

Civic Participation of the A4 Revolution in Australia: Feminism, Queer, and Identity

Key words

Cultural and Political Identity, Social Movements, Feminism, Queer Theory

Executive Summary

This research project involves the exploration of the political contention and influence of the “A4 Revolution” in Australia and how feminism and queer theories supporting LGBTQ rights affect the participation and identity development of the protestors. The research aims to analyse the A4 Revolution as a social and political movement occurring at macro and micro levels. The primary aim of the research is to comprehend the political implications for and significance of the A4 Revolution for women and the LGBTQ+ community in Australia, the reasons for the increasing civic participation of Chinese women and LGBTQ+ community overseas, and the influences of feminism and queer rights movements for shaping the protests and diverse personal and cultural identities among the Chinese community in Australia. This research will contribute to understanding the significance of civic participation for marginalised communities and the rise of feminism and queer participation in political and social movements.

This research will provide significant benefits, including insight into the importance of the A4 protests for Chinese and Australian politics, community-based activism in Australia, how and why people engage with these activities, the influence of modern feminism and LGBTQ+ theories in A4 Revolution, and Australia’s understanding of diverse identities and communities.

Research Aims and Objectives

Backgrounds & Significance

In October 2022 a Chinese man, Peng Zaizhou, stood on Sitong Bridge in Beijing with large banners to protest the harsh COVID restrictions in China and the tyranny of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). A month later, a fire broke out in Urumqi, Xin Jiang, which led to the death of at least ten residents caused by the lockdown hampered the entry of the rescue team and residents leaving the building. This triggered many Chinese citizens in several cities protesting the Zero COVID Policy and CCP. This was the largest protest in China since the Tiananmen Square protest in 1989, and was led by many young adults, feminist activists and gender and sexual minorities. The protest spread among young university students in China and encouraged many other supporters living overseas to participate. Several strategies and methods were used to spread information, including social media, posters, literature, and art. A number of female and queer activists were arrested by the Chinese government, showing that feminist and queer activists had caught their attention and had become political targets.

Though the protest only lasted for a few months, it is a significant event in Chinese history as public protest is exceedingly rare in China. Public protest rarely reaches this scale in China. The mainstream Chinese society's understanding of this protest as a collective phenomenon, its significance to other countries, and its relation to developing diverse identities are limited. The A4 Revolution has successfully ended the harsh "zero COVID" policy in China. Many recognise this political movement as a symbol promoting the collective awareness of many Chinese for their pursuit of freedom, citizenship, and dignity.

The feminist and queer movement in China has become a focus of protests due to widespread discrimination against women and the LGBTQ+ community in mainland China.

The demands of feminist activists and LGBTQ+ activists often intersect with each other, and both groups recognise that the patriarchal system in China significantly affects their rights as women and members of the LGBTQ+ community. In addition, censorship in China has led to the marginalisation of women and queer communities by making these communities less visible (Ling and Liao, 2020). The A4 Revolution demands freedom, dignity, and citizenship, aligning with the demands of women and queer activists. This protest provided the perfect time and platform for the groups to advocate for themselves. By advocating for women's and queer rights, these groups are fighting for the human rights of all people. Sexual and gender rights are human rights pertaining to sexuality and gender (Kismödi et al., 2017). Sexual and gender rights advocate for, including, equality and non-discrimination, the right to life, liberty, and security of the person, and the right to autonomy and bodily integrity (Kismödi et al., 2017). These rights are grounded in universal human rights, and advocating for gender and sexual rights is also promoting the fundamental human rights (Kismödi et al., 2017).

The A4 Revolution is a unique phenomenon in Australia and many other countries, as it is unusual to witness such a high level of participation among international students and new immigrants to Australia and other parts of the world (Gopalkrishnan and University of the Sunshine Coast, 2015). This also has had a significant impact on the discourse regarding the protest in China, as many media have referred to the overseas participants as "foreign forces" and have claimed they are brainwashed by foreign governments. This causes some stigma for Chinese feminists and LGBTQ+ people for being "westernised" and therefore traitors to their own country and culture. This not only impacts the personal and political identity of the activists, but also impacts the political participation of immigrants in Australia, and their sense of belonging here. This research is interested in exploring if living

overseas has influenced research participants in any way to engage with a protest deemed “dangerous”, and how the A4 Revolution might influence Australian society, politically and socially, more broadly.

This research will primarily focus on the participants of the A4 Revolution in mainland China and Australia. For the analysis of participants in mainland China, the research is interested in exploring the mobilisation of the movement under harsh censorship, the adoption of various methods, and the political demands of the public. For the movement in Australia, the focus will be the political positions of Chinese women and queer community and their sense of identity and belonging in Australia. The research on the participants in both countries will focus on their approach to mobilisation and political demands. It will utilise the study of participants in China and Australia to explore the engagement of women and queer communities in the protest and their significance in contemporary society. The A4 Revolution provides an opportunity to study how Australian politics and foreign affairs could interact and understand the participation of political minorities in Australia.

This research will offer an in-depth account of the network, strategies, activities of the protests, and the identity formation and reconstruction of protesters in Australia, especially feminist and queer protesters, including their relationships with the development and practices of the protest.

Aims

This research has 4 main aims:

1. To advance knowledge of the backgrounds, significance, and political contentions of the participation of female and members in the A4 Revolution in China and Australia. This research will explore the causes, political contentions, strategies, and

significance of the “A4 Revolution” in China and Australia, as well as how feminist and queer participations have conducted the protests organisationally and strategically. This will provide insights into the participation of the A4 Revolution in China and Australia, including the content and form of the protests, the demography of the participants, and the participation of feminists and sexual and gender minorities. This also enables analysis of the mobilisation of the overseas protests and the influence of Australian political climate on the protests.

2. To advance understanding of the influence and significance of western ideologies and political theories on the participation of Chinese feminists and queers in the A4 Revolution. This research will examine the reasons for feminist and queer activists' involvement in the A4 movement and how Western ideologies have supported and influenced the mobilisation and political discourse of the protests in China and Australia. The aim is to explore how Western ideologies influence protesters' perceptions of citizenship, civil rights, and political obligations. The impact of feminist and queer movements on the rights and identities of marginalised groups will also be addressed.
3. To advance understanding of the engagement of women and gender and sexual minorities in the protest and their significance in contemporary social movements and Australia politics. This study will explore the relationship between protests and gender and sexual identities, the role of feminist and queer theory in leading protests, and the impact of the protests on civic engagement in the LGBTQ+ community. It will examine the experience of protestors, patterns of interaction, affective dimensions of organising and participation, and the social and political significance of civic participation for marginalised communities. Research will also

focus on the micro-level of the political movements, including emotions and personal identities (Cini et al., 2017).

4. To explore current policy promoting the sense of identity of political minorities in Australia and to facilitate their civil participation in Australia. The project's focus on the micro-level elements of political movements and mobilisation will also be helpful in understanding the influences of political movements on people's identities, including their sense of belonging, cultural identity, and sense of (social, cultural and political) responsibility and belonging. This project aims to explore how minority people's identities and understandings of feminism and queer theory might affect their sense of belonging and civic participation in Australian society. The project aims to explore related policymaking, and how this affects the inclusivity of marginalised people and communities in civic participation. This will be beneficial to the political participation of minority groups, ensuring their rights and values are protected in Australian society.

Objectives

1. To understand the demands, significance, and political implications of feminist and queer participation in the A4 Revolution in China and Australia.
2. To understand how feminist and queer participants in the A4 Revolution have created social networks and discourses of political engagement and have their own communities and cultural meanings.
3. To understand the emergence and influence of western ideologies, including feminism and queer theory, in China, as leading the discussion for the protests and impacting, conceptually, the directions of the protests.

4. To understand the impact of the A4 Revolution in shaping participatory citizenship, which is characterised by meaningful involvement in and interaction with the community, civil society, and politics, and in impacting the diverse identities of feminist and queer communities.
5. To produce new insights into how civic disobedience and political engagement could generate a new sense of cultural and personal identity in Australia and to discuss policies for promoting and protecting the civic participation of women and queer communities in Australia and China.

Research Questions

1. What are the political debates, demands, significance and implications of women's and queer participations in the "A4 Revolution" in China and Australia?
2. Why is there increasing participation of women and people identifying as LGBTQ+ in the protest? How do their ideologies and identity intersect and interact with the protests and Australian politics itself?
3. How can the Australian government provide institutional support to promote civic participation and protect the voice of marginalised communities from diverse backgrounds?

Literature Review

The Feminism Movement in Modern China

Maoist Reform and Women's Role(s) in (Economic) Society.

Feminism has played a significant role in shaping modern China's social and cultural landscape. For over a century, feminist movements in China have fought the patriarchal system. The Chinese patriarchal system is often characterised by the supremacy of the

father and male and the subordination of women in households and society (Sinn, 1994). According to Yu (2020), when Mao made the statement “men and women are the same” in 1964, it was the time when the pursuit of male and female equality in China was the strongest. This movement also allowed women to enter the workforce and political movement, which created the illusion that Chinese women are fully liberated, and that sexism in China has been overthrown (Leung, 2003; Yu, 2020). During the Cultural Revolution, this ideology encourages women to be vocal and active in politics (Leung, 2003; Yu, 2020). However, this gender reconstruction emphasised the masculinisation of women, making women abandon the conventional gender role yet hold onto the responsibility as mothers and wives (Li, 1994; Rowbotham, 1992; Barlow, 1994; Leung, 2003). In the 1980s, the concepts of western feminism reached out to China with Deng’s “Open Door Policy”, yet the Chinese government did not attack it since promoting women’s liberation has been one of their basic policies, and feminism serves as a counterattack for the patriarchal culture and its defendants (Dai, 2007; Yu, 2020). However, with modernisation, the gap between men and women has widened, as most men view women entering the labour force as a threat to patriarchal authority (Leung, 2003). Overall, in recent Chinese history, gender equality appeared to be improved, yet it served as an ideological vessel where the traditional patriarchal system was not challenged, and the traditional domestic obligations were still upheld (Leung, 2003; Rowbotham, 1992).

Modern China and Contemporary Debates on Gender and Women’s Roles and Rights.

In post-reform China, women’s social role has become complicated due to the changing gender composition in many social dimensions (Leung, 2003). Gender inequality in many

workplaces has discouraged many women from returning home to uphold social orders to fulfil the traditional societal expectations for women (Leung, 2003; Wang, 2017). Education in this period has become the primary method for women to seek independence and existence, yet discriminatory practice against women starts emerging from the workplace due to traditional values and structures (Leung, 2003; Sun & Chen, 2015; Wang, 2015). The individual liberation of women was not discussed at the time (Croll, 1995; Leung, 2003).

In modern Chinese society, with the development of technology and the influence of western feminist ideologies, feminist movements that aim to promote individual women's rights started emerging on digital platforms (Baer, 2016; Baer, 2018; Yin, 2020). Adopting the digital platform allowed the connection between individual experiences and collective actions and promoted new ways of networking and mobilisation for feminism activism in China (Traver, 2003; Salter, 2013; Baer, 2016; Baer, 2018; Yin, 2020). The appeal of Chinese feminism stems from the challenge of the patriarchal system in the private and public domain, as well as work as the safeguard for women's rights in the legal system (Yu, 2020).

The LGBTQ+ Movement in China

Homosexual Repression in China.

Attitudes towards homosexuality have always been a complex issue in China. In ancient China, society is quite tolerant towards homosexuality (Burger, 2012). However, after the Second Opium War and Christian missionaries arrived in China, Western values were also brought to China, including classifying homosexuality as a psychological disorder (Yu, 2020). By 1949, same-sex behaviour was considered deviant (Yu, 2020). The establishment of the People's Republic of China started "the dark days for homosexuality in China", and the notion of homosexuality was erased from the public consciousness (Yu, 2020). This has

continued in modern Chinese society, and most people remain ignorant of homosexuality and believe it is a concept imported from the West (Yu, 2020). Cultural Revolution in China has also significantly impacted the public view of homosexuality, as homosexuals are often criticised as class enemies and punished harshly (Burger, 2012; Yu, 2020). Homosexuals are often punished by law as “hooliganism” and face penalties and prosecutions (Yu, 2020).

Modern China and Contemporary LGBTQ+ Politics.

In modern society, homosexuality still faces prejudices and stigma from mainstream society due to a lack of education and information (Li, 2006; Cui, 2008; Yu, 2020). The HIV pandemic also contributes to public homophobia (Mao, 2020). The current government also remains conservative regarding issues around the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, and any content related to the LGBTQ+ community still faces heavy censorship (Bao, 2018; Jia & Zhou, 2015; Cao & Lu, 2014; Mao, 2020). The focus towards the LGBTQ+ community in China is mainly on LGBT NGOs driven by the global concerns of the HIV pandemic (Ling, 2022).

The study regarding other sub-groups of the LGBTQ+ community is minimal, such as the transgender community. Due to the focus on the HIV pandemic and misogyny, the Chinese lesbian community is also under-studied (Ling, 2022). In addition, due to the heavy censorship, no large-scale movement related to LGBTQ+ rights in China can be identified.

Theoretical Framework

New Social Movement Theory (NSMT)

New Social Movement Theory emphasises the importance of cultural values, gender, and environment for social movements and the role of social networks and media (Buechler, 2013; Downing, 2008). It challenges resource mobilisation theory and emphasises decentralised organisation, collective identity and consciousness, and symbolic and cultural

resources (Buechler, 2013; Klaridermans, 1986). This would benefit the project when studying the participation of the feminist and queer community and how their identities affect their civic participation. In addition, NSMT is beneficial for studying diasporic activism, which plays an essential role in the fight for transparency, freedom, and human dignity against authoritarian states, especially by allowing activists to advocate in and from safer environments (Al-Rustom, 2013). NSMT can be used for exploring the emergence of diasporic activism and the importance of identity, culture, and values in forming and mobilising diasporic communities. NSMT strongly emphasises the value of these networks and the contribution of social media to diasporic activism (Moss, 2018; Aziz, 2022). NSMT theory can also provide a valuable framework for understanding the impact of transnational repression on diasporic communities (Moss, 2016). Transnational repression creates a sense of vulnerability and fear among diasporic communities and can interrupt political mobilisation (Moss, 2016). New Social Movement Theory can provide insights into the dynamics of transnational repression and its impact on diasporic communities, as well as how activists adapt using different types of communication technologies (Moss, 2016; Moss, 2018).

Intersectionality

Intersectional feminist theory will be used to understand the experiences of women and the LGBTQ+ community in the “A4 Revolution”. Intersectionality recognises that different social identities, such as gender identity and sexual orientation, intersect and interact, which leads to various experiences of oppression and privileges (Carastathis, 2014; Laperrière & Lépinard, 2016). The use of intersectional feminist theory could benefit the research in understanding the different experiences of women and the LGBTQ+ community, due to oppression unique to individual communities (Laperrière & Lépinard, 2016). This research

will explore how different social and political identities and oppressions influence the movement's objectives, tactics, outcomes, and complexity.

Queer Theory

Queer theory provides a framework to understand how dominant social constructions of gender and sexuality can be used to preserve existing power dynamics and reinforce repressive societal structures (Hennessy, 1994). Queer theory can be used to explore the political demands and mobilisation of the LGBTQ+ movements in China, which are influenced by normative construction of gender and sexuality and the patriarchal system (Crowder, 2007). It can help to understand the nature and effects of heteronormativity and cisnormativity (Crowder, 2007) in China, and to recognise the agency and resilience of the Chinese LGBTQ+ community.

Methodology

Methods

Aim 1:

The primary task is a qualitative mapping exercise to search out different strategies adopted by the A4 Revolution protestors across China and other countries. This task addresses the diversity of adopted strategies for mobilising the A4 Revolution in China and Australia and the breadth of activities across the protests. A key element for this protest is decentralisation (去中心化), which leads to many of the groups being ad hoc and ephemeral. It will aim to identify various materials used for strategically mobilising the protests.

Social media has played a significant role in the formation and mobilisation of the A4 Revolution, providing a platform for the marginalised to speak up and draw attention to

issues such as gender-based inequality and discrimination. The research will identify the distribution of information, such as using poster and social media posts. These resources include texts, images, literature, online interviews, and arts. Much of the needed information can be found online, such as through Instagram, by searching for keywords relating to the A4 Revolution. The research will track activist groups through their social media and websites, which are publicly available on platforms such as Instagram. NVivo will be used to categorise and label data to create a database for analysis of the unstructured text, audio, videos, and images from social media.

Social media data can provide insights into the attitudes, behaviours, and experiences of queer and feminist activists in the A4 Revolution, helping researchers understand the political demands and critical issues that are important to these communities. Social media data can help researchers understand the adoption of feminism and queer ideologies in the A4 Revolution, influencing personal and cultural identity.

Aim 2 & 3:

This research will explore the macro and micro-level of the A4 Revolution and the understanding of community, people, and identity in Australia. The macro-level studies will focus on the ideological perspective of the movement, including how different political views affect the movement and the significance of the movement for the Chinese women and queer community in Australia. The micro-level studies of social movements focus on the link between emotions and social movements and highlight the personal experience of participation from a gender perspective (Cini et al., 2017).

This research will use semi-structured interviews and surveys to collect data and focus on those identifying as women and/or as part of the LGBTQ+ community. The interview will

adopt structured and open-ended questions to discuss the experience of the participants from the women and queer community and aim to gain in-depth understanding of the micro-level of the movements. This would ensure that the research generates a profound exploration to develop a multi-faceted understanding of the complexity and uniqueness of the experience of the protestors with diverse identities (Simon, 2009).

A survey will be designed using Likert-scale questions to discuss the experience of civic participation as gender and sexual minorities. This helps get feedback regarding the movements to the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of the participants.

These are some sample questions that may be included in the survey:

1. How important do you think social media and online platform is for helping mobilise the A4 Revolution?
2. How important do you think it is for raising issues with women's and LGBTQ+ community's rights in the A4 Revolution?
3. How much do you think studying or living outside of China has affected your attitudes towards gender and sexuality issues?

While focusing on personal experience, the interview and survey would engage with the reflection of gender, sexuality, and power with the participants to further explore their identity, struggles, and resilience.

Aim 4:

The "What's the Problem Represented to be?" (WPR) method will be adopted to analyse related policies that affect the civic participation of political minorities in Australia. This research will identify policies related to inclusivity, multiculturalism, and civic participation

and identify the patterns presented in these documents. This method reveals the underlying assumptions and power relations that shape policy decisions (Bacchi, 1999). This method aims to provide a critical analysis of the power structures that shape the policy-making process, which directly affect political minorities (Bacchi, 1999).

Data Analysis

This project intends to utilise thematic analysis and content analysis for data analysis. The thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify and interpret patterns of meaning with data, which helps the researchers to uncover insights to develop a comprehensive understanding of the participant's experience. The collected data will be coded and labelled according to the themes identified.

Content analysis will focus on the various forms of communication on social media during the protests, including media coverage and social media posts. Content analysis can provide insights into how discussions around social, cultural, and political are presented on social media to learn the different attitudes among the groups. For instance, the use of slogan "Totalitarianism does not stop until patriarchy dies" (父权不死, 集权不止) has been popularised by the protests and adopted by many feminist and queer activists. The research will examine how the activists have made connections between totalitarianism and patriarchy in the context of China, and why this slogan has become well-used by many activists across the world. By utilising content analysis, the research gains valuable insights into patterns, themes, and issues that occurred during the movements, as well as the impacts of the movements on the marginalised community, such as females and the LGBTQ+ community.

Proposed completion plan

Year 1

Months 1-4:

- Detailed research proposal: define the research topic, aims, methodology and break down the thesis into concrete tasks.
- Develop a data collection plan.
- Begin literature review.

Month 5-12:

- Extend and consolidate literature review of the research topic.
- Develop a concrete data collection plan.
- Start to collect data.
- Complete Annual Review of Progress.

Year 2

Months 1-4:

- Draft Methodology Chapter.
- Apply for Ethics approval.

Months 4-7:

- First Round of data collection.
- Transcription of interviews.
- Data analysis.

Months 8-10:

- Finalise Methodology Chapter.

Year 3

Months 1-2:

- Write results chapter(s).

Months 3-4:

- Write analysis chapter(s).

Months 4-6:

- Write Introduction and Conclusion.

Months: 6-8:

- Complete and submit full draft of thesis to supervisors.

Months 8-10:

- Submit revised draft to supervisors.

Months 10-11:

- Revisions and final editing.
- Submit Final Copy for Examination.

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