

มุมมองทางสังคมต่อชุมชนเกย์: การศึกษาเชิงเปรียบเทียบทัศนคติ ของเจนวายและเจนซีที่มีต่อเกย์

Social Perceptions of Gay Community: A Comparative Study on Gen Y and Gen Z's Attitudes towards Gay

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Abstract

This research seeks to examine the attitudes of Generation Y and Generation Z towards gay males in two Asian locales: Bangkok, Thailand, and Gwangju, South Korea. To achieve this purpose, the study addresses two primary questions: 1) what are the perceptions Generation Y and Generation Z have regarding gay males? and 2) how do attitudes towards gay males differ between the two regions? A mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, is utilized to investigate the social perspectives surrounding gay males. The findings reveal several key themes, including the social acknowledgment of gay individuals, the imperative for anti-discrimination laws concerning sexual orientation, the dynamics of homosexual identity expression and suppression, and the portrayal of gay individuals in popular culture and media. Additionally, the influence of power structures is recognized as a persistent factor in gay politics, while religious beliefs and contemporary pop culture also play significant roles in determining the potential for further normalization of gay individuals within the social fabric of these regional contexts.

Keywords: *Gay, LGBT, Sexual minorities, Bangkok, Thailand, Gwangju, South Korea, Human rights*

Introduction

Queer studies often examine societal perceptions of sexual minorities, typically addressing the collective view of the LGBTQ community; however, it is crucial to recognize that each subgroup within this umbrella is perceived differently and may encounter varying degrees of social discrimination and stigma. Within this framework,

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gay males frequently occupy a particularly marginalized social position, largely due to pervasive societal prejudices directed at them. This marginalization is reflected in the prevalence of mistreatment and violence specifically targeting gay males, as evidenced by instances of homophobic bullying (Gray. 2014) and sexual assaults against gay men (Javaid. 2017). Given the scarcity of queer research focusing on gay males within the Asian context, this study seeks to explore the attitudes of Generation Y and Generation Z towards a specific gay male community, with a focus on two Asian nations: Thailand and South Korea.

Thailand is labelled as one of the LGBTQ friendly countries in Southeast Asia country. Its openness on discussing LGBTQ issues can be found in today's LGBTQ series and movies, especially on a man who loves man- so-called "Boy's Love (BL)" movies have been increasing drastically. Koaysomboon (2020) mentioned that in 2020, the number of users using LINE TV to watch "Boy's Love" series is counted 20% out of total LINE TV users, which had increased approximately 15% compared to 2019. In addition, this content used to be consumed by 18-25 years old users, but nowadays the statistics indicated the users aged 65 years old and above are also watching BL series.

On the other hand, South Korea has been criticized for its relatively slow progress in terms of tolerance toward homosexuality compared to other developed democratic countries, despite the increasing media coverage of the heterosexual community (Rich & Eliassen. 2020).

Stemming from the phenomenon, the study aims to seek: (1) what the perceptions of the Gen Y and Gen Z towards gay males are; and (2) the differences between two regions' attitudes toward gay males.

A mixed method of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches is utilized to examine Gen Y and Gen Z's attitudes towards gay male community.

Literature Reviews

The study begins by defining LGBTQ and then explores the theoretical foundations of the research, adopting a constructionist perspective to view homosexuality as a modern construct.

1. Definition of LGBTQ+

To understand the first key component—the definition of LGBTQ—Oxford Learner's Dictionary (n.d.) defines the term as standing for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (or questioning). This definition is similar to that of the United Nations Free & Equal (n.d.), which defines LGBT as "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender,"

and “LGBTI” as “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex.” Thus, the term LGBT refers to the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities. This term is commonly used by many to describe people’s gender identities.

2. Foucault’s Constructionist Perspective on Homosexuality

Michel Foucault’s work is renowned for its comprehensive examination of homosexual identities, delving into the historical roots of how sexuality had been shaped by societal regulations and the control of regimes over time in specific contexts. (Foucault. 1978) This research particularly draws on his theoretical insights into power relations and knowledge systems, which are believed to shape social discourse surrounding LGBT issues across different regions.

The three major explicit codes emerged up to the end of the eighteenth century that govern the sexual practices —canonical law, the Christian pastoral, and civil law (Foucault. 1978) continue to resonate today. While canonical law and the Christian pastoral are less dominant nowadays, in Korea, the religious authority of the Christian church remains highly influential in shaping the public’s perception of “legitimate sexual behaviors.” Christianity and Protestantism still exert significant influence, especially in non-capital, regional cities like Gwangju. The religious framework that upholds heterosexuality as the moral norm continues to deeply impact sexual ethics, making it especially difficult for younger generations to break free from these religious influences.

Civil law undeniably continues to play a crucial role in regulating sexual behaviors in modern days. Laws governing marriage and adultery establish the legal framework for distinguishing licit and illicit sexual behaviors and reflect the extent of LGBT rights in a given country.

Drawing on Michel Foucault (1978)’s constructionist perspective regarding explicit codes, this research analysis attempts to interpret the research findings in relation to religious authority, religious ideology, and civic law as they pertain to LGBT issues.

3. LGBTQ Acceptance in Bangkok

Thailand, particularly Bangkok, is often considered one of the most LGBTQ-friendly destinations in Southeast Asia. This acceptance can be demonstrated as follows.

Interms of regulations, Thailand had previously faced delays in legalizing same-sex marriage. In 2024, Thai lawmakers began discussing the legalization of same-sex marriage, with the act expected to be approved by the end of the year (Head & Ng. 2024). The proposed same-sex marriage act includes the following key provisions:

1. Same-sex couples, officially referred to as “civil partners,” would have property rights similar to those of heterosexual spouses.
2. Same-sex couples would have the right to adopt children.
3. Upon the death of one partner, the surviving partner would have rights to manage the deceased’s estate, similar to those of a husband or wife (with “husband and wife” referring to heterosexual marriages).
4. The act also includes provisions for filing a petition for divorce (BBC News Thailand. 2020a).

The Constitutional Court postponed the consideration of marriage equality multiple times, including a delay to December 2021. However, with the recent legalization of same-sex marriage, Thailand has now granted equal marital rights to same-sex couples, marking a significant step toward true legal equality (Friberg-Storey. 2025).

From these points, the same sex marriage act (civil partner) is trying to support the gender equality and equity in Thai society. As Monjagapate & Rungkittanasan (2019) discuss the acceptance of LGBTQ individuals in Bangkok, they conducted interviews with 300 Thai Gen Z individuals. The interviewees were asked to rate their responses on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 indicated strong agreement. The results show that Gen Z people agree that LGBTQ having legal protections is acceptable (4.37/5), being LGBTQ is normal (4.32/5), and importantly, having LGBTQ in family is acceptable (4.36/5).

In addition, Monjagapate & Rungkittanasan (2019) highlighted some misunderstandings regarding the definition of being LGBT. They pointed out that, at times, people mistakenly associate LGBT identity with individuals who wish to change their gender, rather than understanding it as referring to those who are attracted to the same sex.

Moreover, Cabezón (2017) explains how traditional Vinaya interpretations uphold heterosexual norms then Buddhist teachings focus primarily on compassion. Since traditional Buddhist history excluded LGBTQ people from monastic life new interpretations of classic texts now support a more inclusive environment for spiritual groups. The author uses multiple disciplines including history together with texts and anthropology to analyze Buddhist sex ethics thus illustrating complex doctrinal and cultural relationships that form the basis of personal expressions. Through his research he adds important knowledge to all three fields of Buddhist studies, gender studies, and South Asian history as he reveals changes in religious traditions due to changing understandings of sexuality and gender.

Table 1: Perspective on Definition of Being Third Gender (LGBTQ) (Unit: Percent)

Gender of Interviewees (gen z)	Perspective on definition of being third gender (LGBTQ)				
	A man wants to be a woman	A woman wants to be a man	Homosexual (a man loves a man)	Homosexual (a woman loves a woman)	Bisexual
Female	78.39	66.04	50.00	45.06	38.27
Male	75.22	56.63	58.40	49.55	40.70
Third gender	45.83	41.66	58.33	37.50	58.33

Source: Monjagapate & Rungkittanasan (2019)

Although there are still many misconceptions about the LGBTQ community, if we compare the past to the present, Thai society has become much more accepting and understanding of LGBTQ people, recognizing them as normal citizens who exist in society. The term “normal” refers to the way society treats all individuals, ensuring that everyone receives the same rights and legal protections, regardless of differences in sexual orientation. It also encompasses how individuals personally perceive LGBTQ+ people.

4. LGBTQ Acceptance in Gwangju

In South Korea, the LGBTQ+ community continues to face various challenges. Despite the nation’s rapid economic and technological progress, there are no federal protections for LGBTQ citizens, and restrictive, discriminatory policies remain, especially within the military. Issues such as bullying, harassment, inadequate mental health support, exclusion from educational curricula, and gender identity discrimination—particularly in schools—are widespread. In addition, same-sex couples are not allowed to jointly adopt children (Human Rights Watch. 2021).

The public’s attitude toward the LGBTQ+ community is also evident in South Korea’s LGBT rights movement, where challenges stemming from social stigma and strong conservative religious opposition continue to be significant. Despite increasing visibility of LGBTQ+ issues, the community frequently faces violence, including anti-gay protests at regional LGBT events. For example, the first queer festival in Incheon, held in 2018, faced significant delay due to insufficient government support. Around 1,000 Christian protesters gathered, leading to physical assaults and verbal abuse directed at LGBTQ+ individuals (Lee. 2022). Prior to this, the inaugural queer festival in Gwangju also encountered similar challenges involving clashes between religious groups and LGBTQ+ supporters (Dolson. 2018; Kang. 2018).

By acknowledging that the aforementioned issues are primarily observed in non-capital regions, this research has selected the metropolitan city of Gwangju among South Korea's non-capital cities for the following reasons.

First, Gwangju is renowned for its ongoing efforts to promote human rights over the decade. Officially declaring itself a “Human Rights City” in 2011 (WHRCF. 2011), the city has actively upheld humanitarian values and fostered international collaboration. It hosts significant global events, such as the World Human Rights Cities Forum, aimed at advancing human rights worldwide (Matisz. 2021; Matisz. 2022).

Second, Gwangju has historically been significantly impacted by authoritarian rulers and regimes. This history has driven the city to develop constitutional institutions, ordinances, and policies to protect and empower socially disadvantaged groups (The City of Gwangju. 2022). Its unique historical background provides valuable insights into the dynamics between power structures and public perceptions of marginalized communities.

Third, Gwangju is deeply influenced by Christian ideology, including both Protestant and Catholic traditions. In the 1970s and 1980s, Catholic authorities played a pivotal role in developing the city's infrastructure, expanding higher education, and even participating in political events and social movements (Jo. 2016). In particular, Korean Catholicism responded actively to societal changes following the Gwangju Uprising in 1980 (Jo. 2016). This strong Catholic influence has instilled in the public a recognition of religious values as a source of hope, social cohesion, and the common good (Jo. 2016).

On July 18, 2024, South Korea's Supreme Court issued a ruling affirming that the National Health Insurance Service (NHIS) must extend dependent benefits to same-sex partners (Thoreson. 2024). This decision is viewed as a significant step forward, as it not only enables same-sex couples to access public benefits previously reserved for heterosexual couples but also recognizes the legal status of homosexual couples, bringing their existence into the public eye. However, it is also crucial to consider the strong opposition from conservative religious groups during the legislative process concerning LGBTQ rights.

Research Methodology

This research aims to explore the acceptance of gay male community in Bangkok, Thailand and Gwangju, South Korea. The study primarily employs a quantitative analysis, supplemented by a qualitative approach to provide additional insights.

Data Collection

The study is scoped between Thailand and South Korea. In Thailand, researchers conducted a survey among the Gen Y and Gen Z who live in Bangkok. In South Korea, the same format of data collection targeting Gen Y and Gen Z is conducted in Gwangju. While Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, is known for its mass production of LGBT cultural content, Gwangju was selected as another key research location due to its representativeness in advocating for democracy and human rights, its historical significance, and the influence of Christianity. As a self-proclaimed “Human Rights City” (UNESCO. 2015), Gwangju has been working to localize human rights, highlighting its potential to also advance LGBT rights.

The selection of survey respondents is based on generation theory (Nukulompradthana. 2020). These respondents are born between 1980 and 2012, which regarded as Gen Y and Gen Z (See Table 2). The reasons of focusing on these two generations are because, these age groups of people are considered productive population with certain level of education and working experience. Hence, the researchers believe that their perspectives are referenceable and valuable for fostering changes to the society. In addition, in Thailand and South Korea, younger generations are becoming more active in political demonstrations, urging the government to secure their rights, including various civil rights related to sexual equality.

Table 2: Classification on Generation

Generation Name	Births Start	Births End
The Lost Generation	1890	1915
The Generation of 1914		
The Interbellum Generation	1901	1913
The Greatest Generation	1910	1924
The Silent Generation	1925	1945
Baby Boomer Generation	1946	1964
Generation X (Baby Bust)	1965	1979
Xennials	1975	1985
Gen Y, Gen Next	1980	1994
iGen / Gen Z	1995	2012
Gen Alpha	2013	2025

Source: Nukulompradthana (2020)

For the quantitative analysis, researchers have randomly collected 82 samples ranged from Gen Y to Gen Z in the cities of Bangkok of Thailand, and Gwangju of South Korea. The statistical details of the respondents are illustrated below (Table 3).

Data Analysis

To measure the rate of acceptance between these two areas, we have directly collected 82 random samples. Authors have conducted a survey among 82 residents by giving a score from 1 to 5 in each question. Therefore, the collected data which is the primary data will be analyzed in this research. In research result part, authors will demonstrate the average score and sample standard deviation.

$$\text{Average score, } \bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n \text{Score}_i}{n} \dots\dots\dots(1)$$

The formula 1 shows that we show the average score by using the basic summation formula the variable Score_i is described that Score is the score from 1 to 5 that each survey respondent gave in each question while i is the order of survey respondent, and n is the total numbers of respondents.

$$\text{Sample standard deviation, } s = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (\text{Score}_i - \bar{x})^2}{n-1}} \dots\dots\dots(2)$$

Moreover, after presenting the average score for each question, the sample standard deviation (formula 2) will be displayed below the average score. Standard deviation is used for analysis as it illustrates the imaginable shape of the distribution and indicates how close the individual data values are from the mean value. Standard deviation also shows how survey respondents have the conflict and more different options based on the average score.

Table 3: Gender Proportion of Survey Respondent

Gen Y Respondents (Bangkok)	Percentage	Gen Y Respondents (Gwangju)	Percentage
Gender (Biological)		Gender (Biological)	
Female	50	Female	82.35
Male	50	Male	17.65
Total	100	Total	100
Gen Z Respondents (Bangkok)	Percentage	Gen Z Respondents (Gwangju)	Percentage
Gender (Biological)		Gender (Biological)	
Female	77.78	Female	64.29
Male	22.22	Male	35.71
Total	100	Total	100

Results

1. Social Recognition on Existence of Gay (Males)

The first finding pertains to the recognition of the existence of gay males. In Bangkok, 100% of both generations acknowledge the existence of gay individuals in society. Conversely, while the majority of Gen Y in Gwangju also recognize the existence of gay individuals, 14.28% of Gen Z respondents do not believe that gay people exist in Korean society.

Table 4: Survey Question A and B

Question A: Do you think gay (males) exists in your society?		
Respondents	Answer	
	Yes	No
Gen Y (Bangkok)	100%	0%
Gen Y (Gwangju)	100%	0%
Gen Z (Bangkok)	100%	0%
Gen Z (Gwangju)	85.71%	14.28%

Question B: Do you think gays are having the rights that they deserve in your society?		
Respondents	Answer	
	Yes	No
Gen Y (Bangkok)	33.33%	66.67%
Gen Y (Gwangju)	41.18%	58.82%
Gen Z (Bangkok)	13.33%	86.67%
Gen Z (Gwangju)	64.29%	35.71%

2. Equal Rights for Gay (Males)

Table 4 shows how people from both generations perceive whether gay men are receiving the rights they deserve in society. While 66.67% of Gen Y and 86.67% of Gen Z in Bangkok believe that gays do not have the rights they deserve in their society, both Gen Y and Gen Z in Gwangju consider the rights for gays to be relatively sufficient in Korea.

3. Social Perspectives on Gay (Males)

Another set of questions is related to the social perspectives on gay (males). Respondents ranged from Gen Y to Gen Z were required to rate a Likert scale, and the major findings are listed below.

1. Research results indicate that the survey respondents are likely to believe that nowadays gays are still being treated not equally. However, they overall agree on that gay should be equally treated.

2. Respondents from both regions showed relatively positive attitude toward accepting gay family members and friends (see question no. 3-8)

3. Regarding career path (questions 11-12), Generation Y respondents from Gwangju strongly agree that being gay can impact one's career trajectory, whereas the majority of Generation Z respondents disagree. However, it's worth noting that Gen Y might be more likely to have firsthand experience with this issue, given their longer work history and greater familiarity with certain organizational cultures compared to Gen Z.

4. In the question regarding whether gays are allowed to express their sexual orientation, Gen Y from Bangkok shows a moderately positive attitude, in contrast with the Gen Y from Gwangju. However, there is no significant difference in the groups of Gen Z. It can be understood that the respondents overall have identified the reality that gays might not be allowed to express their sexual orientation and agree that gay should be granted freedom to express their sexual orientation.

5. In terms of accessing LGBT-related information in the media, respondents from Bangkok rated significantly higher than those from Gwangju. This suggests that individuals in Bangkok have greater access to LGBT resources through media compared to those in Gwangju.

Table 5: Social Perspectives on Gay (Males) Social Perspectives on Gay (Males)
Perspective

Question	Gen Y (BKK)	S.D.	Gen Y (GWJ)	S.D.	Gen Z (BKK)	S.D.	Gen Z (GWJ)	S.D.
1. Gays are treated equally nowadays in our society.	3.50	0.83	2.17	1.01	2.71	0.89	2.37	1.25
2. Gays should be treated equally.	4.66	0.51	4.64	0.49	4.44	1.59	4.56	1.20
3. I can accept if there is a gay in my family.	4.66	0.81	4.23	1.14	4.33	1.24	4.31	1.19
4. Gay's affection (love) is normal.	4.83	0.40	4.05	1.19	4.42	1.19	4.31	1.25
5. Gays are born to be normal.	4.66	0.51	4.11	1.21	4.42	1.13	4.25	1.23
6. Gays can be leaders.	4.83	0.40	4.58	0.71	4.42	1.17	4.68	1.01
7. Gays can be my friends.	4.83	0.40	4.70	0.46	4.48	1.16	4.43	1.09
8. I believe gays can be capable.	4.50	0.83	4.70	0.58	4.22	1.20	4.56	1.09
9. I believe gays can be reliable and trustworthy.	4.16	0.75	4.76	0.43	3.82	1.26	4.50	1.09
10. Gays are not seeking much attention.	3.66	0.81	3.58	1.22	4.13	1.23	3.18	1.27
11. Being gay can affect one's career path in our society.	3.66	1.75	4.29	0.77	3.06	1.25	2.81	1.42
12. Being gay shouldn't affect one's career path.	4.66	0.51	4.64	0.60	4.26	1.32	4.56	0.89
13. Gays are allowed to express their sexual orientation freely in our society.	4.66	0.51	2.64	1.36	3.82	1.30	3.12	1.40
14. Gays should be allowed to express their sexual orientation freely.	4.83	0.40	4.41	0.79	4.42	1.17	4.75	1.00
15. There is sufficient LGBT related information accessible on the media.	4.00	0.89	2.82	1.23	3.55	1.21	2.50	1.26

Notes:

- 1) In Table 5, survey respondents are asked to rate each question on a scale from 1 to 5. A score of 1 indicates strong disagreement, 2 indicates disagreement, 3 represents a neutral stance, 4 signifies agreement, and 5 denotes strong agreement.
- 2) BKK refers to the survey respondents from Bangkok, while GWJ refers to the survey respondents from Gwangju.
- 3) S.D. stands for standard deviation.
- 4) Table 5 contains the questionnaires derived from the publication by Monjagapate & Rungkittanasan (2019).

Discussion

1. Recognition of Gay Individuals

Firstly, based on a survey, 100% of Gen Y and Gen Z in Thailand acknowledge the existence of gays in society. Thailand legalized same-sex marriage with the enactment of the Marriage Equality Act, which came into effect on January 23, 2025. This legislation amends the Civil and Commercial Code, replacing gender-specific terms like “man and woman” and “husband and wife” with “individuals” and “spouses,” thereby granting same-sex couples the same legal rights as heterosexual couples, including those related to inheritance and adoption (Aljazeera. 2025).

This research aligns with the findings of the NIDA Poll (2021), which reported that 90.51% of Thai people accept LGBTQ individuals, not just gay men. Thai society tends to focus more on a person’s behavior rather than their gender. It is only 7.78% of Thai people who do not accept LGBTQ, but the reason is personal dislike.

Monjagapate & Rungkittanasan (2019) conducted research on the acceptance of LGBTQ individuals among Gen Z in Bangkok. Their results found that Gen Z Thai people highly accept LGBTQ as their friends and family members. Also, they expect that Thai society should have the same rights serving to LGBTQ people. However, when asked about their understanding of the term LGBTQ, the survey respondents from Gen Z indicated that they associate LGBTQ more with individuals who want to change their gender, rather than with being bisexual or homosexual.

Overall, the current findings suggest that the recognition of gay individuals in Thailand extends beyond just gays themselves.

However, being gay refers specifically to a man loving another man. There are challenges both within the gay community and in society at large due to misunderstandings about what it means to be gay, especially when it comes to differences in how gay men express masculinity or femininity. Thai society and Thai gay have been bombarded by the western culture which has resulted to the discourse of “acting manly”. Gays who act womanly can be unintentionally misunderstood as transgender (Soontravaravit. 2010).

In the case of Gwangju, while most respondents in general agree with the statement, “Gays should be treated equally,” their opinions sharply diverge when asked whether “Gays are treated equally in our society today.” A similar gap appears when comparing responses to the statement “Gays should be allowed to express their sexual orientation freely” versus “Gays are allowed to express their sexual orientation freely in our society.” This suggests a potential disparity between how the young generation in Korea perceive the ideal treatment of marginalized groups and the reality of their actual experiences.

The contrast highlights the generational optimism of Gen Y and Gen Z in Gwangju – a non-capital region- regarding their perception of gay, despite the possibility that this optimism may not reflect their actual reality. It raises a crucial question of whether the growing social acceptance seen in increasing awareness is truly being implemented in practice. This finding aligns with the statistics published by So (2024), which show that younger generations in South Korea are increasingly supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, contributing to visibility of them. However, the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation to protect the community remains a significant issue.

In particular, such an absence becomes more distinct in the case of gay men. In October 2023, the South Korean Court upheld a military “sodomy” law that bans same-sex activity between soldiers, with legal penalties of up to two years in prison (Thoreson. 2023). Given the severity of the punishment, this ruling draw attention to the legal risks gay men face in the military and has sparked controversy over its discriminatory nature.

2. Anti-Discrimination Legislation Based on Sexual Orientation

Adopting a constructionist perspective, the second section specifically examines the institutional measures thought to safeguard the rights of the LGBTQ+ community.

As mentioned earlier, Thailand had been in the process of considering the same-sex marriage act for years. However, with the recent legalization of same-sex marriage, the country has taken a major step toward equality. While this marks significant progress, ongoing efforts are still needed to ensure full rights and protections for all citizens (Friberg-Storey. 2025). Moreover, this research has found that Thai Gen Y and Z support that being gay should not be barriers at the workplace.

Although this research and Monjagapate & Rungkittanasan (2019) found that Thai people seem to agree that gays and other genders should have the same rights and legal protections, Suriyasarn (2016) has summarized that gay, lesbian, and bisexual workers are tolerably staying in the closet because of their sexual orientation, and transgender is the one who faces the strongest difficulties to be employed. They can be systematically excluding from many mainstream occupations from both public and private sectors. Zachau & Cortez (2017) point out that 45% of LGBTQ from their study claim that their sexual identity could be one of their barriers to get employed, and 53% of LGBTQ face the mental problem like depression and frustration which are built by discrimination. They are also afraid that their gender identity could interfere their abilities at workplace.

One of the most significant steps toward protecting and ensuring equality for Thai LGBTQ+ individuals is legal regulation. With the recent legalization of same-sex marriage in Thailand, the law now grants equal rights to same-sex couples. While Thai society has long been accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals, this legal recognition, which is same sex marriage act, marks a crucial milestone in eliminating past limitations imposed by the law.

Despite the high awareness, as shown in the survey result, that one's career path should not be affected by sexual orientation, Korea still lacks a specific law to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation in the workplace.

As discussed in the first section, discrimination based on gay identity is particularly pronounced in the military context. In addition to the recent military “sodomy” law mentioned in the previous section (Thoreson. 2023), the Korean army launched a campaign targeting gay soldiers as early as April 2017. As reported by the New York Times (Choe. 2017), at least 32 gay soldiers faced criminal charges during that period. Additionally, an incident was documented in which an army investigator warned a gay sergeant against seeking legal help (Choe. 2017), indicating that the rights of gay individuals in state institutions remain far from secure.

In light of the insufficient protections for gay men—and the broader LGBT community—facilitating mechanisms for dialogue is crucial to reclaiming their rights. In a regional context, the Gwangju Declaration on the Human Rights City (WHRCF. 2011) emphasizes the need for heightened political attention to vulnerable social minorities:

“...all inhabitants, regardless of race, sex...and in particular minorities and any other vulnerable groups who are socially vulnerable and marginalized, can participate fully in decision-making and policy-implementation processes that affect their lives in accordance with such human rights principles as non-discrimination, rule of law, participation, empowerment, transparency and accountability.” (WHRCF. 2011)

However, despite the ostensive claims, the establishment of LGBT non-discrimination measures and meaningful dialogues on the topic remains regrettably absent at the regional level.

3. Expression and Repression of Homosexual Identity

In Thailand, LGBTQ existence is not confined to just the LGBTQ parade. For instance, The Tourism Authority of Thailand-New York showcased the art of Thai drag, performance, and culture at World Pride in New York to highlight Thailand's commitment to being a welcoming destination for LGBTQ travelers (Bangkok Post. 2019). There was also a political demonstration to request the equal rights to all genders (BBC News Thailand. 2020b).

In Thailand, people can express their sexual orientation without violating Thai law. In 2015, Thailand passed the Gender Equality Act B.E. 2558, which aims to protect individuals from unfair gender discrimination. This protection Act is consistent with the Thailand's current situation of LGBTQ friendly environment and in line with international human rights standard (UNDP, MSDHS. 2018)

In addition, throughout its extensive history, Buddhism has encountered shifting attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals, often reflecting the prevailing societal norms of the regions it influenced. While the core principles of Buddhism advocate for compassion and inclusivity, traditional Vinaya regulations have frequently demonstrated limited acceptance of LGBTQ persons, as noted by Cabezón (2017).

As indicated by the survey results, the majority of respondents from Gwangju recognize that sexual orientation is not openly expressed in Korean society. Analyzing this issue in the context of regional religious influence reveals that the continued repression of homosexual identity is primarily driven by Christian authorities, whose significant influence extends across the region's administrative and social spheres.

Foucault argues that Christian pastoral power is one of the foundational forms of power traceable in Western society. This form of power contributed to the establishment of social norms and the definition of "appropriate" behaviours (Foucault. 1978). Viewing Christianity as an adaptation of the pastoral power model (Lindholm & Di Carlo. 2024) may provide an insight for understanding the limitations placed on expressing one's homosexual identity in a guilt-free, sin-free context.

4. Gay Pop Culture and Media Coverage.

Based on the survey results, both nations project a mutually supportive perspective on normalizing gay affection (love). This insight further highlights the social influence of gay pop culture.

Thailand is also famous on producing the same sex's love content series. There are many Thai series that focus on gay themes, such as Boy's Love (BL) series. As the popularity of BL series has surged, Koaysomboon (2020) notes that 20% of LINE TV users in 2020 watched these series on the platform, making it one of the most widely used apps for viewing such content. In addition, this content is not only consumed by users aged 18-25, but also by those aged 65 and above. As a result, the audience spans a wide age range. It can be conveyed that the gay contents and LGBTQ contents are published, and all different generation users can reach to the gay content on media.

In addition, gays can be on all types of media. In the social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Line, YouTube, Pinterest, International and Thai local media. The content of gay can be seen in the social media, especially modern media (Tirapalika. 2018). The content includes health, education, legal, and entertainment media. It can be said that all types gay related contents are available.

Similar to Thailand, South Korea has experienced a notable increase in the production of Boys' Love (BL) series in recent years. Kwon (2023) notes that the BL genre in Korea has undergone a remarkable evolution during this period. Initially introduced to South Korea in the 1980s, BL faced considerable limitations in its dissemination due to prevailing social and cultural conservatism, which relegated it mainly to underground fan communities. However, a significant transformation occurred in the mid-2010s with the emergence of online commercial publishing platforms. This development attracted numerous BL writers, significantly enhancing the profitability of these platforms, leading to heightened popularity and commercialization of the BL genre.

Thailand is widely recognized for its openly diverse LGBT environment and venues, unlike South Korea, where aspects of gay culture and LGBT vernacular expressions are often confined to the underground scene in the district of Itaewon (Lee. 2015). This contrast may help explain the disparity observed in this research survey's results. While most Gen Y and Gen Z respondents in Gwangju acknowledged and normalized affection between gay men, they also expressed a relatively pessimistic attitude towards the idea that gays can freely express their sexual orientation in Korean society. Additionally, they were less likely to believe that LGBT-related information accessible in the media is sufficient. For example, in May 2021, a new wave of Covid-19 cases was linked by the Korean media to "gay clubs" in Seoul, which led to public harassment and intimidation of LGBT individuals (Ock. 2020), further reinforcing the stigma associated with Itaewon's "Homo Hil". While anti-gay sentiments appear to have diminished in the years following this incident, it remains essential to consider the necessity of developing and promoting more inclusive gay spaces and neighborhoods across a broader geographic landscape.

Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the perspectives of Gen Y and Gen Z regarding gay males in Bangkok and Gwangju. In addition to the quantitative data collected, the study delves into broader implications concerning the discourse surrounding gay existence, the enactment of anti-discrimination laws based on sexual orientation, the expression and repression of homosexual identities, as well as the representation of gay culture in media. While Thailand is often recognized for its progressive stance on issues such as the legalization of gay marriage and a more accepting social climate for expressing gay identities, there remain significant barriers that hinder the full realization of equality for the entire LGBTQ+ community.

In contrast, South Korea exhibits a slowly evolving social perception of homosexuality among the younger generations, despite the fact that the actual societal environment lags behind these changing attitudes. Issues such as the legitimacy of gay rights, persistent discrimination against gay individuals, ongoing repression from religious institutions, and the scarcity of spaces for gay social engagement highlight the need for thoughtful legal and social reforms. Constructive discussions and dialogues must occur without being stifled by dominant power structures that represent the “voice of the majority.”

Notably, this study integrates its findings with additional contextual information to provide a broader understanding of regional dynamics. The implications of this research advocate for innovative approaches to addressing LGBT-related issues in the democratic contexts of Asia, where proactive efforts are crucial for the advancement of LGBT rights.

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