



What is it like to be transgender in China?

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Group Number: 1

Homosexual is becoming the least discriminated group among LGBTQ+ community in China as more cases concerning gay couples being exposed on mass media, while public still hold profound prejudice and misunderstanding towards transgender people as a part of sexual minority.

In 2012, news of a house on fire in Qingdao was suddenly reposted over thousand times. The owner, a scavenger wearing long hair with amateurish heavy makeup shown on the television became the center of controversy. Liu Peilin, 63, a trans woman raised by a foster family, is the main figure of the discussion.

Getting Liu on the phone, she told us her willingness to become a female was evoked from playing a heroine in a primary school drama, and it became stronger in her twenties. However, back in the 80s in Qingdao, one of the most conservative time and place, stating one as non-cisgender (gender identity different from assigned sex) would expose one to inconceivable malice, even danger. Thus she chose to keep her desire to become a woman a secret.

Liu had an undivided family before she came out, until a car accident took “his” daughter’s life. “His” wife went missing since then. After her former employer bankrupted, Liu sold her only shelter to raise money for her foster mother’s surgery. Since then Liu was carrying no extra dime except for debt over a hundred thousand Yuan. Liu settled down between a rock and a wall, and she learned to ignore others view towards her and started the life of a scavenger. Liu also became a woman as after that, dressed in women’s clothes that she found in the trash bin. “Strangers were spitting or cursing, I can only try not to take it too hard.”

Data

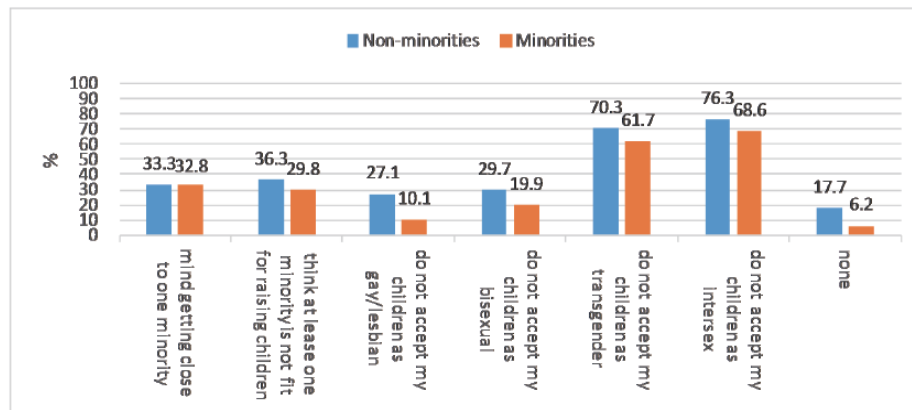
Because sensitivity of topics on LGBTQ community in China, most transgender people choose stay anonymous, which means that there is no relatively accurate statistics on current transgender population. Instead, here is a published research cooperated by Peking University and the NGO named Beijing LGBT Center.

According to this *national survey on social attitudes towards LGBTI in China*,

<https://www.undp.org/content/dam/china/img/demgov/Publication/UNDP-CH-PEG->

[Being%20LGBT%20in%20China_EN.pdf](#)), because 77% of questionnaire sample born in the 1990s and 80% live in city, the results are probably much more optimistic. Even with over 63% of sexual minority filling the questionnaire, trans people receive the second lowest tolerance as and from minorities.

Figure 4 Respondents' answers to minorities-related hypothetical questions (%)



Results of minorities taking this survey show that nearly 50% choose not to come out to families, 74.9% choose not to disclose their minority status at workplace. Only a few hospitals in Shanghai and Beijing are available providing prescription hormone to transgender.

The Pressure of Family Prejudice

Jerry, a trans man in Shanghai who asked to hide his last name, told us he resisted keeping any feminine feature (such as long hair) since five. He was so scared when his mother refused to feed him unless he obeyed to wear dresses. Since then Jerry had to put on what his mother asked him to wear.

Jerry also felt increasingly anxious and felt more uncomfortable when going to public lavatories. He believed that none of his female body parts belongs to him. Jerry became self-abased and started to fail in exams often because of his confusion of identity, and then he became depressed.

Similar stories happen time after time. Fu is a college student who grew up in Chongqing. He once mentioned the willingness to become a man through sex reassignment surgery to his mother in fifth grade, “her face suddenly turned pale, probably thought I’m some kind of monster.” A friend of Fu’s in high school helped her out. After knowing his situation, she actively researched cases to reassure Fu that he is not alone.

Wang Zhou, 22, came out two years ago after knowing the term “transgender”. Wang’s father threatened to suicide when he heard that Wang wanted to become a woman. Later when he confessed to his family that he had injected hormone, his father yelled that he would call the police and find out the source of medicine for Wang.

Societal Prejudice Towards Trans

Family is not the only origin of prejudice. There was a time when Liu Peilin attempted to find a job, but no company employed her after finding out her sexuality, and neighbors expelled her from the apartment.

Trying not to be called as a freak and being excluded again, Liu put on her only suit of men’s clothing and changed to a crew-like haircut to look more like a man. “It was so uncomfortable and embarrassing, like making a cisgender man put on lady’s wear,” Liu sounds dejected. “I can barely recognize myself, even talking coherently becomes difficult. But they still refuse to give me a job or a home.”

Avery Zhao, who is now working in Shanghai, is another trans woman among our telephone interviewees. She told us “transgender person” is mentioned as a derogatory term between relatives where she grew up. Experiences of bullied at secondary school in Guizhou is more serious. Because of her feminized action, “They pushed me to the

railings and imitate movement of intercourse.”

“The public wildly accept the majority rule, but people won’t think that meanwhile, the minority deserve to be respected.”

Born in the end of 80s, FangYuran’s perception of gender was given by parents until junior year. Joining a LGBT community in Beijing let him learn the term “Transgender” for the first time. More importantly, it is a refuge to be himself.

However, the sense of security was soon destroyed. Working at Beijing LGBT Center, Fang once shared his stories of being a transgender to Phoenix New Media.

“Someone made my personal contact public since then. People send messages to insult me, threatened to expose my address try to stop me from doing such report.”

Fang Yuran said on phone. Comments and harassment along with malice are contributing factors to his depression.

Gender Queer

Most of interviewees describe themselves as 70%-90% of gender identity, but Yuri Sa, who is attending university in US, is different. She is defined as gender queer—or non-binary—who has over more than one gender. Conception of gender was not distinct during Yuri’s adolescence, with mental traits of both boy and girl’s, she is a social misfit till now.

Solitude is a word almost every interviewee mentions, it comes with the resistance to prejudice for decades. Sa said public believes that being sexual minority means being non-conservative, even self-indulgent.

Expectation

When talking about expecting domestic changes for transgender, most give

suggestions on building public lavatories for third gender, popularization of consulting service and provision of prescription hormone; some mention permission of changing gender printed on diploma, or finding a job may exist as a huge problem if transgender change their sex on ID card after surgery.

Among the interviewees, Avery Zhao and Wang Zhou specifically expressed their dissatisfaction with status of LGBTQ+ in China. Referring to the case of homosexual male teacher in Qingdao was fired due to parents' concerns for children's safety. Wang Zhou gave his opinion. "Gay people are getting relatively the most attention and support (in LGBTQ+) in decades. If they are still being treated unfairly, equal rights for transgender in China is hard to imagine."

Zhao gives more detailed advice for online payment system and banks should offer optional or non-directional gender prefixes for customers, otherwise it may be offensive. She briefly relates the experience of being questioned by police two hours after posting personal view towards government on Moments using Wechat, saying freedom of speech is unreal today, not to mention protecting sexual minority if they cannot speak. Zhao and two other interviewees convey to us that they have plan and encourage qualified transgender emigrant to more friendly country.

"Government has no energy to spare in attaching importance to sexual minority yet," said Ander in our interview who is a university student in Canada. "First step should be giving the public correct understanding of transgender."

In recent years, more and more young generations are accepting the idea of transgender. In our interviews, peers give them the most assistance and courage. Though support rate is low, three out of five parents of transgender people in twenties hold neutral stance towards their gender identities.

Reported by dozens of media, Liu Peilin has over three thousand followers on Weibo become a positive public figure as transgender. Readers send packages of dresses and cosmetics to her new home built by volunteers in Fuzhou.

June 19, 2019, Nanjing Notary Office published an article on its Wechat official account stating gay couples are welcomed to apply voluntary legal guardianship, so as other minorities. Soon Notary Offices in Shanghai and Beijing followed its step, announcing availability of providing legal protection for LGBTQ in the area. Though there are still problems to be solved, the nation is working on treating minorities in a better way.