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The Issue of Gay Men in Marriage to Women in China

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Abstract: Gay men's marriages with females are a social phenomenon that happens in conservative regions and countries lacking gay marriage legislation. These regions and countries restrict the sexual orientation expression of LGBTQ people and try to discipline them to accept the heterosexual marriage. On account of patriarchal society and the emphasis of offspring, Chinese gay people not only suffer from social discrimination, but are also forced to finish marriage and carry on the family line by their parents. This pressure sometimes results in a deceptive marriage. In a deceptive marriage, gay men hide their sexual orientation and deceive their wives to reproduce. Therefore, gay's wife become reproductive machines and victims of deceptive marriages. This paper chooses *baidu tieba* as a virtual field and observes the situations of gay's wife in the forum. A part of the participants in forum have known that they are victims of deceptive marriage, but most the forum members just suspect their husbands are gay and are stricken with anxiety. Through observation of gay's wife groups, this paper analyses three problems: the AIDS risk, twofold oppression of patriarchy, and demonization of homosexuality. It applies dramaturgy proposed by Goffman to analyse the causes and puts forward suggestions for the three problems.

Keywords: gay marriage, deceptive marriage, dramaturgy

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of a gay's wife is prevalent in a patriarchal society, which is the collision between homosexuality and heterosexual hegemony. Chinese traditional culture highlights marriage and offspring. Although homosexuality has been decriminalised and normalised by Chinese laws and medical institutions, homosexuality is still unorthodox and abnormal behaviour. Many parents cannot accept this sexuality and force their children to fulfil marriage and reproduction. Compared to contract marriage, gay wives are vulnerable to being sacrificed and deceived. Gay who chooses a deceptive marriage is submitted to the oppression of patriarchy and paternalism. Meanwhile, those gays exploit and oppress their wives with the aid of the power of patriarchy and capture women's affection, property, the autonomy of reproduction, and custody of offspring. In his research on deceptive marriage of Harbin Institute of Technology, Zhang Haibo divided four stages of deceptive marriage in the gay's view, and he argues this point in his master's dissertation: There are four stages in the process of gay's wife marginalized in gay husband views: including questioning, struggle, self-reconstruction, and reputation. These four stages show that the process of gay's wife being marginalized is slow and continuous [1].

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This paper mainly draws upon information from the forum of gay wife in *baidu tieba*, which is the biggest online BBS in China. Due to the sensitivity of this topic, utterances about LGBTQ are excluded from mainstream media. The forum of gay's wife in BBS is more secure and free and became the field for victims to protest against deceptive marriage. Compared to internet chat rooms, observation on BBS can avoid the investigation of identity and background. Although gays gather on *blued* (a Chinese online community of gay) and *twitter*, the number of gay's wife is limited than that of gay men, and women are disempowered. Thus, this study does not use sources from these platforms.

The followers of the forum of gay's wife are roughly 48000. Meanwhile, the forum of Man United, a forum of football clubs and one of the hottest forums in *baidu tieba*, is followed by more than 4.8 million netizens. In the department of sexuality, a forum of marriage owns more than 1.4 million followers, and the forum of gay and lesbian is followed by approximately 5.7 million and 1.3 million people respectively. Therefore, the forum of gay's wife is not only out of the mainstream, but also situated on the brink of emotional field and subculture groups.

The active member in the forum of gay's wife can be divided into three types. The first group is true victims who have found their husbands are gay, and they usually share their experiences and help the second group to authenticate whether their husbands are gay. The second group tends to ask questions about their doubts about their husbands. The first and second groups share similar emotional connections. But the third group consists of normal netizens who engage in this discussion. The supervisor of the forum named LM, a victim of deceptive marriage, usually post articles against gay getting married and instruct other women on how to identify a gay.

Articles in the forum include seeking help, sharing experiences and education about HIV. The forum of gay's wife teems with an intensely anxious atmosphere and anti-gay ideology. This paper is based on the virtual fieldwork of online BBS (bulletin board system) and analyses the phenomenon of deceptive marriage and gay's wife in China with the help of Pierre Bourdieu's theories and Judith Butler's theory of gender trouble.

2. Methods

The paper employs the following methods: observation of online discussions, virtual fieldwork, and literature review. First, the author observed the interactions of *baidu tieba* and focused on controversial articles. In total, the author selected 50 articles according to chronological order as research cases. Moreover, the paper also analyses another two articles that administrators have highlighted and stuck on the top of the post group. Second, the author also conducted fieldwork online. Compared to orthodox anthropological fieldwork, online fieldwork provides a privacy field for the author. Because in this field researchers are mostly absent, gay's wife's words and actions are less influenced by scholars. Last, the author gathered online data and existing literature to support the arguments in this paper. For example, in 2016, the Harbin Institute of Technology initiated a study about gay's wife. The study provides detailed data for this paper [1-3]. Existing literature includes a master thesis titled 'Social identity research about the living condition of gay's wife' and a paper titled 'The analysis of gay's wife gender trouble and gender performativity' [2, 3]. Together with some other papers, they provide a large number of cases of gay's wife's experiences.

Bourdieu suggests that male dominance is closely linked to habits and capital. He explains that the reason for predominant habits is historical transcendence [4]. Habits are derived from myth construction and handed down via intergenerational transmission, which is extremely solid without a few challenges. Young women tend to imitate their female elders, who act like mirrors to provide a correct and decent role model. Although Bourdieu's study is complicated and synthetic, he indicates that male dominance becomes elusive in a field controlled by customs [5-6].

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To solve this issue and provide solution, the paper provides an insight into the likelihood of contract marriage. Goffman's dramaturgy offers a possible theory to analyse the interaction methods in contract marriage. Goffman's theory is defined as 'a view of social life as a series of dramatic performance akin to those that take place in the theatre' by American sociologist George Ritzer in his book *Contemporary Sociological Theory: and its classical roots*, and more details are mentioned by Ritzer:

Goffman's sense of the self was shaped by his dramaturgical approach. To Goffman (and to most other symbolic interactionists), the self is not a possession of the actor but rather the product of the dramatic interaction between actor and audience. In other words, the self is a sense of who one is that is a dramatic effect emerging from the immediate scene being present [7].

3. Analysis of the Problems

3.1. Risk of HIV and Other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Because of the particularity of gay sex and unprotected sex with women for reproduction, gay's wife is frequently exposed to the risk of HIV and other STDs [8]. This risk results in the problems of patriarchal oppression and the revenge from gay's wife. For example, there are 109 articles by searching 'AIDS' as keywords in the post group. These articles discuss the publicity of fighting against AIDS, questions about identifying AIDS symptoms, and complaining about and insulting gays. Most of these articles are about the publicity of AIDS. There is only an article about sharing the experience of confirmed AIDS, but the authenticity is difficult to verify. The author of this article claims to be a victim of a deceptive marriage of a gay man. She has posted 9 articles between 2013 and 2019. At first, she posted the question about whether AIDS couples could have children in 2013. Her follow-up articles share the daily life of an AIDS sufferer and the experiences of deceptive marriage. According to the information from websites, her account has been created for more than nine years (2013-2022), but there is no updated information since 2018.

In another article named 'Infected with AIDS by husband' which is a specific area to share their experiences, there are not enough convincing cases in the comments. Most of the comments are rumours such as 'I have heard of some cases'. According to the discussions of netizens in the forum of gay's wife, albeit sex behaviour of gay enlarges the probability of transmitting AIDS and other STDs, there is no comprehensive discussion about the risk of infectious diseases. This phenomenon could be explained from three angles. Firstly, in China, sexual diseases are taboos for discussion influenced by traditional notions. Based on this cultural background, people seclude sexual topics except for reproduction from mainstream society and discourse, which leads to the consequence that people lack sexual education and are unaware of the risk of AIDS and STDs. Thus, when some sufferers who carry HIV and other STDs have not been confirmed, they will not seek help in the forum. On the other hand, although lots of people have known sexual knowledge and generate the demand for help and communication, most people still refuse to post their experiences in public, because they are prone to be stigmatised and regarded as sluts. Therefore, the topic of AIDS and STDs is sensitive in Chinese society.

Secondly, compulsory pregnancy tests confirm part of AIDS and STDs positive parents. In most cases, the couple needs to undergo optional prenuptial physical tests and compulsory examinations before reproduction including the test for AIDS and STDs, which contributes to reducing the risk of venereal infections and inhibits latent deceptive marriage. Lastly, Survivorship bias restricts our scopes. On the one hand, due to Chinese censorship and the size of *baidu tieba*, many voices are suppressed and vanished on the internet; on the other hand, lots of victims lost the opportunity to complain about what happened to them for various reasons.

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Despite only one article about contracting AIDS from her husband, netizens' fear and anger toward gay is closely related to venereal infections. In most articles, the anxiety and fear about venereal diseases from gay's wife are distinct, which results from deception, whether marital deception or health concealment.

3.2. Twofold Oppression of Patriarchy

Discussing the power relationship in deceptive marriage, this paper employs Bouridu's theorises as analysis paradigm. In his classical book *Masculine Domination*, Bouridu explains the legitimacy of patriarchy which do not need any support or verification, and he describes this phenomenon as habits:

The strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it dispenses with justification: the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it [5].

Gay man pursues marriage and offspring because of the pressure derived from patriarchy and traditional rules. Most gay men who adopt deceptive marriage hide their sexual orientation from their parents. Thus, gay's wife usually endures twofold oppression of patriarchy from their husbands and parents-in-law. This situation exploits women's rights bitterly and leads to psychologically unhealthy.

The right of gay's wife has caused attention since the study about gay's wife by the Harbin Institute of Technology. In a master thesis entitled 'The analysis of gay's wife gender trouble and gender performativity', the author highlights the gay's wife's miserable lives suffering patriarchal oppression from husbands and parents [3]. Articles in *baidu tieba* demonstrate the same problem. In a post entitled 'Since my parents-in-law and me found out that my husband was gay, they have always asked me if I can continue the marriage', one gay's wife complained that she was sacrificed to family and marriage. Albeit no domestic violence and other direct abuse in many cases, but elderly especially parents-in-law usually force gay's wife to respect and continue the deceptive marriage, otherwise they shift the responsibility of destroying the marriage and family to gay's wife when women consistently end their marriage.

The twofold oppression of patriarchy can be explained in two dimensions, family structure relationship between different generations and marriage structure relationship between same generations. First, the Chinese conventional conception influences the Chinese family structure relationships featuring respect for the elder and men. When applied to different generations, family relationships show paternalism dominated by patriarchy. Then, marriage has the function of connection. This point is more prominent in Chinese society, because a family formed by marriage has a similar status to the original family, and even the husband's family owns more power than the wife's family, which is a complex issue relating to traditional culture and bride price. Therefore, when this paternalism structure impacts men, the consequence is forced marriage and forced reproduction. This paternalism structure is more complicated for women.

Second, the lack of discourse impairs the protection of women's families, and meanwhile, women are disciplined to maintain their families and deceptive marriage. This is because deceptive marriage which is not normal cannot be understood by elders, and old generations often suspect that women make mistakes or pay less attention in marriage, whereupon gay's wife will not get enough support from her original family until marriage becomes a tragedy. Moreover, women undergo more oppression in the husband's family where parents-in-law choose to help their son conceal the fact of gay in order to protect the family reputation and achieve the goal of fertility. In this condition, gay's wife is objectified to become a reproductive machine and loses the autonomy of their life. Finally, in this structural inequality, women not only suffer mental pressure, but also their rights are easily violated. In conclusion, this is the first oppression suffered by gay's wife.

Another dimension of patriarchal oppression suffered by gay's wife directly results from the marital relationship. Goffman's dramaturgy and Butler's theory of Gender Trouble and Gender

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Performativity explain how structural oppression happens in deceptive marriage [9, 10]. In a marriage full of concealment, a gay plays the role of a straight husband. Although many functions and plots are absent, the role of the husband gives the gay a reasonable social position that can produce power in Chinese traditional patriarchy. Patriarchal oppression from the husband results in the exploitation of gay's wife, including labour exploitation, reproductive exploitation, etc. Gay's wife is not only reproduction machines, but also maids who serve gay's daily life. Combining Bourdieu's and Butler's theory, this behaviour which is attuned to social morals can provide stable and secure positions and social roles for everyone. Therefore, a gay does not need direct intimidation, but gay's wife is subjected to these exploitations self-consciously. Some scholars believe that this is a consequence of enacting gender roles by heterosexual hegemony, which is a deeper issue.

Overall, deceptive marriage is a particular case with Chinese traditional marital characteristics and hence inherits structural demerit of Chinese marriage which leads to twofold oppression of patriarchy from women's parents-in-law and their husbands. Compared inevitable shortage of normal marriage, deceptive marriage results in the premeditated oppression of gay's wife. When gay's wife finds out about the fact of a deceptive marriage, she often struggles with severe mood fluctuations and prepares for revenge.

3.3. Evenge from Gay's Wife —Stigmatising LGBTQ Groups

In the forum, victims share their experiences to avenge deception, including amassing solid evidence and seeking court decisions. But irrational revenge can lead to a vicious circle. Chinese society which lacks respect for sexual minorities force gay to marry, but in contrast victims of deceptive marriage stigmatise LGBTQ groups to avenge their ex-husbands. In the forum of gay's wife, a gay is called "*jilao*" which is an offensive name, and LGBTQ activities are disdained by the victims [11, 12].

There are numerous articles about identifying a gay in the forum of gay's wife, which lead to a kind of stereotype of gay, and even gay groups are stigmatised and demonised by these posts. Because many gay wives have not learned relevant knowledge in the past, gay sometimes defraud trust as much as possible through elaborate camouflage. Thus, victims in forum of gay's wife only share some specific and representative features to distinguish gay, which lead gay's profile into serious stereotype inevitably. Even gay groups are libelled dirty, dangerous, sexual perversions, and sex addiction. This phenomenon can be understood as the result of the anger and revenge of gay's wife who lacks correct gender conception and undergoes long-time deception and exploitation, but it needs further reflection on whether this stereotype leads to a vicious circle.

Despite current observation, victims do not jeopardise all LGBTQ groups remarkably, but there are some discrimination and stigma towards LGBTQ groups, such as irrational utterances like 'parents should be alert to brainwash from the ideology of LGBTQ' and 'the concept of LGBTQ is from the western'. There is a contradiction in terms. Deceptive marriages and the tragedy of gay's wife are the bad consequence of heterosexual hegemony, but meanwhile, gay's wife groups regard LGBTQ groups who advocate feminism and human rights as targets to attack, which means gay's wife try to offset the consequence of heterosexual hegemony in the matrix of heterosexual hegemony.

4. Suggestions

This section first explores the possibility of contract marriage replacing deception marriage, then discusses the issue of AIDS prevention and LGBTQ activities. The issue of AIDS prevention is a synthetic and complex social problem that is linked and intrinsically related to sexual education and LGBTQ activities.

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4.1. Contract Marriage than Deceptive Marriage

Firstly, contract marriage needs a more precise definition. In terms of meaning, contract marriage is that in a lawful way gay and lesbians complete the marriage procedures and play the couple's role in social life to react to the pressure from family and society. Contract marriage can be regarded as a compromise to conventional marriage institutions and has been popularised in a conservative society lacking legislation on homosexual marriage, including in China, Korea, and other East Asian countries. In Chinese, *xingshi hunyin*, or contract marriage, '*xingshi*' is normally translated into English as 'formality' or 'contract'. But it is more appropriate to choose 'contract' to translate this word because it emphasises that it is a binding agreement between a couple. Compared to deception marriage, the most different factor is the agreement between the bride and groom. Thus, the participants of contract marriage correspond to the 'actor' in theories of dramaturgy proposed by Erving Goffman, and this marriage is the drama whose cast includes the couples, parents, family, and their friends. Goffman expounded his argument in the book *The presentation of Self in Everyday Life*:

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be. In line with this, there is the popular view that the individual offers his performance and puts on his show 'for the benefit of other people' [13].

According to different spectators, contract marriage can be divided into two kinds that are performed for society and are performed for society and family. It is present that the different functions of marriage in public fields and family.

In the performance for society, the 'cast' includes couples and their families even including their homosexual lovers and the spectators are the social relations of the 'cast'. Chinese society is conservative and conventional, where marriage is regarded as compulsory behaviour and unmarried singles will be judged and stigmatised by society. Meanwhile, Chinese people embrace collectivism and emphasise the family community which means individual reputation is highly related to family fame, and social stigma not only affects couples but also jeopardises their family. Therefore, we cannot separate the relationship between different generations to analyse the impact of marriage on individuals, because all participants make concerted efforts to avoid capsizing. In contract marriage for society, gays and lesbians may come out to their parents and their parents have accepted this condition, but people still have to make a compromise resulting from the prohibition in law and social restriction. This kind of contract marriage undertakes less amount of performance and less risk. In the meantime, a couple of contract marriages can be protected by heterosexual marital law, and hence this kind of contract marriage is an ideal type.

But contract marriage for society and family is more difficult and involves more pressure, and the likelihood of performance collapse is increased markedly. In this case, only participants making a contract and knowing the truth of marriage are the 'cast', except intimate friends who have gained the trust of participants, but parents and other social numbers are the spectators of this marital performance. Therefore, this condition needs participants to finish more work and performance, and incorporate them into the presentation of daily life, which will disorder their routines and habits. In one research of the Renmin University of China, participants involved in the high-intensity performance will choose to extend the distance between their house and their parent's house and even resettle down in another city. Other couples of contract marriage will choose divorce after a period of marriage because divorce can be acceptable in Chinese society. Despite all of this, this kind of contract marriage for society and family still faces many problems and generates controversy.

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Overall, contract marriage is not a perfect answer to ethics, but it is preferable to deceptive marriage and viable in the current situation of legislation and conventional society. Hence, contract marriage should be considered to replace deceptive marriage seriously. Contract marriage is based on a bilateral agreement, which can control and reduce the likelihood of deception. Meanwhile, contact and legal procedures can give participants maximum protection of their rights and help them to counteract the pressure from family and society. According to the treatise from Korean scholar Song Pae Cho, he said Korea is also a conservative patriarchal society where contract marriage has become popular at the end of the 20th century, and this cases which tried to balance the personal choices and household pressure are worthy to be deliberated. He said in his paper named 'The Wedding Banquet Revisited: "Contract Marriages" between Korean Gays and Lesbians':

On the one hand, these marriages would seem to confirm the stereotype of a conservative Asian culture in which homosexual identity is subsumed and erased by the heterosexual family. However, contract marriages, I argue, disclose not principally the "closeted" nature of Korean gay men and lesbians, but their efforts to negotiate South Korea's heteronormative system anchored in the patriarchal family [14].

Albeit contract marriage cannot solve entire problems and contradictions, such as the issue of offspring and the issue of family stability, but the pressure of marriage will be reduced with the finish of contract marriage, and gay group can bargain with their family and gain more chances and private choices.

4.2. AIDS Prevention and Sexual Education

It is necessary to discuss the issue of AIDS prevention and issue of sexual education and LGBTQ activities together. Particularly in the context of Chinese society, the AIDS epidemic resulting from deceptive marriage is related to the dearth of sexual education and LGBTQ activities. In other words, the absence of sexual knowledge leads to many deceptive marriages and tragedies of AIDS.

Pan Suiming, a famous Chinese socialist in the sexual area and AIDS prevention, published an investigation report about AIDS named '*The Social Construction of AIDS Problem*' which traces the development of the AIDS problem in China [15]. Pan Suiming said diseases are tools of politics. He introduced the case of the British government's politicisation of syphilis and analysed the attitude of the Chinese government towards AIDS in different periods. In my view, discussing topics of AIDS prevention publicity and so on are platitudinous, but it provides a new angle and path to analyse the mechanism of interaction between two factors when ADIS and homosexuality intersect, and it provides a chance to solve the puzzle about the gap between propaganda and realistic effect. According to Pan Suiming's views, for preventing all kinds of infectious diseases, all policies and executive actions authorised by the government can be simplified into two different conceptions.

The first one is regarding people as the subject of economic production and people are elements and indexes of factories. Under the influence of this conception, the government will choose a threatening policy to magnify the hazard and infectious degree of AIDS which can discipline people to keep cautions. Another concept respects human rights, on the basis of everyone having equal rights, the government will not choose irrational policy but encourages different departments to cooperate together and guarantee that there are few discriminations toward patients. Comparing the two different policies, we can find that the latter is more complex and sophisticated, but the first one just needs numerous publicity and efficient propaganda which can lead to effective efforts. Since the 1990s, AIDS has become serious in China, and in 2004 the state council of China proclaimed that AIDS has affected the development of the economy, stability of society, security of the country and destiny of the nation. Exaggerating one phenomenon into the highest layer and the most important issue is a typical operation of the Chinese Communist party because almost all propaganda campaigns conform to this rule. The Chinese government regards AIDS as a monster which can endanger

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national security and the spread of AIDS can cause social disturbance and impair the momentum of economic growth, which detracts from the legitimacy of the Chinese government. Hence, the AIDS problem is a political issue, not a medical issue.

AIDS is essentially an infectious disease that transmits mainly through sexual intercourse, and sexual education should occupy an important position in AIDS prevention. Generally, if governments are eager to achieve the goal of ADIS prevention, they should emphasise the importance of sexual education, but the reality in China is opposite to the hypothesis. This is because according to a ridiculous conception named 'AIDS ABC' which is popularised in Chinese internet and campaigns of AIDS prevention, the first golden rule is 'abstinence' which is highly compatible with confusion ethics and communist belief, and meanwhile active sexuality is one of the factors that can lead to social disorder. Thus, sexual education is secluded from the mainstream educational system, although Chinese students will accept the lecture about AIDS prevention whose content is full of the danger of AIDS, whereas schools do not provide systemic knowledge about sexuality. Therefore, it is difficult for students and the public to attach great importance to AIDS.

In the research on gay's wife, the taboos of gayness cause another key factor in AIDS prevention. Firstly, the Chinese government is unwilling to admit the danger of AIDS infection through gay's sexual behaviours and deliberately try to downplay the participation of homosexuality in propaganda, and sanitary institutions emphasise the risk of heterosexual behaviour and connect AIDS with the sex industry which leads to cognitive biases. Thus, in many cases of gay's wife, although they have found the mystery that their husbands are gay, they still choose to keep secrets and continue to have sexual behaviour for reproduction, which is high-risk sexual behaviour in some sense. Secondly, on account of the sensitivity of homosexuality and suppression of LGBTQ activities, the whole society lack scientific knowledge of homosexuality, which can be represented as discrimination towards them. In the other hands, this ignorance also leads to demonise the danger of gay or neglects the risk of AIDS. Regarding the Chinese government's fear of homosexuality and suppression of LGBTQ activities, it is another complex political issue which also connects with the stability of the regime.

In conclusion, AIDS prevention and LGBTQ activities are serious political issues. There is litter likelihood to solve this issue completely in the current political environment. But for people's health and the development of the economy and regime stability, it is necessary to face the relationship between gay sexual behaviour and AIDS, and thus raise public awareness of AIDS prevention.

5. Conclusion

This research and paper only finished a glimpse of the daily life of gay's wife. The forum of gay's wives in *baidu tieba* just owns a small scale but the amount of gay's wife in BBS is far lower than the accurate number of Chinese gay's wives. The number still secludes those gay's wives who do not find the secret. Maybe some gay's wives do not suffer severe damage, but the tragedy resulting from deceptive marriage is still fairly significant. Whether it is for just people to prevent AIDS, or it is for a wife and a mother to keep mental health. The key point is that nobody should suffer from deception and thus all gay's wife are victims.

With the development of society, the issue of sexual orientation is not only a simplistic question to choose who you love, which be classified as a private field, but also a fight for individual rights concerning identity [14-16]. Albeit this paper discusses the situation of Chinese gay's wife and tries to provide suggestions to solve the problems, gay, another participant in deceptive marriage, appears to be the person who makes changes and puts more effort into his own happiness. More people can dedicate themselves to the cause of human rights. Everyone should be encouraged to strive for their rights as independent humans instead of using the pressure from convention and society as excuses for wrongdoing. This topic is not only about feminism but also humanism.

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