"Of All the Continents, Asia is the Gayest": Resisting Heteronormativity in *Gaysia: Adventures in the Queer East*

Sowmiya R[1] & R. L. N. Raju[2]

[1] Research Scholar, Department of English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore – 632014, India. E-mail: sowmiya.r2020@vitstudent.ac.in

[2] Professor, Department of English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore – 632014, India. E-mail: raju.rln@vit.ac.in

Correspondence: R. L. N. Raju, Professor, Department of English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore – 632014, India. E-mail: raju.rln@vit.ac.in

Abstract

This paper explores the resistance strategies employed by the queer community against the marginalization imposed by heteronormativity. It delves into the physical, psychological, moral, and economic impacts of heteronormativity on queer individuals. Employing a textual analysis approach, the study focuses on Benjamin Law's book, *Gaysia: Adventures In The Queer East*, as a primary source of insight into the experiences and observations of queer individuals in Asian countries. Through the lens of queer theory, this study aims to gain a deep understanding of queer identities, power dynamics, and the transformative potential of homonormativity as a mode of resistance. Although Benjamin Law in his travelogue suggests that Asia, with its most populous countries like China, India, Indonesia, and Japan, is the gayest, the normative and rigid social setup prevalent in most Asian countries does not affirm anything beyond the heteronormative realm. Consequently, the queer community constantly conflicts with the conventional straight society. Building upon Law's observations, this paper argues that homonormativity emerges as the counterculture embraced by the queer community to resist heteronormativity. By shedding light on the resistance strategies employed by queer individuals, specifically the adoption of homonormativity as a countercultural force, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and resilience within queer culture in the face of heteronormative pressures in Asia.

Keywords: heteronormativity, queer identity, homonormativity, resistance, stigma, queerphobia

1. Introduction

The experiences of LGBT people in several Asian nations are examined in the nonfiction *Gaysia: Adventures In The Queer East.* The author, Benjamin Law, an Australian gay man of Chinese ancestry, shares his experiences and insights in the guise of a travelogue. *Gaysia* has taken two years to complete as he describes his itinerary as "me going on some strange, unexpected adventures through the continent" in the Meld Magazine (Salter, 2012). The tour starts in Bali, Indonesia, and passes via various nations, including China, India, and Japan. The author uses a sarcastic tone to describe how queer culture is currently perceived in nations like Thailand, Malaysia, and Myanmar. The inspiration for the work came from the author's identification as a Gaysian, a term used to describe LGBT people of Asian heritage. He believes that because of his particular background, he is well-positioned to discuss the experiences of queer people in Asia. In his own words, the author admits to having a dual identity as an Australian and an Asian and expresses a desire to connect with other Gaysians (Law, 2013, p. 2). Throughout the book, the author vividly portrays the struggles and achievements of queer people in Asia. He also looks at the impact of politics, society, and culture on the quality of life for LGBT people around the world (Kagan, 2022). As a result, the book provides a novel viewpoint on the gay experience in Asia and seeks to advance a better understanding and acceptance of the region's different sexual orientations and gender identities.

The text is divided into seven parts, each corresponding to a different country in Asia. The author discusses Indonesia's pervasive queer culture, including its exclusive gay resorts and the existence of 'money boys', who are used by foreign men, in the section on that nation. Despite being LGBT, the author encounters cultural shock while visiting these nations, which is sure to strike a chord with readers. Besides describing the queer culture, the author also discusses the persecution of queer individuals in various countries. He draws attention to the homophobic views held by the heteronormative society, which frequently tries to 'cure' homosexuality and can result in self-harm. The author also draws attention to the state's and society's hypocrisy in handling various forms of queerness. While some forms of queerness, like transsexual beauty queens, are praised, others, like lesbianism, are scorned and regarded as 'unusual' or 'unconventional.' Through his writing, the author seeks to expose the challenges and discrimination faced by queer individuals in Asia. He calls for greater acceptance and understanding of various sexual orientations and gender identities and exposes the hypocrisy of societal and state attitudes toward queerness.

2. Literature Review

The research conducted by Morrison et al. (2018) on disgust, gay men's sexual behavior, and homonegativity highlights the importance of considering sexual behavior in understanding homonegativity. The study addresses the problem of neglecting this aspect, which has created an imbalance between researchers and individuals with anti-gay agendas (Morrison et al., 2018). James Welker's (2018) article, "From Women's Liberation to Lesbian Feminism in Japan: Rezubian Feminizumu within and beyond the Uman Ribu Movement in the 1970s and 1980s," focuses on the marginalization of lesbianism within mainstream heteronormativity, particularly within the female sphere in Japan. Welker argues that while the women's liberation movement of the 1970s and 1980s in Japan initially neglected lesbianism, it indirectly paved the way for the emergence of lesbian feminist movements. The study "Heteronormativity in the Lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Young People" (2019) contributes important insights to queer theory by examining the intersections of gender, sexuality, and family divisions. The researchers emphasize the need for future studies to embrace diverse lived experiences, applying an intersectional lens to further explore topics such as heteronormativity and gender, deepening our understanding of its impact on the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer young people. (Pollitt et al., 2019).

"Between visibility and elsewhere: South Asian queer creative cultures and resistance" by Rohit K. Dasgupta and Churnjeet Mahn (2023) explores the concept of 'elsewhere' and its significance for South Asian queer individuals. The study highlights the pressure to conform to social expectations and the struggles faced by queer immigrants who must navigate experiences of racism (Dasgupta & Mahn, 2023). "'Bending' against straightening devices: queer lived experiences of sexuality and sexual health in Bangladesh" (2023) examines the challenges faced by young people in navigating heteronormativity and its impact on their well-being in Bangladesh (Alam & Marston, 2023).

2.1 Methodology

The study explores the select text *Gaysia: Adventures In The Queer East* through a qualitative approach and examines the biographical details and sociological aspects of the queer characters. The study provides a theoretical background of queer theory and employs the concepts of queer performativity, homosociality, anti-homophobia, and queer visibility to analyse the select text. The researchers have utilized secondary sources from blogs, research articles, and books to support and/or dismiss the arguments presented in the study through the aforementioned concepts. The diverse forms of resistance and subversion evident within queer spaces, along with the challenges entailed in their establishment and navigation, are comprehensively elucidated by the aforementioned sources. Consequently, these references serve to clarify how the negotiation and valuation of queer identities and communities occur within varying cultural frameworks. Notably, this exploration is conducted within an Asian paradigm, further adding depth to the study's analysis.

2.2 Knowledge Gap

Several scholars, academicians, and researchers have conducted various research on gender and sexuality-related themes in the context of Queer Asia. However, the themes of resistance, queer lived experience, and queer neighbourhood in this select text have not yet been thoroughly examined. There is limited research on the collective LGBTQ sub-culture in a particular geographical location that is the Asian Continent in this context leaving the select text largely unexplored in this field. Additionally, this study delves deep into queers' underground resistance, the celebration of queerness, and queer visibility in a rigid heteronormative society. Therefore, this study aims to explore the concept of queer resistance and visibility and examine how these concepts underplay the counterculture of homonormativity.

2.3 Theoretical Background

This research paper uses a theoretical framework rooted in queer theory to examine the intricate interplay between gender and sexuality within the context of the select text Gaysia: Adventures In The Queer East. Queer theory, "An approach to literary and cultural study that rejects traditional categories of gender and sexuality" (Merriam-Webster), is propounded to theorize the fluidity of sexuality and non-normative sexual categories. It evolved around the 1990s, with the advent of gay identity politics, Queer studies, and Women's studies. The term 'Queer theory' is coined by Teresa de Lauretis, Italian-American feminist and film theorist, during a conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1990. Following the footsteps of Feminism and Post-structuralism (deconstruction), it is propounded to 'destabilize' the normative definitions of sexuality and sexual behaviour. It insists on the dynamic, fluid, and unstable aspects of sex, sexuality, and sexual acts. While Gay/Lesbian studies thrive to deconstruct the binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality, Queer studies embrace the other non-normative sexual categories such as bisexuality, transvestism, transsexualism, and sadomasochism. Over time, Queer theory has been shaped by the exponents like Michel Foucault, Lauren Berlant, Leo Bersani, Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, to reach its contemporary state.

In Queer Festivals, an anonymous transman who is also a queer activist distinguishes Queer theory from Queer activism by stating that "Theory tries to deconstruct identities whereas here we are building an identity" (Eleftheriadis, 2018, p.77). To explain Queer theory, Sedgwick quotes, "It's about trying to understand different kinds of sexual desire and how the culture defines them. It's about how you can't understand relations between men and women unless you understand the relationship between people of the same gender including the possibility of a sexual relationship between them" (Smith, 1998). Sedgwick's concept of queer performativity questions the idea that gender and sexuality are natural, unchanging notions. She contends that they are, instead, performative and created through diverse cultural, social, and linguistic acts. Sedgwick bases a lot of her arguments on the theories of poststructuralist theorists like Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. Further, she contends that queer performativity undermines ideas of gender and sexuality that are binary. By exposing their constructed character, it challenges heterosexual conventions and conventional notions of masculinity and femininity. In

order to promote a more inclusive and wide-ranging understanding of human experiences, queer performativity highlights the fluidity and diversity of identities (Sedgwick, 2003).

In non-sexual social ties and relationships between people of the same sex, the word 'homosocial' is used, unlike the idea of homosexuality, which emphasizes sexual desire and identity. The conventional view that all social connections are built around sexual desire or romantic attraction is contested by Sedgwick's concept of the homosocial (Kosofsky, 2015). She contends that friendships and alliances between people of the same sex, as well as other same-sex relationships, have a big impact on how society is organized and what is considered acceptable. She claims that homosocial relationships frequently entail strong emotional ties, intellectual cooperation, and shared experiences between people of the same sex. These connections can be found in a variety of settings, including social groups, businesses, and educational and military institutions. Homosocial relationships can be seen among people of any gender identity or sexual orientation and are not exclusive to a particular gender or sexual orientation (Kosofsky, 2015). The said concepts have tackled the various issues and facets of queer culture. The concepts like 'anti-homophobia' (Vincent et al., 2011), homosociality, queer performativity, and visibility enable a detailed examination of the queer culture presented by Law within the Asian context. By adopting a queer lens, this study aims to challenge heteronormative assumptions, disrupt traditional binaries, and shed light on marginalized voices and experiences. Further, it provides a comprehensive understanding of how the queers' resistance is shown against heteronormativity works, offering new insights and potential avenues for social change (Worthen, 2018).

3. Discussion

3.1 Queer Culture: A Review of Asian Context

The book *Gaysia: Adventures in the Queer East* explores queer spaces within socially rigid and culturally conservative environments that uphold heteronormativity. Each part of the book accounts for the existence of queer culture and social stigmas surrounding the non-normative categories. The counter-resistance that is exhibited by these queers towards the normative ideology by subverting the norms themselves. Internal conflicts happen within one's self and within the community, the individual belongs to. The external factors also contribute to the internal struggles of a person or the community.

The inner conflicts arise within one's self because that person (queer in this context) is made to believe that he/she is outside the realm of 'normalcy'. In the cases of people who are depicted in *Gaysia*, they are ashamed of their sexuality so they reach out to psychiatrists for therapy sessions. The lack of knowledge about sexual behaviors, same-sex attraction, and the fear of becoming an outcast makes those people opt for psychological treatments and ex-gay organizations. Even if psychiatrists tell them homosexuality is not a disorder that can be cured, they desperately want 'some kind of magic' to happen (Law, 2013, pp. 138,209,308).

The external factors which intensify distress among queer people constitute state and non-state tools. The organizations function for the sole purpose of redeeming people from all kinds of sexual perversions and reinforcing the negative portrayal of homosexuality. The representatives from the two Malaysian organizations, mentioned by Law, express their, disgust and at the same time fear of homosexuality as it poses a threat to the heteronormative familial structure (Law, 2013, pp. 199, 226). Those organizations strive to achieve a sexually, morally 'righteous' society, and get their works carried out in the name of 'moral policing'. For instance, in Malaysia, moral policing is targeting people (sexual minorities) who fall out of morality:

> It is also important here to understand how 'gender' and 'sexuality' are framed in relation to popular and legalist views of criminality. The targeting of sexual minorities by enforcement agencies – such as the police, Islamic Religious Affairs Departments– cannot be explained by 'homophobia' alone. Indeed apart from sexual minorities, unmarried heterosexuals – most visibly Muslim women – are also targeted by enforcement officers in what is popularly termed 'moral policing'. (Shah, 2013, p. 267)

Church-based social norms were used around the world to control sexuality, marriage, and procreation. Religious convictions had a big impact on how various facets of social life were viewed in many traditional communities, especially when it came to sexuality, procreation, and kinship. (Štulhofer & Rimac, 2009). These instances prove:

> Religiosity is often explored as a correlate of attitudes toward LGBT individuals. Studies in the USA and Europe show that negative attitudes toward LGBT individuals are correlated with higher levels of religiosity. (Worthen et al., 2016)

Apart from these external factors, there are clashes within the Queer community itself. A 'socio-cultural border' that separates the queers regardless of their queer identity. In Bali, there is a religious difference which a Balinese guy expresses 'there is a line' – a line that cannot be crossed over (Law, 2013, p. 19). It is similar in the Japanese and Indian societies as well. There is an explicit distinction between gay men, lesbians, and transsexual women in Japan; there are specific bars for specific categories of sexuality and gender; there is not much visibility of lesbianism in the mainstream culture (Law, 2013, pp. 151, 175). Sarah Schulman argues that the American portrayals of homosexuals in an artistic medium as "fake public homosexuality has been constructed to facilitate a double marketing strategy: selling a palatable image of homosexuality to heterosexual consumers that meets their need to have their dominance obscured" (Schulman, 1998). This argument substantiates the observation made by Law in the case of Japan, as he describes "so much of queerness in Japan seemed to be a performance for straight people" (Law, 2013).

Lesbians are neglected in mainstream feminism in Japan. The women's liberation movement during the period between 1970 and 1980 has not acknowledged lesbianism, which made the lesbian community come up with parallel Lesbian Feministic Movements (Welker, 2018, p. 51). The case of transsexual women is also ambiguous as Law (2013) puts it,

> Among queer people in Japan, opinions were split on Haruna Ai. Most loved the fact that one of the most famous TV personalities in Japan was a transsexual woman. In a country that had only legalized sex-change procedures in the past decade, her rise to become an adored mainstream darling was startling. Others had reservations. (Law, 2013, p. 176)

In the Indian context, the divide is in terms of the class hierarchy. Before and after the repeal of section 377, exclusive parties are hosted by and for urban elite gay men – ranging from IT professionals to media people – and they charge five hundred rupees as entry fees. These kinds of parties and clubbing are not encouraged by the Godfather (of the Indian gay scene) as the poor and rural gay men cannot afford these parties (Law, 2013, pp. 302-304). Another crucial problem – aside from all the aforementioned discomforts in and out of the queer culture – that is often associated with queer people and widely stigmatized disease –HIV/AIDS. Among the seven countries, the four – Myanmar, Bali, China, and India – in which HIV threat is ominous as these countries are reserved when it comes to non-normative sexual acts which have consequentially resulted in the spread of this sexually transmitted disease. Ignorance, poverty, and illegality of same-sex acts nurture the disease despite the work done by NGOs and volunteer groups. In a country like Myanmar, even the NGOs cannot help the diseased and the dying as the state has control over the autonomy of such organizations (Law, 2013, p. 264).

Concerning the notion of fusing HIV/AIDS and queer community, Weiss (2003) writes,

> The conflation of homosexuality with AIDS in the popular imagination is awkward: having one's identity associated with disease and "contamination" hardly feeds self-esteem or commands respect, and addressing sexuality only through the lens of HIV/AIDS perpetuates this stereotype. (Weiss, 2003, p. 674)

Weiss' observation can be beneficial while reading Law's account of Burmese people's misconception about the disease as it is mentioned that a homosexual man –is an Engineer with Ph.D. – has assumed that HIV/AIDS is related to 'transgender, transsexual or feminine men' (Law, 2013, p. 251). In his 1996 article "Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identities," Dennis Altman explores how global changes, particularly the impact of HIV/AIDS, have led to increased attention to homosexuality. He argues that this scrutiny often comes from people in non-Western societies with a vested interest in modernity, who try to explain sexuality using Western ideas. In response, some in non-Western societies either deny homosexuality or try to create a nationalist version of it based on their pre-colonial heritage, to distinguish themselves from Western homosexuals. Altman finds that homosexuals in Asia feel conflicted about integrating into a global identity. He highlights the complex interaction between tradition and modernity, suggesting that gay identities may develop differently without the same Western political rhetoric. Altman challenges the idea of a linear progression towards Western-style queerness and shows that similar tensions exist within Western societies regarding shifting sexual identities. By considering countries like Thailand or Brazil as examples, he argues that our understanding of modernity and tradition can change. Altman rejects strict divisions between Western and non-Western experiences of sexuality and calls for understanding sex/gender structures within broader socio-political contexts. He proposes a political economy of homosexuality that acknowledges the interconnectedness of political, economic, and cultural factors. Altman concludes by emphasizing that sexuality is constantly reshaped through the collision of existing practices, myths, new technologies, and ideologies. He highlights the human ability to continually redefine oneself in response to evolving understandings of sexuality. (Altman, 1996).

3.2 Homophobia

Homophobia is a term used to characterize a range of negative attitudes, prejudices, and discriminatory behaviors toward individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT+). It stems from a deep-seated dread, dislike, or aversion of individuals whose sexual orientation or gender identity deviates from the societal norms of heterosexuality and binary gender roles. Quoting Stein,

> Homophobia exists in diverse forms and varies in different contexts, challenging the notion that it is solely driven by male anger toward feminized men. Instead, it is depicted as a flexible cultural construct that can be employed differently in different situations. A nuanced approach to analyzing homophobia is crucial to grasp its complex nature and multifaceted manifestations. (Stein, 2006)

As Plummer points out, it is integral to the system that monitors, imposes, and perpetuates gender inequalities throughout society. (Plummer, 2014). Thus, Worthen calls to customize educational initiatives to target millennials, with a particular focus on millennial cisgender men, in order to effectively address and challenge these problematic viewpoints. (Worthen, 2020). Also, Woodford wants,

> To improve the campus climate for LGBT students, it will be important for educational programs to effectively engage politically conservative students. Encouraging conservative students to participate in existing LGBT awareness programs may be beneficial. But we believe that specialized programs are needed. (Woodford et al., 2012, p.310)

Traditional gender roles and expectations are frequently linked to homophobia. Male-male relationships in particular may be stigmatized due to the perceptions of femininity or frailty associated with being the receptive partner in a same-sex relationship. In addition, examining the parallels between anti-effeminacy attitudes among homosexual men and prejudices among other oppressed minorities can contribute to a greater comprehension of the various manifestations of prejudice (Taywaditep, 2002). In "Marginalization among the marginalized", McCann et al., discuss that exposure to diversity and alternative perspectives can have a positive impact on individuals, leading them to unlearn homophobia and embrace a more inclusive view of gender and sexuality. The study also suggests that some men may be open to growth and development, while others may hold onto traditional beliefs, leading to varying responses to the challenges of homophobia. It also highlights that unlearning homophobia is a complex process influenced by individual factors and experiences, and it is not a universal outcome for all men, even if they engage in activities like reading novels, traveling internationally, or socializing beyond

sports clubs. Nonetheless, the study indicates that there is potential for personal growth and greater acceptance of gender and sexual diversity in some individuals as they mature and gain exposure to diverse perspectives (McCann et al., 2009).

3.3 Subverting the Norms: The Emergence of Queers' Resistibility

3.3.1 Queer Visibility through Queer Events

Despite impediments that hinder the mobilization of Queer culture, queers keep performing their counter-resistance to dodge the normativity. Though *Gaysia* describes the struggling lives of queer people, it also captures their resistibility which reflects in their improving livelihood. Balinese young homosexuals embrace their sexuality without fearing their family's rejection and social stigma, (Law, 2013, pp. 43-44) as stated "for many, desire marks the moment of departure from the default option of heterosexuality." (Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000, p.183)

Celebration of queerness is reflected in this island which is widely known for its resorts, clubs, bars, and villas – Bali's gay spots remind 'Molly Houses' in eighteenth-century England. These houses – as mentioned by Mickey Weems in *The Fierce Tribe* – have been the rendezvous where homosexual men hung out. Those houses have provided a queer space as homosexuality has been a thing that cannot be expressed in words in those times (Weems, 2008, p. 82). By writing about these queer spaces, Johnston " highlight[s] the powerful ways in which these specific spaces reflect particular and partial western discourses of embodiment and place" (Johnston, 2008). Audrey Yue and Helen Hok-Sze Leung (2016) emphasize in their article how urban space plays a crucial role in the formation of queer identities and the development of queer communities. It explores how certain spaces within these cities become important sites for queer visibility, activism, and social interaction.

> These mappings of the gay scene in Singapore demonstrate the reclaiming of space for a marginal group; such a practice is characterised by the rise of a gay consumer space that provided lifestyle options for local queers and gay tourists alike. (Yue & Leung, 2016)

Weems (2008) also talks about the significance of 'drag balls' in the celebrations of Queer culture from decades ago. He states that the drag balls showcase "the public visibility of cross-dressing, and the elevated status of the balls as glamourous, high society functions rather than secret, criminal gatherings" (p. 87). Comparing the drag balls of America with the Japanese drag shows, there are not many social changes happening in the lives of Japanese drag queens whose sexuality cannot be expressed publicly. But like Weems (2008) says, "Laughter was a means of resistance" (pp. 85, 86), Japanese gay men who are ridiculously hilarious on the screen (Law, 2013, p. 162), show their resistance by exhibiting their visibility on media which has a profound influence on the mainstream culture. Despite this profound influence, there is this impending danger of 'being commodified' as argued by Hennessy Queer visibility in commodity culture, while increased visibility of queer identities in commodity culture can help challenge heteronormativity and promote acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, it also runs the risk of commodifying queerness. In other words, queer identities and experiences are turned into marketable commodities, thereby reducing the complexities of queer lives to mere products to be bought and sold. (Hennessy, 1995). On the contrary, the significance of queer visibility is a means to challenge traditional notions of gender and sexuality in international relations. Lind argues that recognizing and integrating queer perspectives can lead to a more inclusive and diverse approach to understanding global politics, human rights, and social movements. It can also help expose how power structures and inequalities based on sexuality and gender operate on the global stage. (Lind, 2014).

In his article, "Graduated In/Visibility: Reflections on Ku'er Activism in (Post)Socialist China", Tian (2019) proposes 'graduated visibility' as a strategy to oppose normativity. To enforce this strategy he puts forth a model which consists of five levels and the first level is the above-mentioned 'full invisibility'. The fourth level is called 'collective visibility' by which he means to denote the creation of 'visibility' by collective efforts which acutely resonate with the concept of Queer events and festivals (Tian, 2019, p. 66).

Ambiguities are revolving around the concept of Queer festivals as it is discussed in *Queer Festivals,* queers are more inclined towards "anti-identitarianism" whereas lesbians and gays are concerned about same-sex marriages and social equality that are castigated by the queers as this homonormativity is more likely to follow the heteronormativity (Eleftheriadis, 2018, pp. 84-86).

Eleftheriadis (2018) in the chapter titled "What Is 'Queer' about Queer Festivals? Negotiating Identity and Autonomy" gives out his account of the Oslo Queer Festival. He brings about the prevailing idea of the distinction between LGBT movements and Queer festivals:

> Queer festivals tend to read the LGBT as a movement with a rather limited scope. By setting itself to the defense of a specific, normative sexual identity (gay, lesbian), the LGBT movement is accused of missing other parts of oppression, and thus setting itself apart from other struggles, which do not relate directly to sexuality, but include economic exploitation, race and gender relations. (Eleftheriadis, 2018, p. 87)

Despite their attack on identity formation by homonormativity, Eleftheriadis (2018) points out the irony of identity formed by the Queer festivals (p. 87). The identity that is formulated through Queer festivals and events – in the case of *Gaysia,* Thailand's beauty pageant for transsexuals, Japan's 'gay boom', and India's QAM pride parade – has hugely influenced mainstream discussions. Their visibility remains a threat to heteronormativity as it can be collapsed just by the queers' existence. Considering this critical issue of showing resistibility, Law in his online interview, mentions "When you barely have any public discussion about homosexuality…… you've gott a completely different context and model for an LGBT rights movement" (Bhattacharya, 2013). Thus India's QAM pride parade has gotten significance as it marks the budding hope amidst the queer community. Their resistance – shown against Section 377 which criminalized them for

nearly a century (Shah, 2013, p. 268) – has paid them sufficiently to gear themselves for upcoming socio-cultural challenges, given the changing contemporary circumstances concerning queer scenarios.

3.3.2 Homosociality

Hammarén and Johansson (2014) in their article "Homosociality: In Between Power and Intimacy" argue that there is a need to theorize homosociality with regard to sociocultural aspects. They state that

> a culturally specific form of female same-sex intimacy, although similar forms are found in, for example, British boarding schools. An older girl at the school helps the newcomers, the younger girls, and provides them with emotional support. Sometimes, this relation develops into sexual encounters and relationships. Although this is taking place in a highly policed and homophobic environment, this particular form of relationship seems to exist alongside the sexuality apparatus and to be accepted. The point here is that homosociality needs to be theorized and understood in different ways depending on the national and socio-cultural context. (Hammarén et al., 2014).

In this regard, Chinese homosexuals survive the torments of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Abelove et al, 1993, p. 227) with the aid of underground resistance. In a country like China where a 'positive portrayal of homosexuality and homosexual culture is not allowed', gay men and women end up in sham marriages – where a gay man and a lesbian get married to each other to subvert the concept of heteronormative marriages (Tian, 2019, p. 65). Lesbians find a sense of belonging in the cyber homosexual communities even though the Chinese internet is not that much democratic, like in other countries. The internet becomes the safe space, hideout, and hang-out space for lesbians as Law (2013) subjectively describes "that in a country renowned for its draconian web-monitoring regime, it was the internet that had given birth to modern gay consciousness" (p. 106).

Regarding the stance of homosexual women in Chinese culture, Amy SIM (2008) has written about 'sworn sisterhoods', the homosocial group of spinsters who strategically feeds other women, a sense of unity – that works against heteronormative structures such as family and marriage – within the female sphere. SIM has equated this sisterhood with the online lesbian communities, as they also share a similar bond of unification in identifying each other's sexuality. Therefore, she argues that "the development of lesbian space poses a challenge for compulsory heterosexuality" (SIM, 2008, pp. 197-198). Furthermore, the recognition of lesbian desire poses a challenge to the conventional acceptance of heterosexuality, revealing the underlying male dominance within typical heterosexual relationships, and fostering connections between women that are free from male expectations (Thompson, 1991). Analyzing this homosociality through the lens of separatism – as Marilyn Frye (1981) says it is 'undeniably connected with Lesbianism' – homosexuals in Chinese culture maintain their queer identity by partially visible and partially invisible for the civic society which treats them with partiality. This resistibility of the queers seems to resemble Frye's words: "Sometimes the separations are consciously planned and cultivated as necessary prerequisites or conditions for getting on with one's business" (Abelove et al, 1993, pp. 91-92).

4. Conclusion

The study of queer culture in Asia through the lens of *Gaysia: Adventures in the Queer East* sheds light on the complexities and nuances of queer existence in a heteronormative society. It highlights the internal struggles, external challenges, and the resilience and resistibility of queer individuals as they navigate their identities, forge connections, and strive for acceptance and visibility**.** In addition, the study has revealed the existence of homosociality, in which queer individuals establish close bonds and support networks with others of the same sex, frequently within the constraints of a heteronormative society. Queer people have discovered methods to celebrate their identities, visibility, and spaces of expression, thereby challenging the dominant ideology. Using a theoretical framework rooted in queer theory and examining aspects such as homophobia, homosociality, and queer visibility, the study provides a comprehensive examination of the challenges and accomplishments of queer communities on the Asian continent. It urges continued efforts to combat homophobia, promote acceptance and comprehension, and establish inclusive spaces for diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in Asian societies. The research also reveals the emergence of queer resistibility and the celebration of queerness within Asian contexts. Queer individuals find ways to assert their identities and subvert societal norms through various means, including the creation of queer spaces and events. Queer events, festivals, and visibility play a significant role in challenging heteronormativity and providing a platform for queer expression and activism. Further, Western countries and academia can debate about homonormativity, the difference between Lesbian and Gay Studies and Queer Studies, and the breach between LGBT movements and Queer festivals. They can do research, discussions, and theorize these issues because they have witnessed the mobilization of non-normative categories (Atay, 2021). But in the Asian continent where queer people are mere 'ghosts' (Law, 2013, p. 99), the only pragmatic deed that can be done by these people: is enough to maintain their sexual identity either absolutely or subtly.

References

Abelove, H., Barale, M. A., & Halperin, D. M. (Eds.). (1993). *Lesbian/Gay Studies Reader*. Routledge.

Alam, P., & Marston, C. (2023). 'bending' against straightening devices: Queer lived experiences of sexuality and sexual health in Bangladesh. *BMC Public Health*, *23*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15085-0

Altman, D. (1996). Rupture or continuity? the internationalization of gay identities. *Social Text*, *48,* 77. https://doi.org/10.2307/466787

Atay, A. (2021). Charting the future of Queer Studies in Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies: New directions and pathways. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *18*(2), vii-xi. https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2021.1907847

Bhattacharya, B. (2013, December 20). *Over the rainbow.* Retrieved March 21, 2023, from http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/over-the-rainbow/article5474878.ece

Dasgupta, R. K., & Mahn, C. (2023). Between visibility and elsewhere: South Asian queer creative cultures and resistance. *South Asian Diaspora*, *15*(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2022.2164429

Eleftheriadis, K. (2018). *Queer Festivals*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv5nph43

Frye, M. (1981). *Some reflections on separatism and power*. East Lansing, MI: Tea Rose Press.

Hammarén, N., & Johansson, T. (2014). Homosociality: In Between Power and Intimacy. *SAGE Open, 4*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013518057

Hennessy, R. (1995). Queer visibility in commodity culture. *Social Postmodernism*, 142-184. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511520792.008

Johnston, L. (2008). *Queering tourism: Paradoxical performances at Gay Pride parades*. London: Routledge.

Kagan, J. (2022, December 19). What is quality of life? why it's important and how to improve it. Retrieved March 28, 2023, from https://www.investopedia.com/terms/q/quality-of-life.asp

Kosofsky Sedgwick, E. (2015). *Between men: English literature and male homosocial desire.* Columbia university press. https://doi.org/10.7312/koso17629

Law, B. (2013). *Gaysia: Adventures in the Queer East*. Noida, UP: Random House India.

Lind, A. (2014). "out" in international relations: Why queer visibility matters. *International Studies Review*, *16*(4), 601-604. https://doi.org/10.1111/misr.12184

McCann, P. D., Minichiello, V., & Plummer, D. (2009). Is homophobia inevitable? *Journal of Sociology*, *45*(2), 201-220. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783309103347

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Queer theory. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved July 16, 2023, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/queer%20theory

Plummer, D. (2014). The ebb and flow of homophobia: A gender taboo theory. *Sex Roles*, *71*(3-4), 126-136. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0390-8

Pollitt, A. M., Mernitz, S. E., Russell, S. T., Curran, M. A., & Toomey, R. B. (2019). Heteronormativity in the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and Queer Young People. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *68*(3), 522-544. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1656032

Salter, I. (2012, March 29). *Law unto himself: The family law author Benjamin Law.* Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://wordpress.meldmagazine.com.au/2012/03/family-law-benjamin-law/

Schulman, S. (1998). *Stagestruck: Theater, AIDS, and the marketing of Gay America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Sedgwick, E. (2003). 1. Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James's The Art of the Novel. In M. Barale J. Goldberg & M. Moon (Ed.), *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (pp. 35-66). New York, USA: Duke Universtiy Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822384786-004

Shah, S. (2013). *The Malaysian dilemma: Negotiating sexual diversity in a Muslim-majority Commonwealth state*. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv512st2.13

SIM, A. (2008). *Sapphic Shadows Sworn Sisterhoods and Cyber Lesbian Communities in Hong Kong.* Retrieved March 31, 2023, from https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46mvqc

Smith, D. (1998, January 17). *'Queer theory' is entering the literary mainstream.* Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://www.nytimes.com/1998/01/17/books/queer-theory-is-entering-the-literary-mainstream.html

Stein, A. (2006). *Shameless: Sexual dissidence in American culture*. New York University Press.

Taywaditep, K. J. (2002). Marginalization among the marginalized. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *42*(1), 1-28. https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v42n01_01

Thompson, D. (1991). *Reading between the lines a lesbian feminist critique of feminist accounts of Sexuality*. Lesbian Studies and Research Group, Gorgon's Head Press.

Tian, I. (2019). *Graduated In/Visibility: Reflections on Ku'er Activism in (Post) Socialist China*. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/qed.6.3.0056

Ussher, J. M., & Mooney-Somers, J. (2000). Negotiating desire and sexual subjectivity: Narratives of Young Lesbian Avengers. *Sexualities*, *3*(2), 183-200. https://doi.org/10.1177/136346000003002005

Vincent, W., Parrott, D. J., & Peterson, J. L. (2011). Effects of traditional gender role norms and religious fundamentalism on self-identified heterosexual men's attitudes, anger, and aggression toward gay men and lesbians. *Psychology of Men &*

Masculinity, *12*(4), 383-400. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023807

Weems, M. (2008). *A History of Festive Homosexuality: 1700–1969 CE.* https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt4cgq6k.14

Weiss, M. L. (2003). *"Rejection as Freedom? HIV/AIDS Organizations and Identity.".* Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/20446275

Welker, J. (2018). *From Women's Liberation to Lesbian Feminism in Japan: Rezubian Feminizumu within and beyond the Ūman Ribu Movement in the 1970s and 1980s.* https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824866730-005

Woodford, M. R., Silverschanz, P., Swank, E., Scherrer, K. S., & Raiz, L. (2012). Predictors of heterosexual college students' attitudes toward LGBT people. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, *9*(4), 297-320. https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2012.716697

Worthen, M. G. (2018). "All the gays are liberal?" sexuality and gender gaps in political perspectives among lesbian, gay, bisexual, mostly heterosexual, and heterosexual college students in the southern USA. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, *17*(1), 27-42. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-018-0365-6

Worthen, M. G. (2020). The young and the prejudiced? millennial men, "dude bro" disposition, and LGBTQ negativity in a US national sample. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, *18*(2), 290-308. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-020-00458-6

Worthen, M. G., Lingiardi, V., & Caristo, C. (2016). The roles of politics, feminism, and religion in attitudes toward LGBT individuals: A cross-cultural study of college students in the USA, Italy, and Spain. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, *14*(3), 241-258. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-016-0244-y

Yue, A., & Leung, H. H. S. (2016). Notes towards the Queer Asian City: Singapore and Hong Kong. *Urban Studies*, *54*(3), 747-764. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098015602996