It was in my university; there weren't many people around because it was during winter vacation. And then I held his hand for once.

Another behaviour – bending an arm on other’s shoulder – could also be regarded as a passive solution applied by participants. It is an inductive topic, rather than a discussion prepared in the interview guide by the researcher. After throwing out their opinions towards holding hands in public space, many participants talk about this alternative strategy they apply to replace the “over intimacy” of the former one. In their opinions, females can hold hands in public space to show their close friendship, but it is wired for males to do so. Meanwhile, bending an arm on someone else’s shoulder is a prevalent behaviour among heterosexual males with close friendships, and some participants decide to use it as a cover so that they can successfully deliver feelings and emotions to their partners without causing unnecessary suspicion or other negative reactions from heteronormative others. This kind of behaviour can be regarded both as a compromise to the heteronormative urban public space and a kind of self-oppression of gay people on their needs. The more this strategy is applied, the less exposure of homosexuals would be. This invisibility of homosexuals (and other sexual minorities) in a city would cause negligence on their social status, resulting in a less sexually diverse and more heteronormative urban public space.

Tio (Interviewee 12, engineer, 28): The only acceptable behaviour in public space for me is ... I put my arm on your shoulder like close friends, and we talk and laugh. Or the most intimate one is I sip my drinks and then pass it on to you.

Interviewer: Do you think people would know you are homosexual base on that?

Tio: No.

Interviewer: Is that the reason why you would do so?

Tio: Yes, because they are vague.

Some participants prefer to care less about the environment and more about actual needs. In their opinions, additional attention from strangers cannot cause substantial damage to them when being in public space, neither physically nor mentally. On the contrary, they believe it is essential and delightful to display different sexualities in public space to increase the diversity of society. Some of them even prefer to challenge the heteronormativity by “kissing harder” or “holding tighter”. In general, they are also less likely to be affected by the unfriendly vibe of public space.

Soka (Interviewee 14, student, 22): Because I don’t care much about others’ opinions, and I think these attentions won’t bring me real damage.

Potato (Interviewee 1, student, 22): But I am fine if I am spotted because firstly, I don’t know them. It has nothing to do with them when I am holding someone’s hand. Secondly, I think it’s nice to show more people that there are more and more of us expressing our love (in public). Isn’t that a good thing? So I’m okay with that.

After the discussion of behaviours, participants talk about their choices among visiting public places that may leak out their identity. Places like gay bars (Figure 4.6), gay cruising, pride parade and homosexual-related volunteer activities are included. The latter two are categorised into “place” rather than “activity” because people need to visit certain places to conduct related activities, and being there is already possible to be regarded as homosexual by others. In this part, alike their attitudes towards homosexual behaviours, participants’ acceptance of homosexual places can be roughly categorised as unacceptable, passively acceptable and actively acceptable. However, their attitudes towards places are more binary than that towards behaviours, which means participants tend to consider the discussed places as either highly unacceptable or highly acceptable. They make further explanations of that from both the individual and the socio-environmental aspect, which would be presented in the following



contents.

Figure 4.6 Gay bar, taken by Bao (Interviewee 18, Internet operation, 25)

Again, participants emphasise the importance of personal preferences and personality here. Take gay bar as an example, for those who do not visit there, living in a conservative society with few homosexual-friendly places does not mean that they have to grab every opportunity and participate in. They prefer to stick with their aesthetics and insist their standards. For some of them, the gay bar is a “boring” place with “cheap alcohol” and “too loud music”, which is “crowded with sex-oriented” people and totally “out of their needs”. Seemingly, reasons for refusing to join voluntary activities or pride parade could simply be “being lazy” or “it is too boring”. Meanwhile,

others who visit gay bar also have personality-related reasons. For example, to “relax”, to “have fun”, to “make friends” or to “satisfy the curiosity”.

The rest of them instead emphasise homosexual-related reasons. For them, the concern of identity exposure is the strongest resistance for visiting homosexual places, even though they have already shown interests in participation. Apart from that, the societal significance is also important. Joining in a pride parade might be meaningful for some of them to fight for equal rights, but could rather be meaningless for others who think they are too powerless to overcome political and cultural resistance, or to be reported by media and heard by the rest of society.

Furthermore, some participants claim that if there will be pride parades in Guangzhou, it means the social environment must be friendly enough to tolerant the existence of such activities in public space, and the place for parade must be less heteronormative and more homonormative to tolerant their exposure. Contrarily, there are also participants who are less confident, claiming that the unguaranteed space vibe would still hold them back from joining a parade. Apparently, these homosexual-related reasons range from individual level to social level, but they all point out participants’ consideration on the property of space and their relationship with it when deciding on homosexual places to visit.

Ryan (Interviewee 20, automotive manufacturing, 26): For instance, if my co-worker or someone from my company sees me, they might not be able to accept that. So there might be some potential negative influences on my job or life, I guess. So if there is a pride parade in Guangzhou, I might not go there.

Echo (interviewee 6, student, 26): I don’t think such things would improve our social status, at least in mainland China... There was a lot of homosexual association in universities, but they were all disbanded with just one policy (from the government)... You can’t fight against a country as an individual. If you are going to fight as a member of an organisation, to make your announcements, then I’ll say I don’t see the point. But if one day, when my participation would surely help the improvement of recognition of homosexuality in this country, then I would go. But at least not now.

Moon (Interviewee 15, project manager, 30): It seems like when there are a lot of us together, I worry less. I feel braver. But if there is only one or two of us, then no. It feels like when gathered together, we claim our position. And you feel total okay to express yourself, to tell others who you are. But as soon as it gets fewer people... this feeling would fade away, too.

Interviewer: So when you and your friend or boyfriend are walking on streets or in a shop, you feel like the space around you is dominated by heterosexuals?

Moon: Yeah, it feels like their territory.

Gay cruising, together with other public space utilisation patterns that are frequently observed in Western countries, was not mentioned by any participants during interviews, unless the researcher asked them. Unlike other international cities such as Toronto, San Francisco, Berlin or Amsterdam, there is neither homosexual neighbourhood has been founded, nor homosexual pride parade has been held in Guangzhou up to date. The researcher tries to collect attitudes towards gay cruising places such as parks and male public toilets, but nearly all participants (19 out of 20) claim that they have never heard of it or been to any. Some of them even do not know the concept until the researcher explained. Also, the only participant who had been to a cruising place says that he only went once and it was in his high school in another city.

In general, cruising place is unaccepted by any participants, and their reasons vary. Few people show their understandings of the existence of such places. They argue that there are different social classes among homosexuals, and some of them are more marginal and disadvantaged than others since they have less social resources. They might be less accessible to the Internet or dating applications because they are aged or less educated. They might be unable to afford the cost of visiting certain homosexual places such as gay bars and have to satisfy needs more economically. For participants who respect the existence of cruising places, the main reason for not visiting there is more likely to be “out of my need”. As for the many rests of them, it is difficult not to criticise such places, and they list out reasons in several aspects. Hygienically, cruising place is usually dirty and unhealthy that is not an ideal space for homosexual behaviours. Ethically, sexual behaviour is usually taken place in a cruising place. However, it is unethical to have sex in any public space, regardless of one’s sexuality. For safety reason, one is dangerously exposed to unknown strangers when visiting a cruising place. It is possible to get stolen, robbed or threatened with his homosexuality by others, or cause himself infectious diseases when having sexual behaviours. In the identity aspect, one may also leak out his homosexual identity if he is seen visiting a cruising place.

Despite all these aspects, it is also interesting to notice that some participants consider cruising places as space that they do not have any sense of belonging, and regard visiting such places as “self-humiliation”. Their consideration is way beyond personal preference, identity exposure or spatial property. They bring it up to the level of ethic, health and safety, which are factors that seem to be much more important to consider with priority.

Potato (Interviewee 1, student, 22): Because that kind of (sexual) social

environment is not what I need. I mean, my social life can be satisfied by current social approaches, so I don't need to look for other ones. But I don't criticise or discriminate them.

Interviewer: You think they are looking for something?

Tio (Interviewee 12, engineer, 28): I don't "think" they are, I am 100% sure! ... First, it's unhealthy. Second, it's dangerous. And third, what are you? Like a "Ji" (directly translated as "a chick", meaning female prostitute in mandarin)? Like a "Ya" (directly translated as "duck", meaning male prostitute in mandarin)? Why do you have to put yourself in such a low position?

Interviewer: So you don't agree or understand such places or behaviours?

Tio: No! I think this is so "low" (an Internet buzzword in Chinese, similar to "cheap" in spoken English)! I criticise that a lot! Low!

Following discussions on homosexual activity and place, participants then have a summary of attitudes in interviews. Basically, all of them admit influences of both the individual aspect and the environmental aspect. For those who have higher acceptance on their homosexuality, their need and personality are put in the front; for those who are still exploring their identity or suffering from the lower acceptance, the resistance of unfriendly social environment, conservative culture, unsupportive parents and family are more emphasised. Among them, the unfriendly social environment has been mentioned most often with their negative experiences. In the urban space they utilise for daily life, they receive all kinds of intolerance, discrimination and negligence from their family, co-workers or even strangers on the Internet. They are both rightly violated and mentally hurt and have to digest them understatedly without enough care or support from the government or society. They are also disciplined to obey the heteronormative social norms by hiding their sexuality, adding more heteronormativity to urban space which already lacks exposure of homosexuals or other sexual minority.

4.4 Space utilisation

Chinese young homosexual's choice of activity and place for daily life is lack of attention. Nevertheless, another important aspect of post-90s urban gay men's life is their dating and social mode, which is also worthy of being studied. It has already been noticed that more young homosexuals in China rely on digital space to meet social needs, but there are still details to investigate before drawing a picture of it without blur or bias. To realise that, several questions were asked during this research. For example, which methods do they respectively use to make friends online and offline? How is the process? Which one do they regard as more critical, rely more on or prefer than another? What are the functions of both kinds of space in their opinions? How do they evaluate

that? In the following contents, their answers would be presented with essential detailed interpretation and figures.

There are several methods to make friends on the Internet and in real life. Most participants would use more than one method, usually a combination of online and offline methods. For online methods, most participants use dating applications to make gay friends. Blued and Aloha are the most popular applications among them, as they are also the biggest Apps with most active members (Benpaode KK, 2017) on the Chinese market. These dating applications allow users to post pictures and other information, sending instant messages after being matched with each other, and creating group chats under specific topics or sub-cultures. Besides that, some participants also make gay friends on other social media that is not designed exclusively for gay people, such as Instagram, Tiktok, Weibo (similar to Twitter), even mobile games or Taobao (a shopping application). Some participants use WeChat group chat as a tool. There are various ways how they join group chats, but they are all set up with specific themes. For example, they create a fans group chat of a concert of a singer, or a video game group chat that allows them to have audio calls while playing games.

As for offline methods, the most often mentioned one is a friend of them invites other gay friends to a party or for some activities such as dining or playing mah-jong. Since they all know about each other's sexuality, it is convenient for them to become friends. Another situation is that participants may have classmates or colleagues that are also gay, and they come out to each other or discover his sexuality by specific signal he releases or information he shares.

According to participants' description, their processes of making friends online and offline are both concluded in the following figures (see Figure 4.7 and Figure 4.8). For many participants, although making friends online brings them more convenience on the one hand by reducing limitations on time and space, it also adds complication and difficulty for them on the other hand to discover one's real personality. Many of them would also become silent online contacts or strangers in the end. People feel free to contact each other as they share the same interests on specific topics, without worrying personal information being leaked out or their homosexuality being judged or attacked. However, the multiple-choice of the Internet, as well as its high anonymity, result in a higher arbitrariness during this online process. Connections are more likely to fade away, and relationships are more likely to be less cherished since it is always easy to meet someone else.

As for offline methods, participants usually do not resist having contacts with other homosexuals brought by their friends. Seemingly, they tend to be friendly to other homosexual classmates or colleagues in real life. Since they already have contacts in person and might have known each other's basic information, participants feel easier to

find out whether they are matched in personality and to maintain connections. The most apparent disadvantage of making friends offline is the difficulty to figure out whether one is homosexual or not since gay people tend to act like a heterosexual in public space, and even refuse to admit their sexuality when they are asked.

Although there are multiple methods to make friends, and theoretically, there should not be many differences since they all share the same purpose, most participants still have preferences. For those who prefer making friends online, their choices are more personal. For example, they might be too shy to start a conversation in reality before acquiring enough information about others; they dislike attending to parties or bars, or they are still students without enough income to support their dates frequently. Several participants believe that it is safer to make friends online due to the anonymity. In their opinions, chatting online does not require detailed personal information, and therefore it is barely possible to leak out their sexuality to other heterosexuals they know in real life. Even though hanging out with other homosexuals offline seldom makes them recognised, they still worry about the minimal possibility. On the other hand, for those who prefer to make friends offline, they emphasise the importance of real communication on the maintenance of friendship, claiming that it is impossible to maintain a friendship without seeing each other in real life ever. And people tend to be more honest in reality since it is easy to tell if someone is lying in front of them.

Apart from these binary preferences, some participants acknowledge the equal importance of both kinds of space and believe that they are functionally different only. Specifically, they argue that they have different utilisations of digital space and geographical space in homosexual life – the former is for building up new connections, and the latter is for friendship maintenance. In other words, digital space offers more opportunities, allows them to get prepared for real communication in geographical space; and geographical space is where they examine their feelings and affection on each other to figure out how much the relationship could develop. They rely on digital space but value the geographical space at the same time.

Echo (interviewee 6, student, 26): (I prefer) online. Because it's troublesome in reality. Like parties ... you'll never know whom you'll meet or what is going to happen. I don't like to deal with that, especially when they're out of my control.

Biscuit (Interviewee 13, finance, 27): I prefer meeting in person when it comes to friends. I can't know your real status by online chatting; all I get is what you display or expect me to have. But if we meet in real life, I can feel your emotions and status better.

Tio (Interviewee 12, engineer, 28): I rely more on the Internet for making friends because it's hard in reality. If I don't use any dating app, I can't make any friend, I don't know anyone of this group. So they are both indispensables... But I rely on real space because we can't be together by just chatting online.

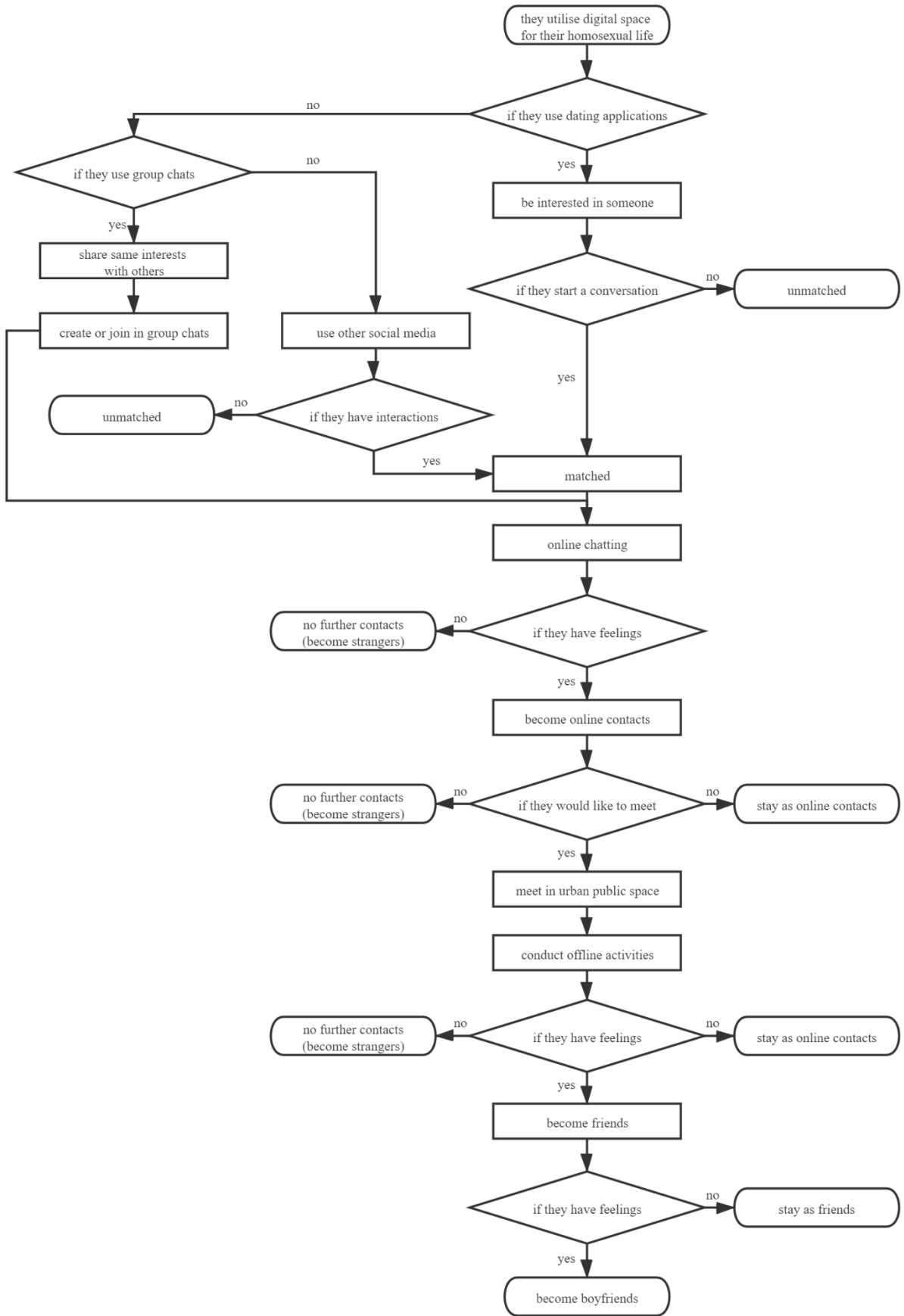


Figure 4.7 Participants' process of making homosexual friends online

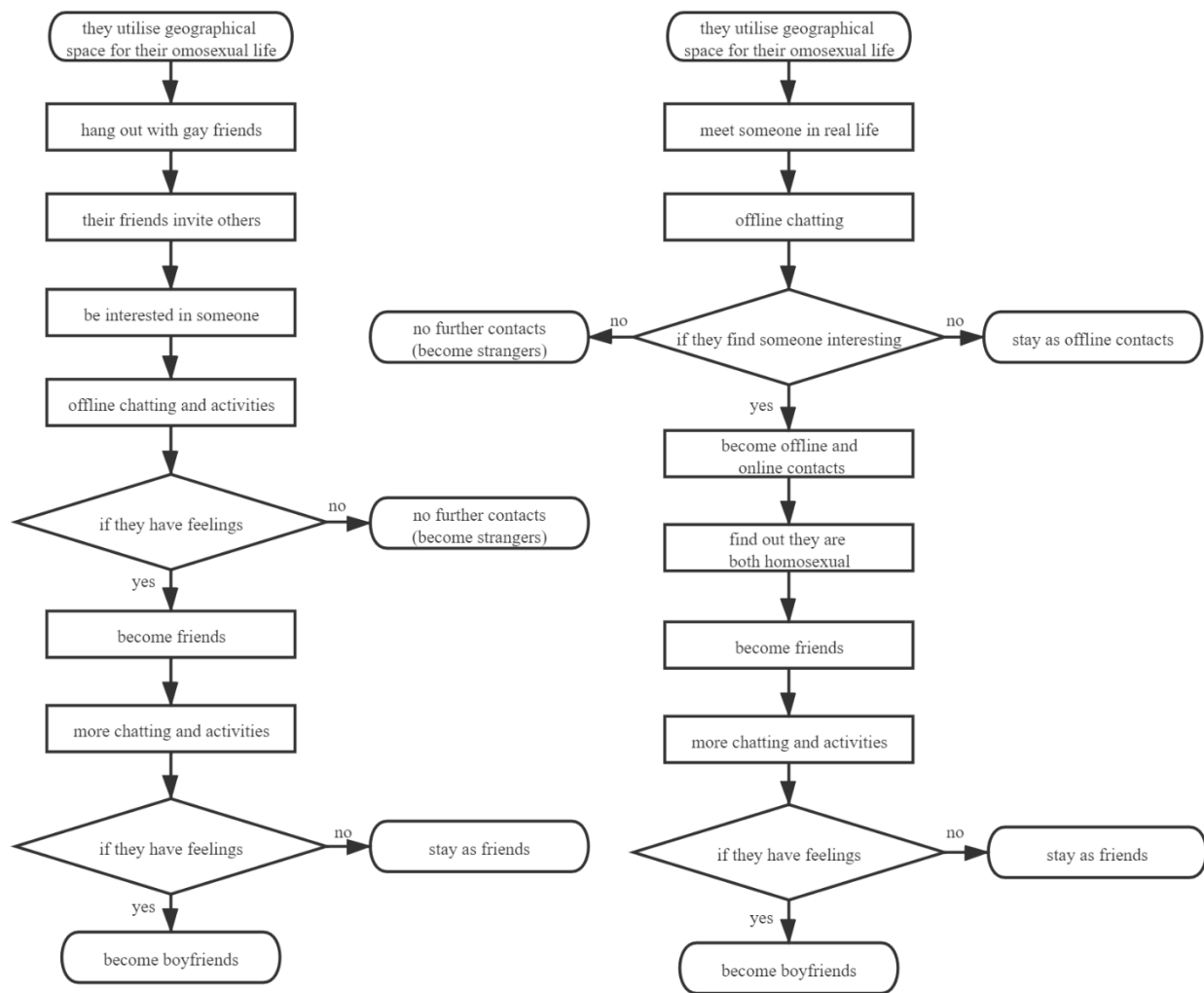


Figure 4.8 Participants' process of making homosexual friends offline

Participants are also asked to make a comparison between the function of digital space and geographical space in homosexual life. It turns out that they tend to regard the Internet as space to freely display personality and sexuality without extra burdens, while utilising public geographical space to mark their real-life trace and to create meaningful connection and memory as the continuum of digital life. For most of them, being a post-90s urban gay man enables them to combine advantages of both kinds of space – the relatively free and tolerant atmosphere of digital space and the genuine authenticity of geographical space. They know how to make different uses of spaces so that needs can be satisfied without suffering from too much resistance in conservative heteronormative urban public space.

Biscuit (Interviewee 13, finance, 27): They are connected. Anyway, digital space is my tool to meet people, and real space is a platform to take a further step on the relationship.

Tree (Interviewee 3, student, 24): Digital space is more like offering chances to meet people. I think friendships will all come back to reality.

Interviewer: Which one did you emphasise?

Tree: The geographical one. I must have real communications with close friends. As for purely online relationships, I really don't have a feeling that we are close. I think they are difficult to maintain.

Chris (Interviewee 5, doctor, 24): The Internet is the beginning of everything because you can't just randomly say "hi" to a stranger on streets or what. And since I am not in a university anymore, I have fewer contacts with it or voluntary activities. So currently, the Internet is my only tool to start any kind of relationship. And real space is like an examination. For those I don't have any feeling, I'll pass after one meeting. If we feel right about each other, that's pretty good.

4.5 Consequences

As homosexuals, gay people apply different strategies as consequences of negotiation with urban public space when developing homosexual identity. One's strategy might differ in times since his values might change by the improvement or regression of social environment. However, his strategy is a statement of his current attitude, as well as his response to urban space. The following tables display the consequences of negotiation of each participant, which consist of several strategies that can be categorised into three groups: positive strategy, including gay marriage, surrogacy, immigration and coming out; neutral strategy, including staying single and cohabitation; negative strategy, including lavender marriage, marriage fraud and identity latency (see Table 4.3). Among these options, eighteen participants claim they would consider positive strategies, seven of them would consider neutral strategies, and seven of them would consider negative strategies. Generally, negative strategies are less considered, as each of them is claimed "out of options" by more than ten participants.

Among all positive strategies, coming out and gay marriage are the most frequently discussed two. Symbolically, coming out is the most acknowledged method to challenge the heterosexual society from the individual level for a homosexual Chinese. Announcing one's homosexuality requires himself to stand out in public, and get prepared for the upcoming resistance from many aspects. Although coming out is widely considered as a plan among participants, it still has prerequisites. For some participants, they need to find the love of their life first, the one that brings them enough company and courage to face all kinds of potential risk. For the others, they emphasise the importance of family, especially parents. It might be unnecessary to come out to everyone they know in life because colleagues and classmates are relationships that usually stay ordinary so that their potential intolerance or discrimination will not mess

Table 4.3 The consequence of negotiation of each participant

Number	Nickname	consequences of negotiation				
		cohabitation	coming out	gay marriage	immigration	surrogacy
1	Potato	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned	yes	not mentioned
2	Egg	yes	not mentioned	no plan	not mentioned	not mentioned
3	Tree	yes	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned
4	Jelly	yes	no plan	no	not mentioned	yes
5	Chris	not mentioned	no plan	not mentioned	yes	yes
6	Echo	not mentioned	yes	no	yes	not mentioned
7	Alex	not mentioned	no plan	yes	not mentioned	not mentioned
8	Bingo	no plan	no plan	no plan	no plan	no plan
9	Minister	not mentioned	yes	yes	not mentioned	not mentioned
10	Patchouli	yes	no plan	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned
11	Senshi	yes	no plan	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned
12	Tio	not mentioned	yes	no plan	not mentioned	not mentioned
13	Biscuit	not mentioned	yes	yes	yes	not mentioned
14	Soka	not mentioned	yes	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned
15	Moon	not mentioned	yes	no plan	yes	not mentioned
16	Panda	not mentioned	no plan	no	not mentioned	not mentioned
17	Yuanyi	not mentioned	no	no plan	not mentioned	not mentioned
18	Bao	not mentioned	yes	yes	not mentioned	not mentioned
19	Edison	not mentioned	no plan	no	not mentioned	not mentioned
20	Ryan	not mentioned	no plan	no	not mentioned	not mentioned

up one’s self-cognition pathway. However, the attitudes of parents and other family are much more critical, not only because some of them still need their economic support, but also that they regard the acceptance of family as the final mark that completes their self-cognition on the homosexual identity. To achieve that, they usually need careful consideration and perfect plans, and even a backup strategy as a safety net.

Biscuit (Interviewee 13, finance, 27): I might come out to my parents and my brother and his wife after my economic condition is good enough. Other people are out of consideration. I might also come out to close friends before my family... I don’t trust many people. I set the boundary between colleague and friend clearly.

Apart from looking for the right partner and chances to come out, some participants show their interests in surrogacy, moving to another country and gay marriage. In their opinions, homosexuality is more like a label that is attached to them by society, yet they are also regular people seeking a better life like everyone else. They consider these strategies as conventional methods to realise life goals, and should not be judged by any ethical stereotype. For example, they prefer to regard gay marriage as ordinary proof of true love and is simply because they are not officially supported as a gay couple in the domestic law system. Nevertheless, unlike coming out, more participants claim that gay marriage is out of consideration. Some of them even argue that they only value the affection, which cannot be guaranteed or protected by a document. For them, the incomplete law system is undoubtedly a resistance, but the socio-cultural discrimination in daily public space, both geographical and digital one, is something that genuinely discourages them.

Jelly (Interviewee 4, sales, 27): I don't want to make a statement or announcement of my attitudes, or to advocate anything. I think it's just a common status. You are not so different from ordinary people. We don't need a wedding to advocate that I have a partner or what, forcing your family to face with that.

As for negative strategy, participants are more likely to reject them as part of their plan. Among them, identity latency is the most incomprehensible strategy, as many of them even require an explanation from the researcher. Identity latency refers to the strategy that a homosexual cuts off all connections with other homosexuals except his partner (if he has one), and live in an understated way without coming out to others. This term is translated as “Tuiquan” in Mandarin, which means quitting from the homosexual group/circle. For most participants, there are several reasons why they consider such a strategy as incomprehensible. Firstly, it is unnecessary to emphasise the sexuality of interpersonal relationship. People become friends because they share similar values or interests, not because they have the same sexuality. It is the personality that matters, rather than sexuality or other superficial factors like money or appearance. Secondly, the homosexual interpersonal relationship has advantages such as better understanding on emotional issues or sub-cultures, which means one feels more natural to discuss homosexual-related topics with other homosexuals than with heterosexuals, especially heterosexuals that he has not come out to yet. Thirdly, this concept itself is meaningless. As long as one is homosexual, he has to get along with himself, no matter how much he can restrain his communication with other homosexuals. From this perspective, there is no “group” or “circle”, and therefore is logically invalid to quit.

Edison (Interviewee 19, media, 30): Actually, I am confused with such an expression. I don't understand why they still emphasise these things and get themselves stuck while many others are trying to come out and fight against the stereotypes. You said you are "not active in the group", then who downloaded this app for you? Your mom? I just don't get it. I don't buy this concept.

Egg (Interviewee 2, student, 24): That's too boring! You will feel so lonely. Plus, we can talk about a lot of things, not only gay topics. It's not that you are hanging out with a gay so you can only do the gay stuff. I think there is nothing to do with homosexuality. It's completely the same as heterosexual friendships.

Marriage fraud is another unwelcome negative strategy among participants. It means a homosexual marries a heterosexual without informing on his homosexuality. This term is translated as "Pianhun" in Mandarin. This strategy is more applied by post-70s or post-80s homosexual males in China, who are at their middle ages, suffering more substantial pressure from their family and social norms. Such a phenomenon has been noticed, reported and studied by both society and academia in recent years (Zhu, 2018). For participants in this research, marriage fraud is more like a baseline that they will never cross. They are aware of the upcoming pressure on their homosexual identity in the future, but concern more of the negative effects of the strategy. They realise that it is cruel to offload burdens by destroying another person's happiness. And deceiving a female into heterosexual marriage would unfairly violate her rights. Plus, they understand that such marriage cannot solve everything but just the first step to obey parents and would bring up more problems. Issues like having a child, sexual behaviour with the wife, mental pressure caused by pretending as a heterosexual husband every day would keep disturbing them, and any little carelessness might cause them into too many troubles.

Tio (Interviewee 12, engineer, 28): I think it is hurtful for both. I can't be myself or give her the love she wants, that's a tragedy. And why did I say I've considered that before? Because it may happen if my parents force me to. So I think this can be my worst ending.

Interviewer: You think this can also happen to you?

Tio: Very likely, if I don't plan well on myself. Of course, I would try my best to prevent that from happening. I want to plan everything well.

As for lavender marriage, despite that more participants tend to claim they will not apply it themselves, it is still more acceptable among participants compared to the previous negative strategies. This term refers to a male-female mixed marriage that at least one of them is homosexual, and the other one is aware of that. It is translated as

“Xinghun” in Mandarin (the abbreviation of “Xingshihunyin”), which means the marriage is only externally formal for specific purposes such as to conceal the socially stigmatised homosexuality. Many participants worry about the potential legal disputes caused by lavender marriage, claiming that even though it is usually contracted before the marriage, there might still be arguments on property or custody in the future. Plus, like marriage fraud, they have to suffer from the enormous pressure brought by such a dishonest, fake marriage, which is barely possible to maintain for the whole life.

Nevertheless, some participants still consider lavender marriage as a final choice, a strategy that they would apply when there are no better options. For these people, it is a feasible solution to deal with their increasingly severe burdens from their family who urges them to have a child and from the society that regards heterosexuality as the only authentic, pure and natural sexuality.

Edison (Interviewee 19, media, 30): I think the idea is okay, at least it's not marriage fraud. It helps to deal with social pressure and family pressure ...I would have to lie more if I go this way. That's way too tiring. You are making up fake things. Troubles will keep coming, and you'll have to lie on that all the time. Yeah, you are married. But the next step is to have a child. You are postponing problems instead of solving them.

Moon (Interviewee 15, project manager, 30): Lavender marriage has lots of legal risks. I've seen many cases. There are always some parents, either yours or your partner's, who keep adding pressure to you. And then your marriage wouldn't last long; you'll come to the part that you fight for property or custody if you have children. You see, they all become problems, and it's a pure tragedy.

Neutral strategy, including staying single and cohabitation with a partner, is relatively less mentioned by participants. However, when the researcher asked them their plan for future homosexual life in the first place, some of them directly described cohabiting life with their boyfriend as the first answer. For these participants, they would instead build internal space with their partner than to fight against or adapt the unsatisfied external space. In subconsciousness, the future life plan is more of their ideal life on the individual level, which is something that they have more rights to manage with their wills. And it seems like they take cohabitation as the balance point of the negotiation between the heteronormative space and their homosexual identity.

5. Conclusion

This research seek to figure out how post-90s gay men negotiate homosexual identity through daily practices in urban public space in the city of Guangzhou. As this research highlights, post-90s urban gay men are better at ideologically accepting their homosexuality than expressing their homosexual needs by conducting intimate behaviours or visiting homosexual places in urban public space. In other words, they feel it more comfortable to live with homosexual identity without many mental burdens, but difficult to ignore attentions from others in public while negotiating with urban space. Their awareness of the heterosexuality of urban public space is on various levels. However, they point out the negative influences of political ideology, traditional culture and conservative urban social environment on their identity cognition process as well as predictions of their future social status. They tend to have intimate homosexual behaviours in an understated way in public. They also develop a unique method of negotiation, which is to utilise both geographical space and digital space by combining their advantages – the realness of the former and the higher tolerance and better anonymity of the latter. In their opinions, both kinds of space are functionally complementary yet equally important. Based on their negotiation, they come up with various strategies as consequences. Either positive or negative, these strategies are developed under the impact of urban public space and its property.

Several sub research questions are proposed in this research. After an empirical study, they are ready to be answered. The first question is, how do they recognize their homosexual identity and the status of homosexuality. The soaring economy and rapid globalisation process of China since Reform and Open Era has not only improved the living standards of Chinese but also shifted their mind to an opener and more tolerant level. Chinese sexual minority, especially those living in bigger cities like Guangzhou, can better embrace their identity with less negative emotions such as shame and guilt. In this research, post-90s urban gay men tend to have higher acceptance towards their homosexual identity; some of them have even begun to rethink the concept of homosexuality and its necessity. Their progression on identity cognition can be regarded as a result of the progress that urban public space has achieved in tolerance towards non-mainstream cultures. In Case's (1979) words, "such progression is dominated by a personal desire to keep one's self-cognition consistent with the environment he lives in." In other words, the impact of urban public space can be represented as post-90s urban gay men's high acceptance of their homosexual identity.

However, they have less positive actions on come out processes, and are less confident in their future social status due to the politically, socially and culturally intolerant environments. Despite that previous researchers have criticised the linear and

unidirectional process of identity formation summarised by scholars like Case (1979), Troiden (1989) and Brady and Busse (1994), there is a lack of focus on the implication of social and cultural contexts in current research. For respondents of this research – young Chinese homosexuals living with deep integration of globalisation process and Confucian values – the conservativeness of the socio-cultural environment holds them back from struggling for a higher level of self-cognition.

The second question is, how do they make use of urban public space in homosexual life. Like other aspects of their social life, post-90s urban gay men emphasise the importance of individuality during discussions of the cognition of their social group from both inside and outside. Derived from their commonly high acceptance of homosexual identity, post-90s urban gay men tend to consider more of their demands and needs, instead of self-restricting by homosexuality when deciding places to visit and activities to conduct in public space. However, the negative influence of heteronormative urban public space, as well as the intolerant social norms, still hold them back. On the one hand, they emphasise interests and personality, claiming that homosexuality is not seriously taken into consideration. On the other hand, they subconsciously act in understatement to avoid identity exposure in urban public space. For them, the heteronormativity of urban public space is one thing that they have already noticed, but their understandings and reactions vary due to their difference in social statuses and identity cognitions. It can be proved in this research that in heteronormative urban public space, the institution of heterosexuality is often understood as a product of nature and the standard for social arrangements, and is widely and deeply embedded in social institutions (Rich, 1980; Warner, 1993). Furthermore, in such space, the heterosexual relationship is regarded as a superior relationship than the homosexual one, and homosexuals are one of the victims of such a traditional sexual ideology (Wei, 2010). However, previous research on gay people has not paid enough attention to their mismatch between self-cognition level and behaviour pattern. They only focused on the negative impact of such heteronormativity on gay people's behaviour in urban public space.

Thirdly, based on their understanding of urban public space and its heteronormativity, how do they negotiate with it by daily practice? Post-90s urban gay men in this research have less acceptance towards intimate behaviours in public. Specifically, most post-90s urban gay men, regardless of their acceptance on their homosexuality, are less likely to have intimate behaviours in public space actively, yet their reasons are more about the socio-cultural environment than the homosexual identity. Alike others under Confucianism-dominated culture, they are disciplined to be conservative about having intimate behaviours in public or addressing unnecessary attention from others. As a marginal social group, post-90s urban gay men are involved

in the contradiction between homosexual identity and Confucianism-dominated mainstream culture (Liu, 2012), which are fundamentally caused by two types of social identification – filial piety and loyalty (Hwang, 1999). In this research, such contradiction is presented by participants' dilemma between multiple identities. For example, the need for having intimate behaviours in public as a homosexual and the concern of exposure in front of heterosexual others. Such a dilemma is apparent when participants are with people whom they are supposed to obey under traditional cultures, such as parents. These social identifications further set up a series of guidelines, which is different from the Western individualistic pattern (King & Bond, 1985), for post-90s urban gay men to identify themselves and organise social behaviour in a relatively conservative way.

Meanwhile, they are used to acquire their identity by having comparison with others around and are used to make decisions after careful observation in public space, to eliminate as much potential discrimination as possible. Such a behavioural characteristic corresponds to the previously mentioned theories of relational identity and collective identity in Confucianism (Bedford & Hwang, 2003; Ho, 1993). And it helps to explain why many of them prefer to kiss or hold hands in dark places with fewer people around. Moreover, some participants claiming that their behaviours with other homosexuals might differ if the surrounding environment is changed. Precisely, one might dare to hold his partner's hands in a silent alley, but would not do so without observing others when walking on a busy street. He would subconsciously imagine possible reactions from pedestrians and the possibility of identity exposure before taking any actions. In other words, referencing other members of the social collective is one of their methods to clarifying social identity in public space. Also, for those who passively accept public intimate homosexual behaviours, they prefer to have understated ones as a compromise to the heteronormative urban public space. Such a preference is a respond to Hubbard's (2008) argument of the negative impact of heteronormativity on the behavioural choice of homosexual in public space: "the stigmatisation (and even criminalisation) of homosexuality seems to encourage a furtive use of space among non-heterosexuals, who may deny their sexuality except when in closeted or safe spaces."

Post-90s urban gay men utilise multiple methods to build up homosexual interpersonal relationships, and these methods can be applied in not only traditional geographical space but also digital space. More of them are relying on the latter for homosexual life, and have developed a complicated process to make friends online, as the Internet provides more opportunities for encounter and protects them from identity exposure or being discriminated against in real life. However, they also emphasise the importance of geographical space, believing its essential function in maintaining

relationships as it allows people to have more in-depth communications and connections. As post-90s urban gay men, it is difficult to value one kind of space over the other, and they prefer to combine advantages of both – use the Internet as space to freely display personality and sexuality without extra burdens, and use public geographical space to mark real-life traces and to create meaningful connection and memories as their continuum of digital life. Unlike Bumgarner's (2013) argument which regards digital space as a means of augmenting the experience of geographical space, the study population in this research regards both kinds of space as functionally complementary and equally important.

The last sub research question is, how do they decide which strategy to apply as the consequence of negotiation. Among all kinds of strategies, positive ones are more considered than neutral and negative ones generally. However, post-90s urban gay men have their prerequisites for positive strategies. For them, the acceptance of family is usually the final mark that completes their homosexual identity cognition pathway. Therefore, economic independence, emotional support from the lover and a thoughtful plan are essential requirements before they come out to their family.

Meanwhile, compared to the meaning of coming out, post-90s urban gay men care less of that of same-sex marriage, which is also an attitude derived from their higher acceptance of the homosexual identity. Some of them question the concept of marriage, preferring to emphasise the meaning of love in a relationship, regarding marriage as only legal protection for rights. Since homosexuality is more considered as a regular label by them, they regard these positive strategies as conventional methods to realise life goals and should not be judged by any ethical stereotype. Relatively, negative strategies are less considered. For participants, it is unnecessary to emphasise the concept of homosexuality in their life. Therefore, it is meaningless to distinguish the circle of homosexual and quite it in any case. As for marriage fraud and lavender marriage, most people regard them as postponements of the final identity issues, and as incomplete strategies that would bring more problems and burdens.

Discussions of assumptions could also be addressed at this stage. Firstly, some frequently observed patterns of public space's utilisation in Western countries are not easily found in Guangzhou. Most post-90s urban gay men are unfamiliar with the concept of gay cruising. During the research, some of them even criticise it from aspects that vary from hygiene, ethic, safety to identity exposure. They are unfamiliar with other utilisations of space (i.e. gay neighbourhood and space for performances), either. For the study population, gay cruising is more like a marginal method of making friends or satisfying other homosexual needs. Since they have high accessibility to the Internet, where they can organise homosexual life without worrying identity exposure or most other potential risks, young homosexual males tend to exclude this method as it usually

provokes more negotiation in heteronormative geographical public space. As for the reason why there is a lack of gay neighbourhood and space for performance in Guangzhou, since there is no discussion from participants, this research is unable to come up with a concrete conclusion. However, participants' reasons for having negative predictions on the future social status of Chinese sexual minority could help answer the question. For gay neighbourhood and performance space such as pride parade, there are three primary resistances of its development: political suppression, media regulation and the ageing population and conservative, traditional culture. With such unfriendly circumstance, it is barely possible for Chinese gay people to create a homosexual neighbourhood; most pride parades and public homosexual performances are also forbidden.

Secondly, post-90s urban gay men rely on digital space, such as social media applications, to build up homosexual relationships within their private groups. For them, the Internet offers platforms to express sexuality, display personality, share interests and satisfy desires without being judged. It is also the most crucial tool to encounter or look for other homosexuals, which means that their utilisation of digital space is usually the first step to create a new homosexual interpersonal relationship. In digital space, one gets to know much more people than in geographical space, and this is an advantage that post-90s urban gay men can seldom reject. As a result, their negotiation with the public geographical space is reduced. It becomes space to examine digital relationships and a continuum of digital connections. However, such dependence does not weaken the importance of geographical space. For the study population, geographical space is still essential for developing and maintaining homosexual relationships. Although some of their negotiations are transformed to digital space, and they may rely on the Internet, they prefer to value the geographical space in homosexual life equally.

Thirdly, there are several differences between the assumed and the observed pattern of homosexual relationship build-up process among post-90s urban gay men: the observed pattern is more complicated since it contains much more details and steps; there are more possibilities in the observed pattern since it has much more requisites before a relationship is built up; it is emphasised that only a tiny percentage of encounters can finally become relationships such as friendship or love relationship; the sex-oriented process is instead not emphasised by any participants; the presumption of "sex-oriented process online is another way of gay cruising" is not mentioned, either. Indeed, the assumed pattern does not consider subtle possibilities and therefore is unable to describe the process thoroughly. It also shows that post-90s urban gay men set up a series of requisites for the relationship build-up process, and whether they can take a further step or not highly depend on their feelings to each other. For the online process, they have multiple methods to create encounters, which proves that digital

space provides more opportunities for them to meet new people. However, online contacts must go through offline dating before building up deeper connections or moving to the next level. For the offline process, there are fewer choices to organise an encounter, but it is easier to distinguish whether connections can be further developed.

Inspired by the unique contradiction that Chinese post-90s urban gay men have between their homosexuality and the conservative socio-cultural environment, this research seeks to study their daily negotiation in urban public space. This research also aims to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the urban homosexual life of Chinese young homosexual males and their status of identity cognition. There is a mismatch between their higher acceptance of homosexual identity and lower acceptance of conducting homosexual behaviour or visiting homosexual places in urban public space. For the latter, as a compromised negotiation, they prefer to do so in an understated way to satisfy homosexual needs without causing extra exposure in public. Such strategies indicate that post-90s urban gay men are aware of the heteronormativity of urban public space on different levels, as they admit so during the research. Moreover, such heteronormativity has suppression on their identity cognition pathway as well as expectations on their future social status. Another consequence of their negotiation is that they transform part of homosexual social life to digital space, where their homosexuality is less judged or excluded, and where they have higher accessibility to other members of their social group. They rely on digital space to acquire much more resources for homosexual social life as a beginning, examine and develop it by in geographical space as a continuum. In other words, post-90s urban gay men negotiate the homosexual identity with the heteronormative urban public space by combining the advantages of both kinds of space.

With these results and conclusions, this research intends to supplement the humanistic perspective in the study field of urban space and to fill the research gap of post-90s Chinese urban gay men. By studying the negotiation of their homosexual life in heterosexual urban space, this research helps acquire a more comprehensive understanding of how the impact of heteronormative space on young homosexual males is formed and presented in urban public space in China.

There are still questions that remain unanswered in this research. For instance, concepts like gay neighbourhood and performance space are barely mentioned by participants, and the reason for such a phenomenon is left to be studied. It would be interesting to have further research on this topic by not only investigating Chinese urban public space and social environment but also comparing that with Western society. Also, the relation between online cruising and ordinary cruising is worthy of being further studied. Most participants in this research express strong disagreement on cruising places for ethical and hygienical reasons. However, many of them admit using dating

applications for short time sex. Why do they reject the traditional cruising but agree on the latter? For which reasons do they judge them differently? Which role does urban public space play during their comparison and decision? These are questions that remain to be explored. Furthermore, digital space has been regarded as less heteronormative space by participants. However, there is still a lack of comprehensive knowledge of such spatial attributes. How friendly is it? How is it represented? Why is it more friendly than real space? How do young Chinese gay men deal with the remaining heteronormativity since digital space cannot be fully non-heteronormative like other kinds of space?

Meanwhile, this research has limitations due to the lack of time, energy and experience. For example, other social groups could have been involved to complete the research topics by adding opinions from their perspectives. This research only interviewed a small number of young Chinese gay men for data collection. However, some findings and conclusions could have been more convincing if they have supports from other social groups. For example, participants' awareness of the spatial heteronormativity is lack of (dis)agreement from heterosexual people or other sexual minorities. Besides, this research found out that participants rely on comparison with others to acquire their identity in a collective. However, without investigations on other social groups, it is difficult to figure out whether it is a phenomenon only within their social group. Secondly, the research method of photography could have offered a clearer picture of the urban public space of Guangzhou if participants were told to send pictures before interviews. In this way, the researcher was able to check and ask for more photos if they were improper. Thirdly, participant recruitment methods are incomplete. Relying on an informal network and online advertisement to recruit participants led to a result that participants are similar to each other in different aspects, including education levels, hometowns, identity cognition status and social values. Such similarities might unconsciously miss out valuable information from potential participants. Last but not least, the connection between findings in this research and previous literature is a bit loose. However, this research paid a lot of attention to ethical issues during interviews, which could be considered as an advantage. For example, all personal information of participants that might leak out their identity was wiped out to assure anonymity. Besides, participants were asked for permission before audio recording and were informed for multiple times that they could stop the interview whenever they feel like that. Such care provided them with a safe and comfortable environment to express feelings and opinions, which provoked more valuable data.

6. References

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