

In contemporary China, rapid urban transformation and political authoritarianism jointly shape marginalized lives. This paper investigates how Shanghai's urban renewal and population management policies since the early 2000s have impacted queer spaces and communities, combining theory and empirical analysis of the interaction between state governance and grassroots agency. Several theoretical frameworks underpin this analysis. Giddens's *structuration theory* (1984) emphasizes the duality of structure and agency, highlighting how social structures and individual actions recursively influence each other. Structures (institutions, policies) set contexts within which people act, yet persist or change only through ongoing human actions, suggesting Shanghai's governance strategies and queer community responses mutually shape one another. Foucault's concept of *governmentality* (1994) complements this by addressing the subtle techniques and strategies through which societies become governable. Rather than explicit repression, governmentality guides populations through urban space regulations and normative controls. Butler's *performativity* (1990) further enriches analysis, stressing identities like gender and sexuality as constituted by repeated social actions. Queer communities perform existence through acts such as public gatherings, which can challenge or reinforce dominant norms. Frameworks of state capitalism and authoritarian urban governance contextualize China's setting. Huang (2008) argues China's political economy since the 1990s exhibits urban-biased, state-led capitalism, driven by strategic political goals. Bremmer (2009) similarly characterizes state capitalism as governments leveraging markets primarily for political ends. This blend of market and planning often manifests in urban redevelopment tightly managed by authorities. Scholars like Ong (2011) note Asian megacities combine neoliberal urbanism with authoritarian governance, where top-down controls facilitate rapid capitalist growth. Chinese local governments thus employ capitalist methods and coercive mechanisms to direct land use and urban form. Collectively, these theories—structuration, governmentality, performativity, state capitalism, and authoritarian urbanism—offer a rigorous analytical framework for examining the co-evolution of Shanghai's queer spaces and state strategies.

The early 2000s marked a turning point for Shanghai's urban landscape and queer community. Following economic reforms, Shanghai launched aggressive urban renewal projects to transform itself into a modern metropolis. Dense neighborhoods of shikumen and lilong housing were demolished for high-rise developments and commercial complexes in

state-driven urban rebirth. Events like the 2010 World Expo intensified these efforts, involving mass relocations and “beautification” campaigns to showcase a sanitized, cosmopolitan city. This process reflects Zhang’s (2015, 2023) observation of advanced disciplinary mechanisms that blend neoliberal behaviors with authoritarian control to maintain state-defined social and economic order. Urban renewal thus represented governmental rationality aimed at shaping specific types of citizens and urban environments. Informal or countercultural spaces tolerated in the semi-chaotic 1990s were increasingly marginalized. Queer venues, emerging in these liminal spaces, consequently, became unintended casualties. Governmentality is evident here: through spatial reconfiguration and population dispersal, the state regulated social life, including queer existence.

Alongside physical redevelopment, Shanghai intensified population management as a crucial element of urban governance. Rapid growth attracted internal migrants, raising official concerns about “floating populations” and urban disorder. From the mid-1990s, Shanghai implemented migrant control mechanisms, introducing quotas that favored skilled, educated migrants with privileges like the “blue stamp” hukou, while less-skilled migrants faced barriers and stigma. By segmenting urban settlers, Shanghai constructed a population hierarchy privileging high-end economic contributors and marginalizing those deemed low-status or “uncivilized.” This biopolitical management intensified with Shanghai’s Master Plan (2016–2035), officially capping the population at 25 million to address overcrowding and associated strains (“big city disease”). While these measures did not explicitly target queer individuals, they reinforced a governance regime emphasizing control and homogeneity.

Within this context, Shanghai’s queer communities experienced both opportunities and constraints. Nationally, the early 2000s saw subtle progress: homosexuality was decriminalized in 1997 and removed from China’s list of mental disorders in 2001. In cosmopolitan Shanghai, these shifts allowed a queer subculture to surface. Gay bars operated semi-openly in expatriate or bohemian districts, and informal community organizations emerged around health issues and social networking. By 2009, Shanghai hosted China’s first Pride events, featuring film screenings and gatherings (but notably avoiding politically sensitive parades). These activities represented performative acts of identity assertion within urban space, though under authoritarian surveillance.

Periodic crackdowns throughout the 2000s and 2010s illustrate state efforts to regain control when queer visibility became politically sensitive. A notable incident was the 2011 police raid on Q Bar, officially justified by public decency violations but contextually tied to broader government crackdowns amid Arab Spring-inspired protests. The New York Times described it as part of China's harshest suppression of dissent in a decade, significantly impacting the gay community. Around 60 patrons were detained, signaling that prominent queer nightlife remained subject to state intervention. Authorities routinely leveraged campaigns against drugs, prostitution, or "hooliganism" to regulate queer spaces indirectly. In 2019, a popular club set to host Pride's after-party lost its permit due to anti-drug campaign empowering police to broadly target nightlife venues. Even without explicitly targeting queer communities, authorities indirectly controlled them under public-order or health-related campaigns, exemplifying authoritarian strategies of control and plausible deniability. Urban policies and crackdowns impacted Shanghai's queer community, eliciting innovative resistance and adaptation.

Physical space usage also adapted dynamically. As formal queer venues faced repression, activities shifted toward informal, fluid, or private spaces, including house parties and pop-up gatherings in friendly cafes or galleries. Ethnographic accounts describe how queer film screenings moved to private apartments when public theaters were inaccessible. Public cruising practices evolved similarly: following a police crackdown in 2021, gay men relocated intimate encounters to alternative sites like malls or different parks. These relocations illustrate spatial performativity, quietly subverting heteronormative spaces and aligning with Butler's concept of performance as reality-making. Though precarious, such fluid spatial tactics enhanced community resilience. By continually relocating and avoiding reliance on fixed locations, queer networks became difficult for authorities to permanently dismantle.

Investigating interactions between state governance and queer spatial practices in Shanghai requires a multi-method approach integrating archival research, ethnographic fieldwork, and computational mapping. Archival analysis of municipal policies, urban plans, and official documents reveals evolving governmental rationalities. For instance, city master plans addressing population limits to combat "big city disease" expose bureaucratic language of governmentality, while internal police directives may illustrate justifications for crackdowns as

public safety measures. Ethnography offers a ground-level counterpoint, using interviews, participant-observation (e.g., at underground drag shows or discussion groups), and oral histories to capture LGBTQ residents' lived experiences. Ethnographic data illuminate subjective responses and subtle forms of resistance invisible in official accounts, such as discreet community tactics following venue closures. Computational mapping complements these methods by visualizing queer-friendly venues' shifting locations using GIS tools and anonymized app data. Maps reveal spatial changes—such as venue dispersal following gentrification or increased central policing—and illustrate the digital social networks' topology (e.g., WeChat group clusters).

Findings from this inquiry reveal nuanced co-evolution between state governance and grassroots queer activism in Shanghai. Neither entirely dominant nor passive, each continually reshapes the other. State governance, leveraging state-capitalist resources and authoritarian zeal, effectively molded urban environments to fit official visions of order, marginalizing LGBTQ organizing through spatial restrictions and regulatory oversight. Yet queer communities have persistently adapted, exploiting gaps through subtle, innovative forms of resistance. In this phase, queer communities demonstrate what Scott (2012) terms *infrapolitics*: discreet actions cumulatively carving out spaces for survival and identity without openly challenging authority. Their adaptability reveals cracks within governance structures and potential for creative intervention. The contestation around queer spaces in Shanghai contributes to global discussions on the “right to the city,” revealing tensions between state-driven citizen curation and community-driven placemaking. Shanghai complicates conventional understandings of neoliberal globalization: its queer performative practices navigate collective values and state scrutiny distinct from Western experiences yet remain agentic. The narrative of queer Shanghai thus exemplifies agency-structure interplay under authoritarianism, providing insights relevant to urban contexts across East Asia.