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LGBTQ+ in China A report studying the recent decisions of the Chinese government on the LGBTQ+ community. How Far Does It Have To Go?

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The LGBTQ+ community in China did not have the most tolerant experience in the country during the modern times. Although historical records suggest that there have been ample examples of sodomy, cross-dressing and one gender living as the other and in between, the modern days have seen everything from ban on LGBTQ+ contents to conversion therapy. In July 2023, the Chinese government shut down the last LGBTQ+ centre in Beijing, earlier in May, they banned the LGTBQ+ couples from adopting children joining Russia in the process. There have been multiple bans and scrutiny on LGBTQ+ contents in media, with censorship growing only stricter through the years. With a very vibrant population, it may not come as a surprise that China has a huge diversity akin to that of India. Several languages, religions, ethnicities in place, Chinese history have had its share of tolerances and intolerances. Naturally, a significant section of the population are the people of the LGBTQ+ community, asking for their rights to just survive among the rest of the citizens. It may come as a surprise that despite such bans, China has a very vibrant legacy of queer literature, both in ancient texts and modern novels, a major chunk of which have a large international audience. In contrast to its neighbour, Taiwan where the community enjoys full legalities with all the privileges, Chinese “Danmei (gay)” and “Baihe (lesbian)” novels come as a forbidden fruit. Sites like Changpei, iQIYI and Jinjiang City Literature (also known as JJWXC) have become major sources for queer contents with apps like Bilibili adapting them into comics and

cartoons (Chinese counterpart of Japanese anime, Donghua). The web-novels gained a huge international following which went up significantly during COVID-19, which led to the international launch of JJWXC site in English and physical licensing and release by Seven Seas Entertainment and Valactea. There have been quite a number of live action adaptations which contributed to the initial popularity of Chinese queer literature among international fans. Some of the earliest can be identified as Chai Ji Dan's Addicted, which not only got the drama banned by the authorities, even the actors were banned from appearing together for a lifetime and individually for a few years for its explicit contents. Similar incidents can be traced from Mo Xiang Tong Xiu's Untamed which got the widely famous site, Archive Of Our Own banned in China due to certain artworks posted. The fandom of the actor Xiao Zhan did entertain such activities towards their idol garnering mass attention from the authorities, leading to ban of the site which caused a public outrage against Xiao Zhan and his fans, leading to a long while of inactivity from the author. The latest hit, Gong Jun and Zhang Zhehan starrer Word of Honour by Priest, was a victim of a similar incident when years old pictures of Zhang Zhehan were discovered in front of Yasukuni Shrine, Japan. The actor was wiped out of existence by the media and his dramas were taken down. It took a while for him to clear his name and get back into the public eye which included his drama being reuploaded on the Youku platform. Certain dramas like Immortality starring Luo Yunxi and Chen Feiyu by Meatbun Who Doesn't Eat Meat, Chasing the Light starring Wang Anyu and Fan Chengcheng by Wu Zhe and Heaven Official's Blessings starring Zhai Xiaowen and Zhang Linghe by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu await airing clearance, reportedly undergoing several scrutinies due to them featuring gay couples. Among such discussions, the fate of the LGBTQ+ people in China remains uncertain due to the growing crackdowns. While the wealthier ones escape or devise other plans to survive, it is getting increasingly difficult for the rather, poorer ones to receive any kind of legal or societal help or support. Culturally, the

elders of the family of the current generations are not woke enough to support their children through their gender or sexuality curiousness, forcing the same societal standards of a model child on their kids. Some of the glaring examples can be seen in the case of Jackie Chan's daughter Etta Ng Chok Lam who was basically cut contacts with and with her wife Andi Autumn faced homelessness due to homophobic parents. As a behaviour not alien to several other countries, this really raises questions of the ideas of perceived normalcy, defying which may warrant child neglect, humiliation, loss of pride of people. Yet despite the disdain, it did not stop people from becoming the largest consumer of China's own Danmei novels. Although Baihe novels could not get as much popularity, Danmei novels have become a sensation among female fans which is now studied as a media phenomenon in several cases. This could be aptly summed up by Cristini (2005, p.9), "no one can tell you for sure whether behind a 'gay novel' there isn't a heterosexual Shanghai housewife." which also shed light on the anonymity bought by bizarre pen-names of the author used for safety from the authorities. While some authors like Mu Gua Huang (author of Fake Slackers) are very open about their identities, it is difficult to trace back most of the authors. The huge female following are sometimes attributed as a desire to break free from the real life stereotypical men to tender and understanding relationships forged in these novels as an escape from the harsh reality. Now the question brings us back to the situation of the LGBTQ+ people in China. Only time will tell if the people will break free from the mould that the government enforced on them, and how much time will it take to do that same. The uncertainties that the future holds and the harsh realities of the present may drive the people, either towards unwilling acceptance or a public outburst asserting their rights in the society freely. The choice now remains at the hand of the Chinese people, witnessing the history.