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**Platformisation as a 'Mycelial' Safety-Net: The Case of a
Queer Feminist-Led Intentional Community in China**

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Keywords:	platformisation, consumer culture, intentional communities, queer-feminism, China



**Platformisation as a ‘Mycelial’ Safety-Net: The Case of a Queer Feminist-Led
Intentional Community in China**

Abstract

Purpose

Marketing scholarship has paid limited attention to how socially marginalised groups, particularly queer women, mobilise the logics of platformisation to organise and sustain communities. This omission is particularly salient in contexts marked by market exclusion and institutional constraints, conditions frequently encountered by queer-feminist communities in the Global South. Examining a queer women-led intentional community – D village– located in rural China, our study illustrates how members strategically engage with platformised infrastructures to cultivate community and collectively construct what we term a “Mycelial Safety-Net”. This safety-net enables participants to navigate market exclusion and resist the broader social marginalisation experienced by queer women.

Design/methodology/approach

We employed a two-year netnographic study of queer female community members’ digital traces, complemented by a participatory ethnographic investigation of their lived experiences in D village. The empirical material comprises field notes from two field visits and semi-structured interviews with ten queer villagers.

Findings

Our findings reveal how queer women leverage the logics of platformisation to organise a Mycelial Safety-Net across interconnected micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. At the micro level, the underground mycelium captures the decentralised, rhizomatic, and often invisible connections through which queer-feminist individuals engage with digital platforms. At the

macro level, the soil signifies the broader socio-political, economic, and technological conditions of platformisation that simultaneously enable and constrain queer-feminist lives and communities. At the meso level, the rhizomatic coordination among queer women becomes materially manifested as mushrooms, emerging as entrepreneurial initiatives, cooperative organisations, and collective infrastructures of care within the platform economy.

Originality

Our study is among the first in marketing scholarship to examine how marketing logics, particularly platformisation, can be strategically appropriated by queer women to organise and sustain alternative market structures of intentional community under conditions of institutional marginalisation. Drawing on an intentional community led by queer women in China, we challenge the epistemic dominance of platformisation research that has largely been informed by Global North, elitist, and heterosexual perspectives. By foregrounding the experiences of queer women in the Global South, we demonstrate how platformised infrastructures can be repurposed to cultivate collective care, community resilience, and more socially just forms of market organisation.

Keywords: platformisation; consumer culture; intentional communities; queer-feminism; China.

Introduction

This study emerged from our ethnographic (Behar, 2003; Gherardi, 2019) and netnographic (Kozinets, 2022) engagement with an intentional community in China, where many community members identified as feminist queers. The initial puzzle arose from our early encounters with individual community members’ social media traces. As feminist and queer researchers with Chinese upbringings, we were intrigued by how these queer women use online platforms to build connectivity, under China’s highly constraining platform environment for sexual minorities (Wang and Bao, 2023; Yang S., 2026). In this article, we examine how digital materialities (Mardon and Belk, 2018) work with physical communal settings to organically establish a decentralised safety net for these queer women in China. This is particularly pertinent at a time when both global and Chinese queer communities continue to experience exacerbated oppression and a survival crisis (Reiss *et al.*, 2026; Yang S., 2026). The queer-feminist intentional community discussed here, which merges community practices with queer-feminist ethics, represents a significant and timely contribution to marketing and consumer culture studies on community building for marginalised social groups (Santana *et al.*, 2026; Pirani and Daskalopoulou, 2022).

Marketing scholars suggest that intentional communities are often delineated as prefigurative configurations of socio-environmental culture (Casey *et al.*, 2020; Hong and Vicdan, 2016), where residents challenge dominant social norms, practice alternative lifestyles, and initiate sustainability through community-building, social (infra)structures, and everyday routines (Casey *et al.*, 2020; Cooper and Baer, 2018). In marketing research, intentional communities are widely discussed for their agency in creating utopian spaces (see Casey *et al.*, 2020; Maclaran and Brown, 2001), facilitating socio-economic sustainability, and challenging hegemonic structures, such as patriarchy (Maclaran and Brown, 2001; 2005). Moreover, intentional communities could be understood as alternative economic systems that

embody a feminist ethos (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2016; Maclaran and Stevens, 2019), adopting care and reciprocity as key ethics to sustaining community (Arnould and Helkkula, 2024; Ehrnström-Fuentes and Biese, 2023) while resisting a hegemonic capitalist structure that favours individualism, competition and domination (Chatzidakis and Maclaran, 2022; Macgregor, 2022). From this perspective, the role of technology – particularly digital platforms – in sustaining intentional communities might appear counterintuitive, given concerns about platformisation’s digital surveillance and the value-extraction business model (Lin and de Kloet, 2019; Zuboff, 2019), which many intentional communities seek to resist.

We acknowledge and agree with these concerns; however, for marginalised communities that face political and market delegitimisation, such as queer communities in many Global South contexts (Reiss *et al.*, 2026; Yang S., 2026), platformisation may play a crucial role in structuring and sustaining them. In China, this occurs through practices such as creative content production (Yang S., 2026) and algorithmic manipulation (Shi, 2025), which follow intentional communities’ counter-capitalist ethos rather than reproducing hegemonic organisational logics. In addition, as Gibson-Graham *et al.* (2016) and Ehrnström-Fuentes and Biese (2023) propose, adopting an epistemology that is beyond the Global North and non-patriarchal is crucial for exploring alternative ways to nurture ‘life-sustaining webs’ (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 161). Our paper echoes such research calls, focusing on the making of a queer-women-led intentional community through the specific lens of platformisation.

Unlike previous intentional community studies, which engage technologies predominantly around eco-housing and architectures (e.g., Pickerill, 2012), farming and local food system development (e.g., Newman and Nixon, 2014), energy management (e.g., Tomicic and Schatten, 2016), our paper focused on a less discussed field – digital platform materialities (Mardon and Belk, 2018; Shannon, 2018). In marketing research, scholars suggest digital materialities as mediators of network-building (Atanasova and Eckhardt,

2021; Kozinets, 2008, 2019; Kozinets *et al.*, 2017; Kozinets and Seraj-Aksit, 2024; Mardon and Belk, 2018), and particularly highlight the key role of platformisation in fostering (counter-)cultural production and communities (see Arsel, 2025; Drenten *et al.*, 2024; Caliandro *et al.*, 2024; Ottlewski *et al.*, 2024). This aligns with intentional communities’ instrumental goal of challenging and resisting dominant marketing and social norms (Casey *et al.*, 2020; Casey and Tadajewski, 2023), in which marginalised communities may adopt platforms to foster a space for utopian and alternative prefiguration. Therefore, this study asks: *How does platformisation support the development of safety-nets in a Chinese queer feminist community?*

The context of this study, D Village, sits on a suburban fringe about a 30-minute drive from a city in Southwest China. Around 2016–2017, a group of local eco-activists discovered the place and started several ecological and queer initiatives there, including a permaculture café, a village school for kids from local and queer families, and an ecological farm. Since then, D Village has attracted more people from various marginalised backgrounds, who are known locally as ‘new villagers’. Of these, digital platforms play an integral role in attracting new villagers. From ‘female-co-living’ (女性共居) advertisements on RedNote to feminist podcasts on XiaoYuZhou (a Chinese podcast platform), these platforms facilitate incomes for new villagers. The way of creating such liveability politics through digital and communal materialities offers insights for domestic marginalised groups and for the global prefigurative ethos of intentional communities.

We adopt a multi-method approach, including netnography (Kozinets, 2020) and ethnography (Behar, 2003; Gherardi, 2019) from 2024 to 2026, combining online observations of the villagers’ shared social media content with field notes and semi-structured interviews with ten queer villagers conducted during our visit. Our findings, inspired by Tsing (2015), adopt a mycelial metaphor to depict a decentralised, covert *Mycelial Safety-Net*

among the queer villagers and their wider networks, co-constituted by digital and physical materialities (Atanasova and Eckhardt, 2021; Caliandro *et al.*, 2024; Poell *et al.*, 2019). The metaphor works as a euphemism of mycelium's capacity to permeate and cross boundaries underground (Tsing, 2015). Grounded in platform marketing scholarship (Arsel, 2025; Caliandro *et al.*, 2024) and (digital) queer feminist marketing studies (Gurrieri and Drenten, 2025; Pirani and Daskalopoulou, 2022; Yang S., 2026), our findings extend understanding of how marginalised consumers leverage platformisation from a grassroots level to foster and sustain an alternative platform market structure – a queer-feminist safety-net. This contribution encompasses a wide array of scholarly discussions on topics including consumer responsibilisation (Geisler and Veresiu, 2014), intersectionality (Eckhardt and Kopalle, 2025), platformisation in marketing and consumer research (Caliandro *et al.*, 2024), and digital materialities of intentional and marginalised communities. The structure of the paper is as follows: we first examine the theoretical foundations of queer feminist intentional communities and their relationship to platformisation studies. We then outline our netnographic and ethnographic data collection methods, followed by the presentation of our findings using a mycelial metaphor, and finally consider the theoretical contributions to three fields: intentional community, queer feminism, and platformisation research.

Theoretical Framework

Platformisation of queer feminist materialities

While platformisation as a systematic analytical concept originates primarily from media and cultural studies (Poell *et al.*, 2019; van Dijck, 2021), marketing scholars have increasingly turned their attention to exposing the complex marketing logics within platformisation, and to the role of platform infrastructures in (re)configuring the possibilities for a more ethical and equitable marketplace and society (Arsel, 2025; Caliandro *et al.*,

2024). Platformisation refers to “the penetration of infrastructures, economic processes, and governmental frameworks of digital platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life, as well as the reorganisation of cultural practices and imaginations around these platforms” (Poell *et al.*, 2019, p. 1). The concept derives from the broader notion of the “platform,” which refers to infrastructural and techno-commercial systems that mediate interactions between businesses and end consumers (Poell *et al.*, 2019). In contrast to the general concept of platforms, van Dijck (2021) argue that platformisation is better understood as a set of governance mechanisms that assemble and coordinate networked platforms. Many critical scholars argue that while platformisation appears to offer a more democratic vision of technological futures, the technology companies that underpin it are, in fact, intensifying social divisions. Owen (2019) critiques such hegemonic governance by big tech companies, arguing that, rather than producing social good, platformisation has become a covert mechanism for capital accumulation. Zuboff’s (2019) seminal work advances this argument through her theory of surveillance capitalism, in which global techno-firms extract and commodify users’ behavioural surplus from platform interactions, convert it into predictive products, and sell them and capitalise on users’ data to predict and control futures markets. This accumulation regime depends on continuous data extraction to predict, target, and ultimately steer consumer behaviour.

Drawing on gender and sexuality perspectives, scholars expose how platformisation simultaneously intensifies the exploitation of both women and nature. Under the dominance of technocapitalism, Silicon Valley tech companies and their CEOs, or the “broligarchies” (Yang S., 2026), gain hegemonic control over digital resources and sustain the status quo of patriarchy (Browne *et al.*, 2024; Scharff, 2024). Specifically, the broligarchical investments cultivate the algorithmic bias regarding gender and sexuality (Browne *et al.*, 2024), the platformisation of the manosphere (Gerrand *et al.*, 2025), and the antagonism towards green

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3 and sustainability agendas. Such platform-sustained patriarchy imposes influence on real-life
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5 politics and everyday practices (Drenten *et al.*, 2024), such as exacerbating the discipline of
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7 women's reproductive rights and maintaining traditional heteronormative family values
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9 (Martins, 2018).
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12 In marketing studies, scholars have begun to discuss the pivotal role of
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14 platformisation in shaping consumer culture (Caliandro *et al.*, 2024), such as consumption
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16 ideology (Drenten *et al.*, 2024), queer culture (see Ottlewski *et al.*, 2024; Yang S., 2026), and
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18 consumer activism (Vrikki and Lekakis, 2023). Emerging studies advocate adopting a
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20 feminist lens to criticise the patriarchal marketing logics of platformisation and broader
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22 technology capitalism (Parsons *et al.*, 2022; Gurrieri and Drenten, 2022). This adoption
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24 includes critically examining how the governance logics of platformisation reconfigure
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26 consumer responsabilisation through a feminist lens, especially their impacts on the
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28 marginalised. "A gender-driven perspective can help understand responsabilisation as a
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30 process where prevailing hierarchies and power relations shape marketplace subjectivities"
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32 (Corus *et al.*, 2025, p. 352). Giesler and Veresiu (2014) demonstrate how macro-level
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34 institutions shape "responsible consumers" by shifting responsibilities that traditionally
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36 belong to institutions onto individual consumers. Building on this perspective, subsequent
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38 marketing research has explored how consumers engage in responsible action from the
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40 grassroots level to foster market inclusion or institutional changes (e.g., Cherrier and Türe,
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42 2022; Eckhardt and Dobscha, 2019; Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013). However, considerably
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44 less attention has paid to how marginalised consumers navigate socio-material conditions in
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46 response to failed and exclusionary market structures (Gollnhofer and Kuruoglu, 2018), and
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48 when institutional mechanisms of inclusion are absent or inadequate for gender-related
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50 individual consumers (Coru *et al.*, 2025), e.g., the Chinese queer-feminist consumers we
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52 study here. Our study joins this stream of research by demonstrating how gender-related
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socio-material resources, through the mechanisms of platformisation, navigate structural exclusions and reshape responsabilisation.

Moving forward, in current marketing scholarship, the intersectional understanding of queer and feminist issues, and contexts beyond Western socio-cultural digital materialities, remain underexplored (Yang and Waverley, 2026). Caliandro *et al.* (2024) suggest that platformisation disrupts the conventional boundary between immateriality and materiality in marketing research. Yang and Waverley’s (2026) study examines how Chinese male beauty influencers create an “ideological antechamber” that enables the navigation of queer, progressive ideologies within a more hostile and constrained technological market, thereby establishing market legitimacy. Our study extends this discussion by examining the interplay between digital materialities and cultural materialities of queer feminism. Drawing on queer feminist theory as a critical lens (e.g., Chatzidakis and Maclaran, 2022; Dobscha and Ozanne, 2001), we explore how these disruptive materialities are organised and negotiated within platformised environments.

Queer feminism offers a theoretical critique of the intertwined patriarchal-heteronormative logics that dominate the organising of platformisation. This body of work conceptualises queer feminism as an epistemological tool that enables us to imagine a yet-to-come way of living, in which heteronormative governance is dismantled, and gender equality is achieved (Ahmed, 2016; Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989). It also envisions future organising that extends beyond gender and sexuality to collective care, post-capitalism, degrowth, multispecies, eco-socialist, decolonial and more (Vijay *et al.*, 2025). We argue that the platformisation of queer imaginaries is not confined to the platformisation itself but could extend further into extra-institutional spheres, including our socio-economic structures. For example, Matich *et al.* (2020) studied how feminist utopian perspectives were platformalised through feminist artworks and networked queer vulnerabilities (Matich *et al.*, 2024).

Similarly, LGBTQ+ families have appropriated platforms to challenge heteronormative family forms and construct alternative modes of queer kinship (Ottlewski *et al.*, 2024). These cases echo van Dijck's (2021) view of platformisation not as a linear, top-down system dominated by corporate actors, but as an ecosystem marked by heterogeneous and unpredictable interactions, which inherently suggest queerness: non-hierarchical, unpredictable, and counter-hegemonic (Ahmed, 2006; Pirani and Daskalopoulou, 2022).

In the next section, we examine how the digital materiality of such queer feminism on platforms becomes imbricated with the physical materiality of intentional communities.

Intentional communities: the “other” space within and beyond the platform ecosystem

While platforms enable digital materiality for counter-heteronormative imaginaries, intentional communities, in parallel, afford empirical playgrounds for the making of these visions. In this study, we understand ‘Intentional Communities’ to be “small, voluntary social units partly isolated from the general society in which members share an economic union and lifestyle in an attempt to implement, at least in part, their ideal ideological, religious, political, social, economic, and educational systems” (Pitzer, 1989, p. 221). Looking at this definition, we wish to underscore that intentional communities are laden with ideological tensions and resolutions for societal reconfiguration. Among all forms of intentional communities, ecovillages, communities with an explicit idealism toward social-ecological sustainability (Wagner, 2012; Rubin, 2021), have been under the spotlight of academic examination and societal progression over the last two decades. Hong and Vicdan (2016) describe utopianism, escapism, and heterotopia as the ideological foundations underpinning ecovillages’ materialistic substances. Casey *et al.* (2020) regard ecovillages as grassroots spaces that provide materialistic conditions that challenge the dominant social paradigm and prefigure alternative production and consumption systems. Broadly speaking, ecovillages and

intentional communities in general are considered “important sites of difference and rebellion” (Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2012, p. 497), challenging dominant social orders and norms and seeking social transformation.

Historically, intentional communities were associated with the ‘hippie’ and countercultural movements (Casey *et al.*, 2016; Halfacree, 2022), which led to (mis)representations of the subject in popular media and cultural products (Metcalf, 2012). Although many contemporary intentional communities actively seek to establish a mainstream, homogeneous, and capitalistic identity (Lennon and Berg, 2022) and maintain social, economic, and political connections with external societies (van Schyndel Kasper, 2008), their unconventional, and often radical, approaches to alternative social structures elicit themselves as “other spaces” (Hong and Vicdan, 2016). Building on Kohn’s “heterotopia of resistance” (2003), Chatzidakis *et al.* (2012) regard intentional communities as heterotopias, for they resist commercialisation, authoritarianism, establishment, capitalism, and consumerism, yet provide spatial agencies for otherness and out-of-order social organisation to take place. By examining factual media’s representation of ecovillages, Lennon and Berg (2022) further shed light on how certain conceptual dualisms shape the *otherness*. They imply that notions including heterogeneity and rurality are represented as the ‘bad’ undesirable others, while homogeneity and modernity are associated with dominance, superiority, and ‘us’ (ibid.).

At present, little research has attended to intentional communities’ participation in the digital platform ecosystem, particularly how different marginalised groups, e.g., queer feminists and intentional communities, intersect within the uprising platform economy. Vicdan *et al.* (2025) propose a symbiotic lens to examine the potentials and limits of food prosumption technologies within a degrowth transition. Drawing on degrowth principles such as conviviality and circularity, they discuss how humans, nature, and technology can

collaboratively afford a non-anthropocentric alliance to confront sociopolitical challenges (Vicdan *et al.*, 2025). Though the paper does not directly study intentional communities or platformisation, its framework offers insights for understanding the role of technology in mediating communities' future imaginaries and world-making.

Additionally, due to their detachment from the mainstream, and therefore, media networking, promoting and disseminating sustainable lifestyles at the macro-society level does not appear to be intentional communities' priority (Hong and Vicdan, 2016). Their connection-building with external collaborators and new members often relies on collaboration with NGOs and local governments (Rõigas *et al.*, 2025). This status quo illuminates an underexplored area: how grassroots actors lacking political legitimacy (e.g., queer feminists in China) develop and sustain communities without institutional support. Platform materialities and the affordances they generate may open up pathways for the formation and sustenance of communities. The following section unpacks the entanglement of queer feminism and intentional community culture within the platform economy in our studied context, China.

Queer feminism and intentional community development within China's platform economy

The extant studies on digital queer feminism and intentional communities are largely embedded within Western Silicon Valley platforms and their geographical context (Farias, 2017; Matich *et al.*, 2024). Platforms in the US and Western European countries often adopt a self-governance approach to regulating content and users, with reduced state interference (Helberger *et al.*, 2018). In comparison, Chinese platforms operate within a heteropatriarchal state-techno-capitalist context (Yang S., 2026), where the central government holds an arbitrary state of power in determining internet regulation and governance (Ye *et al.*, 2024), yet, the implementation of this does not follow a top-down and command-and-control

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approach (Yang G., 2021) but instead can be discursive, bureaucratic, even contradictory, and often transmitted in forms of abstract rules and ideological values (Zhou, 2022). In addition, differing from intentional communities in the West, which often withdraw from the marketplace, the marketing of Chinese rural culture and counter-hegemonic communities has grown in tandem with the expansion of China’s platform economy. Put simply, China’s opaque platform regulation policies sometimes create spaces for counter-hegemonic activism to develop. This section, thence, unpacks how China’s platformised economy configures intentional communities into a conduit for queer-feminist expressions in a non-Western context.

Within China’s post-socialist economic development, gender equality has been promoted as a state policy (Tan, 2023), granting queer feminist consumption culture a large degree of market legitimacy. Nonetheless, grassroots activities toward gender equality continue to face increasing regulation. The materialities of queer feminism are highly regulated within platform markets and across broader social contexts (Han, 2025; Yang S., 2026). Similarly, digital platforms in China adhere to neoliberal logics of market expansion and capital accumulation, while also being required to comply with state policies to secure their market legitimacy (Ye *et al.*, 2024). As a result, Chinese platform spaces are often described as being caught between the government’s political imperatives and the bottom line of commercialisation (Zhao Y., 2008).

To exemplify the “political imperatives”, the government regards rural village development as an effective solution to address existing issues of poverty, labour loss, and farmland abandonment in rural China, as well as to achieve sustainable rural development (Gao *et al.*, 2022). From the state’s perspective, Chinese netizens portraying a desirable rural culture on social media platforms aligns with the government’s “soft power” diplomatic strategy, which aims to endorse positive images to create a cohesive metanarrative of the

country (Zhang and Ma, 2022). Aligned with this agenda, Chinese digital space witnesses a booming number of rural residents actively joining livestreaming platforms to promote rural lives and products (Zhao L., 2023). Simultaneously, counter-urbanisation (or rural gentrification) arises, whereby the Chinese middle class moves to the countryside to escape urban pressure and satisfy their sentiments and nostalgia for rural folk and agricultural cultures (Yu *et al.*, 2024). Although these platform-afforded portrayals of rural life are criticised for flattening, romanticising, and commodifying the countryside (Zhao L., 2023), they make traditionally ‘exotic’ and othered rurality more familiar and approachable to the mass markets (Lennon and Berg, 2022). This implicates Zhao Y.’s “bottom line of commercialisation” (2008), particularly where certain subcultures that are orthodoxly subject to regulation and censorship are assimilated into the mainstream due to their significant commercial imperative (Ding, 2024).

Despite such liberatory potentials, platforms in China often function as tools of cultural governance. Liao (2019a) warns that platformised queer movements may offer only the illusion of liberation, echoing Bao’s (2018, p. 17) call for vigilance about the normalising pull of homosexuality within a neoliberal order legitimised by the Party-state, oriented toward conformity, consumption, and conservative morality. de Kloet *et al.* (2019) and Liao (2024) also discussed that tech giants such as Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent mediate consumer activity within state-led governance frameworks characteristic of an authoritarian model.

Against this backdrop, current digital queer-feminism research in China suggests an alternative understanding of how digital platforms can provide spaces for queer feminist imaginaries to emerge and counter the hegemony of global technocapitalism (e.g., Bao, 2018; Lo, 2022; Tan, 2023). In contexts where political legitimacy is constrained, actors draw upon relatively legitimised domains, including communal economies, platform economies, and (regulated) feminist economies to compensate. For example, Lo (2022) examined how the

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Chinese lesbian community uses digital spaces to navigate intimate relationships and kinship at personal and family levels between the public and private spheres. Guo (2022) shows how platformisation supports women’s independent gig work, alongside de Kloet *et al.*’s (2019) discovery that rural working-class women’s use of WeChat can enhance their knowledge-building, business acumen, affective communication, and self-awareness. Liao (2019a) highlights the crucial role of platforms in initiating and facilitating guerrilla queer social movements in China. These studies suggest that the close interplay between queer feminism and digital platforms represented by China’s platform ecosystem is different from its Western counterpart. The latter typically advocates for institutional changes in a less-censored digital space, whereas the former, although being highly regulated and censored, helps address gender and sexuality related inequalities, especially for those who face intersectional marginalisations (e.g., working class, queer and female).

Notwithstanding, across both Chinese and global platformisation research, the relationships, tensions, and mutual constitution between platformisation and the development of physical queer feminist communities remain underexplored. Particularly, how these domains sustain a “web of life” together has yet to be adequately understood within the marketing scholarship. In the following sections, we contextualise the state’s political advocacy for rural revitalisation and digital platform economies, and explain how such complex, power-laden entanglement creates grey zones for queer-feminist ethos to manifest through the praxis of intentional communities.

Research Context

Our research context, D Village, is a rural village in Southwest China that has been reinvigorated with eco-environmental practices that are endorsed and endeavoured by local

community initiatives. Simultaneously, such community-led efforts are also aligned with the country's development agenda of rural revitalisation and digital technologies (Yang *et al.*, 2026). The integration of urban and rural development has long been prioritised as a key political strategy in the Chinese Communist Party's national economic planning (Pitts *et al.*, 2019). D Village, which lies in a region characterised by vast rural territories, relative economic precarity, and rich biodiversity and ethnic diversity, was facing the crisis of loss of labour and had remained unknown to the public until 2016. Affected by the government's 11th Five-Year Plan of "Building a New Socialist Countryside" (Pitts *et al.*, 2019), the village has been progressively revitalised over the years into a sustainable experimental site grounded in the philosophy and practices of 'permaculture' (Mollison *et al.*, 1991). Table 1 below outlines the related state-led governmental schemes. In particular, our participants are queer women who reside in D Village and have organically formed a community-like neighbourhood with each other.

One focal platform of our netnographic observation is RedNote. It is an e-commerce-driven social media platform widely recognised as a platform for disseminating feminist lifestyles (Guo, 2022). RedNote reflects the market legitimacy of neoliberal feminism in China (Zhan, 2024). The other focal platform, WeChat, is described as a Super App that includes social networking, messaging, payment, and content creation, and is embedded in all sorts of social and technical interactions and economic structures (Jia *et al.*, 2022). Under a platformisation environment that is largely different from Silicon Valley-driven ones, the queer-feminism culture mediated by such is also distinctive. As noted by Yang S. (2026), sexual minority consumers precariously navigate liveability politics and heteronormative techno-capitalism through platform affordances. In the following section, we detail our netnographic and ethnographic data collection from digital platforms and through offline visits.

[Table 1. Key State-Led Schemes]

Methodology

Our research employed a multi-method approach. It started with a netnography (Kozinets, 2020; Kozinets and Grezel, 2024), which analyses the queer-feminist digital traces of D Village, and was then complemented by participatory ethnographic data (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003; Wolcott, 1999; Behar, 2022) collected during two field trips to the village in April and August 2025. The field trips enabled us to produce field notes and interviews with individuals in the queer female neighbourhood there.

In ethnographic studies, researchers often possess more than one identity position in social-structural hierarchies. Our gender, race, class, sexuality, as well as academic positions, cultivate our affinities for certain topics and lead to particular research agendas (Lichterman, 2017). This reflexivity of our own positionalities also shapes our netnographic and ethnographic stances (Kozinets and Grezel, 2024; Davis and Craven, 2020). In this study, the research team comprises two consumer culture researchers. One is a heterosexual female feminist researcher whose expertise lies in intentional communities and critical consumer research. The other researcher is a male queer researcher specialising in gender and sexuality studies and platformisation within consumer culture. Both researchers developed their interests in D Village through one of the queer villagers’ podcast series on the Chinese feminist movement. Our combined positionalities and academic backgrounds cultivated our compassion with the queer women. The positionalities also formed a strong netnographic stance toward the subject matter, enriching the study, offering interactive perspectives, and fostering a deeper understanding of the studied community (Kozinets and Grezel, 2024).

Overall, our netnographic data sources include the queer neighbours' social media content from RedNote and WeChat official accounts, podcasts, and researchers' immersion notes. The ethnographic data comprise interviews with ten queer female villagers, and the researchers' on-site fieldnotes (see Table 2). The research project received ethics approval from the lead author's affiliated institution. All identifiable information is pseudonymised. All data were collected in Chinese and then translated into English. The following sections introduce our data collection process.

[Table 2: Data Sources]

Netnographic Data Collection

Our data collection began with a netnographic approach, designed to examine how digital platforms facilitated engagement between queer women within and beyond D Village, and to identify the emerging cultural patterns within these interactions. Following Kozinets' (2020) framework, we initiated the research with an immersion phase (mid-2024 to early 2025). After acquiring ethical approval, we started immersion journaling in a shared document and met approximately once every two weeks to calibrate. The digital fields for immersion included the villagers' individual podcast channels and the social media accounts associated with their eco-queer businesses. Using villagers' business accounts as keywords, we employed a snowball sampling strategy to locate four podcast episodes in which villagers discussed their eco-queer enterprises. These digital engagements enabled us to observe and contextualise the platformisation pattern of queer feminist organising of villagers.

Ethnography Data Collection

Building on the netnography, we conducted ethnographic fieldwork to understand how queer-feminist culture had occurred and been enacted in everyday routines and the real-

world setting of D Village (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2017). In April 2025, we joined the “Alternative Life Experience Week” organised by the queer neighbourhood in D Village. The experiences included meditation, farming, foraging, and tree-climbing—hands-on practices centred on eco-living and alternatives to urban life. Every two days, we shared and discussed our observations and fieldnotes with each other to triangulate findings enriched by different perspectives and subjectivities (Spiggle, 1994; Carter *et al.*, 2014). Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews (Table 3) were conducted throughout the week while we established trust and rapport with the participants. In August 2025, we returned to D Village and delivered a debriefing workshop with the participants to discuss issues related to womanhood and queer identity. In doing so, we echo the call for reciprocal research by feminist ethnographers (e.g., Davis and Craven, 2020; Mies, 1983) and attempt to mitigate the exploitative dissonance that researchers always claim for authorship of knowledge extracted from the participants’ lived experiences (Stacey, 1988).

This mixed on/offline strategy moved beyond the purely digital/discursive towards a more grounded, material and embodied understanding of platformisation and the collective queer-feminist organising patterns. It echoes netnography’s call to integrate digital traces with embodied, situated practice (Kozinets and Gretzel, 2024). The ethnographic phase illuminated villagers’ daily lives and how their lifestyles intersect with—and are shaped by—platform infrastructures, strengthening the overall triangulation of our data.

[Table 3: Interview Participant Information]

Data Analysis

We analysed the data through an iterative cycle of reflections, discoveries, and inquiries, continually revisiting our interpretations to develop a comprehensive, nuanced account (Kozinets and Gretzel, 2024). Reflexive practice—memoing, peer debriefs, and an

audit trail (Lincoln and Guba, 1985)—was integral to the netnographic ethos and supported credible representations of D Village’s lived experience. Analytically, we combined constant comparison with abductive reasoning. First, we open-coded netnographic materials (immersion notes, screenshots, comment threads) to identify platform practices, meanings, and interactions. These codes informed focused coding and preliminary categories, which we then reiterated against the ethnographic corpus (fieldnotes and interview transcripts), refining and extending them into higher-order themes.

From this cross-case triangulation, we derived the platformisation pattern of queer-feminist culture, how digital infrastructures, material practices, and community norms co-produce visibility, survival, and care. Finally, we synthesised these themes into an integrative model presented in the Findings, articulating the mechanisms and conditions under which platformisation enables (and constrains) queer-feminist organising in D Village.

Findings

Our findings expose that platformisation has helped construct a queer-feminist ‘live-sustaining web’ (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), which we name as the ‘Mycelial Safety-Net’. We define this Safety-Net as a logic of platformisation by which marginalised consumers and social groups leverage platform materialities and queer-feminist ethics to navigate systematic adversities while building convivial networks.

To depict our findings, we draw on Tsing’s (2015) and Sheldrake’s (2021) ecological studies of fungi (see Figure 1). The fungi metaphor echoes the work of J. van Dijck (2021), who uses the tree metaphor to conceptualise the governance of platformisation under the European techno-cultural context. While van Dijck’s metaphor interprets the roots as the infrastructures within the platform ecosystem (e.g., hardware, archetypes, different platform affordances), the trunk symbolising mediating technologies (e.g., apps, social media

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networks, data analytics services), and the leaves representing sociocultural information mediated by platforms (e.g., mobility, education) (see van Dijck, 2021), our findings of the organisation of such (digital) materialities diverge.

In particular, we interpret that the Mycelial Safety-Net is woven by the queer women leveraging different platformisation patterns at three levels. Of these, the micro level – the underground *mycelium* – illustrates a decentralised and rhizomatic pattern of platform use among queer-feminist individuals; the macro level reflects the broader socio-political and economic *soil* of platformisation by which queer-feminist individuals and communities are simultaneously nurtured and oppressed; the meso level depicts how the rhizomatic coordination among individual queer women materialises in a pattern of *mushrooms*, taking the form of entrepreneurial and cooperative organisations in platform economy.

[Figure 1: The Visualisation of the Mycelial Safety-Net]

Underneath these patterns, we uncover how these queer women mitigate different tensions they face at each level and, correspondingly, create counter-hegemonic socio-cultural and economic infrastructures through certain empirical practices (see Table 4). The tensions in accordance with the three patterns are: *socio-cultural configuration* tension (micro) between patriarchal, heteronormative urban lifestyles and queer women’s attempts to escape and reimagine community life; *structural interface* tension (macro) between state-driven platform capitalism and rural revitalisation policies that support community development, and the platforms’ censorship and control over queer and feminist expressions; and *counter-heteronormative commercial initiatives* tension (meso) between queer women-led commercial organisations’ need for financial and material sustainability and anti-capitalist consumers’ resistance to profit-oriented practices.

The distinct affordances and functions of platforms enable the community to establish and scale up its connections. Specifically, (1) participants at the micro level platformise socio-digital infrastructures by decentralising heteronormative platform affordances; (2) at the macro level, participants forge visibility and impacts within the paradoxical institutional and regulatory infrastructures in which surveillance coexists with state-led platform economy and rural revitalisation; and (3) the meso level embodies material-economic infrastructures in which participants creatively develop businesses that sustain material needs while generating impacts for broader queer individuals and women.

[Table 4: Three Levels of The Mycelial Safety-Net]

Unlike trees, mycelium lacks a fixed pattern of cultivation and therefore resists domestication of the capitalist systems and the aim for industrial, scalable growth (Tsing, 2015). The Mycelial Safety-Net symbolises the anti-establish, non-hierarchical, and resistance nature of queer theory *per se* (Butler, 1990). The socio-techno-economic infrastructures of the Mycelial Safety-Net, deeply rooted within queer feminist socio-cultural materialities, underscore an economic model that arises organically from community needs and collective resistance to social oppression, rather than external capital injection (Tsing, 2015; Sheldrake, 2021). Finally, our findings' platformisation model echoes the resilience characteristics of mycelia (Tsing, 2015), capturing the studied community's tenacity and capacity to endure platform governance and mainstream capitalist disruption.

Mycelium – Reimagined Socio-Cultural Configurations (micro level)

At the micro level, we found how individual queer females connect with one another through participation and interaction on social media platforms to reimagine counter-

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3 hegemonic sociocultural configurations. Many queer females we interviewed learned about D
4 Village through various platforms, and once settled there, they established their own digital
5 presence, publishing content about their lives in the village, which continues to attract more
6 like-minded individuals. We analogue this organic, decentralised way of community growing
7 to the growth of fungi's mycelium, of which platforms serve as nodes enabling one filament
8 to disperse into many. Previous research on intentional communities has highlighted their
9 significance in reimagining existing social structures (Farias, 2017). Our findings extend this
10 imagination by emphasising the importance of recognising the electronic-material
11 infrastructures of gender and sexuality (e.g., platform-mediated consumption through digital
12 devices). Within these conditions, the significance of companionship and connection at the
13 micro level becomes particularly pronounced.

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15 This section traces the experiences of several former and current queer female
16 residents of the village, mapping how they became acquainted with one another and
17 expanded their networks both within and beyond the community through digital platforms.
18 The following narratives from participants illustrate these micro-level dynamics of
19 interconnection.

20
21 In 2017, D Village, after being discovered by a group of eco-activists, welcomed its
22 first queer 'new villagers', Chunhua and Rong, who arrived at the village with a vision to
23 experiment "a sustainable way of living (Chunhua and Rong, WeChat public account,
24 December 2017)" and thus organised a series of social and entrepreneurial activities focused
25 on the self-development and wellbeing of marginalised groups (e.g., queer females and
26 families).

27
28 Their initiatives nurtured an organic growth of the LGBTQ+ population in the village.
29 This includes Ai, a current queer villager who runs a feminist podcast with over 110,000
30 followers and a female-only online community on WeChat with nearly 200 group members.

In a podcast episode, Ai recalled that her connection with Chunhua and Rong was previously made through a podcast collaboration, which reassured her decision to move to the village:

It was only after arriving at D Village that I suddenly realised that, for me, I needed a "beginner's village." Social networks are crucial to me, especially as someone like me whose skills [of rural living] haven't yet been fully developed. The rural community networks happen to make up for this — here, I can rely on others without reservation. [...] [D Village] has a group of companions I am familiar with. Besides Chunhua and Rong whom I hosted on my podcast, there are also several friends I met early on while working in the field of gender issues.

(Ai, podcast episode, July 2024)

This excerpt underscores interdependent relationships between Ai and her precedents, underpinned by the podcast platform and socio-cultural materialities (e.g., feminist body, friendships). Ai describes herself as once being a *beginner* who had to *rely on* social/community networks to live in the village. She employs phrases such as *without reservation*, *companions*, and *friends* to highlight the personal and affective nature of her interdependency with others, whilst phrases including *community*, *a group of*, and the plural form of *friends* imply that such interdependence is maintained with multiple, rather than one, person. This excerpt illustrates the supportive and caring atmosphere of the queer community that Ai perceived when she first moved to the village, which is also observed between Ai and those who joined after her. Opposing sovereign consumers in the marketplace who are often laden with responsibilities to care for themselves, others, and societies (Yang and Makkar, 2024; Chatzidakis and Maclaran, 2022), we observe here that shared vulnerability and interdependence among individuals are permissible in the community. Acts of care are not executed via marketised infrastructures but enacted as collective responsibilities, nurturing, rather than exploiting, a communal culture of care. Notably, a key premise underlying the platform's influence on the friendship among these villagers is their shared questioning of gender issues as women, as well as their desire to seek solidarity in response to the constraints imposed by patriarchal institutional structures.

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Besides the materialities of feminist gender that helped villagers forge a connection, Ai’s arrival helped bring D Village to a wider audience through her influence across platforms, leveraging the digital materialities of platforms’ affordances. Frequent references to the village in her podcast consistently attract new queer and feminist visitors who later settle in the village. Meilin and Lijuan are a lesbian couple who currently live in a queer- and female-only youth hostel in the village, which they co-run with Jingyi. Their acquaintance with the village and lives within also began on platforms — from listening to Ai’s podcast (“*[T]he reason I stayed there [D Village] for a week was actually because of Ai’s podcast*”, Lijuan, interview, April 2025). In this circumstance, personal-level relationships are developed from what Yang F. (2023) refers to the ‘hyper-intimacy’ between Chinese feminist podcasters and their audience. Podcasting and the platforms provide a relatively safer digital infrastructure (e.g., no visual appearances are needed) for the formation of micro-female alliances, as we observe here.

We observe a reciprocal and decentralised relationship between Ai and the queer villagers who learned about D Village because of her podcast, subverting our traditional understanding of the power dynamic between internet influencers and their followers. Presently, to avoid the state’s active oppression and silencing of feminist voices and activities, the majority of feminist activism in China takes place underground and on social media platforms (Liu, 2023). While affording the spatial agency to form solidarity and communities among women, platforms also leave opportunities for some who would use feminist discourses as a self-branding strategy to attract Chinese women (He, 2017) and become “microcelebrities” (Senft, 2008), or *wang hong* in Chinese. These women-focused *wang hong* represent a postfeminist undertone (Liao, 2019b), leveraging feminist ideologies and practices through the agencies of popular media and consumer culture to incubate a platform economy where *wang hong*, exerting entrepreneurial labour, capitalise on their

online popularity and traffic (Peng, 2019; Xu *et al.*, 2024). The beneficiaries of such labour are *wang hong* themselves, who maintain a centralised and hierarchical relationship with followers whilst directing all the sociocultural and financial capital to themselves.

Similar to *wang hong*, Ai embraces the platform economy, using her podcast and WeChat community to create spaces for feminist ideologies and practises to be conveyed and communicated; differing to *wang hong*, she redistributes her capital and resources gained from the platforms, instead of solely onto herself, into building a safe and supportive network connecting and assembling separate Chinese queers and women (see Table 5).

[Table 5: Ai's Redistributive Practices]

As shown, Ai's resources help connect, sustain, and even safeguard the community. This, nonetheless, elicits the question of whether Ai's platform resources have entitled her to 'charismatic authority' (Weber, [1922]1978) that may affect the power dynamic within the community. Cocker and Cronin (2017) discovered that internet influencers' charisma fades as their platform activities become routinised. Thus, we infer that Ai's charismatic authority, granted by her influencer identity, diminishes through her everyday, trivial, and interpersonal interactions with others in the village. Despite her caring-for-others persona, Ai is a recipient of care, as the last excerpt suggests, and Haoran's impression provides a further portrayal of her character in the village:

“@Haoran once described me as a mycelium. At first, I thought that didn't sound very flattering, but once I learned how intelligent mycelia are, I decided I want to be one.”

(Ai, WeChat group chat, February 2025)

The metaphor of *mycelium* denotes a decentralised structure in which Ai is not dominant but symbiotic with people in her networks, affording queer feminist re-imaginary

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configurations. Notably, Ai is not the only villager who maintains queer networks on platforms. Many other queer villagers also have their own WeChat or RedNote accounts on which they post creative content, write blogs, and advertise events to attract followers (see Table 3). Once settled, Meiling and Jingyi also started a RedNote account for their hostel and deployed their own resources on platforms to secure guests. Their presence online, like an offshoot, reaches an audience beyond Ai’s network, converting online followers into guests and, further, building deeper connections that ultimately form a wider community of queers and females.

Meiling: Most of [our guests] came through RedNote. Quite a few were also introduced by friends that Jingyi knows or were her friends.

Lijuan: And also my friends. I have a feminist book club community, and people from Ai’s community, too.

(Meiling and Lijuan, interview, April 2025).

This section illustrates intra-community relationships of these queer villagers and depicts a mycelial – continual and interconnected – growth of the community. By unpacking these relationships, we observe how individual queer women discover the village through platform engagement and form solidarity underpinned by reciprocity. From Chunhua and Rong, Ai, and to Meiling and Lijuan, platforms are nodes on the mycelium, interlocking disparate queer females underneath the same fungus. This mycelial network is decentralised. Within it community members are physically, emotionally, and financially interdependent.

Next, we continue to construct the symbiotic fungi analogy by examining how the queer feminist community is organising within the nurturing yet oppressing soil of state politics and platform governance.

Soil—Structural Interface (macro level)

Our second finding focuses on macro-level platformalising, embeddedness within broader socio-political and economic conditions, underpinned by the tension between platform surveillance versus state-led rural revitalisation and platform economy development, the ambivalent position constituting an institutional and regulatory infrastructures (state policy, platform governance, rural development frameworks) that nourish and oppress queer feminist culture in D Village. This soil provides the conditions through which queer women in the village (dis)connect their micro-level lived experiences with wider like-minded queer communities or even surveillance violence beyond the village.

We found that the macro-level of platformisation entangles with the ideological and political ‘soil’ governed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The party’s nationalist campaign, ‘Chinese Dream’, promises a prosperous future with national advancement and social stability. However, the Dream is founded upon the premise of “*a stable and compliant population, controlled through a parallel structure between the totalitarian nation and the paternalistic family*”, where non-heteronormative family structures that the Chinese LGBTQ+ community tends to adopt are excluded (Huang, 2017, p. 238). Notwithstanding the booming development of platform and technology capitalism, the visibility of feminism and queer individuals is under surveillance and regulated (Yang S., 2026). Such an ambivalent environment, i.e., the lack of institutional support for queer feminism alongside the booming ‘she economy’ in digital space, is described as ‘precarious’ (Huang, 2017; Longarino, 2020) or a survival state for queer communities within China’s digital infrastructure.

The vignette about the two authors’ arrival shows that the policy supports the nourishment of ecovillage and platform economies, simultaneously sustaining surveillance over villagers. Such surveillance is not always strictly top-down; platforms also afford hostility towards queer women from other villagers’ malicious reporting of their social media

content. The second author’s fieldnotes reflect this tension between platformised nourishment and surveillance, both as part of the safety-network interface:

“Ai came to welcome us, and together we took a walk around the village reservoir. She told us that just before we arrived, she had spoken with the police. We were both shocked—why would the police come? Was it because of us? I immediately became self-conscious. Ai explained that in the past, some activities in the village—especially those involving visiting researchers—had been maliciously reported by certain villagers, which prompted police questioning. She advised us not to disclose too much about our backgrounds to others, just to avoid unnecessary trouble, as we are not the residents, and people from Ju Wei Hui (Village Management Committee) are not familiar with us. This experience reminded me of Chunhua and Rong’s podcast episode, where they described similar experiences: their queer women-focused businesses and community events were often reported on social media, leading to workshops on queer family education being cancelled. On our very first day in the village, we could already feel the presence of surveillance—real, tangible, not merely something we had read about in literature or news reports.”
(Second author’s fieldnotes, April 2025)

Hence, beyond the surveillance of queer feminist activities on the platform, our findings also show that platforms could sometimes provide a form of protection for queer women, enabling the formation of underground, mycelial connections. We found that these platforms serve as semi-concealed spaces for connection, particularly for dispersed queer women who had initially rooted themselves in shared eco-living values. The following data are from the immersion note on listening to one of a queer couple’s podcast interviews:

“[...] Importantly, on social media platforms, they (Chunhua and Rong, a lesbian couple) *do not directly disclose* their queer identity. Instead, they employ more ambiguous terms such as “rainbow” and “child development” to articulate a form of care politics that aligns with queer feminism. As noted: “*In early 2018, the family moved to D village and began a ‘half-farming, half-X’ lifestyle. As their (Chunhua and Rong) lives progressed and their children grew, they became increasingly involved in public-oriented community initiatives. For example, in 2018, they established a small community-based educational space for preschool children. In 2021, they founded a village farm, with the aim of bringing children closer to nature*” (Podcast interview with Chunhua and Rong, 2023).

(Second author’s immersion notes, 2024)

Although platforms are primarily designed to attract users as consumers and facilitate profit generation in accordance with the logics of platform capital accumulation, they can inadvertently create spaces for queer expression under conditions of surveillance. In the Chinese context, discourses surrounding nature, child development, and community building enjoy relatively high levels of institutional legitimacy, allowing queer individuals to leverage these seemingly apolitical narratives to establish connections, cultivate networks of care, and sustain community formation (Yang S., 2026). This finding resonates with Tan's (2023, p.121; p.135) study on digital media as a productive route for queer feminist activism in China. As they argue, "*digital technology as assemblage and entanglement in the articulation of feminism, queerness, and rights [...] social app videos are not only promotional products for the apps but also a discursive formation of imagining female same-sex desires and intimacy*".

Our findings expose a form of platformisation shaped by queer women in the digital marketplace, resonating with Lamarre's (2017) concept of platformativity, which reframes platforms not as passive intermediaries or purely oppressive structures but as sites of performative potential. Lamarre challenges the region-platform binary that positions platforms as top-down colonisers of local cultures. Instead, platformativity highlights how users exercise agency within platform architectures by negotiating, appropriating, and reconfiguring them from within.

Viewed through this lens, the "platform mask" identified in our findings is not merely a strategy of concealment. Rather, it functions as a performative means of navigating technological constraints, enabling queer women to cultivate community, solidarity, and collective infrastructures of care without triggering algorithmic suppression or state surveillance. Importantly, the notion of "wearing a mask" should not be interpreted as a rejection of queer visibility. Such an interpretation would overlook the specific socio-political context in which

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these practices emerge. Unlike the dominant tradition of Western queer activism, which has historically emphasised visibility politics (Bao, 2024), the platform mask represents a contextually situated strategy through which queer women negotiate the tensions between visibility, safety, and community formation within China’s platformised environment. In Chunhua and Rong’s podcast interview, none of the observed digital traces contains explicit terms such as “homosexual.” Instead, they employ veiled terms like “rainbow” in their self-expressions.

The divergent genealogies of queer-feminist identity and activist cultures in Western and Chinese contexts have, somewhat unexpectedly, helped cultivate fertile soil through which Chinese queer women can navigate platform governance and avoid algorithmic scrutiny. For example, the Chinese translation of queer (ku’er) is largely a transliteration with limited historical and political anchoring in everyday discourse. Coincidentally, Ku’er is also the name of a Coca-Cola soft drink brand in China. Such linguistic ambiguities enable queer individuals to communicate and connect through culturally legible yet politically less conspicuous signifiers, creating space for community formation within heavily regulated digital environments. As participant Lifan remarked during the interview: “*The first time I heard the word ku’er, I thought it referred to that drink.*” As Bao (2024) observes, unlike in Western contexts where “queer” has been reclaimed through long-standing political struggles, in China the term remains avant-garde, obscure, and not widely recognised, even among sexual minority groups. It has yet to enter the mainstream of identity politics. Our findings suggest that because “queer” is less likely to be flagged by censorship algorithms than “homosexual,” it circulates more freely within digital spaces. This dynamic is further illustrated in our interviews with Lifan:

No one really proclaims that (they are feminists). It’s like... no one goes around declaring it, but someone might casually pull a book out of their bag and it’s something along those lines. Or sometimes, we don’t explicitly set up a theme and

say, ‘okay, today we’re going to talk about this or that.’ But it could just happen—like, someone’s watched a women-empowering film recently, and they ask if others have seen it too, and everyone has. And then they start talking about it, and before you know it, we’re all having this conversation... and it turns out everyone has a sense of feminist consciousness. That’s what feels so in tune. But it’s all very natural.

(Lifen, interview, April 2025)

Contrary to our initial expectation that villagers might avoid explicitly advocating queer-feminist identities primarily to minimise risk, most participants suggested that the community does not centre on proclaiming a queer-feminist identity. As Lifen explained, the community is rather organised around the principle of “*sharing something that has empowered you.*” Such motivations reflect a non-advocative queer-feminist orientation, representing a departure from assimilationist forms of politics that privilege visible, respectable, and market-aligned queer identities (Duggan, 2002). Rather than seeking legitimacy through explicit identity claims, this non-advocative queer-feminist orientation functions as a core organising principle of the community and is deeply intertwined with the villagers’ platformisation logics:

On RedNote, we mainly post about everyday life in the village. We don’t dare to publicly share content about our events. That’s because this is where we really live, and we want to protect it—we don’t want trouble. We describe ourselves as a “queer women-friendly space,” but we’re careful with our wording. One time, we wrote “non-binary friendly,” and someone commented: “Does being non-binary still count if your biological sex is male?” In response, we just simply replied “Yes” and didn’t explain further.

[On RedNote], is like when you buy certain things on Taobao, it just knows you’re gay (laughs). We get recommended to people who are interested in gender, women, or queer topics. So a lot of the guests who come here find us through our RedNote posts.

(Jingyi, interview, April 2025)

Our second finding theme illustrates how platformisation functions as a form of soil. Within the tension between platform economy and platform governance, queer women

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strategically harness this very tension to organise their own communities. The soil that emerges from such organising is precarious, but such instability nourishes the underground mycelium, fostering connections that are difficult to control or domesticate, and marked by a tenacious vitality. Therefore, we argue that these queer practices exemplify a form of non-confrontational, embodied resistance distinct from Western understanding of queer activism, whereby our villagers embrace opacity and ambiguity as platformalising tactics (Wang and Bao, 2023). In the final section of our findings, we reveal how platformisation sustains the life-web materialities beyond digital commercial initiatives.

Mushrooms – Counter-Heteronormative Commercial Initiatives (meso level)

The *mushrooms* of this metaphorical symbiotic fungi symbolise the queer villagers’ counter-heteronormative commercial initiatives. The queer women actively engage with the online platforms to create digitally visible and materialised forms of entrepreneurial organisation and impact, including developing the infrastructures of business models and community economy. The platformisation pattern at this level is built on the tension that arose between villagers’ needs for scalable business development with material incomes and queer-feminist ethics, community care that is strongly anti-capitalist.

Unlike general intentional communities, which are traditionally anti-consumerist and considered a practice of consumer activism (Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2012), the queer villagers in D Village maintain a symbiotic relationship (Yang S., 2026) with platformised consumer culture by engaging in an entrepreneurial discourse. In explaining the spatial agencies of ecovillages, Hong and Vicdan (2016) suggest that ecovillages encompass a transition “from space *consumption* to space *production*” (p. 122). We capture the same transition in these queer females’ platform activities. Social media platforms’ role shifts from a mediator of consumer processes (Caliandro *et al.*, 2024) to the distribution channel of feminist and queer

discourses. Meanwhile, through multiple entrepreneurial practices on platforms, including content creation (e.g., posting on RedNote), e-commerce (e.g., trading on KuaiTuanTuan), and community-building (e.g., Ai's podcast), the queer women participate in the platformised production and distribution of consumer culture. In particular, our reflective fieldnotes, as well as the interview excerpt below, document another lesbian couple Lifan and Yanghua's "*female co-living project (女性共居计划)*". Advertised on RedNote, the project invites female travellers to stay in their spare bedrooms and experience rural living at affordable rates. By doing so, they participate in the reproduction of feminist politics in Chinese digital space and adopt the platform economy to sustain their financial viability of living in the village ("*[H]aving some rental income helps us feel more stable here*", Lifan, interview, April 2025).

Moreover, the WeChat public channel, *CrossingRiver*, mentioned in the following excerpt, plays a similar role to Lifan and Yanghua's RedNote account. By smartly leveraging WeChat's algorithmic logic and incentive mechanisms, *Crossing River* provides a digital platform for queer authors to publish feminist and queer essays in exchange for financial incentives, simultaneously serving queer-feminist community-building and individuals' financial stability. As our fieldnotes infer, "*the expansion of these grassroots communities unfolds in tandem with the commercial growth of China's platform economy*" (Second author's fieldnotes, April 2025).

These queer villagers' content creation activities on platforms resemble those of "digital nomads", who "travel with minimal possessions around the world while working from their laptops, taking their jobs with them wherever they go" (Atanasova and Eckhardt, 2021, p. 6). Likewise, these women reside in the inexpensive D Village and rely on the digital platform ecosystem to generate income. Nevertheless, their income generation activities are

not limited to digital platforms. On some occasions, platforms help participants convert online traffic into other sources of income. For example,

Lifen: When we first started this project—the female co-living—[...] we’ve gone back and forth a lot on this decision. For example, if we open that room as a guest room, it could bring in some income to cover our daily expenses, because right now, neither of us is working. The rent here offsets the rent we get from renting out our flat in [our hometown], so that part of our anxiety is eased. But on a daily basis, like when you go to the market or buy rice, oil, and other staples, it still costs money. It’s not much, but when you’re in a state of having no income at all, even that small expense causes anxiety. So having some rental income helps us feel more stable here.

(Lifen and Yanghua, interview, April 2025)

Jingyi: [...] we didn’t start this queer hostel for ‘traffic’ or internet fame. The few of us share a common understanding: this hostel is not meant to be our main source of income—it’s just to help cover costs and to create a space where we can make friends along the way.

(Jingyi, interview, April 2025)

Both accounts above exemplify a unique platform-based business model observed in D Village. Some queer villagers set up their own social media outlets to produce and disseminate feminist and queer discourses within China’s digital sphere. Such activities gradually attract like-minded queer and female individuals and form solidarity among online communities. Subsequently, some community members would then visit the village, and their expenses for food, accommodation, and experiences in the village financially contribute to the various entrepreneurial businesses and initiatives organised by the queer villagers (e.g., the hostel, the female co-living project). Notably, these businesses do not aim for ‘traffic’ or internet fame, nor serve as a main source of income, as Jingyi emphasises. Instead, they address the economic precarity that many experience while living in ecovillages (Metcalf, 2012). Echoed by Lifen’s account, it expresses anxiety about sourcing income to cover the cost of living. Both Lifen and Jingyi use their business income to sustain their alternative social practices of rural queer living, to cover costs and feel more stable. Moreover, Jingyi’s

account unveils another important function these businesses serve: “*to create a space where we can make friends along the way*” (Jingyi’s WeChat article, 2024). This discovery resonates with our first finding that disparate queer women discover one another through social media platforms and form connections both online and in D Village.

By leveraging the government’s strategy of rural revitalisation and actively engaging in the platform economy, the queer villagers we study configure a counter-hegemonic safety network through commercial and entrepreneurial initiatives, providing some degree of economic and social security meanwhile fostering a queer space where “lives lived ‘otherwise,’ outside of the conventional life narratives of family and reproduction” and “modes of resistance which survive the encounter between marginal subjects and dominant culture” can take place (Halberstam, 2003, n.pag.).

Concluding Discussion

Our analysis addresses a gap in marketing scholarship: the lack of research on the platformisation of marginalised communities, particularly the lack of exploration of digital materials that foster queer-feminist communities. While drawing attention to the platform market, our paper also contributes to the discussions on the roles of non-digital (i.e., queer feminist) materialities (Atanasova and Eckhardt, 2021) in fostering communities, a topic that remains under-discussed in marketing studies.

To our knowledge, no prior marketing research has examined the platformisation of intentional communities. Our findings demonstrate how consumers who experience marginalisation within broader social and market structures can strategically navigate digital platforms to organise alternative forms of market participation and community life. We theorise this emergent platform-based market structure as a *Mycelial Safety-Net*. The Safety-Net highlights how queer women collectively mobilise platform infrastructures to create

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community-led systems of support, care, and resource exchange. In doing so, they partially compensate for forms of care and protection that public institutions provide insufficiently. Unlike conventional market structures, this platform-based arrangement is guided by queer-feminist philosophies and ethics, prioritising collective wellbeing, reciprocity, and mutual support over individual market success.

Our findings also contribute to debates on consumer responsabilisation. Existing research has raised concerns about neoliberal logics transforming systemic responsibilities into depoliticised forms of individual responsibility (Geisler and Veresiu, 2014). Subsequently, individual consumers become scapegoats for institutional failures and are made to conform to dominant classed, gendered, and heteronormative expectations (Jones and Arnould, 2025). Our study reveals a different dynamic. It shows that responsibility is not simply shifted from institutions to isolated individuals. Rather, queer-feminist communities collectively construct alternative infrastructures of care from the grassroots level upward. Through everyday practices of community building, resource sharing, and mutual support, participants gradually weave queer-feminist cultural materialities into what we conceptualise as a *Mycelial Safety-Net*. In this sense, responsibility is collectivised rather than individualised, and community formation becomes a means of resisting both market exclusion and the individualising tendencies of neoliberal governance. This contribution addresses a research problem we know little about: how individual consumers and communities undertake responsible actions at the grassroots level in response to the absence of institutional support for systemic social issues (Corus *et al.*, 2025; Gollnhofer and Kuruoglu, 2017). Our study joined the discussion by demonstrating how Chinese queer women under platform-market constraints strategically mobilise queer-feminist materialities to navigate market exclusion and collectively construct alternative infrastructures of care and support.

The other contribution of our article lies in advancing the underexplored domain of queer-feminist studies in marketing by providing an empirical case that illustrates how intersectionally marginalised groups (non-Western, gender and sexual minorities) leverage digital infrastructures to build and sustain communities. Although intersectionality theory has been widely discussed in marketing studies (Eckhardt and Kopalle, 2025; Gopaldas, 2013), particularly in relation to gender, age (Veresiu and Parmentier, 2021), and race (Rosa-Salas and Sobande, 2022). Our research exposes a salient form of intersectionality, suggesting an entanglement of decoloniality, gender, sexuality, class, and even relationships with nature and technological nonhuman actors (Waverley, 2024). These forms of lived, everyday practice remain underexamined and urgently call for greater scholarly attention within gender and marketing research. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, particularly those only hinted at in this study with radical potential to challenge patriarchal structures across intersecting systems of power (e.g., social class).

Moreover, the platformisation remains underexplored in marketing and consumer culture studies (Caliandro *et al.*, 2024). While existing marketing research increasingly seeks to theorise broader platform-afforded ecosystems, such macro-level analyses often overlook the perspectives of marginalised communities—particularly voices from queer and feminist groups and intentional community practitioners. This gap is particularly salient given the dominance of Global North Silicon Valley tech companies in setting the agenda for digital infrastructures. In contrast, our research emphasises the emerging platformised cultures in China and the importance of attending to the intersectional experiences of queer female villagers in these contexts (de Kloet *et al.*, 2019; Yang S., 2026). Their stories are inseparable from broader Global South concerns about gender equity and ecological sustainability, and must not be neglected.

Moreover, platformisation has received little attention in intentional communities and broader sustainability scholarship, especially from queer and feminist perspectives, which originated in human identity but now intersect with more-than-human beings, such as nature and technology (Celermajer *et al.*, 2021; Haraway, 2013; Hickel, 2020). Yet it is crucial to recognise that the economic logics underpinning platforms are grounded in data extraction (Airoldi and Rokka, 2021), including sensitive personal information related to gender and sexuality. While platform utopianism may promise inclusion and innovation, we must remain critically attuned to the market-centric logics and power centralisation embedded within these systems (Chatzidakis and Maclaran, 2022). Nevertheless, as Browne *et al.* (2024) argue, feminist artificial intelligence holds significant disruptive potential. As platform technologies continue to evolve, those in positions of power attempt to sustain their dominance through digital infrastructures, while simultaneously fearing the disruptive capacities these technologies may unleash. Such disruptive forces extend beyond artificial intelligence to include the radical counter-cultural imaginaries embedded within queer, feminist, and ecological ethos. These forces are clearly evident in our findings and in the community we studied, and we hope that more marketing scholars will join our village; let's build solidarity and weave the mycelial safety-net together.

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Qualitative Market Research

Figure 1: The Visualisation of the Mycelial Safety-Net

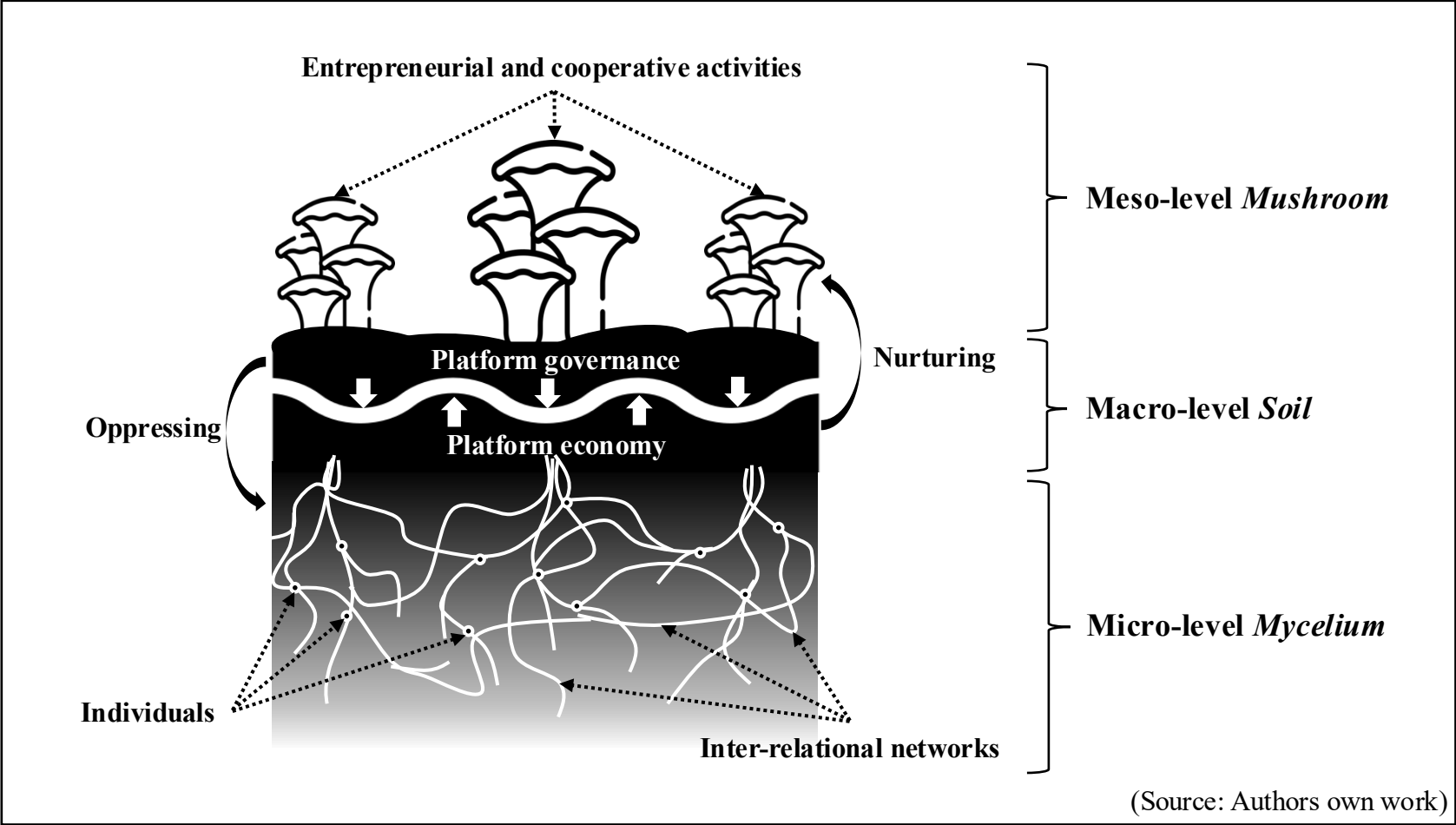


Table 1. Key State-Led Schemes

Policy	Main policy outline	Relevance
Rural Revitalisation Strategy (乡村振兴战略)	Achieve agricultural modernisation, improve rural livelihoods, and build “beautiful villages.” Led by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs; supported by local governments through subsidies, digital infrastructure, and rural tourism development (Zhang <i>et al.</i> , 2022).	Provides the overarching framework under which D Village receives recognition and limited support for eco-living and community entrepreneurship.
Digital Village Development Action Plan (数字乡村发展行动计划)	Promote digital infrastructure, e-commerce, and data governance in rural areas. Implemented by the Cyberspace Administration of China and Ministry of Agriculture; emphasises “internet + agriculture.” (Zhang <i>et al.</i> , 2023).	Enables the platformisation of rural production and visibility, directly affecting how D Village uses platforms for self-business sustainability.

(Source: Authors own work)

Table 2: Data Sources

Type	Source	Data	Purpose
Podcasts	Interviews with eco-queer-feminist practitioners within and outside D Village	4 podcast episodes (40–60 mins each)	To understand the history of eco-queer communities, motivations behind founding them, and challenges of sustaining such communities.
Onsite Interviews	Interview with 10 local queer female villagers	10 semi-structured interviews (60-90 mins each)	To understand the living experiences as queer female in D Village and how digital platforms mediate their way of living in the village.
Social Media Posts	RedNote posts by queer entrepreneurs in the village	13 posts and corresponding comments	To explore the community’s everyday platform activities and how they recruit new villagers/consumers through digital platforms.
Articles and Blogs	WeChat public accounts run by queer villagers	30 articles and corresponding comments	To understand the ethos, educational and social activities of the queer businesses, and consumers' experiences within the eco-queer village.
Online Group Chat History	A private WeChat group chat participated by queer villagers	Group chat history from 04/2024 to 04/2025	To investigate less-public aspects of community building and internal communications, complementing publicly available data.
Immersion Notes and Fieldnotes	Researcher’s observation during online observation and the field visit (30/03–31/08/2025)	Reflexive notes documenting lived experience and digital-platform interaction	To examine how digital platforms and physical spaces co-construct eco-queer lifestyles and community dynamics in-situ.

(Source: Authors own work)

Table 3: Interview Participant Information

Pseudonym	Business Type	Gender & Sexuality	Age	Education	Staying Period in D Village	Platform Literacy & Activities
P1 Meilin	Queer hostel; gig works	Female Queer	20s	Bachelor	Over 1 year	Feminist podcast audience; co-manages the queer hostel RedNote account
P2 Lijuan	Selling handmade accessories; gig works	Female Queer	20s	Bachelor	Over 1 year	Feminist podcast audience and guest; participant of a feminist book club
P3 Tongtong	Freelance; gig works	Female Queer	20s	Bachelor	Over 1 year	Works in transnational e-commerce
P4 Guimei	Queer co-living; music workshop	Female Queer	30s	Bachelor	Over 1 year	Runs a personal WeChat public account
P5 Yaqin	Queer co-living; well-being meditation	Female Bisexual	30s	N/A	Over 1 year	Runs a personal WeChat public account
P6 Lifen	Female co-living; organic product; queer school in planning	Female Queer	30s	Bachelor	Over 6 months	Co-manages the female co-living RedNote account; runs a podcast channel; trades organic products on WeChat
P7 Yanghua	Female co-living; organic product; queer school in planning	Female Lesbian	30s	Bachelor	Over 6 months	Co-manages the female co-living RedNote account; trades organic products on WeChat
P8 Jingyi	Queer hostel; feminist workshop; poem writing workshop; queer women sport coaching	Female Lesbian	30s	Bachelor	Over 1 year	Co-manages the queer hostel RedNote account; runs a personal WeChat public account
P9 Haoran	Queer painting; publication	Queer	30s	Bachelor	Over 4 years	One of the earliest new villagers. Their works were purchased through introductions made by visiting friends to the village
P10 Qianru	Fabric dyeing; gig works	Female Queer	20s	Bachelor	Over 1 year	Previously co-managed the queer hostel RedNote account; feminist podcast audience and guest

(Source: Authors own work)

Table 4: Three Levels of The Mycelial Safety-Net

Level (Metaphor)	Platformisation pattern	Tension	Infrastructures	Empirical Practices
Micro (Mycelium)	Decentralised, relational, and rhizomatic coordination among the participants	<i>Socio-cultural configuration:</i> heteronormative urban lifestyles vs. queer feminist resisting and reimagined community life	<i>Socio-digital infrastructures</i> (platform practices, affective ties, informal support networks)	Platformising socio-infrastructures; coded visibility; mutual aid; reworking algorithms and content norms
Macro (Soil)	Embedded within broader socio-political and economic conditions, which is simultaneously oppressing and nurturing	<i>Structural Interface:</i> platform surveillance vs. state-led rural revitalisation and platform economy development	<i>Institutional and regulatory infrastructures</i> (state policy, platform governance, rural development frameworks)	Negotiating visibility; aligning/misaligning with policy narratives; leveraging permissible economic activities
Meso (Mushrooms)	Visible and materialised forms of entrepreneurial organisation and impacts	<i>Counter-heteronormative commercial initiatives:</i> Scalable business development vs. queer-feminist ethics and community care	<i>Material-economic infrastructures</i> (business models, community economy, resource circulation systems)	Developing queer-friendly businesses; sustaining livelihoods; redistributing resources; enabling wider queer and women's empowerment

(Source: Authors own work)

Table 5. Ai's Redistributive Practices

Redistributive practices	Descriptions	Exemplars
Referral	Ai refers visitors to stay in places accommodated by the community neighbours.	<i>Ai introduced a lot of people to stay with us. [She] sometimes posts our hostel's information in [her WeChat community group chat], or if someone she knows wanted a place to stay, she'd recommend our place first or something like that (Meiling, interview, April 2025).</i>
Knowledge exchange	Ai invites guest visitors to share their experiences and knowledge in alternative cultures and practices with the neighbours.	<i>Ai built her audience community through her podcast series, where she also invited villagers as guests to share their experiences of queer and eco-living lifestyles. For example, in the May episode, she invited Li Juan to discuss her reasons for moving to the village as a member of Generation Z and to share her experiences of living in the mountains without electricity and having to fetch her own water (Second author's immersion notes, May 2025).</i>
Gifting and resource-sharing	Ai exchanges gifts and favours with neighbours, opening her home to those who don't have access to facilities such as washing machines in their own residence.	<i>The background sounds in today's [podcast] recording might be a bit noisy, as I'm not sure if you can hear the washing machine running [in my place]. [...] That's because Qianru doesn't have a washing machine where she lives, so she has to go around borrowing the neighbours' (Ai, podcast, May 2025). [...] you gave me your speaker, and I didn't feel too much pressure. I felt really grateful and happy, but not stressed, because I think we're pretty close (Qianru, podcast, May 2025).</i>
Entrepreneurship	Ai liaises with neighbours to collectively host commercial experiences for people who are interested in rural living.	<i>During our Alternative Living Experience Camp, Ai organised workshops based on the villagers' expertise, facilitating engagement between them and the camp participants. In addition, Ai served as the gatekeeper for the camp participation, ensuring a safe environment that protected both villagers and participants from homophobic and misogynistic violence (Second author's fieldnotes, April 2025).</i>
Diplomacy and network-building	Ai speaks about her experiences of living in the village on her podcast channel, introducing the village to a large audience.	<i>I moved to D Village right before last year's Spring Festival [...] The village is full of LGBTQ+ vibes and has a strong female presence, at least in the group of neighbours I usually hang out with. The ratio of women to men among the new villagers is about 4 to 1, and quite a few of the women come from LGBTQ+ families (Ai, podcast episode, July 2024).</i>

(Source: Authors own work)