



Queer Women in Urban China: An Ethnography (Routledge Research in Gender and Society)

Elisabeth L. Engebretsen

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Lala (lesbian) and gay communities in mainland China have emerged rapidly in the 21st century. Alongside new freedoms and modernizing reforms, and with mainstream media and society increasingly tolerant, lalas still experience immense family and social pressures to a degree that this book argues is deeply gendered. The first anthropological study to examine everyday lala lives, intimacies, and communities in China, the chapters explore changing articulations of sexual subjectivity, gendered T-P (tomboy-wife) roles, family and kinship, same-sex weddings, lala-gay contract marriages, and community activism. Engebretsen analyzes lala strategies of complicit transgressions to balance surface respectability and undeclared same-sex desires, why "being normal" emerges a deep aspiration and sign of respectability, and why openly lived homosexuality and public activism often are not.

Queer Women in Urban China develops a critical ethnographic analysis through the conceptual lens of "different normativities," tracing the paradoxes and intricacies of the desire for normal life alongside aspirations for recognition, equality, and freedom, and argues that dominant paradigms fixed on categories, identities, and the absolute value of public visibility are ill-equipped to fully understand these complexities. This book complements existing perspectives on sexual and gender diversity, contemporary China, and the politics and theories of justice, recognition, and similitude in global times.

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