

INTRODUCTION

Women academics are considered as an **underrepresented group** in academia throughout the world. They are facing many **obstacles** in career development, but they embrace **career expectations and possibilities** as well. This feminist research explores **elite Chinese women academics' strategies** to thrive in academia, and how their experiences shape their career paths under **Chinese cultural context**.

Neoliberal academia

Male-dominated institutional culture

Chinese traditional society

RESEARCH QUESTION

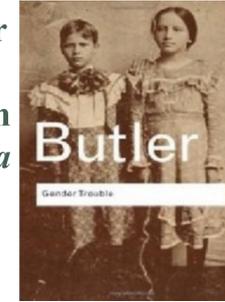
What are the different aspects of experiences do Chinese women academics perceive as important in academic career development in top-ranking universities in China?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gender Performativity theory of Judith Butler

Gender is an identity **tenuously constituted in time**, instituted in an exterior space through *a stylized repetition of acts*. (Butler, 2006, p.191)

Butler, J. (2006). *Gender Trouble*. Routledge.



METHODOLOGY

Feminist qualitative research

Feminist narrative inquiry

Semi-structured interview

A fictional story completion

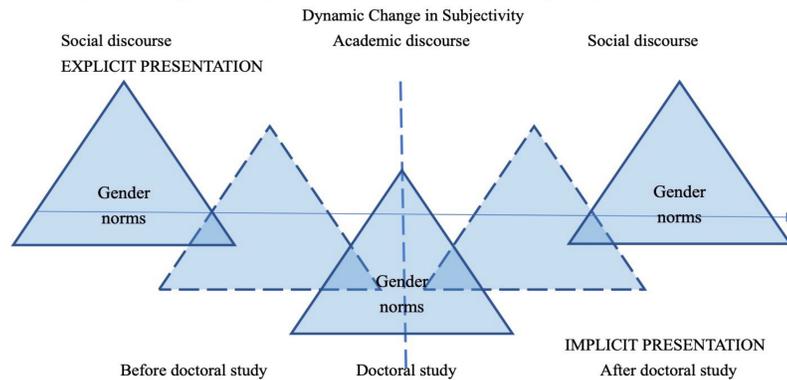
PARTICIPANTS

- 20 Chinese women academics
- From a particular group: **Chinese leading universities**
- Representing **one of the excellent groups** of Chinese academics

FINDINGS

• Doctoral education

Graph 1.1. Iceberg model of dynamic change in women academics' subjectivity



- The manifestation of gender norms **fluctuates** in different stages throughout doctoral study (See Graph 1.1). Gender norms are more dominant in **the two transitions of before and after doctoral study** than in the period of doctoral study.
- Along with the transition of life stages, **the dominant discourse alternatively changes** between academic and social discourses, which leads to the **performance of gender norms** in their gender subjectivities.

• Academic career development



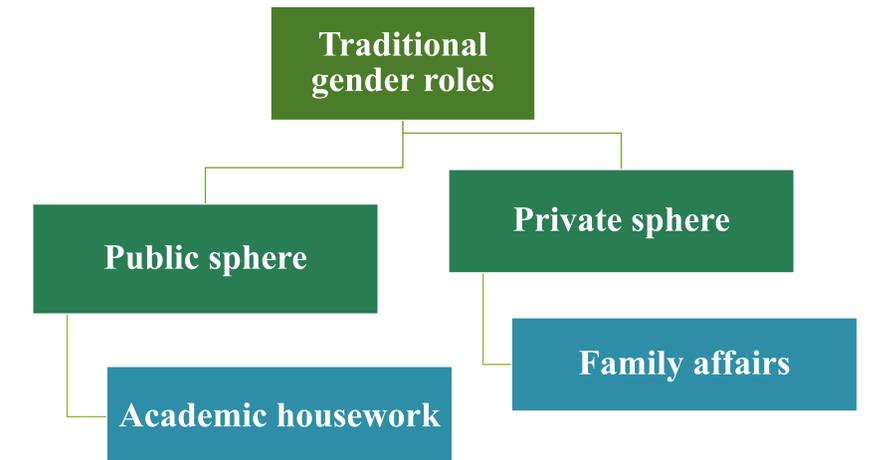
Graph 2.1. When gender identity is consistent with academic identity



Graph 2.2. When gender identity is inconsistent with academic identity

- The agency of women academics is **paralyzed** by gender norms.
- **Shaped** by the social and institutional discourses, the identities women academics perform have been **negotiated**, and they are making **concession** (See Graph 2.2) to **meet the expectations of being inferior** (lighter blue).

• Work-life balance in motherhood



- **A zero-sum game:** academic career and motherhood.
- Taking **disproportionate caring work** (academic housework and family affairs) helps **marginalize** Chinese women academics in male-dominated discourses.
- They tend to **show conformity** to the **prediscursive ontology of female body** through prioritizing motherhood.

IMPLICATIONS

- For women doctoral students and academics, to recognize the **take-for-granted gender norms** and to **think out of the box** may contribute to their academic career development.
- More double-blind research audit is expected to **limit** the negative affect of **gender-oriented academic network**, for example, "boys' club".
- **Family-friendly policies and proportionate labor division in institutional culture** might advocate the career development for women academics.

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