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Waves Under the Surface:

The LGBTQ NGO field and its cultural changes in China

By

Yuxin Zhao

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Faculty Advisor: Tori Gross

Preceptor: Brianne Painia

Abstract: How to perceive the location of LGBTQ NGOs in the NGO sector in a heteronormative state? How do LGBTQ NGOs in an authoritarian regime survive and make a change? To answer these questions, I draw on field theory to analyze the LGBTQ NGO field in China. The interdependent and nested relationship between the LGBTQ NGO field and other fields makes LGBTQ NGOs vulnerable to exogenous shocks. The presence of the representative organs of the state in multiple fields also contributes to field instability since the actions of the state are hard to predict. By providing empirical studies of the experiences of LGBTQ NGOs in the unstable field, I find out they are able to carry out cultural changes. This thesis aims to advance the understanding of the field ecology in authoritarian contexts with the presence of strong states as well as the cultural change potential of the NGOs in the field.

Key Words: LGBTQ NGOs; NGO Sector; Field theory; Social Movement; Cultural approaches; Authoritarianism

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Introduction

On July 6th, 2022, an online post with a list of the names of the LGBTQ university student organizations whose WeChat public accounts were clamped down on July 6th last year was reposted by a large number of Chinese LGBTQ activists on various social media platforms. Many of them expressed their grievance as well as anger regarding the shrinking space of LGBTQ communities in China. Since 2013, tons of identity-based and rights-based organizations' social media accounts have been cracked down, and many organizational events were terminated under the pressure of the tightening political environment. Under the current circumstances filled with struggles and uncertainties, I hope to shed light on how LGBTQ NGOs are influenced by external pressures, how they cope with the pressures, and how they make social changes.

Many scholars agree that NGOs in China are not in a confrontational stance against the state; rather, they play important roles in communicating and mediating the resources and ideas that pass between the state and society (Hsia & White, 2002; Ma, 2002; Hildebrandt, 2015; Kallman & Clark, 2016). In most literature pertaining to NGOs in China, the organizations that directly provide social services which align with the interests of the central state or the local governments are extensively explored, such as environmental NGOs, Education NGOs, and HIV/AIDS NGOs (Schwartz, 2004; Yang; 2005; Spires, 2011; Hildebrandt, 2015). However, rights-based or identity-based organizations have yet to draw much attention. In my work, I would like to fill this gap by examining LGBTQ NGOs, which are contextualized in a

heteronormative authoritarian state where LGBTQ identities are marginalized and LGBTQ rights are unrecognized.

Given the heterogeneous nature of public space and LGBTQ NGOs in China, I adopt the framework of field theory. Field theory focuses on the interactions of the organizations inside a specific field as well as the interactions of one field with its larger environment (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). This interactive approach helps analyze the contested and dynamic actions of LGBTQ NGOs (Teets, 2009). My study also elaborates on field theory by taking authoritarian contexts into consideration, where the state penetrates its power into each field. Moreover, field theory also incorporates two areas of scholarship, namely, institutional theory and social movement theory, to account for the stability and transformation of a field. LGBTQ NGO field in China, an emerging field, which is constantly shocked by exogenous pressures, is unstable. What factors contribute to the instabilities of the LGBTQ NGO field, and what are the experiences of the LGBTQ NGOs as well as their actions for change, are the main questions investigated in this thesis.

This paper proceeds as follows. In the first two sections, I introduce the theories and methodologies I use in this study. In the second part, I apply the field theory to China's NGO sector to provide an overview of China's NGO field. Then, I will position LGBTQ NGOs in China's NGO sector to articulate how the LGBTQ NGO field interacts with its broader environment and other fields with the aim of shedding light on the instabilities of the LGBTQ NGO field. In the third part, I depicted the experiences of three LGBTQ NGOs situated in the unstable field based on my fieldwork. Borrowing cultural approaches from social movement theory, I consider LGBTQ NGOs as cultural change-makers by delineating their innovative

organizational forms and operational strategies. In the conclusion part, I outline the implications as well as limitations of this study.

Literature Review

As the number of NGOs in China has risen substantially in the past few decades, over 500,000 NGOs are officially registered and approximately 1.5 million NGOs are unregistered, the NGO sector in China has attracted enormous attention from academia (Economy, 2014). Following the tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville's concept of civil society, which argues that the increased participation in voluntary associations of the public contributes to the construction of vibrant democratic societies (Tocqueville, 1899), tons of literature has revolved around the question of whether NGOs in China can be viewed as a proxy for the development of civil society (White, 1993; Saich, 2000; Howell, 2004; Ma, 2005; Hasmath & Hsu, 2016). The presence of the authoritarian single-party regime has added puzzles to this question. Some scholars find that there are qualities of classic civil society brought out by Chinese NGOs, and the NGO sector can be seen as the antecedent to democratization (White, 1993; Howell, 2004; Ma, 2005; Teets, 2009). However, other scholars note that the resiliency of the authoritarian state can never be ignored, and thus the expansion of Chinese NGOs cannot necessarily create anything more than "sprouts" of civil society (Tsou, 1994; Unger & Chan, 1995; Hildebrandt, 2015; Shieh, 2016). It is significant to address the fact that the NGOs in China are not homogeneous; rather, there are numerous types of organizations working on various projects with different approaches (Spires, 2011; Hsu & Jiang, 2015). Additionally, the authoritarian state is fragmented and has multiple levels of governance with respect to different types of organizations (Hsu, 2016; Shieh, 2016). Thus, I argue that the concept of classic civil society that

takes the NGO sector as a whole cannot capture the entire picture of Chinese NGOs. Instead, the relationship between the state, the NGO sector, and society should be understood through an interactive approach, which focuses on the dynamic and contested actions in a specific field (Teets, 2009). In this thesis, I shift my focus from the civil society framework and turn to an alternative approach – the field theory framework.

Field theory is a good tool to analyze the meso-level social order and has been applied by some political scientists and sociologists in the past decade. The term "organizational fields," defined by Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell, refers to the "recognized area of institutional life" (1983). Fields crystallize around the shared, if not consensual, understanding of rules, goals, strategies, and actors in a social arena. And the shared understandings are always termed "institutional logics" (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). The field theory and institutional logics challenged the classic model of formal organizations – especially the tradition following Robert Michels and Max Weber -- which perceived the bureaucracy as the most effective and rational form of organizing (Michels, 1962; Weber, 1978; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Clemens, 1993). An established field provides the "rules of the game," which are habitually operated by the actors in this field and thus considered appropriate, although they may not be the most effective ones (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; DiMaggio, 1991; Armstrong, 2002; Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008). Moreover, according to institutionalists, fields limit the strategies of action that can be pursued by institutionalizing the "rules of the game" and exert the pressure of isomorphism upon organizations since the organizations that follow the rules get both legitimacy and resources (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In previous works, the relatively stable fields, where the actors operate under the already established institutional logics with high

consensus on goals, rules, strategies, and positions of actors in the fields, are mostly studied. However, the degree to which the fields are institutionalized is variable, and the unstable fields are hardly explored. By unstable fields, I mean the fields with a low level of institutionalization, where actors do not have settled ways of operation. Instead, they are uncertain about the field environment and are able to act strategically to make some rules work for them. I define the LGBTQ NGO field in China as an unstable field, where there are neither settled "rules of the game" nor preferred organizational strategies available for LGBTQ NGOs. To examine an unstable field, I would concentrate on two questions: how this field interacts with its environment as well as other fields and how actors experience the instabilities of the field.

An exceptional strength of the field theory is that it concerns the relations of the actors in a field and the relations of the field with its outer environment. Prior works on fields are mostly applied to liberal democratic states, which have comparatively autonomous and self-contained fields. Although some scholars acknowledge the presence of the state, like Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam, who claim that the state could be considered as a set of special fields since the state actors are able to define or ratify the rules of other fields in a given territory, they still claim that the state fields have limited influence on other nonstate fields (2012). Because of the separation of political governance from the economic and social bases of society in most modern states in Western Europe and North America, nonstate fields have taken considerable responsibility for economic management and social services provision (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). Little attention has been paid to the field ecology with the presence of a strong state. In an authoritarian context like China, beyond taking state fields as special fields which are able to set rules for others, I argue that the state power can penetrate into various nonstate fields, and the representative organs of the state can play a role in shaping the actions taken by the actors in

each field. I will examine China's LGBTQ NGO field to shed light on how a field interacts with its outer environment as well as how it interacts with other fields with the presence of a strong authoritarian state.

When it comes to field change, scholars turn to social movement theories. According to some scholars, social movements are the collective efforts to create new fields or to transform existing fields (Dobbin, 1994; Clemens, 1993; Armstrong, 2002; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). In this respect, theories from social movement scholarship provide some insights into the instabilities of a field. However, given the authoritarian context in China, where contentious politics has limited space, scholars seldom note the social movement potential of NGOs (Hilderbrandt, 2013; Lei, 2018). I argue there are two main reasons contributing to it. On the one hand, social movement literature has long been dominated by resource mobilization theory and political process theory, which concentrate on seeking policy change by mobilizing material resources in a rational way. McAdam defined the social movement as "rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through noninstitutional means" (1982). Only the changes initiated by the powerless groups which seek to change the state policy and the redistribution of economic and social power fully qualify as a social movement (Armstrong, 2002; Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008). Resource mobilization theory and political process theory fit uneasily with collective activities in an authoritarian context like China since these theories have taken the electoral system and civic engagement for granted. On the other hand, I would argue that social movement organizations in the digital era, since the 21st century, are less responsible for mobilizing confrontational collective activities. By social movement organizations, I mean the organizations established by activists to gather resources, get public attention, and build networks, which are prerequisites of a movement.

However, thinking of movements in the digital era, like Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, it is easy to find out that they detached from social movement organizations. Instead, their organizing processes relied heavily on online platforms like Twitter and Facebook. That is because digital connectivity is able to help activists get public attention, gather resources, and build networks of participants and thus replace the roles that the social movement organizations played in the pre-digital era, as Zeynep Tufekci explained in her book *Twitter and the Tear Gas* (2017). Similarly, many scholars recorded LGBTQ protests or activisms in China as special events, which were mobilized by individuals on social media platforms rather than organizations (Bao, 2018; Engebretsen, 2015; Liao, 2015). The research about LGBTQ organizations in their own right, including their organizational forms, strategies, networks, etc., still keeps blank.

To perceive LGBTQ organizations in an authoritarian context in the digital era, I borrow cultural approaches from social movement theory. As post-1960s movements, including the women's movement, LGBTQ movement, the peace movement, and the environmental movement, came into scholars' sight, the limitation of the resource mobilization theory and political process theory was addressed. Scholars developed cultural approaches which have invigorated social movement theory in three aspects. Firstly, the goals of the social movement are understood to be not only instrumental but also cultural, including changing public opinion, creating a collective identity, providing emotional support, etc. In this aspect, many scholars expanded the scope of social movements, incorporating collective activities with cultural goals (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Dobbin, 1994; Bernstein, 1997; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Armstrong, 2002). Secondly, the forms or models that the organizations adopted are not governed solely by material considerations; instead, cultures have rules about who should organize in what ways and for what purposes. The cultural change brought about by social movements appears as a critical

source of institutional change (Clemens, 1993). Thirdly, social movements have cultural outcomes, including performances, ideations, and artifacts (Van Dyke &Taylor, 2018). In short, those scholars take social movements, for instance, the feminist movement (Clemens, 1993) and the gay movement (Armstrong, 2002), as the main force to bring about cultural change, while the organizations are participants of the movements. Largely overlooked, however, is how organizations, as the agents of cultural change, operate where there is no visible movement on the ground. In my work, I place emphasis on LGBTQ NGOs to examine the cultural projects they operate as well as the cultural change they make. Moving beyond analyzing organizations individually and separately, I situate LGBTQ NGOs in a field to draw attention to a context with multiple actors, available strategies, and relational mechanisms. In this way, the connections, interactions, and interdependence of the organizations become visible.

Methodology

When I refer to LGBTQ NGOs in this thesis, I mean sexual identity-based NGOs. The services they provide include building inclusive communities, holding workshops, providing mental health support, encouraging diverse gender expression, and so forth. To avoid causing confusion, I differentiate LGBTQ NGOs from HIV/AIDS NGOs. In the 1990s, the HIV/AIDS outbreak and its wide diffusion burdened the public health systems, and HIV/AIDS NGOs aiming to provide medical services emerged (Hsia & White, 2002). Compared with countries where the Gay and Lesbian movements predated the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the HIV/AIDS NGOs competed for medical resources with gay and lesbian organizations (Armstrong, 2002), the establishment of China's HIV/AIDS NGOs was assisted by the state and local governments, and those organizations were the only legitimate NGOs to get national as well as international

fundings (Engebretsen, 2014). Although those organizations played an essential role in increasing the visibility of LGBTQ people and promoting the decriminalization and depathologization of non-heterosexual identities in the late 1990s to the early 2000s, the logic of responding to an epidemic profoundly influenced those organizations and marginalized logic of promoting an identity (Armstrong, 2002). As a consequence, most HIV/AIDS NGOs adopted the public health framework and are incorporated by formal medical institutions that are professional and bureaucratic. In this thesis, I talk about identity-based LGBTQ NGOs only.

The first set of data that addresses the environment that the LGBTQ NGO field is embedded in consists of primary data and secondary data. I investigated several legal documents regulating the NGOs in China, which were obtained from official government websites. I also included one confidential internal document of the Chinese Communist Party in 2013 – Document No.9, which was leaked and thus could be accessed in the public database. The secondary sources, including the research pertaining to other fields, like the media field, were also included to shed light on the interdependence and interactions between the LGBTQ NGO field and other fields.

The second set of primary data that addresses how LGBTQ NGOs experience the instabilities of the field and make cultural changes consists of the interviews and the online content on LGBTQ NGOs' social media platforms. The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted from May 2022 to October 2022 through zoom. One interview lasted 40 minutes to 90 minutes, and I conducted eight interviews in total. The informants are core members of three LGBTQ NGOs in China. They are university students, graduate students, and young activists with a high education background. I recruited the informants by snowball sampling: the informants were asked to suggest friends who were members of LGBTQ NGOs in China and

might be interested in this research. Additionally, the interviews were all carried out in Chinese, and the quotes in this thesis are my translations. I also supplement the interview data by content analysis of the articles and posts on WeChat public accounts as well as the archival websites of the LGBTQ NGOs.

I focus on WeChat partly because it is the most popular social media platform in China. WeChat unites the functions of information sharing and social network building into one platform, which is attractive for grassroots NGOs. Besides private chatting and group chatting that are common to social network applications, WeChat allows individuals as well as organizations to create public accounts that can be used to publish articles, organize events, and collect donations. The articles and messages posted by WeChat public accounts are accessible to everyone. The individuals who subscribe to the public accounts get notifications as soon as there are new posts on the public accounts. Additionally, one public account can repost the articles posted by another public account. LGBTQ NGOs widely use WeChat public accounts to spread their information to a larger audience.

In this research, I investigate three LGBTQ NGOs, Harmony Student Club, Rainbow Coalition, and Sparkling World, which experienced the clampdown of their WeChat public accounts and then reorganized successfully. The clampdown is the manifestation of the instabilities of the LGBTQ NGO field, and the reorganization process sheds light on the experiences of the NGOs in this unstable field. Harmony Student Club is a student organization in a public university; Rainbow Coalition was a student organization at first and transformed into a social organization; Sparkling World is a lesbian organization that has operated for nearly two decades. I chose those three organizations because they have adopted different organizational structures or forms. They also had different levels of resiliency when they encountered the

clampdowns and adopted various strategies in the process of reorganization. Moreover, as actors in the LGBTQ NGO field, the three organizations I investigated have some connections with one another. Moreover, it is common for a participant of one LGBTQ NGO to work for other LGBTQ NGOs simultaneously.

Since LGBTQ-related content has been a sensitive topic in China, I use pseudonyms for both organizations and informants to keep their confidentiality, and the organizations' WeChat public accounts and websites will not be disclosed.

An Overview of the China's NGO Field

Nongovernmental organizations and associations are components of a relatively new but increasingly significant social sector, namely, "the third sector," around the globe since NGOs play essential roles in social service delivery, cultural production, social advocacy, and so forth (Kallman & Clark, 2016). But the ecology of the third sector varies by country. In this section, I provide an overview of the Chinese NGO sector by introducing two institutional logics that govern the field from a macro perspective.

The logic of corporatism has long dominated the organizational sphere in China from the 1910s to the early 2000s (Unger & Chan, 1995; Ma, 2002; Spires, 2011). The corporatist framework, following Phillippe Schmitter's definition, refers to the corporations created and kept as auxiliary and dependent organs of the state. It is commonly used to describe state-led NGOs and government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) in authoritarian states like China (1974). After the collapse of the Qing Dynasty (1911), unions like youth groups, peasant associations, and professional associations, which served as the "transmission belts" between national leaders and local people, were the early forms of corporatist-style organizations in China (Unger & Chan,

1995; Spires, 2011). In the three decades after the establishment of the PRC (People's Republic of China), social organizations were subject to state control since the state was the only legitimate institution to provide social services under Maoist rule (Ma, 2002). Even after the late 1970s, economic reform policies were implemented, which shifted the responsibilities of social welfare provision from the central state to the local governments, communities, and households and thus encouraged a proliferation of social organizations, most of those newly established organizations were corporatist organizations (Ma, 2002; Unger & Chan, 1995; Hsu et al., 2016). Given the centralized political culture and the tradition that the state-led organizations and GONGOs have dominated the field for a long time, the logic of corporatism still had its strength even after the era of economic reform.

The registration systems, furthermore, drew a clear line that divides the NGO field into two branches: registered NGOs and unregistered NGOs. As a response to the 1989 Tiananmen protests, the state started to establish a strict registration system to regulate the NGO sector with the aim of preventing the emergence of large-scale social movements which have the potential to challenge state authority. Two national-level regulations were issued in 1998 and 2004, respectively, which required an organization to register dually, both with an official ministry of state council called the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) and a professional supervising unit from the bureaucratic organizations of local governments (Saich, 2000; Shieh, 2016). The state-led NGOs and GONGOs easily got registered, and the registered NGOs are evaluated by the corresponding government departments. That is, the registered NGOs should submit financial and activity reports to both their supervisory units and the local bureaus of MoCA annually (MoCA, 2005). MoCA also provides ratings for NGOs seeking government funding, and maintaining A-level status is important for NGOs to get funding from local governments. In this

way, the registered NGOs are prone to the logic of corporatism to align their interest with the local governments (Tian & Chuang, 2022). On the contrary, the NGOs established and operated by private actors mostly remained unregistered (Hildebrandt, 2015; Hsu & Jiang, 2016).

However, economic reform, on the other hand, brought changes to the bureaucratic system and created new sets of needs, interests, and grievances, which influenced the emergence of new types of NGOs other than the corporatist organizations – grassroots NGOs. And the grassroots NGOs formed an alternative institutional logic. The decentralization policies, with an aim to promote economic development, transformed the highly planned economy into a market-oriented economy. To improve the responsiveness of the state, local governments got the comparative autonomy to make decisions on their local affairs. Given the relaxed environment, non-profit NGOs as well as for-profit corporations that were established by private actors proliferated in response to various demands of the public (Shieh, 2016). On the state side, to monitor the work done by the cadres in the local governments, the cadre responsibility system was established. Under this system, lower-level local cadres fulfill the targets set by their superiors, which serve as evidence of their performance and the credentials for their promotion (Edin, 2003; Chan, 2004). To attain the goals set by superiors, lower-level local cadres need to cope with bottom-up pressure from the citizens by helping them solve problems, including health service delivery, environmental protection, labor rights, and so forth (Cai, 2008; Hsu & Jiang, 2015). Grassroots NGOs which directly provide social services fulfill the needs of the local governments, and thus the local governments keep those NGOs for their own interests even if they are unregistered (Spires, 2011; Hildebrandt, 2015). Borrowing Spires' concept of "contingent symbiosis," the survival of grassroots NGOs could be attributed to the fragility and mutual benefits that characterize the NGO-government relationship (Spires, 2011). I would argue

that many grassroots NGOs follow the logic of symbiosis, and the organizations regulated by this logic have some autonomy to pursue their organizational goals but need to provide some sort of social services.

To conclude, in China, the boundaries between the state and society are blurred, and the logic of corporatism and the logic of symbiosis are useful in understanding the landscape of China's NGO field. However, according to Timothy Hildebrandt, grassroots NGOs are "self-limiting" organizations. A self-limiting organization is situated on the continuum, swayed by the combination of the changing environment and the adaptive strategies adopted by the organization (2013). Thus, the logic of symbiosis is too broad and too abstract to capture all grassroots organizations. Different types of NGOs, including healthcare NGOs, environmental NGOs, education NGOs, LGBTQ NGOs, etc., are situated in the different political and cultural environments and have various sets of operation strategies. Therefore, a more detailed analysis is needed.

The Instabilities of LGBTQ NGO Field

Borrowing from Fligstein and McAdam, who conceive of "all fields as embedded in complex webs of other fields," actors that make up smaller collectivities are located within larger fields and interact with other fields (2012). In this section, I will introduce the interactions of LGBTQ NGO field with other fields, which contribute to the instabilities of the LGBTQ NGO field.

From a large point of view, the LGBTQ NGO field is embedded in an authoritarian political field. I would take 2013, the start of Xi Jinping's presidency in the PRC, as a watershed moment in the story of NGOs I present. Since then, the space of LGBTQ organizations has been

shrinking. Under the leadership of Xi, social organizations have been facing higher levels of policing compared with the previous administration led by President Hu Jintao (Fu & Distelhorst, 2017). Xi established the National Security Commission and installed himself as the head of this coordination body. He deployed the national security framing that positions NGOs as a threat to national security, whereas Hu viewed managing NGOs as a part of “stability maintenance” (Wang & Minzner, 2015). Xi has also promoted some ideological propaganda. Document No.9, a document circulated by the General Office of the CCP in 2013, pointed out the prospective ideological work of the state. This document cautioned against the “false ideological trends,” including western constitutional democracy, universal values of human rights, civil societies, neoliberalism, liberal journalism, etc. In this way, authoritarianism and heteronormativity are incorporated into the ideology of nationalism. Against this backdrop, rights-based activism is particularly targeted. For instance, in 2015, there was a large crackdown on a group of rights defense lawyers, and the lawyers were arrested on the allegation of inciting the subversion of state power (Lei, 2018). Similarly, LGBTQ activism has been accused of being “hostile foreign forces,” which originated from the West and are antagonistic against the Chinese regime. Under this ideological framing, LGBTQ identity and Chinese identity have been perceived as mutually exclusive. Although there were no formal rules banning the establishment or the operation of LGBTQ NGOs, the ideology propaganda of the state had a signaling effect. That is, as subjects of this ideology, the local police are more conscious about the pride events held for LGBTQ people; the mass media are stricter in censoring LGBTQ-related content; the diverse gender expression burdens some taboos. Taken together, LGBTQ NGOs operate in a harsh environment.

The LGBTQ NGO field is also embedded in the grassroots NGO field. Some rules that aim to regulate the grassroots NGO field impact LGBTQ NGOs disproportionally. In September 2016, PRC enacted Charity Law, which provided new ways for domestic nonprofit organizations to register and fundraise. The law permitted the NGOs to register as "charitable organizations" with the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) of the local governments only, and they do not need to find supervisory agencies. Charitable organizations could engage in public fundraising after they get charity certificates conferred by the state. Additionally, charitable organizations are supervised by relevant government departments and submit annual work reports and financial accounting reports to the departments (Charity Law, 2016). According to Spires, the issuance of the Charity Law has facilitated a new wave of corporatism since it is easy for entrepreneurs who have close ties with the governmental system to create charitable organizations (Spires, 2017). However, grassroots organizations are further marginalized since their funding channels are harshly scrutinized if they are not registered as charitable organizations. In January 2017, another law that regulated NGOs, the Law on Administration of Activities of Overseas NGOs in Mainland China, was enacted. This law influenced the grassroots NGOs that received financial support from International NGOs (INGOs). The law made it mandatory for INGOs to register with the Ministry of Public Security, and the INGOs were required to establish representative offices before carrying out activities in China. The INGOs that did not set up representative offices were required to cooperate with Chinese partners, including registered NGOs if they planned to carry out activities. The law also required the INGOs to report where they get their funds and how they use the funds in detail (Law on Administration of Activities of Overseas NGOs in Mainland China, 2017). The two laws disproportionally affected the LGBTQ NGO field. Given that the strict scrutiny of the MoCA and the "sensitive" nature of projects LGBTQ

NGOs operated, it is reasonable to infer that LGBTQ NGOs would not try to get registered as charitable organizations. Spires' studies also backed up this inference (2017). Besides, since INGOs were the major funding sources of most LGBTQ NGOs, the retreat of INGOs from China made tons of LGBTQ NGOs lose their financial support. My informants from Sparkling World said that before 2017, a large proportion of their funding came from the INGOs and companies that support LGBTQ communities, but their organization could no longer get funding after the law that regulated the INGOs was enacted (Informant Xiaonian and Informant Jiaxin, 2022).

The LGBTQ NGO field also has a close relationship with the field of online social media. On the one hand, the online space has created new ways of organizing activities. On the other, the presence of the state in the online sphere and its governance over it also impacted LGBTQ NGOs indirectly. The diffusion of digital technologies has provided broader spaces for public discussion, information sharing, and network building, and thus the online space has become a networked public sphere (Tufekci, 2017). Social media platforms, such as Sina Weibo, a microblogging platform similar to Twitter, and WeChat, the most popular social media app in contemporary China, have offered accessible ways to organize activities, build online communities, hold events, etc. However, on the other side, the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) also provides authoritarian governments with new approaches and strategies for political control (Lorentzen, 2013; Qin et al., 2017). According to Rongbin Han, state officials use ICTs to operate daily surveillance, prevent mass crisis in advance, manage ongoing crisis, and manipulate public opinion. There are both automatic and manual screenings of online media platforms, and "inappropriate" content would be removed. Individual violators may be notified to delete their posts, and their social media accounts can be suspended or even closed (Han, 2018). Although media censorship is not new in authoritarian

China, it has become stricter since 2013. In Xi's speech in 2013, he urged the Party to be "combative" online and wage war to win over public opinion by forming a "strong internet army to seize the ground of new media." Under this backdrop, the Central Leading Small Group on Internet Security and Informatization was established and then upgraded to the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission in 2018, and the leading group is meant to censor online content (Ma & Thomas, 2020).

Besides the routine surveillance of online content and posts, repressive actions of the state are adopted more actively in certain periods than in others. To illustrate this phenomenon, Rory Truex introduces the concept of the "dissident calendar," which means the set of dates known in advance by the public that could serve as focal points for potential collective action. The collective actions occurring in focal points are perceived as more threatening to the regime, and thus the authoritarian state would engage in preemptive repression before these dates to minimize the protentional threats (2016). According to H. Christoph Steinhardt, the periods before the dates in the dissident calendar constitute sensitive periods, which include the anniversaries of the mass repression of protests like the 1989 Tiananmen square Incident on June 4th, major political gatherings like the annual Two Meetings of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in early March, and the special anniversaries of the Party as well as the nation such as National Day on October 1st (2020). During these sensitive periods, local officials instruct their security personnel to pay close attention to social stability management and control work (Steinhardt, 2020).

Shutting down online social media accounts is frequently used by the state to stop the dissemination of information that is considered harmful to the state and individuals or organizations that disseminate such information are punished. The clampdowns investigated in

this research follow the rationale that the repressive measures are adopted by the state during sensitive periods. On July 6th, 2021, dozens of WeChat public accounts run by LGBTQ student organizations in universities were cracked down without providing any explanations. Harmony Student Club and Rainbow Coalition were two of them. According to the retrospect of the current chair of Rainbow Coalition, 2021 was a "special year." In March and April, many chairs of the LGBTQ student organizations were called by the staff from the administrative institutions in their own universities. Some of them were asked to provide information about the activities they plan to hold, and some of them were asked to stop the operations of their organizations in several upcoming months. From April to June, the LGBTQ social organizations in Southern China encountered strict inquiries. Most of the organizations, either student organizations or social organizations, did not hold public events in May and June (An informant Tang). Following the logic of Truex and Steinhardt, the year 2021 could be considered a sensitive year because it is the 100th year since the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. And the period around the date of the anniversary, July 1st, was extremely sensitive (Truex, 2016; Steinhardt, 2020). Thus, it is reasonable to say that the date of the mass clampdown, July 6th, was in a sensitive period. Sparkling World was clamped down in early March of 2022, which coincided with the annual Two Meetings and International Women's Day. On May 31st, 2022, the WeChat public account of Rainbow Coalition was shut down again. The date was close to the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Incident on June 4th. Moreover, before being clamped down, Rainbow Coalition posted a notice on its WeChat public account that a workshop about political depression would be held on June 4th. Although this workshop was not meant to memorialize the Tiananmen Square Incident, according to my informant, the activities pertaining to politics are more likely to be repressed in sensitive periods (Steinhardt, 2020).

To summarize, the LGBTQ NGO field is constantly influenced by its broader environment. State power penetrates into multiple fields that LGBTQ NGOs are embedded in or interact with, and the regulations that the state imposes on other fields also impact the LGBTQ NGO field directly or indirectly. However, the actors in the LGBTQ NGO field are not passive recipients who are subject to external pressures. Instead, the actors inside the field are able to make adjustments in accordance with the changes in the environment as well as find opportunities to make a difference. In the next section, I will move into how actors in the LGBTQ field react to external pressures.

The Three LGBTQ NGOs and their Cultural Projects in the Field

In this part, I will focus on three LGBTQ NGOs whose WeChat public accounts were shut down and who then reorganized successfully. I will introduce each organization's organizational forms, routine activities, cultural projects, and their strategies to cope with the clampdown. These factors could shed light on different levels of resiliency of the organizations as well as the cultural changes they have made in the LGBTQ NGO field.

Harmony Student Club – An Institutionalized Organization

Harmony Student Club is a student organization in a public university, Y University, located in a city in Southern China. It was established in 2005 after a professor gave a course pertaining to homosexuality at Y University. The organization aims to provide a platform for students to talk about gender-related topics, especially feminist sentiments as well as LGBTQ-related content. One major goal of the organization is to raise the consciousness of the students regarding social inequalities based on gender and sexuality and encourage students to change the status quo (Harmony Student Club WeChat post, 2016). There are two major departments in

Harmony Student Club: the activity department and the translation department. Members of the activity department are responsible for holding routine activities, such as reading workshops and networking events. Members of the translation department translate some English academic articles on gender studies, including sexuality education, feminist theory, and queer studies, into Chinese. Then, they post those translated articles on the WeChat public account of the Harmony Student Club, which is accessed for free (Informant Yan and Informant Sizhe, 2022).

Harmony Student Club is embedded in the field of the university student organization system, which is strictly regulated by the institutional logics of the field. I argue firstly that the members of a student organization are limited to the students on campus, and the activities it holds target the students in the same university. Secondly, a student organization is under the management of the Committee of Communist Youth League (tuanwei), a department of the administrative institution in each university that manages and supervises the activities to student organizations. Suppose the organization members plan to hold public activities to recruit members outside of their organizations on campus, especially the activities that utilize the venues of the university. In that case, the organizers must get approval from tuanwei. Thirdly, student organizations normally apply a hierarchical organizational structure with a regular and frequent turnover rate. There is a chair for each organization. Under the chair, there are several departments, and each department has its leader. A student organization recruits new members each year as the freshmen come to campus, and the new members who get admitted to an organization are assigned to different departments of the organization. The members of the leadership team, including the chair of the student organization and the leaders of each department, are always sophomores and juniors. In most cases, the leadership team changes yearly. The members of the new leadership team are always directly appointed by the members

of the old leadership team. Though some organizations adopt the voting system, the mechanisms are always immature, and the consequences can be easily manipulated (Informant Xudao, 2022). Additionally, the "retired" members can still work for the organization until graduation if they want.

Harmony Student Club is governed by the three logics above. The logic that the members are limited to and the activities are targeted at university students of a student organization implies the closeness of the community. All active members of the Harmony Student Club are students at Y University. Although they claim that they welcome participants of any age, as well as any location, few members outside of the Y University have joined (Informant Sizhe, 2022). Most activities that Harmony Student Club routinely holds are the ones that are popular among university students, including academic workshops, roundtable discussions, card games, and dating activities, which are not widely held by individuals out of universities. According to an article posted by the Harmony Student Club WeChat public account, which collected interviews with former members of the organization, many members defined Harmony Student Club as a small, closed, and inclusive community (2022).

As a student organization, Harmony Student Club is under the control and management of tuanwei. The chair and the department leaders of the organization need to submit the activity proposal to tuanwei and negotiate with its staff if they plan to hold an event that is open to the whole university. One of the greatest struggles that the organization has encountered was the cancellation of their play, The Vagina Monologues, by tuanwei in 2018. The Vagina Monologues is a play written by Eve Ensler and was first performed at HERE Arts Center in New York City. The play talks about the topics of female sexual experience, genital mutilation, experiences of reproduction, menstrual periods, prostitution, etc. (Ensler, 1996). The play was

introduced to China in the early 2000s, and Harmony Student Club hosted the play every year from its establishment until 2018. The students made some adjustments to the original script and performed in a venue of Y University. The play brought some taboo topics into the students' sights, including women's orgasms, sexual harassment, lesbian politics, gender transition surgeries, etc. Some topics were heatedly discussed by not only the members of the organization but also the students at the whole university. In an interview, a former chair claims that "the discussions followed by the play made the students rethink the taboo topics, and in the long run, those topics are visible and normalized" (Harmony Student Club WeChat public account, 2022). The project of The Vagina Monologues was terminated in 2018 by tuanwei, which could be attributed to the increasingly conservative political environment. Against this backdrop, the topics that could be talked about publicly before are now deemed sensitive. Moreover, as Yan and Sizhe mentioned, tuanwei has not allowed Harmony Student Club to attend the Baituandazhan, the affairs held for all student organizations on campus to recruit new members in October every year, and the members are struggling to cope with the pressures imposed by tuanwei.

Given the hierarchical structure of the student organizations, the organizational style of Harmony Student Club is highly dependent on the chair of the organization. According to Yan, a few years ago, there was an extroverted chair. And under his management, Harmony Student Club held activities with a high frequency, around once per week, which made many members of the organization become friends. However, as the chair changes, the organizational style changes accordingly. Nowadays, they do not have as many activities as before. The high turnover rate, on the other hand, also makes it hard to have formal rules in a student organization. As Sizhe, the current chair of the Harmony Student Club, pointed out,

> *"We have a loose organizational culture (Sizhe chuckled). We do not have any rules to regulate how frequently we should meet and what kind of projects we should work on regularly. Every participant could come up with a project they want to do and then work on it if it is feasible…So, we might have many projects working on sometimes and no project at all at other times."*

Similarly, as a member of the translation department, Yan added that the selection of the articles being translated was also determined by translators themselves. They may select the ones assigned by their professors, the ones they read on other platforms, or the ones they were interested in. Yan concluded that most members of the translation department do not mean to build a connection with the readers of their translated articles; rather, most of them do this work to maintain and express their own cultural beliefs in this closed community.

Harmony Student Club was one of the organizations whose WeChat public accounts were clamped down on July 6th, 2021. Since it was a mass clampdown that tons of student organizations encountered, the members of Harmony Student Club did not feel severe emotional distress. One lesson they have learned from the clampdown is that they need to explore more approaches to archive their posts as well as the channels to deliver their messages in case of being clamped down on one platform and thus losing collective memories (Informant Yan and Informant Sizhe, 2022). The new public account was created in March 2022. According to Sizhe, it took them some time to find the articles they had posted on their former account since the managers of the public account had changed several times, and some of them did not have the habit of saving manuscripts of the articles they posted. Besides, under the backdrop of the pandemic, Y University postponed the start date of the school year, and the students then had a hard time coping with travel restriction policies and lockdown rules. Thus, the members of the Harmony Student Club put aside the organization's affairs for several months. Actually, the projects that Harmony Student Club worked on did not change a lot because of the July 6th clamp down. This July, a new project was launched -- the current members interview the former

members about their experiences in Harmony Student Club, their thoughts pertaining to the LGBTQ organizations, and the suggestions they have for the current members, and then organize and publish the interview materials on their WeChat public account (Harmony Student Club WeChat public account, 2022). I would argue that most of the projects that Harmony Student Club has worked on are cultural ones which would meet few hindrances in the process of reorganization.

For further plans, Sizhe claimed that they would focus more on offline activities, which would be held in small groups. On the one hand, the activities held in small groups of people do not need to get approval from tuanwei. On the other, given the strict censorship on social media platforms, offline activities are much harder to be tracked. Besides, Sizhe also mentioned that they would try to find other venues and resume the performance of The Vagina Monologues.

In summary, Harmony Student Club was highly institutionalized by the rules that governed the university student organization field. Thus, the members of the organization seldom come up with creative activities that are absent in this field. Moreover, under the governance of tuanwei, the autonomy to hold transformative projects like The Vagina Monologues is increasingly shrinking.

Rainbow Coalition – A Transformative Organization

Rainbow Coalition was a student organization at first whose organizational form was similar to the Harmony Student Club. It aimed to provide informal mental support to LGBTQ people as well as promote knowledge about gender diversity. The works that the members of Rainbow Coalition operated could be divided into three subfields: community-building, informal online counseling, and academic research (Informant Dudu and Informant Tang, 2022). For the community-building department, the activities that Rainbow Coalition held were similar to the

ones held by Harmony Student Club, which were popular among university students. For example, organization members may be gathered to watch an LGBTQ-related movie together and share their thoughts in a roundtable discussion session (Informant Dudu, 2022). Not surprisingly, the members of the academic research team usually translate some academic journal articles or conduct their original research in the field of social sciences, which is similar to the Harmony Student Club. The service of informal online counseling provided to LGBTQ people is an original project initiated by Rainbow Coalition. Rainbow Coalition intends to provide "peer support" – talking with the clients, listening to their struggles, and providing suggestions to them. The counseling providers are students or volunteers who worked for Rainbow Coalition. They got basic training in counseling from students with psychology majors before they acted as informal counselors (Informant Tang, 2022).

After the July 6th clampdown, the organizers of the Rainbow Coalition implemented a strategy called "getting out of the university" to transform the organization from a student organization to a social organization. Following the concept of organizational repertoires that Clemens elaborated on, the available organizational forms or models are cultural "toolkits" of an organization. The organization could adopt a new organizational form or the combination of multiple organizational forms at its disposal (Swidler, 1986; Clemens, 1993). Although the model of social organizations was hardly adopted by the organizations affiliated with universities, it was still in the set of organizational models that are culturally and experientially available. The choice of organizational models is influenced by both instrumental as well as cultural considerations, which have rules about who should organize, in what way, and for what purposes (Clemens, 1993).

The transformation of the organizational forms brought changes to the members of the organization as well as its leadership team. According to Tang, the current chair of Rainbow Coalition, the organization has attempted to adopt the strategy of "getting out of the university" since 2019. Some activities held by the Rainbow Coalition started to open to other LGBTQ people outside of X University that year. However, since Rainbow Coalition did not change its university student organization model and thus is constrained by the institutional logics of the university student organization field as I analyzed before, the participants of Rainbow Coalition were still dominantly X University students. The July 6th clampdown served as an impetus for the leadership team of Rainbow Coalition to adopt the “getting out of the university” strategy officially in their process of reorganization. Rainbow Coalition opened a new WeChat public account several months after being clamped down, which signaled that it restored the routine operation of the organizational affairs. New members, who were outside of X University, were actively recruited. Dudu, Xiaonian, and Tang, three of my informants, who are not X University students, knew and joined Rainbow Coalition when they saw its recruitment information. According to Dudu, there were more than two hundred individuals who joined Rainbow Coalition after its reorganization within just a few months. Besides, the leadership team also welcomed individuals outside of X University. Tang, who had substantial experience working for LGBTQ-related NGOs, was assigned as the chair around mid-2022. Furthermore, Rainbow Coalition was able to hold some activities and events other than the ones that are popular among university students. According to Dudu, Rainbow Coalition held several big events after it reorganized successfully. At those events, they invited LGBTQ activists, non-profit organization leaders, the owners of gay and lesbian bars, etc., and they talked about the pressures they encountered, their future plans, and the potential for cooperation.

During the process of transformation, Rainbow Coalition adopted various approaches as well as found new allies. When Rainbow Coalition has adopted a new organizational model, it was able to recruit new members as well as provide services to not only students at a single university but also the whole public regardless of age, education level, and occupation. After the new WeChat public account was created, the members of the organization posted the recruitment information of their organization on multiple social media platforms, including social networking applications like Weibo, short video sites like TikTok, and gay/lesbian dating applications like Blued (Informant Tang, 2022). Besides disseminating the recruitment information by members of the organization, they also reached out to other LGBTQ organizations for help. For instance, Sparkling World reposted the recruitment information that Rainbow Coalition published in their WeChat public account and called its followers to join Rainbow Coalition. Moreover, the core members of Rainbow Coalition also actively participated in LGBTQ-related workshops to introduce their organization to a broader audience. According to Clemens, once the organizational model is selected, the relationship of this organization with its environment and other organizations would change. The choice of a model may draw an organization closer to some groups while weakening other inter-organizational ties (Clemens, 1993). As a social organization, Rainbow Coalition could build relationships with other LGBTQ-related organizations as well as small businesses that a student organization does not reach out habitually. Moreover, although Rainbow Coalition identified itself as a non-profit organization, it registered as a cultural company. According to Xiaonian,

> *"Under the backdrop of an increasing number of strict regulations as well as supervisions implemented on non-profit organizations since 2016, in my observation, there are three approaches that are normally adopted by LGBTQ NGOs: affiliating to registered HIV/AIDS NGOs; registering as businesses; keeping underground. Rainbow coalition chooses the second one."*

Tang added that Rainbow Coalition could be found on Tianyancha, China's leading website, which has collected information on nearly 300 million companies. Registering as a company, Tang argued, was partly because it was easy for them to rent venues for holding activities or events if their organization was a registered and legitimate organization. There are three sources available for Rainbow Coalition to rent venues. First, they can get help from LGBTQ NGOs with physical working sites, like Sparkling World. Second, they can cooperate with some private companies. For instance, they would use the venues of the companies and then make advertisements for those companies in return. Third, they are able to cooperate with foreign Consulate Generals located in Beijing who are willing to support LGBTQ rights (Informant Tang, 2022). Thus, the adoption of the model of social organization has helped Rainbow Coalition find allies and build new relationships with other organizations.

As for the rationale for adopting the strategy of "getting out of the university," Tang said, "it is partly because of the consideration that an LGBTQ social organization is less politically sensitive than an LGBTQ student organization." The view that the identity of the students is politically sensitive could be attributed to the aftermath of the 1989 Beijing Student Movement, a mass protest initiated and organized by university students located in Beijing. The 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident was a violent action adopted by the state to suppress the protesters (Zhao, 1998; 2000). X University, where the Rainbow Coalition was affiliated before, was one of the active universities in the 1989 Beijing Student Movement. The student organizations at X University, which have the potential to initiate social movements, have been under strict supervision in recent years, especially during sensitive periods (Informant Dudu & Informant Xiaonian, 2022). On the other hand, as tuanwei strengthened their control over LGBTQ student clubs, the members of Rainbow Coalition wanted to eschew the supervision of tuanwei.

Unfortunately, the WeChat public account of Rainbow Coalition was shut down again in May 2022. Compared with the mass clampdown that many organizations encountered on July 6th, 2021, this clampdown was targeted at Rainbow Coalition solely. And the organizational members, especially core members, felt much more distressed compared with the last clampdown (Informant Tang, 2022). In this case, as Tang recalled,

> *"I guessed there were three possible reasons that contributed to this clampdown. Firstly, the previous chair openly criticized the state policy as a representative of Rainbow Coalition…and the organization was targeted by the police; secondly, we recruited participants to join an online workshop pertaining to political depression that would be held on June 4th, a sensitive date, through our WeChat public account; thirdly, we translated an article about LGBTQ movements in Russia and published it on our WeChat public account."*

I asked Dudu and Tang about their future plans for reorganization. Both of them agreed that they would keep the project of informal online counseling. As Tang said, there are many professional counseling services provided for LGBTQ people, and most of them adopt a counselor-patient framework, which easily makes clients feel that they are sick to some extent. Rainbow Coalition was the only NGO that provided "peer support" services, which could fill the blank of the "market." The counseling is operated through Rainbow Coalition's WeChat public account every Friday night. A step further, beyond keeping the operation of the "peer support" project, members of Rainbow Coalition also plan to explore other opportunities. For example, they plan to make short videos about the stories of LGBTQ individuals and post those videos on Bilibili, a video-sharing website popular in China. Compared with texts, videos are much harder to censor, and videos are easier to build communication with the audience. They also plan to carry on some formal translation projects that could be published by publishing companies.

To summarize, as an organization adopts a specific model of organization, it signals its identity to its own members and others. The organizational transformation of the Rainbow

Coalition implied changes in the primary identities of its members: from students to LGBTQ activists. The transformative model of the Rainbow Coalition could enrich the cultural repertoires that could be imitated by other organizations. In a conference participated in by many LGBTQ NGOs, the members of other LGBTQ student organizations stated that the Rainbow Coalition was a good model for them, and that they may also try to implement the strategy of "getting out of the university" (Conference, 2022). Although the Rainbow Coalition was clamped down again, the transformative model is still available for other organizations.

Sparkling World – A Prefigurative Community

Sparkling World was a lesbian grassroots organization established in 2005 as a response to the invisibility of lesbians in the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which enormously increased the visibility of gay communities disproportionally. The issues that Sparkling World has been concerned with are not only lesbian issues in particular but also LGBTQ-related as well as women-related topics. Following Taylor and Whittier, who refer to lesbian feminist communities as the "prefigure" of an ideal society, I would argue that Sparkling World is a prefigurative community with a non-hierarchical structure, whose inclusive cultural codes are practiced in "submerged" networks (Taylor & Whittier, 1992; Melucci, 1989).

The organizational form that Sparkling World adopted is non-hierarchical. Compared with Weberian formal organizations, which have bureaucratic structures and fixed working standards, the structure of Sparkling World is informal, but it is responsive to the needs of the communities. Rather than having an organizational chair who oversees all affairs in the whole organization, Sparkling World has applied a "co-director system," which comprises four directors at the horizontal level who manage the organizational affairs together (Informant Xiaonian and Informant Jiaxin). Xiaonian, an intern of Sparkling World, pointed out that

Sparkling World has a friendly working environment, and the new projects would be discussed by the members of the working team before they were launched. Besides, aside from long-term projects, many projects that Sparkling World is working on are highly responsive to the social issues that were heatedly discussed by the public. For example, there was a heated discussion about the discrimination rules towards LGBTQ people in some companies. As a response, Sparkling World posted an article that collected the relevant anti-discrimination laws in China that people could use to protect their rights (Sparkling World WeChat public account, June 2022). After the July 6th mass clampdown of LGBTQ student organizations, Sparkling World held an in-person workshop for leadership teams of student organizations based in Beijing. In the workshop, the members of Sparkling World gave some support and provided some suggestions to the student organizers (Informant Xiaonian and Informant Tang, 2022).

However, adopting a non-hierarchical organizational structure does not mean that Sparkling World has no basic rules of management and operation. Instead, it has different departments which are responsible for different types of long-term projects. The projects are well-organized and carried out on schedule. And the works allocated to the members of a work team need to be done on time. The three dominant departments of Sparkling World are the social advocacy department, the media communication department, and the community building department. The members of the social advocacy department work in two areas: international LGBTQ advocacy programs initiated by the United Nations as well as national advocacy projects seeking the equal rights of LGBTQ people. The members of the media communication department operate the social media accounts of Sparkling World on various platforms, including WeChat public account, Weibo, etc. As for the community building department,

currently, there are three active projects: the oral history project, the assistance program for newly established LGBTQ organizations, and the volunteer editor project.

The oral history project was initiated in 2009, which aimed to collect the stories of the establishment and the changes in LGBTQ communities, especially lesbian communities, since the 1990s in China. The members of this project conducted interviews with 38 LGBTQ activists, investigated 9 communities and collected materials from multiple archives. Then, the members organized the collected data around various topics. Since September 2016, one short article with a specific topic has been published on the Sparkling World WeChat public account each week (WeChat public account of Sparkling World). The assistance program for newly established LGBTQ organizations was initiated in 2019. It aims to provide some help for comparatively inexperienced organizers. Xiaonian is a member of this project. She said, “in our project, we provide inclusive sexuality education materials, deliver training as well as grants, and hold workshops or salons.” In mid-2022, the community building department initiated a new project, which provided opportunities for volunteers to write articles and post them on Sparkling World’s WeChat public account. The articles need to be summaries of several journal articles pertaining to gender and sexuality studies. The volunteers are free to choose specific topics in accordance with their interests, and they will get some basic training before they write their articles. According to Jiaxin, the operator of this volunteer editor project, this project was established to get more individuals involved in knowledge production and construct a community for individuals who are interested in gender and sexuality studies. Jiaxin and her colleagues were always there to help the volunteers when they had questions. And they were willing to foster an environment that was open to discussion. Compared with other volunteer opportunities in most NGOs, where volunteers were hired for the operation of some already established projects, this

project of Sparkling World was designed for volunteers. Instead of focusing on the efficiency of the project operation, Sparkling World is concerned more with the incorporation of diverse volunteers. It is open to recruiting new members, and the project operators are willing to provide training to its new members. Moreover, volunteer editors do not need to be experienced with editing or have a background in social sciences; instead, volunteers with any majors are welcomed.

Following Alberto Melucci, “submerged” networks, which are on the flip side of the visible dimension of professional-political collective action, function as "cultural laboratories" where individuals practice alternative cultural codes in their daily interaction (Melucci, 1989). The non-hierarchical organizational form and the community building projects I mentioned above are cultural experiments of the Sparkling World, which differentiate it from mainstream NGOs. Beyond that, when members work on those projects, they also practice alternative cultural codes when they interact with other community members. Members of Sparkling World are encouraged to use pseudonyms they picked up for themselves rather than their given names in their daily conversation. Moreover, in the events held by Sparkling World, members always include their gender pronouns when they introduce themselves to others, which is hardly seen in most settings other than LGBTQ-related events in China. It is worth noticing that the members use English words when they say their gender pronouns. It is because there is no parallel concept of "gender pronouns" in Chinese culture, and there are no equivalent Chinese words for gender-neutral pronouns -- "they/them." In written texts, when someone's gender identity is not disclosed, "ta," the pronunciation of the Chinese words "she" and "he," is always used. In July 2022, there was an online activity initiated by Sparkling World, which called for the subscribers of its WeChat public account to create a Chinese word for gender-neutral pronouns.

Compared with the two organizations listed above, Sparkling World has higher resiliency to cope with the clampdown. The WeChat public account of Sparkling World was clamped down in March 2022, and it opened a new public account around ten days later. Some members still held interviews to recruit new interns the day after the clampdown following the planned schedule. Xiaonian states that the core members of Sparkling World have the expectation that their public account would be clamped down sooner or later after they witnessed the clampdowns of many feminist organizations and LGBTQ organizations. The core members held an in-person meeting after their WeChat public account was clamped down. Jiaxin, who participated in the meeting, recalled:

> *"In the meeting, the core members were not pessimistic or cynical…One member said it did not matter if the brand of our organization existed or not; instead, what really mattered were our members as well as the things we did and would do…As long as we are here, we can always do something. Where there is life, there is hope.*

According to Jiaxin, Sparkling World was not severely affected by the online clampdown since the core members of Sparkling World are experienced in coping with pressures similar to it. Since its establishment, there have been many instances that the local police terminated the ongoing events held by Sparkling World, and the members learned some lessons from their previous experiences. For example, an archival website for saving the articles they posted on their WeChat public account was established several years ago. To prevent getting the attention of the police, they would not disseminate information about the events they plan to hold on their social media platforms. Rather, according to Xiaonian, participants got to know the events through interpersonal as well as informal communication. She took her personal experience as an example. She recalled the first event she attended held by Sparkling World and found that she got to know about this event because her roommate informed her. At this event, she built a

personal relationship with one of the core members, Jiaxin, and then got invited when there were other events or activities.

I would say that Sparkling World works actively in both online and offline spaces, but the two spaces do not overlap too much. Instead, they have different projects and separate information transmission channels. Contrary to common sense that the online platform always plays the role of information transmission, the online posts of Sparkling World did not serve offline activities. In the case of the clampdown on the WeChat public account, only the online space of the Sparkling World was affected, while the offline activities worked as usual (Informant Xiaonian, 2022). But given that the archival site has already been established, the clampdown has limited influence on online projects. For instance, the articles of the oral history projects were uploaded to the new public account in June 2022. Members of the media communication department were responsible for the reorganization of the WeChat public account. As a subscriber of the WeChat public account of Sparkling World, I have experienced the process of its reorganization. Firstly, Sparkling World posted a poster including a WeChat ID of a private account operated by the members of the media communication department on other social media platforms like Weibo. The previous subscribers who saw the information would directly add a private WeChat account. Then they would be added to a WeChat chatting group, where they could get updates on the reorganization and subscribe the new public account as soon as it was created.

To summarize, compared with the other two organizations, Sparkling World has the highest level of resiliency when they encountered the clampdown, which could be attributed a lot to the strategy of separating the operation of the online and offline projects. Moreover, the

members of the Sparkling World experiment with various cultural codes and ways of life in their daily interaction, which help to build a quasi-utopian gender-inclusive community.

Summary

There are diverse types of organizations that carry out various projects in the LGBTQ NGO field. In my research, I investigate three of them. The Harmony Student Club is highly institutionalized by the logics that rule the university student organizations; the Rainbow Coalition provides a transformative organizational model that enriches the organizational repertoires; the Sparkling World endeavors to construct a community that is inclusive and supportive. The sudden clampdown on the WeChat public accounts is a manifestation of the unstable nature of China's LGBTQ NGO field. Against this backdrop, there are no preferred organizational models or strategies, and LGBTQ NGOs need to try different approaches to "test the water" based on their positions in the field. The cultural projects they operate and the organizational forms they innovate enrich the repertoires of the field, which are experientially available for other organizations.

Furthermore, the activities of LGBTQ NGOs and the interactions between those NGOs can shape the environment of the whole field. In the unstable LGBTQ NGO field, the NGOs work in cooperative rather than competitive ways. Instead of competing for resources and becoming dominant incumbents in the field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), LGBTQ NGOs perceive themselves as components of a supportive community. Therefore, they are willing to share their information and experience with others.

Conclusion

This study examines the Chinese LGBTQ NGO field by analyzing the exogenous forces that impact the field as well as the experiences of the actors inside the field. Since society is composed of a multiplicity of fields, the LGBTQ NGO field inevitably interacts with other fields and is influenced by them. In the first part of this thesis, I examine the interactions of the LGBTQ field with other fields which account for the instabilities of the LGBTQ NGO field. Given an authoritarian state, the state power penetrates into multiple fields that have close interactions with the LGBTQ NGO field and implements some pressures on it in both direct and indirect ways. In the second part of the thesis, I examine how LGBTQ NGOs experience the instabilities of the field. Since there are no settled institutional logics ruling the LGBTQ NGO field, NGOs need to "test the water" themselves. The members of LGBTQ NGOs innovate organizational forms, operate creative projects, and practice inclusive discourses in their daily work and interaction. In this way, the LGBTQ NGO field can be seen as a cultural laboratory, and LGBTQ NGOs are the agents of cultural change-makers.

This study has several implications for NGO field and field theory in general. Firstly, analyzing the organizations in a field makes the relational mechanisms of multiple organizations visible. Secondly, by analyzing the LGBTQ NGO field in China, I intend to add authoritarian contexts into the discussion of field theory. The presence of the strong states adds complexities and ambiguities to the field ecology and is able to impact the interactive patterns of the actors inside a field.

Moreover, the finding of this study that LGBTQ NGOs are culture change-makers has implications on social movement scholarship in two ways. On the one hand, as social changes, especially institutional change, brought out by visible social movements have been explored extensively, this study turns to the latent social change carried out through daily work and

interactions. On the other, the cultural approaches also provide some insights into the ways to make social changes under closed political opportunities.

Besides, the limitations of the study cannot be ignored. Firstly, because of the limited research time, I just examined three LGBTQ NGOs, which are far less sufficient to capture the landscape of the whole LGBTQ NGO field. Secondly, the imitation, cooperation, or competition of the LGBTQ NGO field with its similar fields, like the feminist field, have not yet been explored in this research.

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