

DOCTORAL THESIS

The study of the responses of lalas to social exclusion in China

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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with non-heterosexual women, who are commonly known as lalas in China. The conditions for non-heterosexuals in China have been improving since the beginning of the reform period. But despite that the life of lalas is still full of difficulties because how the government, family and market operate is under heavy influence of heterosexism. Compared with other non-heterosexuals such as gay men, the difficulties faced by lalas receive much less attention not only in society but also in academic communities. To address this important but understudied area, this research focuses on the social exclusion faced by lalas and the anti-exclusion strategies they prefer to use. No study has been done on these issues in a systematic way before. The findings of the study serve to enhance our understanding of lalas and develop effective anti-exclusion strategies preferred by them. Moreover, the discussion of the findings of this study is intended to contribute to knowledge advancement especially in identifying the grey areas of the studies of the welfare mix approaches and the adult worker models.

Against this background, this research focuses on two main research questions (What are the patterns of social exclusion faced by lalas in China? What are the strategies preferred by lalas in China?) and two supplementary research questions (What are the implications of the study of social exclusion experience of lalas in China on the study of the welfare mix approaches? What are the implications of the study of the social exclusion experience of lalas in China on the study of adult worker models?)

Thanks to the 20 lalas informants, this research project obtains their important views on social exclusion through in-depth interviews. Despite the unfavorable conditions for non-heterosexuals to share views about their life in China, the lalas informants provide valuable information about social exclusion (or inclusion) issues they face in their daily life in the past, present and future (such as discriminations in school, work and difficulties to get along with family members) and the ways they try to deal with these issues (such as making plans on contract marriage, migration and cohabitation). This information, supplemented by those obtained from reviews of formal and informal document, and participant observations, provides insights into the examination of the anti-exclusion strategies (such as the RED, SID and social detachment) preferred by them, and the discussion of the importance of developing welfare mix approaches and the adult worker models based on non-heterosexism.

Furthermore, the findings show the commonalities and differences between lalas in their response to social exclusion. It is important to note that there is a gap between the anti-exclusion strategies many lalas prefer and what they could actually use. It is equally

important to note that some lalas could effectively deal with most of the life difficulties and become an invulnerable at least in some period of life. This discovery is useful both in gaining recognition of the unique life experience of each lala, and exploring the possibilities for lalas to tackle their shared problems in joint efforts.

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