

# Same-sex marriage is not recognised in Hong Kong, but that did not stop 10 LGBTQ couples tying the knot

Wednesday 10 July 2024, by [LEUNG Hillary](#) (Date first published: 6 July 2024).

**“Ten years ago, we met in a gay-friendly church... we met at the right place, the right time,” one man told his partner after they exchanged their vows at a wedding in Hong Kong that saw 10 LGBTQ couples get married.**

The banquet hall in Hong Kong’s Eaton Hotel has seen countless weddings celebrations – but never like this before.

There was not one newlywed couple, there were 10. The wedding officiant appeared not before them but on a screen via Zoom, her time zone in the US state of Utah putting her 14 hours behind the city.

Standing beneath a flower arch and the words “Pride to Wed,” the newlyweds took turns exchanging their vows and giving speeches to their partners. Some wiped tears from their eyes as they spoke. Metres from the stage, friends and family members held up their phones to capture the moment.

“Ten years ago, we met in a gay-friendly church... we met at the right place, the right time. We did a lot of happy things, a lot of crazy things. He brought me a lot of happiness and wonderful memories,” one man told his partner.

The scene was a celebration of love and diversity in a city where same-sex marriage is not recognised. Months ago, wedding planner Next Chapter put out an open call for LGBTQ couples who wanted to get married in an event marking Pride Month, with the company making the arrangements and subsidising all costs.

Such “fly-free weddings” are one of the company’s offerings, an alternative to making a trip to a country where gay marriage is legal. The weddings are performed virtually by an officiant in Utah, where there are no residency or citizenship requirements for marriage licenses.

“In three weeks, we had over 35 sign-ups for the event,” Kurt Tung, who co-founded the company with her wife, told HKFP.

“We have people from different parts of the spectrum. We want people to know that we have more than just gay people here. There are also those who are trans, and some who are pansexual,” she said in Cantonese.

## **‘More than just a piece of paper’**

LGBTQ activists in Hong Kong have long fought for more rights for the minority community, with cases often playing out in the court of law. The battles have seen some landmark victories, including one in 2019 in which the top court [sided with a gay civil servant](#) applying for spousal benefits and

tax assessment, and another in 2021 when the court [granted equal parental rights](#) for same-sex partners.

Most recently, last September, the city's top court [handed down a landmark ruling](#) giving the government two years to provide a legal framework for recognising same-sex partnerships.

The court, however, unanimously held that there was no constitutional right to same-sex marriage in Hong Kong. Still, the recognition of same-sex partnerships would allow same-sex couples to access benefits that heterosexual couples have in areas such as housing, taxation and immigration.

With no existing framework and no apparent progress since the September ruling, some of the couples who tied the knot at Eaton Hotel last Tuesday said they never imagined they would get married at all had they not been able to do it virtually.

Dark Chan, 45, said she had previously thought about getting married in Canada, where same-sex marriage is legal. But it would be a significant expense – both time and cost – for guests to fly over.

“Getting married in Hong Kong online means I can get the blessings of my family and celebrate with my friends,” Chan, who works in the restaurant industry, said in Cantonese.

Lucas Peng, a 66-year-old Singaporean entrepreneur based in Hong Kong, said getting married was a practical consideration and meant “more than just a piece of paper or a certificate.” With this recognition, he and his husband could now feel more at ease if one of them were to pass away.

“This marriage certificate is another form of guarantee or assurance. It gives greater strength to our wills,” he said, flowing between Cantonese and English as he spoke.

## **Growing acceptance**

Hong Kong's politicised environment has made all forms of activism harder, including support of LGBTQ rights. The Hong Kong Pride Parade, an NGO that used to organise colourful marches in the city, has held [only](#) indoor bazaars featuring LGBTQ-friendly groups since 2021.

Two of Hong Kong's largest political parties, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) and The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (HKFTU), say same-sex partnerships are a threat to “traditional” family values.

Ahead of Hong Kong becoming the first city in Asia to co-host the Gay Games last year, lawmaker Junius Ho said “national security apparatus” should bar the city from staging the event, [calling campaigns supporting](#) the legalisation of gay marriage an “unhealthy trend” supported by the West.

But Tung, the co-founder of Next Chapter, said she believed society was growing more accepting of same-sex relationships in part due to media coverage of events – such as this wedding – aimed at raising awareness of the minority community.

Joseph Chen, the director of culture at Eaton Hotel, [cited a survey carried out](#) by three universities showing rising acceptance of same-sex couple rights.

“In 2013, just 38 per cent [of people supported same-sex marriage],” Chen said. “10 years later, it was over 60 per cent.”

“We hope this event can let... those who oppose understand that everybody has the freedom to love, marry, and have the same benefits as heterosexual [couples],” Chen added.

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**Hillary Leung**

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