



Asexuality in Asia: The Intersection of Tradition, Identity, and Sexual Diversity

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Abstract

This study explores the complex cultural and social dimensions of asexuality in Asian contexts, emphasizing how Confucianism, collectivist traditions, and familial expectations shape distinct experiences of asexual individuals. Employing a systematic literature review methodology, the research draws on empirical and theoretical sources across Asian countries, such as China, Japan, and India, to uncover the multifaceted challenges faced by asexual individuals. Specific findings highlight how Confucian values in East Asia reinforce norms of marriage and reproduction, while familial pressures in South Asia, deeply rooted in Hindu and Islamic traditions, exacerbate the marginalization of asexual identities. The research also examines the impact of stigmatization and limited access to culturally competent care. By contrasting these regional distinctions with Western norms, the study underscores the necessity for culturally sensitive policies and inclusive frameworks. The conclusion offers targeted recommendations, including the implementation of culturally adapted educational programs and healthcare practices to foster visibility and support for asexual individuals in Asia.

Keywords: Asexuality, Stigma and Visibility, Sexual Orientation in Asia, Culturally Competent Care, Inclusive Research on Sexuality

1. Introduction

Asexuality is a sexual orientation marked by the lack or minimal degrees of sexual attraction to others, spanning a range of identities such as demisexuality and greysexuality (Schneckenburger et al., 2023). Research reveals that roughly 1% of the population identifies as asexual, with several individuals accepting this orientation as an inherent facet of their identity rather than a defect (Strzelczak, 2023). Asexual individuals may nonetheless sense romantic attraction and participate in sexual activities, underscoring the complexity of their experiences (Schneckenburger et al., 2023). The sociological examination of asexuality uncovers its connections to broader topics such as identity, stigma, and community, hence contesting conventional notions around sexuality (Winer, 2024). Asexuality is increasingly acknowledged as a valid sexual orientation, leading to discussions over its significance for comprehending human sexuality and relationships (Markiewicz, 2024).

The examination of asexuality in Asia is crucial because of the distinctive cultural, social, and religious influences that create experiences different from those in Western cultures. In China, Confucian culture significantly influences the development of sexual minority identities, including asexuality, which is frequently less recognized and comprehended than lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities. Research demonstrates that asexual individuals in China encounter analogous patterns of sexual minority identity as bisexuals, frequently confronting adverse identity views, however with much less difficulty in understanding these identities than bisexual individuals (Su & Zheng, 2021). Asexuality in China is marked by less sexual attraction and desire, with asexual individuals participating in sexual behaviors less frequently than heterosexuals, underscoring a cross-cultural consistency in the comprehension of asexuality (Zheng & Su, 2018).

The historical backdrop of sexual variation in Asia, shaped by diverse religious and cultural ideologies, complicates the comprehension of asexuality, as conventional perspectives on sexuality and gender roles persistently influence modern experiences (Reyes & Clarence-Smith, 2012). The globalization and transnational characteristics of sexual identities in Asia require a sophisticated methodology for examining asexuality, as these identities are frequently interlinked with familial frameworks and cultural expectations that markedly diverge from Western standards (Erni, 2002). Moreover, internalized heterosexism and the commitment to conventional Asian values may obstruct the revelation of sexual orientation among sexual minorities, including asexual individuals, thus exacerbating their experiences (Szymanski & Sung, 2013). The changing cultural politics of gender and sexuality in Asia, propelled by economic and social transformations, also affect the experiences of asexual individuals as they maneuver through the intersections of governmental laws, cultural ideologies, and social hierarchies (Zheng, 2016).

Research demonstrates that asexual individuals in China encounter comparable patterns of sexual minority identity to bisexuals, frequently confronting adverse identity views; however, they suffer less difficulty in processing these identities than bisexual individuals (Su & Zheng, 2021). Asexuality in China is marked by less sexual attraction and desire, with asexual individuals participating in sexual behaviors less frequently than heterosexuals, underscoring a cross-cultural consistency in the comprehension of asexuality (Zheng & Su, 2018). The historical backdrop of sexual variation in Asia, shaped by diverse religious and cultural ideologies, complicates the comprehension of asexuality, as conventional perspectives on sexuality and gender roles persistently affect modern experiences (Reyes & Clarence-Smith, 2012). The globalization and transnational characteristics of sexual identities in Asia need a sophisticated examination of asexuality, since these identities frequently intersect with familial frameworks and cultural expectations that markedly diverge from Western standards (Erni, 2002).

Moreover, internalized heterosexism and the commitment to conventional Asian values can obstruct the revelation of sexual orientation among sexual minorities, including asexual individuals, so exacerbating their experiences (Szymanski & Sung, 2013). The changing cultural politics of gender and sexuality in Asia, propelled by economic and social transformations, also affect the experiences of asexual individuals as they maneuver through the intersections of governmental laws, cultural ideologies, and social hierarchies (Zheng, 2016). Comprehending these dynamics is essential for delivering culturally competent treatment and support to asexual individuals, who frequently encounter obstacles in obtaining suitable healthcare due to misconceptions and insufficient awareness among healthcare practitioners (Jones et al., 2017). Examining asexuality in Asia provides significant insights into the intricate and varied influences of cultural, social, and religious elements on sexual

identities, underscoring the necessity for culturally attuned methodologies in both research and practice.

2. Methodology

This study's literature review on asexuality in Asian contexts utilized a systematic and integrative approach to investigate the interplay of cultural, social, and religious factors shaping asexual identities and experiences across various countries in Asia. A comprehensive search strategy was employed across multiple academic databases, including PubMed, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, to ensure the inclusion of diverse and relevant literature. Keywords such as "asexuality," "sexual diversity in Asia," "Confucian values and sexuality," "LGBTQ+ in Asia," and "cultural perspectives on asexuality" were utilized. Boolean operators (e.g., AND, OR) were applied to refine the search process, allowing for a more targeted yet expansive exploration of scholarly resources. This strategy aimed to capture a broad spectrum of academic discourse and empirical studies relevant to the topic.

To maintain focus and relevance, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. Studies eligible for inclusion were peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings published between 2000 and 2024, with a central focus on asexuality or related sexual minority identities within Asian contexts. Priority was given to works addressing cultural, social, or religious influences on asexuality. Exclusion criteria eliminated studies focusing exclusively on non-Asian populations, articles lacking empirical data, and those not available in English or Mandarin. This filtering process ensured the literature reviewed was both contextually relevant and accessible for analysis.

The selected literature was systematically organized and analyzed through thematic categorization. Key themes included the impact of Confucianism, family dynamics, visibility and stigma, and healthcare access for asexual individuals in Asian societies. These themes facilitated a coherent synthesis of insights, allowing the review to construct a narrative that highlights the unique cultural, social, and religious dimensions influencing asexual identities. Additionally, the literature was critically analyzed for methodological rigor and relevance. This involved evaluating each study's sample size, data collection methods, and cultural sensitivity to ensure a robust understanding of the topic. Limitations and gaps in existing research were also identified, providing a foundation for recommendations for future studies.

To contextualize the findings, the review aligned them with broader frameworks of sexual diversity and intersectionality, integrating both Western and non-Western perspectives. This approach ensured that the review not only acknowledged global discourses on asexuality but also highlighted how Asian cultural norms and traditional values intersect with and diverge from these narratives. Finally, all sources were meticulously documented following APA guidelines to ensure proper attribution and reproducibility. Cross-disciplinary insights were categorized under sociological, psychological, and cultural studies, facilitating a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the topic.

By employing this structured and culturally sensitive methodology, the literature review achieved a thorough and nuanced exploration of asexuality in Asian contexts. It paves the way for the development of frameworks and practices that are inclusive of cultural diversity, offering valuable insights for both research and applied fields related to sexual diversity.

3. Understanding Asexuality: A Global and Asian Perspective

Asexuality, viewed globally, is a complex sexual identity primarily defined by an absence or minimal sexual attraction to others, differentiating it from hypoactive sexual desire disorder, a clinical condition (Kelleher, 2022; Steelman & Hertlein, 2016). Asexuality is acknowledged as

a minority sexual orientation, with roughly 1% of the global population identifying as asexual (Kelleher, 2022; Strzelczak, 2023). Asexuality includes a range of identities, such as demisexuality, characterized by sexual attraction only after establishing significant emotional connections, and greysexuality, defined by rare sexual interest or attraction under particular conditions (Schneckenburger et al., 2023). Asexuality overlaps with romantic orientations, resulting in categories such as romantic asexuals, who feel romantic attraction, and aromantic asexuals, who do not (Antonsen et al., 2020). The diversity within the asexual community contests conventional understandings of sexual orientation and intimacy, as asexual individuals can participate in romantic relationships and feel closeness devoid of sexual desire (Antonsen et al., 2020; Dambrowsky, 2022). The asexual identity is frequently misconstrued and neglected, resulting in increased anxiety and despair among asexual individuals due to societal stigma and insufficient recognition (Kelleher, 2022). Asexuality is progressively acknowledged as a valid sexual orientation, enhancing broader dialogues on sexuality, identity, and the critique of heteronormative beliefs (Dambrowsky, 2022; Winer, 2024). The visibility of the asexual community is increasing, notably in academic and social media contexts, leading to demands for enhanced understanding and support, especially within educational environments (Mollet et al., 2023). Asexuality constitutes a distinct and legitimate sexual identity that enhances our comprehension of human sexuality and contests traditional notions of sexual attraction and connection.

Asexuality, characterized by an absence of sexual attraction, has garnered extensive global academic attention, particularly from Western scholars. The seminal research conducted by Anthony Bogaert in 2004, which estimated that around 1% of the population identifies as asexual, represented a crucial development in acknowledging asexuality as a viable sexual orientation, despite ongoing controversy (Strzelczak, 2023). Western research has predominantly concentrated on the evolution of asexual identity, the dynamics of sexual and romantic interactions among asexual individuals, and the intersections of asexuality with other identity facets (Fennis & Rucker, 2022; Hille, 2022). Asexuality comprises a spectrum, incorporating demisexuality and greysexuality, hence underscoring the diversity among the asexual group (Schneckenburger et al., 2023). Studies indicate that asexual individuals frequently encounter difficulties associated with heteronormativity and obligatory sexuality, which affect their identity formation and internalization processes (Kelleher et al., 2022). Asexual individuals, despite lacking sexual desire, may participate in sexual activities and establish romantic relationships, with notable differences in relationship experiences and sexual behaviors between romantic and aromantic asexuals (Hikmiah & Hikmiah, 2022). Asexual individuals' psychological well-being is a problem, since they exhibit elevated levels of anxiety and despair relative to their heterosexual and non-heterosexual counterparts, possibly attributable to societal stigma and insufficient recognition (Kelleher, 2022). The literature indicates a necessity for increased intersectional research and enhanced cultural variety in studies to more accurately represent the asexual group (Oliveira et al., 2021). Western research has substantially advanced the understanding of asexuality; yet, there is a persistent demand for more inclusive and comprehensive studies to address the existing gaps and issues encountered by asexual individuals worldwide (Winer, 2024).

Asexuality in Asia faces distinct obstacles and cultural attitudes that are intricately linked to the region's socio-cultural dynamics and historical circumstances. In numerous Asian communities, discourse regarding sexuality is sometimes deemed taboo, hence complicating the visibility and acceptance of asexual identities. This cultural reluctance is apparent in the wider context of sexual healthcare, as cultural beliefs and attitudes obstruct candid discussions about sexuality, including asexuality (Rashidian et al., 2019). The convergence of asexuality with other oppressed identities, such as LGBTQ Asian American adolescents, compounds the

situation, since these individuals frequently encounter microaggressions and a deficiency of culturally appropriate resources (Shen et al., 2023). Asexuality in China is occasionally perceived as a coping mechanism during the nation's sexual revolution, wherein conventional norms about marriage and sexuality are being redefined (Wong, 2015). The cultural politics around gender and sexuality in Asia are ever evolving, shaped by economic transformations and social dynamics, which impact the perception and experience of asexuality across various civilizations (Zheng, 2016). Misconceptions regarding asexuality, such as its association with celibacy or conditions like Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder, endure due to insufficient knowledge and comprehension, further marginalizing asexual individuals (Colborne, 2018). The experiences of sex-positive asexuals in India contest the stereotype that all asexual individuals are disinclined towards sex, emphasizing the diversity within the asexual community and the necessity for inclusive practices and sex education. The convergence of asexuality with disability introduces distinct issues, as asexuality is frequently attributed to disabled individuals, thereby confounding their sexual subjectivity and identity (Cuthbert, 2020). The cultural perspectives of asexuality in Asia are influenced by a complex interaction of traditional values, contemporary factors, and the continuous quest for acknowledgment and comprehension within varied social and political environments (Ho & Blackwood, 2022).

4. Historical and Cultural Context of Sexuality in Asia

Historical and cultural perspectives on sexuality in Asia are profoundly linked to traditional beliefs and societal expectations, especially about marriage, reproduction, and sexual conventions, which considerably shape sexual identities. In South Asia, prevailing heteronormative and cisnormative standards persist, fostering a difficult atmosphere for sexual and gender diverse individuals (SGDP). These individuals encounter stigma, discrimination, and marginalization, perpetuated by societal norms and institutional values, resulting in adverse health outcomes and minority stress (Banik et al., 2022). The historiography of gender and sexuality in East Asia has been influenced by regional frameworks, with nations such as Korea and China previously neglecting queer sexualities. In Korea, conservative Christian discourse and militarization exacerbate the marginalization of sexual minorities, whereas Japan's conservative position paradoxically asserts a historical acceptance of non-normative sexualities, complicating the pursuit of explicit rights (Frühstück, 2022). Throughout Asia, the LGBT community utilizes resistance tactics against heteronormativity, while homonormativity arises as a countercultural phenomenon. This resistance is essential in nations such as China, India, Indonesia, and Japan, where inflexible social structures frequently clash with queer identities (Sowmiya & Raju, 2023). The notion of "Queer Asia" challenges the uniformity of sexual identities imposed by Western-centric frameworks, highlighting the necessity for culturally unique models to comprehend the many sexual and gender identities throughout the area (Eguchi, 2022; Kwon & Eguchi, 2023). In South Asia, discussions on sexuality are historically shaped and interwoven with societal control and power dynamics, affecting the articulation of sexual identities (Cuneo, 2018). The hesitation of Asian LGBTQ+ individuals to reveal their sexual orientation, stemming from traditional familial norms and homonegative sentiments, underscores the persistent challenge for acceptance and the necessity for more inclusive sexual health communication (Breen et al., 2020). The interaction of traditional norms, societal expectations, and resistance techniques influences the intricate dynamics of sexual identities throughout Asia, requiring a sophisticated comprehension of regional and cultural settings (Kong et al., 2016).

The investigation of cultural impacts throughout Asian regions uncovers both significant variances and remarkable parallels, especially with the effects of Confucianism in East Asia and the many religious influences in South Asia. Confucianism, profoundly embedded in East Asian cultures including China, Japan, and Korea, substantially influences social, economic,

and educational structures. It fosters ideals such as collective harmony and deference to hierarchy, which are manifest in the corporate practices and educational systems of these nations (Liu, 2011; Nawrot, 2020). Confucian ideals have played a crucial role in promoting economic collaboration and integration in East Asia, leading to the phenomenon known as the "East Asian miracle" in economic progress (Hasan, 2019). The influence of Confucianism is not consistent throughout the area. For example, it forms the foundation of basic education in Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam; however, the degree and method of its incorporation differ (Sui, 2023). Conversely, South Asia is distinguished by a diverse amalgamation of Hindu and Muslim influences that distinctly define societal norms and customs. The dissemination of Islam via trade and Sufism has profoundly influenced Southeast Asia, whilst Hindu traditions remain essential in defining cultural and religious activities in nations such as India. Notwithstanding these disparities, there exist predominant themes of spirituality and religiosity that pervade both regions, fostering a collective feeling of humanity and moral instruction (Zhao & Lee, 2024). Furthermore, although Confucianism is not a conventional religion, its philosophical principles have been likened to religious doctrines regarding their socio-economic effects, akin to the influence of Hindu and Muslim beliefs on South Asian countries (Hasan, 2019). This intricate interaction of cultural and religious factors emphasizes the diversity within Asia while also highlighting shared elements, such as the focus on community and moral values, which are essential in defining the region's identity and progress.

Conventional values profoundly influence the cultural backdrop of asexuality and the experiences of sexual minorities by shaping societal conventions, attitudes, and legal structures. These beliefs frequently determine what is seen acceptable or deviant, influencing the view and treatment of sexual minorities. Traditional values can result in the stigmatization of non-heteronormative identities, as evidenced in the Chinese context where Confucian culture influences sexual minority identities, including asexuality, by perpetuating negative perceptions and identity conflicts within these groups (Su & Zheng, 2021). In Russia, legislative regulations underscore traditional values, thus strengthening cultural norms that may marginalize sexual minorities. The minority stress model elucidates the mental health disparities experienced by sexual minorities, emphasizing how cultural norms and traditional values exacerbate stressors like stigma and insufficient familial support, particularly among Chinese sexual minority men (Sun et al., 2021). Moreover, conventional sexual scripts, entrenched in cultural norms, shape sexual behaviors and expectations, as evidenced in the cybersex experiences of sexual minorities, where deviations from these scripts may result in distinct obstacles and experiences (Courtice & Shaughnessy, 2018). The assignment of sexual orientation, frequently shaped by conventional norms, significantly influences perceptions of sexual minorities, with ideas regarding the controllability of sexual orientation associated with resistance to their rights (Bakitovna, 2022). In Western societies, the ideological clash between traditional values and contemporary liberal perspectives exacerbates the experiences of sexual minorities, as traditional values frequently serve to rationalize discrimination and exclusion. Traditional values function as a foundation for society standards and a source of conflict for sexual minorities, impacting their identity, rights, and mental health across many cultural contexts (Moldabayeva, 2024; Shcherbina, 2022; Ventriglio et al., 2020).

5. Asexuality in Contemporary Asian Societies

Cultural influences profoundly influence the view and acceptance of asexuality in East Asia, especially in nations such as China, Japan, and South Korea. Confucian ideals, which prioritize familial duties and social cohesion, significantly influence perceptions of sexual minorities, including asexual individuals. In China, the compulsion to adhere to conventional family frameworks frequently results in adverse identity perceptions among sexual minorities, including asexuals, who may encounter fewer obstacles in identity formation than bisexual

individuals, yet still grapple with self-identification challenges due to societal norms (Su & Zheng, 2021; Zheng & Su, 2018). The collectivist society dominant in East Asia prioritizes family and societal norms, perhaps resulting in bias against persons who diverge from these standards, including asexual individuals (Kim & Song, 2023). In South Korea, conservative Christian discourse exacerbates the acceptability of non-normative sexualities by portraying these identities as antithetical to traditional values, thereby denying sexual minorities full citizenship rights (Frühstück, 2022). Notwithstanding these problems, there is an increasing recognition and acceptance of sexual minorities in East Asia, partially attributable to the impact of the internet and education, which have fostered the development of the "pink economy" and enhanced visibility for the LGBT community (Xu, 2018). The stigma surrounding non-heteronormative identities continues to pose a substantial obstacle, evidenced by people's hesitance to reveal their asexual orientation due to apprehension of discrimination and societal expectations to marry and procreate (Kelleher & Murphy, 2022; Koo et al., 2014). This cultural context highlights the necessity for more inclusive legislation and public attitudes that acknowledge and accept the range of sexual orientations, including asexuality, in East Asia.

Research on asexuality in East Asia, specifically in China, Japan, and South Korea, uncovers a multifaceted interaction of cultural, psychological, and social elements that shape the identity and experiences of asexual individuals. Asexuality in China is frequently analyzed within the framework of sexual minority identity. Research suggests that asexual individuals, akin to bisexuals, generally possess more adverse sexual minority identities than their lesbian and gay counterparts, although they experience less difficulty in identity processing than bisexuals (Su & Zheng, 2021). A study of Chinese asexuals (Zheng & Su, 2018) revealed that they demonstrate patterns akin to those observed in Western nations, marked by minimal or absent sexual attraction and non-partner-oriented sexual desire; yet, they exhibit diversity in sexual activities and desires. This indicates that the fundamental mechanisms of asexuality may be uniform across civilizations. Confucian culture in China significantly influences the formation of sexual minority identities, including asexuality, which is less examined than in Western contexts (Su & Zheng, 2021). In South Korea, although research on asexuality is scarce, the general experiences of sexual minorities reveal insufficient legal safeguards and ongoing discrimination, which may also impact asexual individuals (Kwok & Lee, 2018). The literature emphasizes the necessity for heightened knowledge and comprehension of asexuality, promoting more intersectional viewpoints and the incorporation of many experiences within the asexual spectrum (Hille, 2022). Despite the expanding research corpus, a substantial gap persists in comprehending the biopsychosocial factors influencing asexual individuals in East Asia, underscoring the necessity for culturally attuned research that prioritizes asexual perspectives and experiences (Kelleher et al., 2022; Oliveira et al., 2021). In summary, although asexuality in East Asia exhibits many similarities with Western experiences, cultural subtleties and societal perspectives profoundly influence the actual experiences of asexual individuals in these areas.

In Southeast Asia, religious convictions and societal perspectives profoundly influence the experiences of asexual individuals, frequently within the context of overarching LGBTQ+ matters. The region is defined by a multifaceted interaction of cultural, religious, and colonial traditions that shape notions of gender and sexuality. Christianity, prevalent in nations such as the Philippines, has traditionally shaped legal and moral frameworks, frequently supporting heteronormative and binary gender standards (Goh & Neo, 2023). The religious effect is intensified by a rebirth of religiosity in Southeast Asia, associated with reactionary forces opposing evolving gender roles and the heightened visibility of varied sexual identities (Radics, 2023). Such contexts can cultivate homonegativity and discrimination, as evidenced by research that underscores enduring negative sentiments towards LGBTQ+ individuals,

influenced by factors such as age, religiosity, and traditional values (Bilon & Clemente, 2023; Firdauzi et al., 2022). In nations such as the Philippines and Thailand, despite certain legislative initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality, societal stigma persists; this impacts not only transgender individuals but also those who identify as asexual or otherwise outside the heteronormative paradigm (Janamnuaysook et al., 2024). The political economics of heteronormativity exacerbates the predicament, since LGBT individuals frequently contend with familial and social expectations that emphasize conventional family forms (Ling, 2023). The travel patterns of LGBT individuals seeking more tolerant contexts highlight the obstacles encountered in their home countries. The inadequate acknowledgment and safeguarding of LGBTQ+ rights in the region exacerbate minority stress and mental health challenges, underscoring the necessity for culturally tailored gender-affirming behaviors and legal reforms (Alibudbud, 2023). The experiences of asexual individuals in Southeast Asia are influenced by a combination of religious, cultural, and societal variables that frequently marginalize non-heteronormative identities, requiring a comprehensive strategy to advocacy and reform (Langlois, 2022).

The investigation of asexuality and the experiences of asexual individuals in Southeast Asia is significantly underrepresented in academic literature, as demonstrated by the supplied studies. Asexuality is sometimes neglected despite considerable attention given to LGBTQ+ problems, notably regarding gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals. A study on behavioral health among adolescents in Thailand incorporated asexual individuals within the larger LGBTQA+ group, emphasizing discrepancies in mental health outcomes relative to their cisgender heterosexual counterparts (Wichaidit et al., 2023). This study did not thoroughly examine the particular experiences or obstacles encountered by asexual individuals.

The overarching background of LGBTQ+ acceptance in Southeast Asia, as examined in multiple research, reveals a multifaceted environment where cultural norms and legal structures frequently fail to acknowledge and promote diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. The political economy of heteronormativity in Southeast Asia persists in affecting the lives of queer migrants, who frequently pursue more tolerant conditions overseas (Ling, 2023). Cultural factors, such as Thailand's Boys' Love media, may impact public acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities; yet, discourses seldom encompass asexuality (Habibah et al., 2021). The systematic analysis of mental health challenges among LGBTQ individuals in Southeast Asia highlights the increased frequency of mental health concerns; nevertheless, asexuality is not explicitly included (Tan & Saw, 2022). The deficiency in existing literature indicates a necessity for concentrated research on asexuality in Southeast Asia to enhance comprehension and address the distinct experiences and challenges encountered by asexual individuals in this area.

In South Asia, especially in nations such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, religion and familial frameworks significantly influence asexual identities, frequently through cultural and societal conventions. The strong presence of religion in these areas, where Hinduism and Islam prevail, frequently governs the moral and ethical structures that shape individuals' sexual identities. Religious beliefs might perpetuate the stigmatization of non-normative sexual identities, such as asexuality, by emphasizing traditional family structures and heterosexual ideals (Kibria et al., 2021). Family dynamics, especially the influence of the mother-in-law, considerably affect personal decisions on sexuality and family planning, as seen by their impact on contraceptive use in these nations (Pradhan & Mondal, 2023). The familial influence can affect the perception and acceptance of asexual identities, as conventional family expectations typically emphasize marriage and procreation, thereby limiting opportunities for asexual individuals to express their identities without encountering familial pressure or misunderstanding. Moreover, the absence of comprehensive sex education in South Asia, as evidenced by studies from Bangladesh and India, intensifies the difficulties encountered by

asexual individuals. The restricted and frequently erroneous information regarding sexuality, exacerbated by cultural and religious resistance to sex education, results in many individuals without the requisite comprehension to recognize or express asexual identities (Nazrul, 2024). Moreover, societal norms that perpetuate heteronormativity and patriarchal family structures further marginalize asexual identities, as these norms are firmly ingrained in the cultural fabric of South Asian societies (Banik et al., 2022; Pandya et al., 2023). The convergence of religion and familial frameworks in South Asia engenders a multifaceted milieu wherein asexual identities are frequently misinterpreted or disregarded, thus requiring a comprehensive cultural transformation towards inclusivity and recognition of many sexual identities.

Asexual individuals in South Asia, especially within conservative or traditional societies like those in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, contend with societal expectations against a backdrop of firmly rooted socio-cultural norms that emphasize heteronormativity and forced sexuality. The literature indicates that these societies frequently impose rigid gender roles and expectations, which are perpetuated by diverse socialization agents including family, peers, and media (Mahapatra & Murugan, 2023). Asexual individuals have distinct obstacles in these circumstances due to their divergence from society norms about sexual attraction and procreative marriage, which are regarded as societal imperatives (Alam & Marston, 2023; Kelleher et al., 2022). The notion of "straightening devices" in Bangladesh exemplifies societal mechanisms that steer individuals towards heterosexuality and gender conformity, consequently marginalizing those who deviate from these norms, including asexual individuals (Alam & Marston, 2023). The marginalization is exacerbated by insufficient visibility and representation in research and public discourse, as studies frequently exclude the experiences of sexual minorities, including asexual individuals, in favor of more prominent LGBTQ+ identities (Alam et al., 2024; Banik et al., 2022). The intersectionality of asexuality in these locations entails managing societal expectations alongside the stigma and prejudice stemming from deviations from conventional sexual standards (Banik et al., 2022). This may result in considerable mental health issues, as the compulsion to conform can induce feelings of loneliness and distress, further intensified by the absence of supportive resources and community networks (Bhatia et al., 2024; Kelleher et al., 2022).

Notwithstanding these challenges, asexual individuals frequently utilize personal and communal coping strategies to navigate their identities within these constrictive environments; however, the literature indicates that further research is necessary to comprehensively understand and support these processes (Kelleher et al., 2022). The navigating of societal expectations by asexual individuals in South Asia involves a complicated interplay of opposing heteronormative norms while pursuing acceptance and understanding within their communities.

Asexual individuals in West and Central Asia have considerable obstacles due to stringent cultural and religious norms that frequently fail to acknowledge or affirm asexuality. The issues faced by asexual individuals are exacerbated by the ubiquitous effects of heteronormativity and obligatory sexuality, which influence their internalization and identity formation, frequently resulting in feelings of isolation and stigmatization (Kelleher et al., 2022). In areas where discussions about sexuality are considered taboo, particularly in many regions of Central Asia, cultural views exacerbate the challenges of managing sexual healthcare, as both physicians and individuals may lack the terminology or framework to adequately address asexuality (Rashidian et al., 2019). The absence of recognition and social acceptance of asexuality constitutes a substantial obstacle, as societal norms in these areas frequently emphasize conventional sexual and gender roles, hence limiting the acknowledgment of asexual identities (Lima, 2021). This erasure can result in the medicalization and pathologization of asexuality, causing persons to be frequently misunderstood or misdiagnosed, further marginalizing them

within both sexual and gender majority and minority contexts (Lund, 2020). The convergence of cultural, political, and religious elements in Central Asia, particularly the impact of Islam and historical gender norms, engenders a complex milieu wherein gender diversity and non-heteronormative identities are systematically disregarded (Peshkova & Thibault, 2022). Notwithstanding these hurdles, an increasing corpus of study and activity aims to counter heteronormative constraints and foster enhanced comprehension and acceptance of varied sexual identities, including asexuality, in these countries (Sowmiya & Raju, 2023). Nonetheless, the necessity for more inclusive and culturally attuned methodologies in healthcare and societal dialogue is essential for enhancing the acknowledgment and support of asexual individuals in West and Central Asia (Tam & Ross, 2023).

Research findings pertaining to West and Central Asia uncover a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors that have influenced the region. Historically, West and Central Asia have been shaped by numerous empires, resulting in a collective cultural and literary heritage, exemplified by the ancient literary traditions originating from the Fertile Crescent and the impact of Islamic culture from the 7th century CE onward. The region's literary innovation manifests in both elite and people traditions, with notable contributions from Persian and Arabic literature, reflecting the ideological and religious transformations of centralized nations. The Middle East-West Asia region confronts considerable agricultural issues stemming from micronutrient deficits in soils, intensified by severe climate conditions and socio-economic limitations. This has resulted in diminished crop yields and an urgent requirement for sustainable agricultural techniques to rectify these deficiencies, especially in micronutrients such as zinc and iron (Ryan et al., 2012). Central Asia, noted for its many ecological zones and past hydrological volatility, has undergone extensive prehistoric investigation, underscoring the region's intricate cultural evolution and interactions with adjacent areas (Kohl, 1985). The socio-economic landscape is significantly shaped by natural resource extraction, with diverse religious influences throughout the region, ranging from Islam in the west to Buddhism in the east (Hipsher, 2012). Health problems, notably the HIV epidemic affecting marginalized populations such as men who have sex with men and female sex workers, highlight the necessity for enhanced research and preventative measures to tackle the distinct risk factors in Central Asia (Baral et al., 2012; Wirtz et al., 2013). The historical synchronization of empire expansion and contraction in East and West Asia, influenced by Central Asian nomadic and agricultural populations, underscores the region's crucial role in overarching historical developments (Chase-Dunn et al., 2009). Genomic studies elucidate the intricate histories of Western Asia, providing insights into the region's significance as a nexus of human migration and cultural Exchange. The varied findings highlight the complex nature of West and Central Asia, stressing the necessity for ongoing multidisciplinary research to comprehensively grasp its history and contemporary dynamics.

6. Social Challenges and Mental Health Implications

Asexual individuals in Asia encounter considerable prejudice and stigma, especially with marital expectations, household duties, and societal norms. In numerous Asian civilizations, the cultural background is profoundly entrenched in heteronormative and cisnormative ideals, frequently marginalizing individuals who deviate from conventional sexual and gender standards, including asexual persons (Banik et al., 2022; Ling, 2023). In numerous Asian cultures, marriage is regarded not merely as a personal achievement but also as a familial and societal obligation, frequently perceived as a responsibility to perpetuate family lineage and satisfy filial duties (Liu & Chong, 2024). Asexual individuals, lacking the inclination for sexual interactions or conventional marriage, frequently encounter familial pressure to adhere to societal norms, resulting in feelings of guilt and psychological anguish (Barreto & Boislard, 2023). This pressure is intensified by the notion of filial piety, especially in nations such as

China, where authoritarian filial piety can aggravate the mental health effects of familial discrimination (Liu & Chong, 2024). The insufficient comprehension and acceptance of asexuality within certain cultural contexts may cause asexual individuals to be viewed as deviating from societal standards, leading to social stigma and discrimination (Breen et al., 2020). Moreover, the legal and social acknowledgment of various sexual orientations, including asexuality, is restricted in numerous Asian nations, thereby sustaining the marginalization of asexual individuals. The absence of acknowledgment and dominant societal conventions perpetuate the obscurity of asexuality in public dialogue and legislation, hence exacerbating the discrimination encountered by asexual individuals in Asia (Alibudbud, 2024). The convergence of cultural expectations, legal structures, and social norms presents a formidable landscape for asexual individuals, who must maneuver through these pressures in pursuit of acceptance and comprehension within their societies (Banik et al., 2022; Xia, 2024).

Asexual individuals encounter considerable mental health difficulties stemming from societal pressures and stigma, akin to those faced by other sexual minorities. Research indicates that asexual individuals frequently encounter discrimination and minority stress, resulting in psychological anguish and social anxiety. Shame has been recognized as a mediating role in these mental health outcomes, suggesting that asexual individuals absorb adverse societal beliefs, thus worsening their mental health concerns (Barreto & Boislard, 2023). The creation of the Asexual Stigma Inventory emphasizes the distinct stigmatizing experiences faced by asexual individuals, including sensations of alienation and disregard, which exacerbate their mental health challenges (Boot-Hauray, 2023). Asexual persons exhibit elevated depressive symptoms relative to heterosexual individuals, although they possess a diminished risk of self-harm and suicide attempts compared to bisexual and gay/lesbian individuals (Xu et al., 2023). The prevalence of suicidality among asexual individuals is alarming, with notable correlations identified between minority stress, including victimization, and suicidal ideation and attempts (Chan & Leung, 2022). Self-stigma, characterized by individuals internalizing negative stereotypes about themselves, significantly contributes to the decline of mental health and the escalation of suicidal behavior, as it engenders emotions of shame and hopelessness (Coelho & Pereira, 2022). The absence of social support as a protective factor for asexual individuals encountering discrimination exacerbates their mental health challenges (Barreto & Boislard, 2023). The wider LGBTQIA+ population, including asexual individuals, encounters obstacles in obtaining mental healthcare, especially in rural regions, due to societal stigma and discrimination, which impedes their capacity to seek assistance (Maria et al., 2024). These findings highlight the necessity for focused mental health interventions and public education initiatives to enhance awareness and acceptance of asexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation, thereby mitigating stigma and improving mental health outcomes for asexual individuals (Chan & Leung, 2022; Omondi, 2024).

The deficiency of mental health resources and support networks for asexual individuals in numerous Asian countries is a complex issue, intricately linked to overarching systemic challenges encountered by sexual minorities and the general populace. In Southeast Asia, substantial obstacles to getting mental healthcare comprise stigma, inadequate health literacy, and cultural views, which are intensified for minority groups, including asexual individuals (Andary et al., 2023). The circumstances in South Asia are comparably severe since sexual minorities, including asexual individuals, encounter increased risks of mental health disorders and suicides due to socio-political adversities and insufficient social integration (Bhatia et al., 2024). The Indian subcontinent exemplifies a context in which LGBTQ+ individuals, especially asexuals, encounter healthcare disparities, apprehension of ostracism, and harassment, which inhibit their pursuit of essential mental health assistance (Gaur et al., 2023). The deficiency of mental health resources in South Asia is exacerbated by insufficient funding,

a lack of educated experts, and widespread stigma, all of which impede the delivery of proper care (Grover, 2022; Kuruvilla & Jacob, 2014). The wider Asian backdrop exposes a mental healthcare crisis characterized by constrained finances and accessibility challenges, further marginalizing asexual individuals who do not conform to the more prominent categories of sexual minority (Chanpattana, 2010). Economic limitations and disparities in resource allocation intensify these difficulties, resulting in numerous individuals without adequate care (Hong & Heok, 2009). The literature on Asian LGBTQ+ health reveals substantial deficiencies in research pertaining to asexual individuals, signifying an absence of focused investigations and support mechanisms for this demographic (Breen et al., 2020). The mental health situation for asexual individuals in Asia is marked by institutional neglect, necessitating extensive governmental reforms and culturally attuned interventions to tackle these widespread challenges.

7. Representation and Visibility in Media and Society

The depiction of asexual characters and identities in Asian media and popular culture is significantly limited, mirroring wider patterns of underrepresentation and symbolic annihilation in global media. Asexuality, frequently referred to as the "invisible orientation," has only recently started to achieve prominence in Western media, exemplified by shows such as "BoJack Horseman" and "Sex Education" that include asexual characters; nevertheless, such portrayal remains uncommon in Asian contexts (Barclay, 2023; Sagi, 2022). The absence of asexual representation in Asian media is linked to the overarching difficulties encountered by LGBTQ+ narratives in the region, as cultural and societal standards frequently devalue non-heteronormative identities. The restricted dialogue concerning asexuality within the larger context of Queer Asia is apparent, as it predominantly emphasizes other LGBTQ+ identities and concerns (Eguchi, 2022; Kwon & Eguchi, 2023). Despite the notable increase in the representation of queer narratives in Asian media, particularly through the Boys Love (BL) genre that examines male-male romance and has achieved widespread popularity throughout Asia, asexuality is predominantly overlooked in these narratives (Miller, 2023). The BL genre, although offering a venue for the exploration of varied sexualities, predominantly serves heterosexual female viewers and generally excludes asexual characters or themes (Miller, 2023). Moreover, the scholarly and media emphasis on LGBTQ+ matters in Asia frequently neglects asexuality, as seen by the scant study and coverage in both academia and mainstream media (Breen et al., 2020). The absence of representation not only sustains the invisibility of asexual identities but also underscores the necessity for more inclusive narratives that embrace the entire spectrum of sexual orientations, including asexuality, in Asian media and cultural enterprises. The present condition of asexual representation in Asian media highlights the overarching difficulties in attaining thorough and fair representation for all sexual minorities, requiring a deliberate initiative to incorporate asexual narratives into the ongoing dialogue regarding LGBTQ+ representation in Asia (Medina, 2022; Sagi, 2022).

Asexuality advocacy and support networks in Asia constitute a segment of the wider spectrum of queer and sexual minority communities that are progressively achieving visibility and support via both online and offline channels. The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) is a prominent online platform that has been instrumental in the establishment and development of asexual communities worldwide, particularly in Asia, by offering a venue for individuals to interact, exchange experiences, and obtain information (Profus, 2015). The advancement of queer studies and advocacy in Asia has been shaped by efforts such as the AsiaPacificQueer Network, which has promoted academic and community discourse on queer identities, including asexuality, in the area (Kwon & Eguchi, 2023). Online networks are essential for marginalized groups, providing anonymity and a secure environment for self-expression and support, exemplified by married bisexual males in Taiwan who utilize these

platforms to navigate their identities and seek social assistance (Hou & Lu, 2013). Digital platforms have been crucial for asexual individuals to cope with societal rejection and discover personal significance in their orientation, as they frequently encounter invisibility and denial in heteronormative society (MacNeela & Murphy, 2015). The overarching framework of LGBT activism in Asia, exemplified by projects such as "Being LGBT in Asia," emphasizes the significance of networking and community mobilization to advance human rights and address stigma and prejudice (Pokhrel et al., 2013). These initiatives are enhanced by digital storytelling and media techniques that engage both local and transnational audiences, thereby bolstering the visibility and advocacy of sexual minorities, including asexuals, throughout Asia (Hanckel, 2023). The convergence of online networks, scholarly discourse, and advocacy campaigns creates a strong support network for asexuality and other sexual minority identities in Asia, promoting personal and community empowerment.

Asexuality, as a sexual orientation, is frequently underrepresented and commonly misinterpreted in both society and academic spheres. Diverse organizations and networks are crucial in enhancing knowledge, fostering acceptance, and supplying resources to asexual individuals. The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) exemplifies a community platform that facilitates the collective understanding and identity formation of asexual individuals by creating language and discourse to address their distinct issues (Chasin, 2015; Tlachac, 2015). This online network is crucial in assisting individuals in recognizing and embracing their asexual identity, providing a sense of pride and support despite societal constraints and heteronormative beliefs that may obstruct acceptance (Kelleher & Murphy, 2022). The internet is an essential resource for asexual children, who frequently obtain more health information online than offline, underscoring the significance of digital platforms in delivering crucial assistance and information (McInroy et al., 2021). Asexual individuals often face pathologization and microaggressions in healthcare environments, highlighting the necessity for healthcare providers to enhance their knowledge and cultivate asexual-competent practices to validate and support asexual identities (Flanagan & Peters, 2020; Tam & Ross, 2023). Moreover, the stigma and discrimination encountered by asexual individuals, indicated by elevated reports of daily discrimination relative to non-asexuals, underscore the necessity for advocacy and awareness initiatives to address anti-asexual bias and foster social transformation (Iraklis, 2023; Rothblum et al., 2020). Support groups similar to those for intersex individuals can significantly enhance public understanding, and advocate for improved care and acceptance of asexual individuals (Cull & Simmonds, 2010). These groups and networks are crucial for fostering an inclusive atmosphere for asexual individuals, offering the resources and support necessary to negotiate their identities and relationships in a setting that frequently challenges their existence.

8. Research Gaps and Future Directions

The literature on asexuality identifies significant gaps, such as a paucity of empirical investigations, regional inconsistencies, and methodological obstacles. One significant gap is the lack of empirical study particularly addressing asexuality, as the prevailing literature often generalizes findings from broader LGBTQIA+ studies without considering the distinct characteristics of asexuality (Kelleher et al., 2022; Winer, 2024). Methodologically, identifying and quantifying asexuality presents considerable issues; current instruments frequently do not encompass the complexities of asexual identities, resulting in uneven research designs and outcomes (Hinderliter, 2009). This is exacerbated by sample concerns, as asexual individuals are underrepresented and their perspectives are not prioritized in research (Hinderliter, 2009). Furthermore, there is a significant deficiency of study on asexuality in non-Western contexts; the majority of studies concentrate on Western populations, thereby overlooking regional variances and cultural impacts on asexual identity (Poston & Baume, 2010; Thaarun et al.,

2023). The interaction of asexuality with other sociological topics, including gender, identity, and stigma, remains insufficiently examined, constraining the comprehension of how these elements affect asexual experiences (Kelleher et al., 2022; Winer, 2024). Moreover, the healthcare sector exhibits a deficiency in asexual-competent practices since healthcare providers frequently lack training to address the unique requirements of asexual individuals, resulting in pathologization and microaggressions (Tam & Ross, 2023). The deficiency in healthcare is intensified by the lack of systematic collection of sexual orientation and gender identity data, obstructing the formulation of inclusive healthcare policies and practices (Hernandez et al., 2022; Jeames & Fernandez, 2022). These gaps underscore the necessity for more focused, inclusive, and methodologically rigorous research to enhance understanding and support for the asexual community.

The necessity for culturally sensitive study approaches accounting for Asian cultural contexts regarding asexuality is emphasized by the intricate interaction of cultural norms, values, and identities that influence sexual manifestations and experiences in Asian countries. Research in Asian contexts frequently encounters distinct problems stemming from cultural conventions and prejudices, which can affect both the research process and the interpretation of results. The examination of sexual minority Asian and Pacific Islander Americans underscores the significance of recognizing cultural values like community connectedness and traditional family expectations, essential for accurately interpreting sexual minority experiences without imposing Western norms that could pathologize healthy cultural expressions (Choi & Israel, 2015). The examination of Queer Asia underscores the necessity for frameworks that extend beyond Western-centric theories to encompass the diverse and dynamic cultural landscapes of Asia, which feature distinct identities and practices frequently neglected in global queer studies (Kwon & Eguchi, 2023). The difficulties of performing sensitive research in Asian cultures, exemplified by investigations into sexual harassment in Sri Lanka, underscore the imperative of cultural competence and sensitivity to address cultural intricacies and stereotypes that may influence participant responses and researcher interpretations (Adikaram, 2018). Furthermore, the advocacy for culturally specific sexuality education in multicultural Asian settings, such as Hong Kong, highlights the necessity of navigating cultural norms and taboos to adequately meet the requirements of varied populations (Kwok & Kwok, 2022). In the realm of asexuality, comprehending these cultural subtleties is essential, since asexuality is sometimes misinterpreted or equated with celibacy, and cultural misconceptions can exacerbate the experiences of self-identified asexual individuals (Haefner & Plante, 2014). Consequently, it is imperative to adopt culturally sensitive research methodologies that integrate local cultural values, involve community stakeholders, and employ inclusive and nontraditional approaches to accurately represent the diverse experiences of asexual individuals in Asian contexts (Awad et al., 2016; Bush, 2024). This method not only improves the validity and reliability of research outcomes, but also guarantees that the distinct cultural aspects of asexuality are acknowledged and comprehended within their particular socio-cultural frameworks.

Future investigations into asexuality, gender, familial interactions, and the influence of digital environments on asexual identity may be enhanced by examining many underexplored domains identified in the referenced studies. The convergence of asexuality and gender in digital environments presents a rich area for exploration. Digital environments offer distinct opportunities for identity exploration and expression, enabling individuals to curate their identities and engage with like-minded communities worldwide, as evidenced in the realms of queer literature and digital well-being practices (Hanckel, 2023; Sapuh & Das, 2024). The significance of digital spaces in influencing gender and sexual identities is underscored by critical analyses of gender, sexuality, and embodiment within these realms, which reveal the interrelation of social categories and the capacity of digital environments to both contest and

perpetuate intersectional inequalities (Vuyst et al., 2022). Moreover, the dynamics of familial ties in digital environments, especially the impact of digital spaces on gendered family roles and caregiving practices, necessitates greater investigation. The analysis of digital mothering and the gendered characteristics of online family interactions highlights the necessity of comprehending how digital environments influence family dynamics and caregiving responsibilities (Locke et al., 2022; Miron, 2023). Moreover, the impact of digital media on identity formation during adolescence and young adulthood indicates that digital platforms significantly shape personal and social identities, including asexual identities, through processes such as selection, manipulation, and utilization of digital experiences (Soh et al., 2024). Ultimately, the evolution of gender identities and power dynamics in digital realms, as explored within the framework of digital dilemmas, underscores the capacity of digital environments to both empower and oppress individuals, indicating a necessity for research that rigorously investigates these dual impacts on asexual and gender identities (Parry et al., 2018). Integrating these ideas will enable future research to yield a more nuanced comprehension of how digital environments affect the intersectional identities of asexual individuals and the broader ramifications for family dynamics and identity formation.

9. Conclusion

The study of asexuality within Asian contexts reveals significant insights into the diverse cultural, social, and religious influences that shape sexual identities. Findings suggest that, unlike in Western societies, asexuality in Asia is often intertwined with traditional values, familial expectations, and historical perspectives on sexuality (Su & Zheng, 2021; Zheng & Su, 2018). These factors create unique challenges and barriers for asexual individuals, who may struggle with visibility, acceptance, and access to supportive resources in settings where sexuality is heavily influenced by cultural norms and religious beliefs (Jones et al., 2017; Szymanski & Sung, 2013).

The implications of these findings extend to broader conversations around sexual diversity and identity. Understanding asexuality in Asia underscores the need for inclusivity in global discussions on sexuality, recognizing that cultural context significantly shapes how sexual identities are understood and expressed. This awareness calls for a culturally sensitive framework in which Asian experiences of asexuality are not marginalized, but rather integrated into the wider discourse on human sexuality (Erni, 2002; Reyes & Clarence-Smith, 2012).

In closing, enhancing visibility and representation for asexual individuals in Asia is essential to fostering a more inclusive understanding of sexual diversity. Research that is both culturally informed and inclusive can provide a platform for the experiences of asexual individuals, allowing for more accurate, empathetic, and effective support. Such efforts are crucial in challenging stereotypes, reducing stigma, and promoting a more nuanced appreciation of the complexity of sexual orientations in diverse cultural settings (Schneckenburger et al., 2023; Zheng, 2016). This conclusion reflects the importance of integrating cultural context into research on asexuality and calls for continued efforts to bridge the gap between Western and Asian perspectives on sexual diversity.

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