VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOP: CHINESE WOMEN ACADEMICS' PERCEPTIONS OF EXPERIENCES IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT – A FEMINIST CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

According to findings in international research, women academics face many obstacles in career development, but they embrace career expectations and possibilities as well. This research seeks to explore the experiences of elite Mainland Chinese women academics' career development. It recruited 20 women from Chinese "double first-class" universities and investigated their strategies to thrive in academia, what they perceived as important in their career paths, and if doing a doctorate locally or internationally made a difference to their experience of an academic career. I conducted the research qualitatively by narrative inquiry through a fictional story completion and semistructured, in-depth interviews. I employed critical discourse analysis in data analysis along with analytical concepts from the work of Judith Butler. Based on the narratives, I identified the following matters as important among these women academics in their career development: their perceptions of the performance of gendered subjectivities throughout doctoral education, the fusion of different identities in career development, and the inscribed bodies of work–life balance in motherhood. These aspects constructed their gender and academic subjectivities and identities in the male-dominated, neoliberal academic context of elite Chinese higher education. The women academics also showed resistance to repositioning themselves in institutions. The tension between the gender constraints they experienced and their academic career aspirations contributed to their temporal and fluid identities. An important contribution this thesis makes is the extension of our knowledge about the career experiences and aspirations of elite Chinese women academics, including those who received overseas doctorates, through the use of Butlerian theory.

Dedication

To my grandmothers in heaven, to my mother and to all great women.

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INTRODUCTION:
WOMEN AND WOMEN ACADEMICS IN CHINA

Introduction

Women academics are considered, as a group, to lack voice in academia throughout the world. They face many obstacles in career development according to findings in prior research, but they embrace career expectations and possibilities as well. This critical feminist research seeks to explore how elite Chinese women academics perceive their experiences in academic career development in the Chinese cultural and geographical context. The participants are from a particular group, recruited from Chinese "double first-class" universities, representing one of the leading groups of Chinese academics. Furthermore, women academics who study overseas for doctorates are likely to be exposed to very different academic cultures compared to those who study locally. Therefore I included women who had undertaken doctorates overseas as well as those who had done so locally in my study.

Importance of This Research

The underrepresentation of women academics in high-level positions can be found in higher education worldwide (e.g., Aiston & Yang, 2017; Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2017; Liu, 2017; Morley & Crossouard, 2016). The proportion of Chinese women academics declines with the ascendence of academic ranks. Based on the latest statistics of education personnel in higher education institutions of 2019, there are 1,760,786 full-time academics in Chinese higher institutions, 894,860 (50.82%) of whom are women academics; 682,603 middle-level full-time academics with 382,399 (56.02%) women; 531,888 subsenior level full-time academics with 252,941 (47.56%) women; 230,301 senior-level full-time academics with 72,593 (31.52%) women (Ministry of Education, 2020). Understanding the needs of Chinese women academics in leading universities may help administrators in higher education institutions cooperate with the group more efficiently and effectively in order to improve how they support the career development of those academics. This research can also provide examples and qualitative analysis for potential women academics and early-stage women academics, who may take the participants' career paths as guiding lights. Furthermore, this research may raise awareness for Chinese women academics of the

relations between doctoral education and their career paths, enlightening their plans for long-term career development.

To date, limited research has been conducted on women academics in China, even less on those from leading Chinese universities. Thus, another reason for the importance of the research shows in the particular group of women participants who were all recruited from Chinese double first-class universities, which indicates a higher education-elevation project implemented by the Chinese government in 2017, including 42 elite universities (Ministry of Education, 2017) aiming to be ranked as world-class universities. In international academia, the gender performances of women academics in public and private spheres are broadly discussed. There is a large body of literature in international academia interpreting the work–life balance, particularly in motherhood, of women academics as well; however, studies on similar topics are limited in Chinese academia. The research on career paths of elite Chinese women academics in leading universities may enrich the fundamental study on Chinese women academics for further research.

Research Focus

The research developed from the perspective of previous literature on women academics in an international context, which mainly focused on obstacles in the career development of this group (e.g., S. Acker & Feuerverger, 1996; Ensour et al., 2017; Peterson, 2016; G. Yang, 2019; X. Yu et al., 2012; Yuan, 2017; X. Zhu & Yu, 2015). This research also explores Chinese women academics' possibilities and opportunities by closely examining their career paths in leading Chinese universities.

The research seeks to explore the contrast between women academics who earned their doctoral degrees overseas and those who earned them domestically, aiming to provide insights into the process of how women doctoral students become women academics in Chinese double first-class universities. As the highest university degree, doctoral education forms students' academic thinking patterns and guides their academic career by specifically training them to carry out research (C. Mitchell, 2019; Schwabe, 2011). The academic identity of doctoral students established in doctoral education is reshaped by changing educational contexts (Ai, 2017). Women doctoral students, both international and local, face not only the requirement of academic achievement, but also gender issues throughout their doctoral education. The experiences shared by participants show the specific situation of women with either domestic or overseas doctorates in contemporary Chinese academia.

This research also investigates how Chinese women academics strike a work–life balance in their (prospective) motherhood. As a feminist critical research project, this study emphasizes how gendered social and institutional discourses construct women academics' subjectivities and identities. It is insufficient to discuss the career development of the women academics in depth without considering their family responsibilities. Women academics usually encounter more hindrances in their academic career development from their overloaded domestic duties. This research demonstrates a dialogue between career and family for Chinese contemporary women academics. Their coordination between the public and private spheres calls for the policy makers in academia to support the career development of women academics in legislation and at policy level.

Research Question

The research question was expanded from my initial research plan. At the very beginning, I aimed to do comparative research to explore the perception of domestic and international doctoral education in Chinese women academics' career development. After writing the research proposal and reading a large amount of literature, I started to realize that I might be interested in a larger topic to show a bigger picture. Besides doctoral education, in this feminist critical research, I want to sketch the flesh and blood of those women academics to show their lived experiences in the Chinese higher educational context. According to prior findings, women academics face obstacles as well as possibilities in career development. This led me to a question when I was seeking the research topic: how do women academics view their career development? I was driven by this simple question to seek answers. Meanwhile, I kept the comparative study of women with domestic or international doctorates because I was still curious about whether there are different perceptions between the two groups. I thus combined this branch of comparative study with this research to explore more tensions and possibilities. The aim is also reflected in my qualitative data collection from two groups of women academics (see Chapter 4).

By this means, the research question started to mature from my intersected identities of an international doctoral student, a domestic academic, and more importantly, a Chinese woman with overseas studying and working experiences. This study seeks to investigate the career paths of doctorally qualified Chinese women academic and the multiple roles they play, including their experiences of both obstacles and possibilities. It explores the following question:

How do Chinese women academics perceive their experiences in academic career development in top-ranking universities in China and does doing a doctorate locally or internationally make a difference?

To seek insights into this question, driven by Butlerian theory, I have investigated the lived experiences of 20 Chinese women academics working in double first-class universities through fictional story completion and semistructured interviews to explore elite Chinese women academics' strategies to thrive in academia, how they contributed to these strategies and how their experiences shaped their career paths.

Reasons to Investigate Chinese Women Academics in Top-Ranking Universities with Domestic and Overseas Doctorates

This research aims to investigate the career development of Chinese women academics working in top-ranking universities. I define domestic top-ranking universities as the 42 double first-class universities according to the national policy of higher education development. The main reasons for choosing these research participants are as follows.

Why Women Academics in China? In recent decades, Chinese higher education has been experiencing a transition (see D. Fu & Zhang, 2021; J. Wang, 2021). The Chinese government aims to construct world-leading research-intensive universities (see Ministry of Education, 2015, 2017). This reinforcement of academic achievements calls for more academically well-trained researchers with high research productivity. Therefore, it is likely to form institutional norms in double first-class universities to achieve this goal.

Furthermore, this research seeks to explore the connections between academic performance and family responsibilities from the perspective of Chinese women academics. Similar to the women academics studied in international academia, Chinese women academics disproportionately take on family responsibilities to fulfill social expectations by doing the "second shift" after work to take care of their families (e.g., Dickson, 2018), but this situation is understudied in prior domestic research. These elite women academics also perform gender based on the gender roles of men as the breadwinners and women as the housekeepers[1] (e.g., Suitor et al., 2001). Despite the prevailing social discourse of women being the main caregivers (e.g., W. Li & Zhai, 2019), the performance of these Chinese

[1] The Chinese version goes like "men are responsible for the public sphere; women are responsible for the private sphere" (*nanzhuwai, nvzhunei*).

women academics is shaped by the traditional Chinese culture in childbirth decisions, childrearing obligations, and personal career development. Therefore, their situation may be particular compared to women academics in Western countries.

Why Chinese Academics Who are Women? To investigate how the Chinese academics who are women position themselves in their academic career development, this research emphasizes the agency of participants from two layers of tension. The first layer shows the tension between agency and the hindrances in career development. Chinese women academics with a decent educational background, who work in double first-class universities, are likely to embrace strong career aspirations. They are willing to be accomplished in their academic career, driven by their agency. Therefore, when Chinese women academics encounter hindrances in career development, they tend to make more efforts to prevent themselves from being leaked from the academic pipeline.

Another layer of tension comes from their underrepresentation as women academics. Although, overall, the ratio of Chinese women doctoral students has climbed steadily to 41.87% in 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2021), the proportion of Chinese women academics employed in Chinese universities shows a downward trend as the academic rank increases (Ministry of Education, 2020). A large proportion of the Chinese women academics are settled in the lower level of the academic ranks with limited administrative or leadership experiences. The women academics in double first-class universities are not exceptions to this imbalanced structure, albeit the excellence they obtained. Although they have often reached a higher level of achievement, compared to their men counterparts, not every one of them is academically satisfied. What hinders them in climbing the academic ladder? Working in the competitive academic culture, their less advantaged situation has brought extra tension to their career development.

Why Chinese Women Academics in Top-Ranking Universities? Another aim in this research is to explore the extent to which these Chinese women academics are formed by social and institutional discourses. As employees with doctorates working in double first-class universities, those participants represent a group of Chinese academics of excellence. When this demanding workload competes with family responsibilities, this conflict is more likely to show among women academics working in Chinese double first-class universities. Further, those women academics have to equip themselves with advanced research capacity to cope working in a competitive institution for career development. The ambition for

Chinese higher education development might be one of the reasons, but it is also attributed to the shake-up of lifelong employment system in Chinese higher education institutions (see L. Lu et al., 2019). Their articulations, as shared with me in their interviews, are more likely to reflect the working situation of Chinese women academics in contemporary institutional and social discourses.

Why Compare Chinese Women Academics with Domestic Doctorates with Those Receiving Overseas Doctorates? The research has a comparative focus on the Chinese women academics who gained domestic and overseas doctorates and seeks to find the differences and similarities between the two groups. Academic career development is significantly influenced by doctoral education (Schwabe, 2011). Under academic globalization, with returnees[2] and Chinese policies that attract overseas human resources, the group of Chinese academic returnees has grown. When women academics are doing doctorates overseas, they are challenged to the values of other cultures and acquire academic capacity in international academia. This cultural inscription may affect their academic work after returning to domestic universities. As an international doctoral student, I have experienced this transition as well. Women academics who study overseas are likely to be exposed to very different academic cultures compared to those who study locally. It is interesting to consider whether this exposure makes a difference to how they think about their careers and whether it will change their career aspirations. Besides, for prospective doctoral students, especially women doctoral students, the research may provide some information if they are swinging between domestic and overseas universities and make it possible to link doctoral study with an academic career. Besides the influences brought by their various study experiences, this research emphasizes how the Chinese women academics made those choices whether they studied abroad or not. These reasons and considerations are deeply analyzed to show their performances in career development.

Apart from explaining the importance of this study, raising the research question, and discussing the selection of participants in this research, this chapter introduces Chinese higher educational development from political and cultural aspects. This is followed by an exploration of the lives of women in contemporary Chinese society and the development of women's liberation movements in China. I then introduce Chinese women academics from

[2] In this research, *academic returnees* refers to the academics who receive doctorates overseas and/or have overseas research experience (e.g., Y. Chen et al., 2015).

the gendered institutional structure, the reforms in the employment system, and the social image of women doctoral students/graduates. Finally, this chapter describes the proposed structure of this thesis in general.

Political and Cultural: Rapid Development of Chinese Higher Education in the 21st Century

Although my focus in this study is specifically on Chinese women academics with doctorates, in order to provide the social context, I have drawn on writing that examines the development of Chinese higher education more generally, in contemporary university settings. Chinese higher education has experienced a transition in the 21st century. In a collectivist society, the development of the country is centralized. In this situation, the development of the Chinese higher education ought to support the improvement of Chinese comprehensive national strength, and meet Chinese strategic needs (Ministry of Education, 2018b). The political, economic, and cultural aims call for competitive higher education quality under the direction of the Communist Party of China[3] (CPC). This section begins with the Chinese context of higher education led by national policies, followed by the expansion and marching plan in Chinese higher education. Last, this section introduces the career development trajectories of women academics in double first-class universities.

Chinese Higher Education Led by National Policies

Chinese society operates on the solid basis of collectivism. The pursuit of individual achievement should be within the borderline of collective benefit (J. Zhu, 2021). To consolidate and develop the socialist system, the Chinese government makes economic construction the central task and seeks ways to vigorously promote economic development and social progress (C. Lu, 1990). Chinese higher educational institutions must actively respond to social concerns, closely connect with social needs, and provide all kinds of qualified professional human resources for economic construction and social development (W. Tang, 2016).

As a socialist country, the higher education system has developed under the guidance of national policies. Elite Chinese higher educational institutions are all public. Their autonomy is developed in the frames of demand from the national development, and thus it is greatly shaped by the official document implemented by the Ministry of Education in the People's

[3] Another translation is the Chinese Communist Party. This research uses the official translation of the Chinese government.

Republic of China (the PRC). Therefore, the Chinese government emphasizes the research capacity of academics in order to accelerate higher education development.

Every 5 years, China implements a national developmental plan, in which higher educational development is usually of significance. The fourteenth 5-year plan (2021–2025) particularly puts emphasis on the construction of double first-class universities. In recent years, President Jinping Xi has also made several speeches specifically about higher education development. In April 2021, President Xi visited Qsinghua University, one of the top universities in China, and claimed that the higher education system of a country required a group of first-class universities, and the quality of those universities determined the quality of the whole higher education system (Guangming Politics, 2021). Therefore, the construction of double first-class universities has been a political tactic for Chinese socialist construction. Holding this mission, the expectation and pressure placed on academics in the double first-class universities is usually much higher compared to those in other universities.

The Expansion of Chinese Higher Education

As a developing country with a large population, it has taken merely 20 years for China to complete the mission of higher education transformation from elite education, to popular education, and to universal education (D. Fu & Zhang, 2021). In the Chinese academic context, there is a large body of literature on Chinese higher education expansion. To provide a context for this study, I review the research from the aspects of the political guidance, the economic needs of the labor force, and the remaining problems.

National political policies have been one of the significant external motives of Chinese higher education development (D. Fu & Zhang, 2021). As the Chinese government emphasizes, the level of higher education development is a key signal of comprehensive national power (D. Wang & Wang, 2021). CPC has always led the political guidance in higher education development (D. Wang & Wang, 2021) based on the strategic plan of the country. To date, the CPC is implementing the fourteenth 5-year plan (2021–2025), aiming at the construction of a powerful country with high-level research-intensive universities (Xinhua Press, 2021). As President Xi emphasizes, China should pave a unique higher education development path with Chinese characteristics dominated by socialism (Ministry of Education, 2018b). With the strong political leading force, Chinese higher education expansion has shown remarkable success at a fast speed (D. Fu & Zhang, 2021). As a great number of Chinese women students have benefited from higher education expansion, the

number of women college students has increased steadily, as the statistics show: in 1985, the percentage of women college students was 30% and it raised to 44% in 2005; in 2014, it climbed to 52.12% (B. Chen & Xu, 2017).

The higher education expansion also satisfies the Chinese economic needs for a labor force to develop the country. In 1999, Chinese government decided to start the higher education expansion under the social development in the Reform and Opening-Up policy, which largely changed the Chinese political system and formed a socialist market economy system[4] (D. Wang & Wang, 2021). The fast development of the socialist market economy system has called for many graduates produced by the expansion of higher education to participate in the social economic construction (C. Liu & Yuan, 2020).

Admittedly, the rapid expansion in Chinese higher education has brought issues. In the early stage of Chinese higher education development, the major two problems of the Chinese universities were the overall low research achievement and the shortage of experienced academics (C. Liu & Yuan, 2020). During the expansion, these two problems have remained. The number of academics has not improved proportionately with the increasing number of college students (J. Zhao & Hu, 2021). Aiming at the recruitment of more academics to fill the vacancies, Chinese universities recruited academics with lower requirement in research experiences (C. Liu & Yuan, 2020). As a result, except for the leading universities, a lack of research production still can be commonly seen in nonleading universities as a side effect of the expansion (C. Liu & Yuan, 2020).

Marching Plan: Elite University Programs

Chinese higher education institutions have been officially stratified for decades. The development of the stratification has been characterized by three government projects. The first two projects emerged in the 1990s. In 1995, the Ministry of Education evaluated all the universities and ranked the top 100 for the "211 Project"; in May of 1998, the Ministry of Education selected the top 39 from the 100 universities and named the group the "985 Project" and targeted them to forge world-class universities. Those selected universities are more likely to gain abundant funds from the Chinese government, which has equipped them with advanced facilities, attracting skilled academics and competitive students with excellent performance in National College Entrance Examinations, known as *gaokao*. The

[4] The socialist market economy system is the market system developed under the socialist conditions with public ownership, proposed by Xiaoping Deng in 1992.

third project came in 2017. As the Chinese government's strategy of speeding up the pace in higher education development, the Chinese government implemented a double first-class project to replace the 985 and 211 Projects (Ministry of Education, 2017). The word *double* stands for two funnels: world-class universities, and universities with world-class disciplines. The former are evaluated comprehensively while the latter are only evaluated in one or more disciplines. The 42 world-class universities and 95 universities with world-class disciplines, like a pool that accumulates the most powerful domestic academic resources, are the pinnacles of Chinese higher education development.

The double first-class project was a refined version of the 985 and 211 Projects. After nearly 20 years of higher education development, non-985 or 211 universities also made significant progress. There are two major differences between the two lists. On the one hand, the criteria in selecting universities are different. The new category of universities with world-class disciplines offers opportunities to many universities which are specialized in certain fields, like foreign languages or science. Since the criteria of 985 and 211 evaluations point to overall performances in all disciplines, those universities with specializations were less competitive and were easily eliminated from the list. On the other hand, the double first-class project remains fluid whereas the others stay static. The Ministry of Education (2015) renews the double first-class list every 5 years as a constructive period by evaluation. The unqualified ones are removed from the list and newly qualified ones are added. The policy aims to keep the egalitarian opportunities for every university in the competition to elicit their research productivity.

In 2014, President Xi claimed educators should learn from the operation experiences of elite higher educational institutions in other countries, and build leading Chinese universities on the basis of the Chinese situation through high-quality development in higher education, targeting to sufficiently strike the balance of individual development and social economic development (J. Wang, 2021; also see D. Fu & Zhang, 2021). Embracing the ambitious goal of building world-class universities, both local governments and double first-class universities have made an effort on this program construction (J. Zhao & Hu, 2021) with policies that privileged the double first-class program (Guan, 2018). In the discourse of Chinese higher education, the concept of double first-class universities signifies superior resources, more opportunities and better development for the academics as well as the students (e.g., W. Cai & Zhao, 2021). The academic reputation and social impact of double first-class universities are comfortably ahead of other universities (W. Wang et al., 2018).

Moreover, those Chinese leading universities embrace the mission of serving the social economic development of the country (D. Wang & Wang, 2021), so that their political function has been emphasized.

The Career Development Trajectories of Academics in Double First-Class Universities

According to the logic of high-quality development, improving quality in higher education calls for building a professional academic team (Xinhua Press, 2021). Teams of academics with high research capacity are the core of double first-class universities (J. Wang et al., 2019). The high-quality development of leading universities also depends on the quality of academics (J. Cai & Zhao, 2021). To attract outstanding scholars, from 2005, the 985 and 211 Program era, Chinese governments at all levels have released a large number of government policies and initiatives with a great number of subsidies (X. Shi, 2015). Given the core criteria of all the rankings contain academic performance (W. Wang et al., 2018), for the world-class universities, they are expected to compete with the leading universities in well-known world-class university/discipline ranking lists[5].Therefore, they particularly emphasize the research capacity of academics.

In recent years, in the context of neoliberalism in universities, some Chinese leading universities have implemented policies with "publish or perish" as a new trend, which is similar to the tenure-track system in the US (M. Ren & Liu, 2021). In the Chinese higher education system, an academic's career development is closely related to research performance (L. Li, 2017; M. Ren & Liu, 2021), especially in the first 3 to 6 years before they are tenured (Y. Li & Zhu, 2020). Academic ranks, which are known as *zhicheng*, are the dominant landmarks in Chinese academics' career development. In 1986, an appointment system of academic ranks in colleges and universities in China was formally established (H. Zhao, 2018). Usually, academics with doctorates start their career as a *lecturer*. They then struggle in the river of research requirements to gain the academic ranks of *associate professor* and *professor*. Specific requirements for promotion may differ in different universities. Also, Chinese academics need qualifications to be supervisors for master or doctoral students through meeting higher requirements in research output.

[5] In the Chinese higher education system, ARWU, THE, QS, and US News are the four commonly recognized world-class university/discipline ranking lists (e.g., W. Wang et al., 2018; J. Zhao & Hu, 2021).

Chinese Women in Contemporary Society

Chinese women are constructed by the changing social discourse in country development. This section begins with the liberation movements of Chinese women from a historical perspective, followed by Chinese women nowadays in families and marriage, and the social images of Chinese women doctoral students.

A Movement or a Policy Change: Chinese Women's Liberation Movement

Compared to the feminist movements in Western countries, which are more likely to start at a grass-roots level, the Chinese women's liberation movement was launched by the government. The women's liberation movement in China started from the early 20th century (H. Wang, 2021) led by CPC, which has played a dominant role in promoting gender equality in governing the country. This section chronologically introduces the development of women's liberation in China in recent decades.

In the 1920s, by imparting knowledge and skills, the CPC mobilized women to participate in productive labor, and propagated the ideology of women's independence (H. Wang, 2021). In 1939, after the outbreak of the anti-Japanese war,[6] as an unprecedentedly grand occasion, Chinese women, especially women in the countryside, made a great contribution to the victory and managed to shake the foundation of paternalism in the patriarchal Chinese society (H. Wang, 2021). After the foundation of the PRC in 1949, the CPC decided to launch the movement of women's liberation from the top-down to promote women's participation in the labor force (Y. Jin, 2006).

In the socialist Revolution and Construction period[7], women were strongly encouraged to participate in country construction, and gender roles started to loosen (Z. Lu & Liu, 2015). After the Great Leap Forward period[8] in 1958, driven by the ambitions of making rapid progress in social economic construction, it was increasingly common to see women doing heavy physical work because of the shortage of workforce (Z. Lu & Liu, 2015). This strong national call largely promoted degendered workforce (Y. Jin, 2006; Z. Lu & Liu, 2015). Throughout the 20th century, gender equality has been a critical political issue for Chinese women (Gaskell et al., 2006).

[6] The anti-Japanese war is one of the most significant historical events in the foundation of the PRC.
[7] The Socialist Revolution and Construction period refers to 1949 to 1978.
[8] The Great Leap Forward period, from 1958 to 1960, was a mass movement in the Chinese economic construction characterized by the realization of high indicators of industrial and agricultural production, due to the lack of experiences in socialist construction (W. Liu, 2008).

At the end of 1978, the Chinese government implemented the Reform and Opening-Up policy[9]. China devoted itself to economic development and made remarkable signs of economic progress. Women's liberation movements burgeoned and thrived with the development of the country, and some speeches and supportive national policies were made. After 1987, Chinese feminism development was influenced by Western theories of neoliberalism, postmodernism, activist feminism, and Marxist feminism, embracing a shared aim of women's liberation movements in China and Western countries: the pursuit of gender equality.

On 7 March, 1990, President Zemin Jiang gave a speech for the 80th Anniversary of International Women's Day, in which he illustrated and explained Marxist feminism and its connotations, bringing Marxist feminism to CPC and Chinese people to promote gender equality (H. Shi & Du, 2021). The study of Chinese women has started to emphasize individuals and their subjectivity since then (H. Shi, 2019).

In 2017, 43.5% of the Chinese workforce were women, which exceeded the national target of 40%. In professional positions in institutions, 48.46% were women, while 39.8% of them were high-level positions (China Business Industry Research Institution, 2018). In 2018, President Jinping Xi worked with the Chinese Women's Federation in depth to strengthen the importance of uniting with women and helping women in need (People's Daily, 2018).

At a national level, through its legitimacy in China's constitution, the CPC guides people to eliminate gender discrimination and stereotypes about women (Pang, 2021) through laws and policies. China has established a legal system for the comprehensive protection of women's rights and interests, including more than 100 laws and regulations (The Central People's Government of the PRC, 2020). The first regulation named "Resolution on the Women's Movement" was made by the CPC in July, 1922, claiming that private ownership is the origin of the oppression and slavery of women (H. Wang, 2021). In 1954, the Chinese constitution granted "equality between men and women" legitimacy (Z. Wang, 2016, p. 16), and it is been repeatedly brought up by Chinese leaders since. In 1995, the CPC endorsed equality between men and women as a feminist pursuit in a basic national policy to promote China's social development, announced by Zemin Jiang in the Fourth United Nations World

[9] The Reform and Opening-Up policy is a Chinese national policy, which has actively developed foreign economic and technological cooperation and exchanges, expanded foreign trade, absorbed foreign funds, introduced advanced technology and management experience, and accelerated China's socialist modernization process (S. Li, 2022).

Conference in Beijing (Z. Jiang, 1995). In 2010, President Jintao Hu demonstrated that the CPC had taken women's liberation and equality between men and women as a key aim of the country's development on the 100th Anniversary of International Working Women's Day (Guangming Daily, 2010). In October 2020, President Jinping Xi delivered a speech at the 25th anniversary high-level meeting of the World Conference on Women in Beijing, at the UN General Assembly, and emphasized that equality between men and women had long been China's basic national policy (The Central People's Government of the PRC, 2020). He claimed that gender equality should be operated in practice through building a world in which women are not discriminated against (The Central People's Government of the PRC, 2020).

It is worth noting that, in contemporary Chinese society, despite the legislation of gender equality, "the presumptions and power dynamics of male supremacy could overrule the ideological and legal legitimacy of feminist actions" in practice (Z. Wang, 2016, p. 16), which leaves spaces for this research. Admittedly, gender equality in legislation may enable local policies to actively encourage, for example, women's participation in leadership; however, the sufficient realization of a real sense of gender equality is still on the way (P. Chen & Hsieh, 2019). A. Liu and Tong (2014) also point out that the perception of gender among Chinese people is still in a transitional stage, and compared to Chinese women, Chinese men, who are usually in the positions of power, are more likely to show approval of gender norms. Though Chinese women are willing to advocate gender equality (A. Liu & Tong, 2014), they usually are not powerful enough to deconstruct the longstanding gender norms. In this situation, Chinese women's liberation has developed with a complex contradiction (Zheng, 2020).

Chinese Women, Family, and Discourse

Chinese women's status in marriage and motherhood is closely dependent on the development of society. In ancient Chinese society, the dominant Confucian culture on gender equality contradicted feminism (Rosenlee, 2006). Women were supposed to conform to "the three obedience and four virtues" (*sancong side*), in which "three obedience" means to be obedient to one's father before marriage, to one's husband after marriage and to son/s if the husband passes away; "four virtues" stands for women's appropriate behavior, proper words, submissive look, and fine housework skills. Another well-known saying for women is "ignorance is a women's virtue" (*nvzi wucai bianshide*), which means women's lack of knowledge is considered her virtue. The two examples are the representatives of social

discourses in ancient Chinese society. Notably, both sayings emphasize the *virtue* of being women, constructing the social discourse of women's gender role.

In contemporary Chinese society, wife and mother are not the only roles women play. With women's large participation in the workforce, the phenomenon of men as the breadwinners and women as the housekeepers has become much less normal. Not all women stay inside (*nei*) to take care of the family and not all men are the only one who goes outside (*wai*) to be the main supporter. Although Chinese men and women participate in the workforce in "outside–outside" (*wai–wai*) mode, meaning the couple both go outside for full-time work, women have not unloaded the burden of family chores, and they usually take up the responsibility in both private and public spheres (F. Li, 2019). That is to say, the social expectations of women have advanced from being the sole housekeepers to being the breadwinners and the housekeepers.

In the development of society, as the major caregivers of children in families (Yi, 2020), the motherhood of Chinese women has been shaped by the social imagination of what a good mother should be like (L. Cai, 2015). The centralization of family relations in contemporary Chinese society has produced the parents' agency in family education (S. Xiao, 2014), taking parents from child-raisers to professional parental educators, wise consumers in the education market, and educational-activity decision makers (Yi, 2020). Being administrators and executors of family affairs may give women a false sense that it comes with family power, but it is more likely to bring a "mental load" to women (F. Li, 2019).

This ideal image contrasts with the independence and professionalism of women academics in the leading universities. As introduced, the collectivist social mechanism has established the foundation of the Chinese social discourse as well as the institutional discourse in universities. Its tension can be seen in both public and private spheres. For example, a woman academic may sacrifice her academic career (the individual need) to take the major childrearing responsibility for her nuclear family (the collective need). Although, for the women who remain single in the contemporary China, the advocacy of people's individualization has been discursively constructed (Y. Yu & Tian, 2022), in this research, all the Chinese women academics are more likely to be immersed in this ideological guided collectivist social system. When they are making personal decisions, they are likely to be performing the social norms in an attempt to fulfill expectations.

Chinese Women Academics

The context of Chinese women academics is introduced in this section from institutional and structural aspects, followed by the role of media in building the Chinese social image of women doctoral students/graduates.

Gendered Institutional Norms and Hierarchical Structures

The leadership positions and senior academic ranks are both male-dominated in Chinese universities (e.g., P. Chen & Hsieh, 2019; Cheng, 2010; F. Lu, 2020; Ruan, 2021; Y. Wang et al., 2013; H. Yang, 2018; J. Zhao & Jones, 2017). Institutional norms, which shape the development of individual academics, are constituted by academic discourse and administrative power. Organizational culture is usually invested with assumptions and expectations that are gendered (J. Acker, 1992; Menéndez et al., 2012). These institutional norms shape the formation of academic identities among Chinese academics (M. Ren & Liu, 2021). Compared to the academic performance-based neoliberalism in international academia (e.g., Amsler & Motta, 2019; Grant & Elizabeth, 2015), Chinese academia mostly relies on the domination of the government (Shin & Harman, 2019). With the aspiration of constructing double first-class universities as a national policy, based on the quantitative criteria of world university ranking systems, the number of research publications are directly transferred to the workload of academics, and the requirement may be higher in universities and colleges (M. Ren & Liu, 2021). This collective academic goal frames the career development of academics, and it shows the institutional operation of power relations on the individual academics (M. Ren & Liu, 2021; also see K. Fu, 2010). For example, in institutions, women academics are more likely to take responsibilities which don't contribute to their research productivity or academic excellence (e.g., Heijstra et al., 2017; Macfarlane & Burg, 2019).

Chinese universities are administered in hierarchical structures (e.g., Y. Wang, 2022). It is common that academics are subordinate to institutional leaders, showing top-down administration (Y. Wang, 2022). The administrative power is likely to be intertwined with the academic power for the dual power the leaders hold in Chinese universities (H. Wang, 2021). As one of the key preconditions, most of the deans have excellent academic performances (C. Wang et al., 2021). When they are academic authorities, their academic network and resources help increase the possibilities of being powerful leaders (C. Wang et al., 2021). However, Chinese women academics are disadvantaged in both academic

performance and academic networks (K. Yu & Wang, 2014; Y. Zhu & He, 2016). Therefore, the hierarchical structures in Chinese universities are often gendered.

The Chinese government has noted this gendered structure in academics. Some guidance and policies have been implemented in higher education institutions. For example, a newly implemented national policy encourages women academics to play a greater role in scientific and technological innovation (Ministry of Science and Technology, 2021). Notably, though the career development of Chinese women academics has been emphasized, practical measures are still needed in higher education institutions to achieve gender equality (e.g., B. Liu & Li, 2009; X. Yu et al., 2012).

The "Iron Rice Bowl" Reforms and Women Academics

Most Chinese women academics working in double first-class universities have experienced the revolution of the personnel system in domestic higher education. The original personnel system, also called the *normal employment system* (see J. Zhu et al., 2017), has been gradually substituted by the *tenure-track employment system*.

The normal employment system was developed from Chinese socialist construction. Since the foundation of the PRC, academics in higher education institutions, who are seen as national cadres, have been eligible for the lifelong employment system (W. Lu, 2021). This personnel system is metaphorically called *iron rice bowl* (*tiefanwan*), also known as *bianzhi* in Chinese, which means once one is recruited in this system, one will not face unemployment in normal circumstances (the rice bowl can never be broken because it is made of iron). This system is still operating in some Chinese nonleading universities nowadays. Although this permanent employment, similar to a tenure system, ensures the employment security of academics (L. Lu et al., 2019), this equalitarianism, known as another metaphoric concept *big-pot (daguofan),*[10] proposed in 1958*,* has led to the lack of effective evaluation of the performance of academics (Y. Ren et al., 2020; G. Yan, 2019). In 1999, the Ministry of Education implemented a policy, claiming that the personnel system in higher education system would gradually change to a contract-based one in 2 years (J. Cai & Qiu, 2020). However, in practice, social concerns meant this reform did not make a

[10] The concept of big-pot emerged in the 1970s, and means everyone is eating from one big pot, regardless of the contribution of individuals. This mode of social distribution reduced the initiative of individuals and was eventually eliminated in most Chinese workplaces. However, the thinking pattern of big-pot still affects Chinese people working in public institutions in contemporary society.

breakthrough until 2014 in a small number of domestic universities, most of which are double first-class universities (L. Lu et al., 2019).

After years of pilot study and negotiation with the labor market, nowadays, Chinese universities take the combination of tenure-track employment system and the normal employment system in employment of academics. The former appears to be more competitive but usually with higher annual income, while academics in the latter system are more secure in their career but are less likely to receive higher payment. For research-intensive universities, the ideal achievement is that all new academics enter the tenure-track employment system so that their research potential can be stimulated under the pressure of high risk and high returns (e.g., L. Lu et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the evaluation of academics in the normal employment system has also been gradually merged to the standards of the tenure-track employment system (J. Zhu et al., 2017). This Chinese version of publish or perish is named *promote or leave (feisheng jizou)*.[11]

In this transition of personnel system, the Chinese government aims at the development of the quality and quantity of research productions, especially in international academia, which resonates with the construction of double first-class universities. In this situation, Chinese women academics who experience the tenure-track employment system are evaluated based on academic performance, especially research productivity. This marketization of higher education institutions emphasizes competition and performance with limited tolerance. Moreover, this system makes women academics in their early-career struggle more for they are more likely to face the contesting roles of social and institutional discourses, so that the tension between gender and academic subjectivities and identities becomes strong.

Through this reform, Chinese higher education aims to stimulate competition among the academics by encouraging their research productivity with pressure (Y. Ren et al., 2020). Bringing insecurity to the academics, these revolutionary changes produce a competitive academic ecology, especially for those who work in elite universities. Therefore, Chinese women academics in double first-class universities are more likely to experience these social

[11] Promote or leave (feisheng jizou) means that the academics are given a fixed number of years (in practice, the fixed years in the first contract are mostly between 3–6 years; Li & Zhu, 2018) to reach a settled academic standard. The first 6 years are called the *first employment period (shoupinqi*), which is a new term in the Chinese employment revolution in higher education institutions. Young academics are expected to produce several publications each year once they are recruited. If they are unable to meet the publication requirement in a fixed number of years, the first contract will end. If they do meet the requirement, new contracts will be waiting for them until they get tenure. This employment system is mostly conducted in Chinese leading universities as a new trend.

transitions and institutional system changes. Their working environment may have been overturned in the past decade. To survive the fierce competition in their career, they work under great institutional pressure.

The Role of Media in Building the Chinese Social Image of Women Doctoral Students/Graduates[12]

Though the expansion enables the universalization of Chinese higher education, graduate students, especially doctoral students, are only a small proportion in higher education, which makes this group of students elite education receivers (D. Fu & Zhang, 2021). In May 1983, China had the first group of 18 domestic doctoral graduates, one of whom was a woman. In the 50 years of Chinese doctoral education development, some evolution can be noted. In the first and second decades of domestic doctoral education, the growth rate of women doctoral students greatly increased. It shows the rapid ascent of women academics in high-level education (K. Fu, 2010).

Though the history of Chinese women taking doctorates is not long, this group has received unfriendly comments in Chinese society for years. At the end of the 20th century, Chinese women doctoral students/graduates started to emerge. In the constitution of their social image, the media usually describes an unfriendly condition of women doctoral students/graduates in their social roles (L. Sun, 2017). The fictional social image of women doctoral students/graduates is usually named *the third gender*[13] (e.g., T. Li, 2008; L. Wu & Liu, 2019; Y. Yang, 2011) to show their exclusion (L. Sun, 2017). They are also likely to be described by media as a group of "anxious, self-pitying, and eccentric women" who depart from the heteronormative cultural norms (X. Li, 2021, p. 11).

[12] In Chinese Mandarin, there is a slight difference between doctoral students (*boshisheng*) and doctoral graduates (*boshi*). However, people usually use the latter to signify both. Also, in the discourse of mass media, the second term (boshi) is often used to describe doctoral students (boshisheng) as well. Hence, in some of the articles with limited information, it is hard to identify if the subjects have received doctorates. In this section, I use the expression of doctoral students/graduates to generalize the two names.

[13] This name was popularized in Chinese mass media in 1990s. In this description of women doctoral students, *the third gender* usually means the Chinese women doctoral students cannot be categorized as women, because doing doctorates, they are not doing the thing women ought to do. They cannot be categorized as men, either, for their biological features. In mainstream gender binary, the Chinese women doctoral students are excluded from both genders. The concept of the third gender may be interpreted as a man-like woman. It shows the oppression and resistance to women with high professional skills when they are performing beyond the image of women in gender roles (e.g., T, Li, 2008; L. Wu & Liu, 2019; Y. Yang, 2011). Nowadays, it can hardly be heard in Chinese society, for doctoral education prevails and an increasingly larger proportion of women doctoral students is seen.

In media reports, the difficulty of women doctoral students/graduates in fitting with marriage has become one of the most discussed topics (Y. Yang, 2011). The discussion of the marriage issue for women doctoral students/graduates started from the 1990s as mostly negative images of *leftover women*,[14] and so forth (Luo & Ren, 2011). The media discursively constructs the intersected but contested ideologies of leftover women to form a conservative and progressive norm (Y. Yu, 2019). L. Sun (2017) argues that, because of late marriage, and the conflict of childbirth and study in women doctoral students, to attract readers, some media platforms purposefully claim that women doctoral students/graduates are disadvantaged in the marriage market. Though there is some defense that women doctoral students/graduates can do housework, it still indicates that women doctoral students/graduates should step back to the cultural expectation of a woman belonging in the roles of mother and wife (L. Sun, 2017). Therefore, in the gaze of media, women doctoral students/graduates were depicted from a gendered perspective (Y. Yang, 2011). X. Li (2021) argues that the reports of women doctoral students/graduates reflect the strategic dissemination and consolidation of the patriarchy in Chinese society. By this means, the social image of women doctoral students/graduates was initially built, and has been emphasized and constantly reproduced (L. Sun, 2017) in the repeated description of difficulties among this group (Luo & Ren, 2011).

When the media took responsibility for introducing this group to society, media reports were mainly shaped by the male-dominated discourse (N. Jiang & Niu, 2008). The stigmatization of women doctoral students/graduates has spread at a rapid speed (L. Wu & Liu, 2019) and the description of them tends to go to extremes through stereotyping the group (K. Fu, 2010). Y. Shen (2010) argues it is because men feel threatened by women doctorate students/graduates having comparatively high economic and social status. The competitiveness of women with doctorates also deconstructs the gender roles of virtue, self-sacrifice, and conformity to male domination, and thus it attracts controversial comments (L. Sun, 2017). This discourse navigates the reconstruction of gender roles in society and stimulates conflict in public and private spheres (T. Li, 2008; M. Tang, 2010). Moreover, X. Li (2021) indicates Chinese media has been conducting a large-scale silence on women

[14] *Leftover women*, which used to be a Chinese popular term in the 2000s, usually refers to the group of women who have not married over the age of 30 (e.g. Gui, 2017), and it is banned in public media for its gendered discrimination (H. Wang & Yang, 2017).

doctoral students/graduates who fit patriarchal expectations or heteronormativity, but emphasize the "deviants" who do not conform to the norms.

With the development of society, today, the social image of women doctoral students/graduates has diversified. Y. Yang (2011) claims that, after 2000, more than half of the news shows a positive social image of women doctoral students/graduates, and about 10% is neutral. Scholars call for the mass media to remain objective to guide social discourse (H. Tian et al., 2020), and restore the real picture of this group (Y. Yang, 2011) to eliminate this symbolic violence on them (L. Wu & Liu, 2019).

Structure of This Thesis

This thesis is organized into eight chapters. In my analytic chapters (Chapters 5–7), I draw on data from my fictional story completion, and semistructured interviews to examine the aspects the Chinese women academics perceive as important in their career development. In what follows I provide an outline of each chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 1: Introduction: Women and Women Academics in China

In the first chapter, I provide an overview and the significance of this study and identify the research question I respond to in this project. I begin this writing by examining the development of Chinese higher education, the liberation of women in Chinese society and Chinese women academics.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: A Portrait of Women Academics

In the second chapter I examine a significant body of literature on the male-dominated and neoliberal discursive context in academia and institutions to provide a birds-eye view of women in academia. Then, I review the research on women academics and women doctoral students in both international and domestic contexts.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework: Poststructuralist Feminism, Judith Butler, and Performativity

This chapter identifies the gender performativity theory of Judith Butler underpinning this thesis. I start with the statement of my reason for using Butlerian theory based on my personal experiences. I articulate the poststructural positioning in this research and the rationale of using this theoretical frame. I briefly introduce the theoretical basis of gender performativity theory from language and discourses, power relations in heterosexual gender matrix, and the theory of Beauvoir, so that I conclude, for Butler, gender is a fictive concept.

I then thoroughly explain all the core theoretical concepts I use in data analysis. Finally, I review the literature on Judith Butler and gender performativity theory published by Chinese scholars from three aspects: the integration of Butlerian theory in Chinese context, the use of Butlerian theory in domestic academia and the critiques.

Chapter 4: Methodological Considerations

In this chapter, I provide detailed account of the methodologies and methods employed in this critical feminist research, beginning with a discussion of my research standpoint. This chapter provides an account of the qualitative data collection through a fictional story completion and semistructured interviews, and an introduction to the participants and data collection process. The data are analyzed by the method of critical discourse analysis to explore how the taken-for-granted social discourse and gender norms shape the subjectivities and identities of Chinese women academics. I also explore the key issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations relevant to this study.

Chapter 5: Performances of Subjectivities: Doctoral Education and Gender Norms

In this chapter, I interpret the gender and academic subjectivities of Chinese women academics throughout their doctoral education. They performed gender subjectivities shaped by gender norms, which are contested with their academic identities. This may have affected some of the women academics' decisions and hence led them to start their academic careers at a lower rank than their men counterparts. Then, I claim that gender subjectivities of the women academics fluctuated before, during and after doctoral education. During doctoral study, the women academics navigated the academic discourse, while before and after doctoral study, the social discourse started to dominate. However, the gender norms were not eliminated but dimmed when the women academics were dominated by academic discourse. Once the social discourse took over, the gender norms of the women academics burgeoned like dry seeds with water.

Chapter 6: Fusion of Identities: Career Development in Chinese Academia

In the second chapter of data analysis, I explore the gender and academic identities in the career development of the Chinese women academics. I identify the underrepresentation of Chinese women academics in domestic universities. I start with the implicit shortage of opportunities in academic development for women academics. I then investigate the disproportionate participation of women and men in leadership positions. After that, I analyze the marginalization of women in domestic academia in terms of the hindrances on

the career path to professor. In the end, I discuss the repetition of names of the women academics in regulatory practices and how their performance is shaped by the contested discourses in being women academics.

Chapter 7: Inscribed Bodies: Work–Life Balance in Motherhood

This chapter presents an analysis of the narratives from the participants to examine their work–life balance in motherhood. I begin with the discursive constraints on Chinese women who are driven by normativity in both social and institutional discourses. Following this discussion, I suggest that their bodies are changeable to meet the different expectations while moving between family and career. I then draw attention to the dual identities they performed in intersected time and spaces in families because of the autonomy of academic work, and how they cross the boundary of bodies to intrude in male-dominated academia and survive.

Chapter 8: Concluding Thoughts: Prospective Future

The final chapter draws together the key argument made across the thesis. It identifies the contribution to knowledge in higher education, theoretical and methodological aspects, and the importance of this knowledge. I answer the research question from the perspective of doctoral education, academic career development, and work–life balance in motherhood in Chinese women academics. Then, I claim the contribution of this thesis to the Chinese and international higher education system as well as the theoretical contribution to the use of Butlerian theory in empirical feminist studies and in the higher education context, followed by the methodological contribution of using a fictional story to elicit the revelations of the participants. I reflect on how I developed my academic identity and what I learned in writing this thesis using Butlerian theory. I discuss the limitations in theory use and participant selection. Lastly, suggestions for further studies are made.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW:
A PORTRAIT OF WOMEN ACADEMICS

Introduction

Women academics have attracted research attention for years. In this chapter, I outline a portrait of women academics in terms of the major findings of their working environment and the experiences of women academics in international and Chinese academia, along with research that has examined women doctoral students to provide a comprehensive consideration of the discussion on women academics. As identified in Chapter 1, I argue that women academics are struggling in the competing discourses in society and institutions, which are embedded in the gendered structure of Chinese universities. This literature draws attention to the complex regulatory practices in academia and illustrates how they shape the performative acts of women academics in career development. The gaps and key problem identified in the prior research build the basis of my research focus. I seek to map the research landscape relating to my research focus from two strands. For one, I focus on the literature on women academics rooted in the Chinese higher educational context. For another, in some sections, I have engaged with a wide range of literature including research from American, British, New Zealand, and Asian settings to provide a detailed consideration of the experiences of women academics.

In the following sections, I give an overview of the main fields of the literature informing this study, penetrating deeply into each area as well as showing how they are related through a series of interconnections. To locate this discussion, I begin this chapter by providing a birds-eye view of women in academia from a developmental perspective to critically understand the male-dominated institutional discourse and neoliberalism. My focus then turns to the studies of both overseas and Chinese women academics to understand their experiences in prior research. Lastly, I review the literature on women doctoral students internationally and locally.

A Birds-Eye View of Women in Academia

Universities are built on a plurality of interests which normalize male values and interests (R. Thomas, 1996). Those norms are constituted by the institutional discourse, and hence shape the subjectivities and identities of both women and men academics. R. Thomas (1996) writes,

> Discourses operate through a range of techniques within the organization, which function to discipline the individual and shape and control behavior in ways which can assert male bias. The concept of culture can be used, therefore, as a short-hand term to cover all these taken-for-granted, "natural," unquestioned attitudes and behavior, values and basic assumptions about the nature and function of the organization and the role of women within it. (p. 143)

Dominant discourses are performed within a frame which shapes how things are understood and how subjects come to act (Henderson & Moreau, 2020). The technique of this operation has been understood as a mundane way (Butler, 2006) with "taken-for-granted, 'natural,' unquestioned attitudes" (R. Thomas, 1996, p. 143). The identity is negotiated and conferred in discourses, which have constituted force, by discursive expression at microlevel (Butler, 1997). This operation of discourses in universities controls and shapes the behavior of academics (R. Thomas, 1996), and hence the analysis of women academics should be contextualized in social and institutional contexts (S. Acker, 2014). Salvi (2013) argues, "the discourse practices of academic institutions, however, come into play to guarantee a set of shared values, a basic consensus on what is to be discussed and how, and a common background of learning" (p. 42). Therefore, women in academia need to be a part of the institutional discourses to "become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (Butler, 2006, p. 22). In prior research, scholars mostly explored the institutional discourse from the aspects of male-dominated culture and neoliberalism, as I review in the next two sections.

Male-Dominated Institutional Discourse

The male-dominated social discourse affects the context of higher education institutions. Shah (2018) claims, "educational institutions are a reflection of respective societies" (p. 310). In the current research, most scholars agree that the discourse of gendered organizational culture is one of the main hindrances for women academics and women doctoral students (e.g., Banchefsky & Park, 2018; Ferreira, 2003; Haake, 2009; Zippel, 2017). The role of women is formed in this constructed, gendered, organizational culture, the reflection of dominate discourse underlying the society with traditional gender roles (R. Thomas, 1996).

Foucault (1981) argues the history of sexuality "must first be written from the viewpoint of a history of discourses" (p. 100). "Discourses contain rules of inclusion, exclusion and classification which govern the content of knowledge" (Morrow, 1995, p. 16). The absence of sexuality in the organizational discourse may have historical roots in male-dominated

discourse (see J. Acker, 1990; Connell, 1987). J. Acker (1990) claims most working organizations are dominated by men, therefore constructing the gender identity of individuals. However, historically, there was little debate about masculine institutional power even when it appeared to be too obvious (J. Acker, 1990). This organizational culture forms a "masculine ethic" of being tough, analytic, and impersonal to make men's traits the standard (Kanter, 1975, p. 43). The gender composition in institutions sets the value of doctoral students (Haake, 2009), and meanwhile affects the attrition rates of academics (Ferreira, 2003).

Robyn Thomas (1996) conducted a research project on the academic performance of women academics in gendered organizational culture. Affecting everyday life in higher education institutions, gendered cultures are deeply entrenched (R. Thomas, 1996). In this situation, women are less likely to resist this disciplinary power (R. Thomas, 1996). This gendered culture in universities sets up barriers for the full participation of women academics (R. Thomas, 1996), so that the gender segregation in universities is more likely to be reinforced. Thomas (1996) argues that some of the research on women academics ignores the social, organizational, and political context in which the institution operates.

The male-dominated discourse in academia usually limits the access and opportunities of women (Banchefsky & Park, 2018; McGuire & Reger, 2003). In academia, gender discrimination is subtle and less direct (Monroe et al., 2008) and thus women are likely to be unaware of it (J. Acker, 1990). Women are seen as *invaders*, out of place and *abnormal* in academia (Sheppard, 1989), which is seen as men's battlefield. Women are therefore unwelcomed in the masculine culture produced by male-dominated institutional discourse (Banchefsky & Park, 2018). Women are "neither the subject nor its Other, but a *difference* from the economy of binary opposition, itself a ruse for a monologic elaboration of the masculine" (emphasis added, Butler, 2006, p. 25). As a *difference*, women academics need to tiptoe in academia to be cautious of not violating male-dominated norms (Zippel, 2017). Zippel (2017) argues that gendered organizations build women academics glass fences in global academia in the way of space and context construction. The power of social culture has implications for how the perception of gender equality is shaped (Shah, 2018). Despite the legislation and policies implemented in institutions to ensure gender equality, there remain "sticking points" in the career development of women academics (Aiston & Fo, 2021, p. 152). These entrenched structural inequalities and unequal access to resources enhance the marginalization of women academics (Hakiem, 2021). Meanwhile, when women

academics in neoliberal universities respond to the change, they are satisfying external requirements by maintaining their feminist commitments in, for example, genuine collaboration and enjoyment (S. Acker & Wagner, 2019).

In this institutional discourse, women academics are more likely to be in disadvantaged positions in their career development. They tend to be assigned a workload which is unrelated to research productivity (Musselin, 2013) or to take up "a more subservient, even victimized, position with the organisational hierarchy" (Mewburn et al., 2014, p. 168), and thus they must sacrifice their research time. This reallocation of time enhances the academically hierarchical structure in institutions. Gender differences can also be seen in how academics use their time in work and life (e.g., Dickson, 2018; Diksha, 2015). Women academics disproportionately take on nonacademic work and academic housework, for example, teaching (Barrett & Barrett, 2011) and service roles (e.g., Macfarlane & Burg, 2019; Misra et al., 2011). It may negatively affect their research productivity, especially for young women academics, and make them less productive than their men counterparts. This marginalization tends to enhance the gendered imbalance in career development in the male-dominated institutional discourse, which often constrains the agency of Chinese women academics.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is merged with the dominant discourses in academia driven by the development of higher education. It governs academics by reshaping their performance with explicit institutional norms. Grant and Elizabeth (2015) write,

> Neoliberalism is but the latest face of governmentality, a comprehensive project of modern power ongoing since the Enlightenment through which individuals, no longer subject to the rule of religion or the arbitrary and spectacular power of sovereigns, are recruited to discipline themselves in relation to a series of more or less explicit norms. (p. 290)

With the more intensive power operation in neoliberal academia, the organizational culture is likely to care less about the academics but rather aim at the stimulation of research outputs. Academic life emphasizes competition – individuals strive for reward in short supply (S. Acker, 2010). Amsler and Motta (2019) describe how the careless culture influences academics and what neoliberalism expects from academics,

> The careless culture of neoliberal university space is thus reproduced in part through a discourse of individualisation, in which relationships are impoverished and

> structural oppressions become defined as problems of individual failure, lack of consideration or selfishness … The ideal neoliberal subject is infinitely flexible, always on call, de-gendered, de-raced, declassed and careless of themselves and others. The onto-epistemological violence enacted against other ways of being is immense; attempts to erase all practices, imaginings and embodiments of becoming academic differently. (pp. 91–92)

Prior research on neoliberalization in universities often demonstrates the loss of autonomy among academics (Amsler & Motta, 2019). The careless context neoliberalism advocates in higher education contradicts the caring work usually culturally associated with women (Lynch, 2010). Neoliberalism expects academics to be deindividualized and fully involved in academic work collectively. This effect of neoliberalism blurs the academic and nonacademic dimensions of life (Amsler & Motta, 2019) and leads academics to combine academic work with other commitments (Manfredi & Holliday, 2004).

Under the implications of neoliberalism in universities, academics and doctoral students are urged to be research productive, and hence this aim brings more tension. S. Acker and Wagner (2019) found that some difficulties in doing research are intensified in neoliberalism, especially when the research is "in a feminist mode that incorporates caring with the welfare of junior staff" (p. 75) for the loss of autonomy in seeking financial support. Doctoral students also experience a challenging and competitive atmosphere with their supervisors as well (S. Acker & Haque, 2015). Consequently, the academy, as a contested site, has created profit-oriented features along with the marginalization of gendered academics (Mayuzumi, 2008). Influenced by the neoliberal academia, Chinese double first-class universities require their academics to make academic achievements with high efficiency. Therefore, gendered career development is attributed to lower research productivity among women academics (Y. Zhu & He, 2016).

Women Academics in International Research

The microinequities for women academics constitute a political organizational culture which expects women academics to "fit in" (Aiston & Fo, 2021) and thus hinders their path to higher levels. In this situation, the acts and performances of women academics are driven by institutional norms (e.g., Aiston & Fo, 2021; Lester, 2011). As Aiston and Fo (2021) argue,

> There is a strong case to be made for taking micro-inequities far more seriously as advocates for greater equity in the academy. As noted earlier, despite legislation,

> policies and strategies—albeit not in all international contexts—there remain "sticking points," whereby women are not reaching the most senior ranks, or leadership positions. (p. 152)

The explicit institutional norms are legislated, while implicit norms are internalized. Those unwritten norms are the "sticking points" for women academics by constantly exposing them to unhealthy workplace stress and limited institutional support (Blithe & Elliott, 2020). The agency of women academics is constrained by their conformity to institutional structures (S. Acker & Wagner, 2019), and calls for women academics to survive in the unequal discourse through their agency (S. Acker, 2010).

The tension between gender and academic subjectivities and identities in women academics concerns researchers. The tension women academics engage with in academia enables women academics to construct self-defeating gendered conflicts in their researchhood (Barnard, 2019). Obstacles to career development are broadly examined in research on women academics in international research (e.g., S. Acker, 2012; Aiston & Jung, 2015; Carvalho & Diogo, 2018; Dickson, 2018). The possibilities for and development of women academics are discussed as well (e.g., Asghar et al., 2018; Webber & Canche, 2018). In this section, the research on women academics in international academia is interpreted to provide a sketch.

Being the Other: Academic Housework

Women academics are identified as "Other" in institutions (e.g., S. Acker, 1980; Kim, 2014). The internalization of the value system of patriarchal society makes women naturalize the oppression and marginalization (see Butler, 2006), which leads to their position of Other. Wager (1998) claims there is some "tension" between "femininity and profession" for academic women who are always categorized as "outsiders" (p. 236). Women academics may find themselves placed "between two almost mutually exclusive stereotypes" (p. 238) with embarrassment: as professionals, they are oddities, and as women, they are unusual academics. These implicit values and expectations shape the academic career opportunities of women and heighten the inequality in higher education (Hakiem, 2021).

Labor divisions in institutions reflect and extend social gender structure by inheriting social hierarchy (J. Wang, 2005). Mattsson (2015) argues that women academics are united as a group that demonstrates a subordinate and heterosexual femininity in institutions and academia. In terms of the historical discourse of caring work, women academics are

expected to take caregiver positions in the institutional hierarchy (Angervall, 2018), which can be explained as a form of social cultural cloning: “a way of upholding social structures and privilege” (Mattsson, 2015, p. 689).

Some researchers agree that women are the ones who enhance the male-dominated institutional discourse. Lester (2011) argues “regulatory powers function as systems that seek to perpetuate gender role performances through social interactions and discourses to define, regulate, and perpetuate gender norms” (p. 164). Bearing gender binary in mind (see Henderson, 2015), institutions tend to allocate more teaching and service work, which are less likely to improve research productivity, to women academics. As a result, this workload allocation is more likely to disadvantage women by leaving them less time for research (Aiston & Jung, 2015). Therefore, women academics tend to seek ways to balance their competing identities as women and academics (Mattsson, 2015). As a result, women academics tend to perform a complicated dance between performing gender culturally and being successful academics (Zippel, 2017) to fulfill the dual expectations.

Scholars argue that women’s repetition of gendered labor division in institutional environments is related more to gender than academic rank. Even though some women academics have been at the top of the academic ladder, they usually downplay the power and authority of those positions because they think they are responsible for more service and administrative work (Monroe et al., 2008). Macfarlane and Burg (2019) also point out that women professors tend to take on more responsibilities associated with their academic roles, while men are more likely to focus on the freedom associated with those roles. With this felt sense of duty to the collective good of institutions as a whole, women academics tend to spend more time on the service role (Misra et al., 2011). In a nutshell, the academic housework, like the service commitment, is mostly taken up by women academics, even if they have already stood at the top of the academic-rank pyramid (Macfarlane & Burg, 2019).

Women academics usually hold high expectations for themselves as being care givers and doing the “labor of love” as a widespread belief (see S. Acker, 1995), making their subjectivities both stable and uncertain at the same time (Angervall, 2018). They obtain a sense of security from teaching and interaction with students, but they also remain unstable when they realize that teaching has limited contribution to their research advancement (Angervall, 2018). Embracing their willingness to meet exterior expectations (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), more allocation of teaching, administrative work, and pastoral care may limit

the research capacity of women academics (Aiston, 2011) and thus enhance their marginalization in institutions. This disproportionate service burdens matter because "they directly threaten the well-being of women in readily observable ways" (Docka-Filipek & Stone, 2021, p. 2172). One of the consequences is the underrepresentation of high-level women academics in the academy (e.g., Meng & Zhang, 2017).

S. Acker and Feuerverger (1996) report that in institutions, women academics think they are doing good when they work excessively hard to take more responsibilities for the nurturing and housekeeping side but feeling bad for their disadvantaged position in the academic reward system. The system, which offers opportunities of tenure, promotion, and merit criteria, emphasizes research production. In this situation, when women academics compare themselves to their men counterparts, they usually have a sense of injustice (S. Acker & Feuerverger, 1996). When the gender gap in research productivity is noted among academics (e.g., Aiston & Jung, 2015), to maintain competitiveness in academia, some women academics tend to both do academic housework and be academically productive through devoting more time to work (S. Acker & Feuerverger, 1996), although it usually loads more burden on them.

Constant Work–Life Conflict

Many researchers tend to attribute this gender gap to family responsibilities. For example, motherhood is one of the major hindrances in the academic path of women (Dickson, 2018). After women doctoral students become academics, they are in intersected roles of scholars, mentors, teachers, community members, mothers, and partners (Motha & Varghese, 2018). The complexity usually gives women academics confusion and tension.

Findings of tension in women academics mainly point to the major conflict: work–life balance. As with other resources, the allocation of time in a family is constrained by gender norms and women are more likely to be the ones to make concessions (e.g., Diksha, 2015). Many academic mothers reflect the negative feeling that the demands of family, childrearing, and academic workload intersect such that they have to work anytime and anywhere, and they never get a reprieve (Dickson, 2018). Shaped by the gender norms of being the main caregiver in the family, women with flexible work times have little division between work and life which provides them opportunities to take care of the family (Hagqvist et al., 2015). Further, women academics' career and biological clocks are ticking simultaneously (Dickson, 2018). Despite the adequate discussion, Aiston and Jung (2015) notably argue that

the emphasis on family-related variables may draw attention away from the institutional structural and practices in academia.

Good work–life balance leads to the career success of women academics, but it also requires their strategies. Cho and Ryu (2016) argue that women who become academics are considered to be successful in career development with strong family support in the first place. To keep work–life balance, women academics seek social support from, for example, spouses and parents (Naz & Khan, 2017). Those women professors in hard applied and urban fields who manage to climb to the top of the academic ladder usually have supportive family members and domestic help to release their time (Ruan, 2021). Compared to men, women have to rely on outside help to ensure their devotion to academic career development, for they are still expected to perform gender. These strategies do not originally deconstruct the gender norms, but provide women academics more possibilities.

Women and Their Academic Geographical Mobility

Academic geographical mobility is tied closely to gender inequality (Bilecen & Mol, 2017). Geographic mobility, which is "a gendered terrain," has been perceived worldwide as critical to academic excellence and career advancement (Leung, 2017, p. 2711). Though overseas research experiences are more likely to get prestige and recognition for women academics, as well as being one of the key factors relating to academic leadership (K. Yu & Wang, 2018, p. 128), academic mobility also increases the cost at a personal and family level (Suarez-Ortega & Risquez, 2014). Thus, women academics have to make adjustments shaped by cultural and gender norms (Tam & Araújo, 2017).

Despite the potential advantages of becoming academic returnees, gender segregation in academic geographic mobility has been shown in prior research when women are less likely to participate (e.g., Bilecen & Mol, 2017; Suarez-Ortega & Risquez, 2014; K. Yu & Wang, 2018). Leung (2017) argues women are more likely to sacrifice their career by leaving the profession or giving up the chances when they are mobilizing for higher levels, since it often causes tension with their partners (S. Acker & Armenti, 2004). For example, women academics in USA and South Korea reported they need to sacrifice their mobility or research productivity for their family and household (Yoon & Kim, 2019). Suarez-Ortega and Risquez (2014) interviewed 10 female and male academics and found different motivations for academic mobility in their narratives: women academics highlighted personal development while men academics were more concerned with professional benefits. Women

academics face personal and family difficulties associated with academic mobility, which makes the compatibility of these intersected roles difficult (Suarez-Ortega & Risquez, 2014). However, women tend not to attribute the reasons to the hindrance of gender. For example, the Muslim women academics interviewed by Shah (2018) attributed the barrier to their academic geographic mobility to religious reasons rather than gender equality issues.

Silence and Resistance

Women academics are governed by the technology of performance-based research audits in neoliberalism and this appraisal is a gaze from academia because it requires academics to be examined and determined according to their academic performance and self-image (R. Thomas, 1996; also see Grant & Elizabeth, 2015). Constructed based on male norms, the meritocracy in institutions is more likely to be fictional than realistic (R. Thomas, 1996). R. Thomas (1996) writes about performance appraisal,

> Traditional discourse on performance appraisal often portrays an image of rationality, objectivity and neutrality. It is suggested that "done properly," appraisal offers the opportunity to review performance, stimulate staff development and thereby motivate the individual. (p. 146)

R. Thomas doubts if the appraisal is "judgmental or developmental" (p. 146) for women academics. Because the aspiration to fit in and to blend in (e.g., Aiston & Fo, 2021; Sheppard, 1989) to the male-dominated academy, women academics make an effort to keep up with their peers in career development. Acker and Armenti (2004) argue despite the conformity or resistance of women academics respond to the institutional discourse, they tend to empower themselves through harder work and reduction of sleeping time.

Women academics are mostly silent about this governance. Aiston and Fo (2021) explain the underrepresentation of women academics in the senior academic ranks and leadership positions in higher education by presenting the silence or silencing of them. Though women academics may resist to some of the institutional policies, their emotions of "anger, fear and frustration" are usually absent to form "a political solidarity as women" (Grant & Elizabeth, 2015, p. 298). They "have failed to *collectively* oppose neoliberalism's assault on their working live" in research audits (Grant & Elizabeth, 2015, p. 297). The silence of women academics is considered a strategic action in the communication to challenge gender constraints in the institutions, and those gender constraints also produce silence (Aiston & Fo, 2021). Moreover, silence usually results in exclusion of self-manifestation in women academics and it often leads to their invisibility in the institutions (Aiston & Fo, 2021). This

performance is likely to have originated from the expectation of women being subordinate in the social discourse. Women academics are shaped by those gender norms through showing little, or not showing, resistance to these gender norms in academia (e.g., Aiston & Fo, 2021; Grant & Elizabeth, 2015).

Possibilities for Being Academics

Other than the hindrances of being women in academia, being academics gives possibilities to women in their career development and personal lives. In this section, I review the main literature on the possibilities for women academics from the aspects of individual academic performance, family role models and institutional policies.

Webber and Canche (2018) claim gender differences in contemporary early-career academics are "disappearing or are yet to be revealed in the first decade" in the US (p. 924) after gaining doctorates, though women's salaries are lower than men colleagues with a rising gap over the decade. In authorship, the proportion of women first and respective authors has shown an upward trend in journal publications in recent decades (Asghar et al., 2018). Although women authors are still underrepresented, the average citation of their work by other author is higher than men's (Asghar et al., 2018).

In the positive impact for children, as early as more than 30 years ago, it was found that women academics with preschool and 5–13-year-old children showed more productivity, with the explanation that "the strong and positive effect of children at younger ages may reflect life-cycle variables and decisions—the time of childrearing to correspond with other events supporting productivity in publications" (Fox & Faver, 1985, p. 545). Today, the multiple roles of the mother prove to set a role model for children, especially for girls, and having children is usually a positive indication of the capability and flexibility of their mothers for the autonomy of academic positions (Dickson, 2018).

Supportive policies and suggested solutions are emerging for women academics' development in many countries to improve their experience. German educational and academic institutions set up women's scholarships and research programs for women academics to apply for, to increase the ratio of women in higher level positions (Meng & Zhang, 2017). To reduce the negative effects of "boys' clubs" and "core groups," American women academics have created sister clubs and advocate for women directors (Yuan, 2017). Isgro and Castañeda (2015) suggest that "a culture of care" for academics and students who are mothers, adjustable workplace norms and more needed services and facilities, like a

"mothers comfort zone," would massively contribute to the group. For universities as well as higher education governing bodies, one solution to help establish a work–life balance for academics is to implement formal family-friendly policies and programs for employees (X. Ren & Caudle, 2016).

Understanding Chinese Women Academics

As in international academia, Chinese women academics, who are challenged by gender norms when they try to fulfill academic expectations, face the tension between their gender and academic subjectivities and identities. The absence and silence of Chinese women academics is rooted in the gendered structure in Chinese universities. In retrospect, every step of women's higher education development closely relates to social change in gender values (see Shah, 2018). The Chinese higher education context is marked by gender norms, which have been the barrier to career advancement for women academics (J. Zhao & Jones, 2017). The privileged masculinity in the Chinese higher education context has constructed the discursive field of gender norms (J. Zhao & Jones, 2017). Notably, the disadvantaged position of women academics has been legitimatized and naturalized (X. Yu et al., 2012; also see McNay, 1992). Men academics are more likely to perceive that women academics are less competitive, and women academics tend to actively withdraw from opportunities in academic career development (X. Yu et al., 2012). In accordance with this, Chinese women are likely to show less ambition based on the different expectations of men and women in society (Larsson & Alvinius, 2020).

Despite rapid developments Chinese universities, the discursive structure in academia is still male-dominated (X. Yu et al., 2012). For example, in the research field of education, the research of women academics is less recognized, with distinctly lower citations than their men counterparts, and the gap widens with the escalation of research level (X. Yu et al., 2012). In their research interests, women academics tend to focus on empirical methodologies; however, compared to the macroperspective studies represented by grand narration (J. Li & Huang, 2021), which are broadly conducted by men, these microresearch perspectives are more likely to be implicitly underrated in academia (X. Yu et al., 2012). Moreover, to achieve quantity of research production, some Chinese universities may value scientific disciplines more than humanities and social scientific disciplines for the higher research productivity in the former, which could lead to the dissatisfaction of women academics (W. Cai & Zhao, 2021), and hence it may lead to them having less control of

discursive power in academia (K. Fu, 2010). This disadvantage would result in the lack of academic resources and opportunities, which negatively affects their academic career development, and enhances the domination of academic authority and prestige of men academics (K. Fu, 2010).

On the contrary, some researchers argue, even though Chinese women academics may be oppressed by the highly demanding work in academia, admittedly, the high-level entry qualification could positively narrow the gender gap. Chinese women academics have experienced a process of gaining power through the historical development of Chinese higher education (H. Wang, 2021). For example, G. Yan and Shang (2018) claim that gender is no longer been a barrier for career development as study level elevates, women academics are able to enter academia by receiving the same long-term professional academic training as men. Regardless of this, the disproportion of senior-level women academics in Chinese universities shows that higher education institutions are still masculine organizations.

Gender Segregation in Chinese Academia

After years of endeavor, Chinese women academics are treated equally to men in Chinese universities *in policies*. Although women academics are appointed at almost the same rate as men, they are less likely to gain higher academic ranks than their men colleagues, with the percentage of women academics declining as academic ranks ascend.

This gender segregation at senior levels is a product of the Chinese social system and traditional culture (Y. Li & Wang, 2021). Women academics grow up with the socialization of traditional gender roles, so that they have been inscribed by the social discourse (K. Fu, 2010). As a result, although Chinese women have high workforce participation, they face increasingly high career pressure in the "gender-segregated" labor market, which reduces the possibilities of career success for women (Y. Li & Wang, 2021). For example, young women academics usually embrace high career aspirations (Q. Zhou & Wang, 2020). However, in Chinese universities, the ratio of women professors and doctoral supervisors is quite low, which leads to a lack of women role models and mentors for young women academics (Cheng, 2010).

Research attributes the gender segregation in senior academic ranks to the lower research productivity of Chinese women academics compared to their men counterparts (e.g., M. Fu & Li, 2021; Y. Zhu & He, 2016). Studies mostly focus on research publications, which have been become vital to receiving acceptance and recognition in the academic community (C.

Li, et al., 2019) in two respects. On the one hand, women are usually in less advantaged positions than their men counterparts for participating in social networks, for example, international collaboration (Zippel, 2017, p. 74). Y. Zhu and He (2016) argue that Chinese women academics' smaller, lower quality social networks are a significant reason for their lower research productivity, because it is widely admitted that being a part of dominant academic circle is essential for future academic career development. In this situation, Chinese women academics are less likely to be involved in academia than men academics, and the lower connection with industry and government also limits those women academics from gaining research resources (Y. Zhu & He, 2016). On the other hand, Chinese women academics devote less time to research work (K. Fu, 2010; Y. Zhu & He, 2014). The effect of domestic imbalanced housework allocation has extended to career development and exacerbated the gender inequality in the public sphere (Y. Zhu & He, 2014). With the dual responsibilities of work and family, women academics are under higher pressure than men (M. Fu & Li, 2021). In the meantime, for the traditional gender roles in Chinese family, as introduced in Chapter 1, men, the breadwinners, appear to be more productive because they need to support their families (M. Fu & Li, 2021). Another possible reason is, as with women academics in international academia, Chinese women academics are inclined to take more teaching responsibilities and service work, which occupies more time but contributes little to their academic performance (Y. Zhu & He, 2014).

Work–Life Balance in Motherhood

The international metaphor of the *leaky pipeline*[15] also applies to women academics in Chinese academia. The academic system is operated on the presumption that men are the workers (X. Yu et al., 2012). This working system assumes the employees have no other social responsibility than working, no limitation in working hours and no interruption in career development (J. Acker, 1990), which obviously does not fit women academics (X. Yu et al., 2012). Despite their academic career, Chinese women academics are expected to take more family responsibilities, to be the main caregivers to children and to accept the disproportional allocation of family affairs as part of their gender role and social expectations (e.g., B. Liu, 2015; J. Zhu, 2017). It contradicts the ideal neoliberal working system demonstrating the careless culture (e.g., Amsler & Motta, 2019) and may cause dissatisfaction of the authorities.

[15] This refers to the attrition of women academics in academia (e.g., Marschke et al., 2007; Todd et al., 2008).

The conflicting roles of Chinese women academics require them to respond to different requirements (Suarez-Ortega & Risquez, 2014). Ren and Caudle (2016) describe the difference in work–life balance between British and Chinese women academics as walking on a tightrope from behavioral, interpersonal, and intrapersonal perspectives. In China, women academics' social and family roles are separated or even contested, which constrain them by dual expectations (X. Yu et al., 2012). Chinese men academics are encouraged to devote themselves to work, whereas Chinese women academics' career development is more likely to be influenced by family obligations, and thus the gender gap may widen over the years (H. Yang, 2018). X. Yu and colleagues (2012) conclude that the marginalization of women academics occurs in three ways: visible (away from the academic and administration core group), invisible (gender blindness, gender preference) and reversed marginalization (the social stereotypes of well-behaved wife and mother, the bias against successful women).

Generally, women academics face their career development from a conciliatory perception by making an effort to balance work and family, and they tend to emphasize the latter (Lavie-Martinez, 2011). K. Fu (2010) echoes that women academics participate in social affairs as social individuals, while they usually consciously and unconsciously turn to family affairs and overlook their career development. However, their longing for career development and achievement is contradictory to the traditional expectations of family roles (K. Fu, 2010). Since the implementation of the "one-child policy" [16] in 1980, Chinese society has developed a children-centered culture, and mothers are often the main caregivers (F. Liu, 2019). Yi (2020) finds that the higher the level education a woman has received, the more likely she will be to adjust her life plan for her children's education. However, "academic careers are extremely family-unfriendly" (Gu, 2012, p. 122). A few women academics reported that they are busy with the intersection of family chores, childrearing, and academic work anytime, anywhere (Y. Shen, 2010). Compared to men academics, Chinese women academics are more likely to sacrifice great job opportunities for family issues, and thus reduce time and energy on working (Y. Zhu & He, 2014).

The finding of Luo and Ren (2011) shows that, in contemporary society, Chinese women academics devote themselves to the work for the sense of self-accomplishment rather than for economic reasons. Why are those women willing to take disproportionate family

[16] A birth control policy implemented in China from 1980 to 2015. It means one couple can only have one child.

responsibilities? Though women who have received high-level education are less likely to be negatively affected by economic issues in their work–life balance, they perform gender roles in their family mainly to maintain their relationship with their partner (Luo & Ren, 2011). Luo and Ren argue that though prior literature on the work–life balance in women doctorate holders shows they do not walk away from gender roles, with the development of society and the self-awareness of women, these roles are continuously updated and reconstructed, and traditional cultural beliefs have been shaken.

In contrast, some domestic scholars point out that marriage and childrearing does not negatively influence the productivity of Chinese women academics, for the academic achievement of mother academics is not lower than childless women academics (e.g., Y. Zhu & He, 2014). Y. Zhu and He (2014) argue that marriage and childrearing do not necessarily negatively influence the working and research time of women academics, but do influence their daily time allocation. However, this view has be challenged by other scholars, for the reduction of periodic research productivity throughout childbirth is significant. In academic career development, the number of journal article publications declines significantly at the age of childbearing among women academics (X. Yu et al., 2012). Childbirth has been proved to be the most obvious factor to negatively affect the career development of women (Zhuang, 2020). In this argument, one of the possible explanations could be that Chinese women academics take some strategies to maintain the quantity of academic publications during childbirth by making extra efforts to reduce this negative effect on their career development (see Chapter 7).

Road Less Traveled: Women and Doctoral Study

Women doctoral students, as prospective women academics, start to face the tension between gender and academic subjectivities from the start of their doctoral study. Along with the expansion of Chinese higher education, the recruitment of the Chinese doctoral students has expanded rapidly. In 2020, 466,549 domestic doctoral students are studying in campus, were enrolled, 41.87% of whom were women (Ministry of Education, 2021). However, the percentage of women doctoral students is disproportionately smaller than women students in bachelor and master's studies. The possible explanation provided by the Ministry of Education (2018a) is the overlapping time of women's ideal age of childbearing and their doctoral education reduces the motivation of women applicants. Therefore, Chinese women doctoral students begin to experience conflicting roles in the social and intuitional discourses.

In this section, I firstly examine the literature of women doctoral students in non-Chinese countries in brief. Because this research aims to explore if there are any differences between women academics with domestic and overseas doctorates, I then review the research on Chinese women doctoral students from the perspective of gendered constraints in Chinese society, followed by the research on Chinese doctoral students who study overseas as well as those who return to Chinese academia after receiving international doctorates.

Women Doctoral Students in Non-Chinese Countries

The experiences of women doctoral students in countries outside China has been addressed by researchers. In this section, I review the literature on women doctoral students in international academia and their Othering roles and disadvantages they usually face after graduation, from a gendered perspective.

Women doctoral students may feel Othered as women in a professional field (S. Acker & Armenti, 2004; Mansfield et al., 2010). Attrition is more common with women doctoral students for the "challenges they experience which men do not necessarily experience" (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014, p. 2). They are often more challenged to meet academic requirements without sufficient support from their colleagues, spouses, and family members (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014). Because women doctoral students juxtapose two roles as a student/researcher and a mother and/or wife, or as a student/researcher and a professional worker (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014), they are expected to meet these dual expectations in doctoral study by switching roles between doctoral student and wife and mother (L. Brown & Watson, 2010). Managing demands of these two roles always sparks more intensive feelings for women doctoral students, and requires significant emotional labor (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013). The failure to handle the two contesting roles well usually provokes feelings of guilt (L. Brown, 2008). Because society values the sexuality and domesticity of women, but not their professional identity (Cronshaw, 2017), women doctoral students are likely to face more tension, frustration, and dissatisfaction with stress in their study (Carter et al., 2013). Women doctoral students also report they are more concerned about future work–life balance before graduation than men and they can hardly identify with the women academics in their faculties who are not mothers (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006).

Further, researchers focus on the academic career development of women doctoral students after graduation. Men tend to continue with postdoctoral positions or join nonacademic institutions, while women prefer stable academic jobs (S. Lin & Chiu, 2016). The Othering

of women leads to the lack of strong professional networks and job preparation (Mansfield et al., 2010). Lindahl et al. (2021) identify women doctoral students underperform compared to their men counterparts, as the latter usually have more collaborative opportunities. Mansfield et al. (2010) also find that the institutional culture, family responsibilities, and issues in self-identity formation are the main constraints for female doctoral students in their future academic career.

Women Doctoral Students in Chinese Doctoral Education and Their Gender Constraints

There is a small body of Chinese research on graduate education, especially doctoral education, which has grown in the past decade. Current research on Chinese women doctoral students is basically domestic publications in quantitative research (e.g., L. Jin & Liu, 2011; L. Jin et al., 2018; M. Ma et al., 2014; Y. Ma, 2009). Most of the research aims at showing the overall developing trend and the correlation of affecting factors of students based on statistics in recent years. In-depth investigation is limited in Chinese studies in doctoral education but it is emerging in recent years (e.g., G. Yan & Shang, 2018; C. Zhou & Zhang, 2020). The domestic studies of doctoral education mainly pay attention to doctoral students' enrollment (e.g., Niu & Zhou, 2021; C. Wang et al., 2021), academic study in doctoral education (e.g., C. Li et al., 2019, 2020; T. Ma, 2011), doctoral students' employment (e.g., L. Jin & Liu, 2011; L. Jin et al., 2018; M. Ma et al., 2014; Y. Ma, 2009). Women doctoral students also draw the attention of domestic researchers (e.g., C. Li & Chen, 2021; T. Li, 2008; Luo & Ren, 2011). Though research about Chinese doctoral students has emerged since 2010, few studies specifically focus on Chinese women international doctoral students and their career development in both international and Chinese academia. Moreover, few studies link doctoral education and academic career development, despite the close relation between them. In the past decade, Chinese women doctoral students have been increasingly investigated by domestic scholars, with most of the research about the pressure and limitations of academic career development, and their difficulty satisfying social expectations. I review the prior research on Chinese women academics from the perspective of gender roles, stereotyped social expectations, and gendered career aspirations as follows.

A large proportion of research on Chinese women doctoral students or doctorate holders specifically examines family and marriage (e.g., Luo & Ren, 2011; Y. Shen, 2010; H. Tian et al., 2020; L. Wu & Liu, 2019) and gender images (e.g., L. Sun, 2017; Y. Yang, 2011). This body of research mainly explores the obstacles of marriage and work–life balance in Chinese patriarchal society and the negative or contradictory image of women doctoral students in

Chinese social media and literary work, mainly caused by the competing expectations for women and doctoral students, and the hierarchical structure under Chinese male-dominated social discourse (e.g., Niu & Zhou, 2021; C. Zhou & Zhang, 2020). This research focus shows that women doctoral students' gender roles are paid close attention, while this trend can hardly be seen for men doctoral students. Therefore, Chinese women doctoral students are often confronted with more tension for their intersected identities, which may enhance their stress.

Academic passion is identified as a controversial motive in Chinese women doctoral students along with their increasing participation. G. Yan and Shang (2021) claim that women doctoral students embrace more academic passion than men doctoral students, and the latter are more likely to be driven by exterior reasons, for example, economic benefits and the pursuit of a higher educational degree. The finding is in line with their earlier research finding that women doctoral students are mostly motivated to pursue doctoral education by a sense of accomplishment (G. Yan & Shang, 2018). In contrast, Y. Ma (2009) argues that women doctoral students are less likely to pursue doctorates for their research passion, but more for the expectations of teachers and parents. These different findings may be attributed to the higher participation of women in doctoral education in the past decade.

Chinese women doctoral students are also driven by other reasons while pursuing the degree. C. Li et al. (2019) argue that Chinese women doctoral students are more likely to see doctorates as an occupational requirement, rather than lifetime professional development, than men, for their academic enthusiasm is discouraged by social culture. Y. Ma (2009) claims some Chinese women academics seek doctorates because of the expectation of parents and teachers. The determination and persistence they employ during doctoral study are largely encouraged by the supportive attitude of their parents (G. Yan & Shang, 2018). C. Zhou and Zhang (2020) also claim outstanding academic performances of some women students before doctoral education builds their confidence to help with their academic development in doctoral study. Dai et al. (2021) argue that, for the Chinese women doctoral students who have been academics but still seek doctorates, the pressure and encouragement from institutions, and family support, are the major reasons for them to undertake doctoral education.

The prospective academic development of Chinese women doctoral students is hindered by stereotyped social expectations (C. Zhou & Zhang, 2020). Chinese women graduate students

are hindered by family responsibilities and the implicit male preference on their way to doctoral education (Niu & Zhou, 2021). Even though they go through those obstacles, their doctoral journey is still bumpy. H. Sun and Zhang (2020) identify that Chinese women doctoral students face academic and nonacademic gender pressure in coordinating thesis and publications; keeping balance in work, study, and family; and difficulties in personal communications with significant others. The pressure of Chinese women doctoral students is mainly related to academic performance, marital issues, employment, and biased social stereotypes (H. Sun & Zhang, 2020). Among surveyed Chinese part-time doctoral students, 30.5% of women reported doctoral study as involving much devotion, little productivity, and tiredness, while only 20.2% of men reported the same feelings (Zheng et al., 2004). A quantitative research project conducted among Chinese doctoral students shows that research productivity of women doctoral students is significantly lower than men and the probability of late graduation is 18.48% higher than for men (C. Li & Chen, 2021). Chinese women doctoral students also report less confidence about future employment (H. Sun & Zhang, 2020) and, on average, they take longer to obtain their first work opportunity (L. Jin & Liu, 2011).

Chinese women doctoral students usually embrace gendered academic career aspirations. Statistically, despite the identified disadvantages for women doctoral students, their job placement ratio, number of job offers received, starting salary, and job satisfaction do not show gender differences (L. Jin & Liu, 2011). M. Ma et al. (2014) echo this finding and claim there is little gender difference in the academic job market. However, after graduation, a disproportionately large number of women doctoral students choose domestic postdoctoral opportunities or job opportunities in familiar cities, which shows women academics tend to choose less challenging but more stable work opportunities (M. Ma et al., 2014). This finding is supported by a 10-year study of doctoral graduates in Tsinghua University, showing that whereas the number of women doctoral students starting academic careers in Chinese leading universities appears to be 10% less than men, the number of women doctoral students starting an academic career in nonleading universities is about 5% more than men (L. Jin et al., 2018). Among Chinese doctoral students who have high research capacity, men generally have much stronger aspirations for academic achievement than women (Y. Ma, 2009). The strategy of women doctoral students in job seeking limits their mobility and the willingness to be challenged in employment, thus may negatively interfere

with the employment quality of this group, which may limit the future academic career development of women doctoral students when they become academics.

Chinese Students in Overseas Doctoral Education

Chinese international doctoral students face enticing and frightening experiences in foreign countries, with new possibilities and hindrances (e.g., Elliot & Kobayashi, 2019; Elliot et al., 2016), and thus they develop a series of coping strategies to form their identity in English cultural educational contexts (L. Ye & Edwards, 2015). According to prior research, Chinese doctoral students' motivations for studying abroad vary, but the experiences all form a vital role in their "life trajectory of self-actualization" (L. Ye, 2018, p. 226). The decisions to study abroad for doctorates are shaped by their "goal of self-realization" (L. Ye, 2018, p. 226). Ding (2016) sketched the motivation of Chinese international doctoral students as dynamic, because the decision to pursue an overseas degree "results from the interaction" of "contextual, institutional and individual" forces (p. 121). Huang (2021) argues that Chinese students undertaking overseas doctoral education are increasingly motivated by the domination of Anglophone academic publications in the neoliberal academia. However, no matter what students' motivations are, popular views of Chinese students as "passive, obedient and lacking in autonomy" (Goode, 2007, p. 593) still prevail, which closely relates to the difficulties or stereotypes in learning and intercultural supervision (also see Ding, 2016). With a Chinese educational background, they may have to transfer from being passive learners to thinking critically (L. Xu & Grant, 2017).

International Chinese doctoral students are doing the highest educational degree in new countries, mostly in a culture differentiated from their homeland. Researchers pay close attention to the cultural and academic adaptation of Chinese international doctoral students to the different dominant social and academic discourses in the host countries by investigating the students' academic identity formation (e.g., Huang, 2021; L. Xu & Grant, 2017). Current research mainly explores academic writing and research publications in their academic identity formation. Huang (2021) argues that "writing dominates doctoral study" (p. 753). The academic identity of Chinese international doctoral students is produced in the process of writing their doctoral thesis (L. Xu & Hu, 2020) and receiving feedback during thesis revision (L. Xu et al., 2020). The Chinese culture inherited by doctoral students is highlighted and reshaped by thesis writing and interaction with supervisors in intercultural supervision (L. Xu et al., 2020). Those who write in English as a second language shift the domestic way of academic writing to the Western way, which "temporarily suspended" their

original learning experience (Huang, 2021, p. 757). By this means, Chinese international doctoral students constantly revise and evolve their individual academic habitus (Huang, 2021). Furthermore, academic publications enable Chinese international doctoral students to be visible in international academia, and hence helps form their academic identity (Huang, 2021). Driven by neoliberal academia, Chinese international doctoral students also aim at international publication writing for future academic career development. They also seek more international academic networks for co-author opportunities to cope with the "intensifying pressures of international productivity and performativity in the Chinese academy" (Huang, 2021, p. 760).

Becoming Academic Returnees in Chinese Universities

Chinese academic returnees refer to those who study abroad for doctorates or have periodical overseas doctoral study and research experiences and then start their academic career in the Chinese academy (e.g., X. Xu, 2009; D. Zhang & Yuan, 2014). More of the returnees have doctorates from prestigious overseas universities with international academic training (J. Zhu, 2017). The transnational academic working experience is likely to be beneficial for their academic career development (e.g., Leung, 2017), but, at the same time, it requires them to adjust to dual academic discourses (e.g., Ai, 2019; Y. Wang & Ye, 2020). In domestic research, academic returnees are a special group which is singled out, and compared to doctorate holders graduating from domestic universities in research productivity (Y. Chen et al., 2015; X. Ye & Liang, 2019), doctoral supervision (C. Li et al., 2019), professional roles (Min, 2019), ideological performances (Y. Li, 2016) and so forth.

In Chinese higher education development, universities aim to attract more returnees (J. Zhu & Wang, 2019) with the presumption that returnees will have higher research productivity to help universities improve their academic development (X. Ye & Liang, 2019). Some Chinese universities claim overseas study experiences are preferred (X. Ye & Liang, 2019), and provide higher salaries, research funding, residence, and higher academic ranks to attract returnees (Pu, 2019). In Pu's (2019) interviews with 20 university presidents, research capacity, English language proficiency and creativity are reported as the advantages of returnees. Nevertheless, in research productivity, only academic returnees in humanities and social science disciplines show advantages in having international publications (Min, 2019).

Scholars also report some obstacles for Chinese academic returnees in domestic academia, for example, the lack of domestic social network, the limited social connection with their

current colleagues (Pu, 2019), less generous payment (Y. Li & Zhu, 2020), poor academic evaluation, and the limited social network (Y. Chen et al., 2015; Pu, 2019). Therefore, compared with domestic doctorate holders, returnees are less likely to have domestic publications (J. Zhu, 2017) or to receive national research funding (Pu, 2019; M. Zhou et al., 2019) because they are less familiar with domestic academic norms, which are considered as the two of the major criteria in academic evaluation in domestic universities. However, Min (2019) draws the conclusion that universities still implement advantageous policies for academic returnees in recruitment, which means the disadvantages for returnees are limited.

Though academic mobility is more likely to be an advantage for career development in academia (Nikunen & Lempiäinen, 2020), for the Chinese returnees, going back to their homeland for further career development is a double-edged sword with both pains and gains (Ai, 2019). As a returnee, Ai (2019) analyzes his own experiences with struggling to reconstruct his academic identity in a domestic university, and dreaming about living in an imaginary academic environment to eliminate the reverse cultural shock. This experience of Ai's is not rare among Chinese academic returnees in the early-career stages, who tend to be confronted with temporal challenges of not being able to get along with the domestic academic culture (Y. Wang & Ye, 2020). For example, some of the returnees have to adjust their aspirations to domestic academia to digest the inability to adapt, while some show disagreement with the institutional academic evaluation system (D. Zhang & Yuan, 2014). Having publications in international journals is considered the technique to succeed as Chinese academic returnees (Ai & Wang, 2017; also see D. Zhang & Yuan, 2014). However, their research autonomy and self-achievement shows a downward trend as the working pressure increases after being recruited (Y. Li & Zhu, 2020). The advantages of being academic returnees usually peak in the early academic career and fade over time (R. Tian et al., 2013). In contrast, some scholars argue, the early academic career could be the hardest time for the returnees because of the different research culture and academic working styles (e.g., D. Zhang & Yuan, 2014; J. Zhu, 2017).

Current domestic and international research mainly focuses on different perspectives of Chinese academic returnees. Domestic research tends to study academic returnees from institutional policy makers (e.g., Pu, 2019), administrators (e.g., J. Zhu & Wang, 2019), and specific standards of academic evaluation (e.g., Min, 2019); while international research is more likely to concern the change of personal identities (e.g., Ai, 2019), the challenges in academic work (e.g., Y. Wang & Ye, 2020) and the strategies to be a part of the working

environment (e.g., B. Wang, 2019). Moreover, the comparison of academic returnees and local academics has come to attention in the last 5 years due to the development of Chinese doctoral education and the narrowing gap with the world elite universities (M. Fu & Li, 2021). The overarching review shows that the Chinese academic returnees are valued by the Chinese universities because of the academic advantages in international education, and hence the universities implement policies to attract returnees with the expectation that they can bring benefits to the current academic ecology (Pu, 2019). In the meantime, the academic returnees are undergoing the transition from students to teachers as well as the reverse cultural shock in the dominant academia (J. Zhu, 2017). Chinese scholars call for more supportive policies and measures to help academic returnees bring advantages while fitting into the domestic academy (e.g., D. Zhang & Yuan, 2014; J. Zhu, 2017).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature about the institutional culture, women academics, and women doctoral students in international and domestic academia. Through this review, I aimed to reveal the scholarly interest in the Chinese women academics within the context of the present Chinese higher education development. I have drawn attention to the gendered structure in universities as a space that is increasingly focused on by policymakers and scholars given the concerns about academic development. In addition, a large body of international research has been examined which identifies the experiences of women academics, especially in the aspects of work–life balance and career development, and the poststructural feminist empirical study on women academics. The review has also identified the burgeoning interest in the experiences of the Chinese women doctoral students, Chinese international doctoral students, and academic returnees. In this way, this chapter has demonstrated the need for further empirical research with a theoretical orientation which this thesis seeks to address through its close attention to the lived experience of Chinese women academics. In the next chapter, I introduce the theoretical considerations of Butlerian theory, particularly gender performativity theory, employed in this research; the theoretical concepts used in the data analysis chapters; and the existing research on or using Butlerian theory in Chinese academia.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POSTSTRUCTURALIST FEMINISM, JUDITH BUTLER, AND PERFORMATIVITY

> Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically *incredible.* (Butler, 2006, p. 193)

Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to demonstrate the theoretical framework with an overarching poststructural feminist lens. I explain the theoretical location of this research and provide an overview of gender performativity theory from Judith Butler. Judith Butler proposed gender performativity theory to explain how sex and gender are constructed in the operation of power relations, constructed by social discourse. Gender performativity theory is developed from the theories of Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, Monique Wittig, and some other poststructuralists and feminists. Further, I explain some core theoretical concepts based on gender performativity theory to underpin my later data analysis. Lastly, I introduce literature from Chinese scholars that situates Butlerian theory in the Chinese context with a particular focus on gender performativity theory.

Conducting gender performativity theory in the Chinese higher education context is a comparatively new attempt based on my personal experiences. When I transferred from being a student to being staff, as well as an academic, in a Chinese university after receiving my master's degree, my identities were transferred along with the "environment" I was in. I draw attention on this transformation to seek theoretical justification. Is the formation of identities really rooted in myself or was it influenced by the environment? If this change, at least, partially starts in me, what made it happen and how does this process work? How can I develop different selves with limited effort, mostly unconsciously? I raise similar questions about the experiences of other women academics. In my reading of the theories for this research, I have sought the answers in gender performativity theory. To explain the lived experiences of the Chinese women academics, it is key to interpret the discourses they are in and how the discourses interact with them as subjects. Chinese women academics are confronted by contested discourses from the institutions and society. Gender performativity

theory provides a means to conceptualize the formation of the subjectivities and identities of these Chinese women academics.

Bearing this complexity in mind, I have chosen to employ poststructural feminism, particularly gender performativity theory, as the theoretical framing of this project. Gender performativity theory provides a generous theoretical location to work from, indicating the intersectionality of the joint force of subjectivity and identity formation of women academics in discourses.

Furthermore, I position my work in this space because poststructural feminism is compatible with my research methodology and methods in qualitative perspective. On the one hand, poststructural feminism emphasizes the articulation of women, which is consistent with the qualitative orientations of feminist narrative inquiry. On the other hand, the design of research methods of a fictional story completion and semistructured interviews are discursively presented as a repetition of performative acts. To place the participants in these discursive fields helps interpret how their subjectivities and identities are shaped and reconstructed.

Lastly, poststructural feminism goes along with the critical discourse analysis as the data analysis method to explore the power relations in social and institutional discourses. Through the critical lens, the experiences of Chinese women academics in the discursively constructed Chinese higher education context has been reshaped.

In this chapter, I explore poststructural feminism and conceptualize subjectivity and identity in poststructuralism, followed by the theoretical considerations of Butlerian theory, particularly gender performativity theory, employed in this research. I then explain the theoretical concepts used in the data analysis chapters. In the end, I review the existing research on or using Butlerian theory in Chinese academia.

Poststructural Feminism

The word *feminism* came from the French word *feminisme* in the first women's political club founded in France in the 18th century (Shan, 2015). Until the early 1970s, the common division of feminist theory development was liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism, laying the groundwork for further theoretical development (Saulnier, 1996, p. 2). In the 1970s, feminism encountered postmodernism, which produced an enrichment of feminist research methodology (Saulnier, 1996, p. 5). It is noteworthy that

postmodern feminism is an umbrella category as well as an epistemological position with a subcategory: poststructural feminism (Leavy, 2007, p. 87). Poststructural feminism takes language and discourse as not only a system for description and reflection of underlying reality but also for the constitution of objects (Malson, 1998, p. 26). Discourses and regulatory practices are the main focus of discursive analysis (Davies & Gannon, 2004). It is not only the language that is discursively constituted, but also the material body (Davies, 2006). Poststructural feminism is open to changes in culture and individuals, and its subject is theorized as fluid, fragmented and with fewer boundaries. The meanings discursively attributed to bodies are never static but rather in a constant site of struggle in which meanings can change (Weedon, 2004). The subject coexists with the context that it is in, and the context is also constituted by the subject. Contradictions are also embraced by the theory. Poststructural feminism tends to manifest the fictiveness of the material, which is represented by the bodies. The changeability of discourse reflects the vulnerability and fluidity of its construction, but also enables the continuous reconstruction, for poststructuralism seeks to find the possibilities for existence within the social world that we live in by transcending "the individual/social divide" (Davies & Gannon, 2004). On this basis, poststructural feminism aims at the deconstruction of gender relations and the means of gender demonstration by making, in particular, the binary gender framework visible, analyzable and revisable (Davies & Gannon, 2004). All thoughts basically mediated by power relations are constituted by culture and history, as Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) argue; "the relationship between concept and the object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by social relations of capitalist production and consumption" (p. 304).

Poststructural feminism, as the overarching theoretical framework, is employed in this research to explore the world constructed in Chinese women academics' accounts. Compared to the limited amount of domestic Chinese empirical research about women academics, which prefers socialist and Marxist feminism, poststructural feminism is more likely to be conducted in international empirical studies (see Chapter 2). My participants, the women academics, are living in contextualized communities, and are both independent as researchers and dependent as members of the communities. Further, they are playing other roles outside of work. The Butlerian theory of gender performativity is used in the analysis of contextualized "micropolitics of power" (Leavy, 2007, p. 89).

Conceptualizing Subjectivity and Identity in Poststructuralism

In poststructural feminist perspectives, subjectivity and identity are constructed in discourses. For Foucault (1982), in culture, human beings are made subjects. The contexts, or culture, which constitute those subjects are constructed in discourses by the same means. In this process of constitution, the subjects are subject to the regulatory power presented by discursive regimes (Foucault, 1982). Foucault (1982) emphasizes this as "subject to someone else by control and dependence" (p.781). He also claims that subject is tied to one's own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge (Foucault, 1982). Thus, Butler (1992) argues, "subject is neither a ground nor a product, but the permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process" (p. 13). She emphasizes that, in a poststructural feminist perspective, the subject of gender contains "permanent possibilities" (p. 13) in the discursive construction. Under the constraints of regulatory power, subjects are dynamically shaped and navigated. The regulations coexist with the possibilities. Therefore, the subjectivity discussed in poststructuralism might be named "situated subjectivity": "one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act" (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 17).

In the argument from Butler and Foucault, the extent of autonomy conflicts with concept of subject. "In humanist thought the subject and subjectivity are assumed to be unified and rational and the subject is governed by reason and free will, which give it agency" (Weedon, 2004, p. 8). For Weedon (2004), subjectivity consists of an individual's conscious and unconscious sense of self, emotions, and desires. In poststructuralism, language constitutes subjectivity rather than being its expression or reflection (Weedon, 2004), and is the central to the formation of subjectivity (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005).

The constructivist stance on identity emphasizes its constructivity, fluidity, and multiplicity by "softening" this term (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). During the construction of subjectivity and identity, individual subjects identify with "the identities on offer" by the internalization of particular meanings and values to take up the identity (Weedon, 2004, p. 6). Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue that at least some self-sameness remains in the concept of softened identity, while other things are changing. The visibility and intelligibility of identity to others is presented through cultural signs, symbols, and practices, as the materiality of bodies (Weedon, 2004), the attachment of definitive markers to an individual literally, and the classifications of people in relation to gender, ethnicity, and so forth (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). In the poststructural paradigm, the process of identity formation is shaped by

regulatory power in discourse. In this self-identification, one needs to situate oneself in narratives, or to place oneself in categories in different contexts (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). When one is identifying oneself, one is also identified by others, and both are fundamentally situational and contextual (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). The identity, along with the agency, may show in different degrees and types of compliance and resistance (Weedon, 2004). In the application of identity in narrative research, identity is constructed based on contextualized narratives, more or less anonymously by social discourses or public narratives with no specific person or institution as an *identifier* (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Subjectivity and identity could be subverted as well for the failure in identification, which leads to "the basis for dis-identification or counter-identifications which involve a rejection of hegemonic identity norms" (Weedon, 2004, p. 7). Weedon (2004) claims, "identity is central to the desire to be a 'knowing subject', in control of meaning" (p. 21). In this research, identity is conceptualized as a temporally stable but eternally changing term. Identity is contrasted with its natural definition and is seen "as a construction, a process never complete—always in 'process'" (Hall, 1996, p. 2). Identification is usually conditional, and lodged in contingency (Hall, 1996). Hall (1996) writes,

> Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption, there is always "too much" or "too little" – an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality. (p. 3)

For Hall, identification works in uncertainty and instability, which gives identity formation possibilities. In this constant constitution of identity, when gender is an act, for Butler (2006), identity is a practice and an effect. Through identification with the social "rule-bound discourse" (p. 198), identity is made by this practice and is showed as an effect. Once identity becomes an effect, it is involved in the practice led by the discourse for another time. Butler writes,

> Indeed, to understand identity as a practice, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life. (p. 198)

This claim shows that identity is formed in the social discourse. However, as this performativity is constructed, does it mean identity constitution is passive though subjects are culturally intelligible? What is the space of agency working in this identity constitution? Butler responded to this inquiry in 2018 by claiming that she does not deny the sense and

intelligibility of subjects. However, considering the condition of "the knowing and sensing subject" being intelligent is affected by the "pre-conscious body and the environment," and "by others and by an exterior world" (Butler, 2018, p. 247). This intelligence of the subject has been implicitly constrained by the social discourses, "because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects" (Butler, 2006, p. 198). When the signification conceals itself, it can hardly be found by the subject during its constitution. Therefore, the "the limited intelligibility can be account for by the fact that its impressionability is partially unconscious" (Butler, 2018, p. 247). By this means, the subject identifies with this repeated signification under regulatory practice, and the agency can only be located in "a variation on that repetition" (Butler, 2006, p. 198). In this research, besides the interpretation of the data using Butlerian theory, I attempt to seek the possibilities of intervention and subversion in those gendered regulatory practices, as Butler (2006) writes:

> The critical task is, rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them (p. 201).

Repeated Construction: Gender and its Performativity

Poststructuralism explains gender issues from a discursive perspective. For Butler (1988), like subjectivity, gender is not a product but a performance. The way of performing gender is shaped by the contextualized regulatory power, and thus individuals can develop unified performance to conform to the power relations. Notably, this construction and production happens in a naturalized, concealing way in the operation of regulatory power. She writes,

> Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis. The *tacit collective agreement* to perform, produce and sustain discrete and polar genders as *cultural fictions* is obscured by the credibility of its own production. (emphasis added; p. 522)

Butler emphasizes that gender is a construction, and mostly implicit. Through the exercise of the power in culture, binary gender is constructed with two layers of illusion. The first layer is the illusion of culture being an operator, guiding the formation of the binary gender. In Butlerian theory, culture is constructed in social discourses as well. The constructiveness of culture determines its changeability and at the same time denies its ontological being. The second layer of illusion conceals the epistemological concept of the binary gender and its

reproductivity. This illusion, formed and enhanced by discourse, duplicates to strengthen the agreed performance of extreme genders. It is the "culture fiction" (p. 522) that produces gender. Being discursively constructed, narratives not only represent but constitute social actors and the social world in which they act (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Therefore, the two layers of illusion, including the operator and the production, form the repetition of gender norms and make sense of this process. But how does the "tacit collective performance" (Butler, 1988, p. 522) form and work? What is the basis of this performance?

In this section, I introduce the origin, development, and regime of gender performativity theory from its discursive constitution and operation in Butlerian theory. I begin with the explanation of language and discourse and power in the heterosexual matrix as well as their interrelations. Then, I bring in the concept of "becoming a woman" from Beauvoir to show the basis of the development of this theory. At last, I argue that, for Butler, gender identity is a fictive concept.

Language and Discourse

For Butler (2006), language is the means of presentation in power and social structure. This formation of gender identity is constructed and reinforced by language and discourse, whereas language and discourse are developed from the gendered expression. Therefore, language gains the power to create "the socially real" through the locutionary acts of speaking subjects (p. 156). For Butler, language, as an instrument, is used to develop political concepts under the power of regulation, and this development itself is political. For example, the feminine signifiers in language are usually affiliated with the masculine – the word "woman" is developed from the word "man."

Similar statements can also be seen in *The Mark of Gender* authored by Monique Wittig in 1985. For the gendered language and discourse, Butler (2004) argues, "against this subsumption of gender to regulatory power that the regulatory apparatus that governs gender is one that is itself gender specific" (p. 41). The knowledge production on gender is constrained by those originally gendered construction of language and discourse.

Discourses are likely to be exercised naturally and implicitly. Therefore, the classification of female and women is accepted by subjects in social practice. The knowledge of, for example, binary gender, guides social events through power relations based on discursive events. The naturalized acquisition of knowledge in the experienced world is constructed by

the operation of discourses. For Butler (2006), the reproductivity of language stands for infinite possibilities to construct discourses. She writes,

> As historically specific organizations of language, discourses present themselves in the plural, coexisting within temporal frames, and instituting unpredictable and inadvertent convergences from which specific modalities of discursive possibilities are engendered. (p. 198)

Other than the construction of gendered structure, Butler argues that the construction of language and discourse also ensures the possibilities to shake this frame. Discursive fields, which produce the subjectivities and meanings, are hardly homogenous but mixed and complex. In poststructural feminism, it is the pluralism of discourse that makes the social practice changeable. For example, gendered discourse is formed and maintained, but is also challenged and reshaped in the repetition of social practices.

Power Relations in Heterosexual Matrix[17]

A regulation is that which makes regular, but it is also, following Foucault[18], a mode of discipline and surveillance within late-modern forms of power; it does not merely constrict and negate and is, therefore, not merely a juridical form of power (Butler, 2004).

Female and male, woman and man, those discursively constructed concepts are descriptions as well as restrictions. The "either–or" alternatives announce the hegemony of heterosexuality. The matrix of sex and gender is confined by those names. Assuming people are sexually divided, it is also impossible to identify masculine or feminine as monolithic and monologic "that traverses the array of cultural and historical contexts in which sexual difference takes place" (Butler, 2006, p. 18). Thus, the only way to conduct dualism is to regulate the inner consistency of sex and gender and to stabilize the hegemony of heterosexuality. For Butler, the constitution of the hegemonic heterosexual frame reflects the social expectations. The heterosexual matrix speaks for dualism. When it constructs the way power relations work, it also confines power. Power can only be exercised to maintain these two fixed frames in certain spaces.

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[17] The development of language is based on the binary concept of sex, when Wittig (1985) sees heterosexuality as 'instrumental in the political discourse of the social contract' (p. 4).

[18] Foucault (1982) argues, "Power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted 'above' society as a supplementary structure whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of" and the relationship of power is "a mode of action upon action" instead of "act[ing] directly and immediately on others" (p. 789). For Foucault, power relations are part of the social practice, and it is impossible to see their "radical effacement" for they are embedded in the actions, when they effectively control and guide those actions.

For Butler (2006), "gender can denote *a unity* of experience, of sex, gender, and desire" (p. 30). This unity is built on the continuity of sex and gender and the heterosexual desire (Butler, 2006). Those presumptions unravel "a stable and oppositional heterosexuality" (p. 31), which can only be "truly known and expressed in a differentiating desire for an oppositional gender—that is, in a form of oppositional heterosexuality" (p. 31). This division of binary gender is on the basis of ontological sex and gender develops from this sex origin in the heterosexual frame. This explanation of gender expands the concept of gender in social discourse and conveys the underlying norms of gender construction. Therefore, gender is more likely to be the representation of the intersected relations of sex, gender, and desire, and it results in forming these oppositional roles between women and men.

Butler (2006) thinks heterosexuality is the cultural desire, buried in social discourse. Its binary working system defines its exclusion of the things that do not belong to either of both options with a clear boundary in-between. The heterosexuality frame provides separated frames for women and men. For Butler, as "a constant parody of itself" (p. 166), the norms of compulsory heterosexuality do not only operate with force and violence. Butler writes about the deconstruction of sexual categories:

> Indeed, the source of personal and political agency comes not from within the individual, but in and through the complex cultural exchanges among bodies in which identity itself is ever-shifting, indeed, where identity itself is constructed, disintegrated, and recirculated only within the context of a dynamic field of cultural relations. To be a woman is, then, for Wittig as well as for Beauvoir, to become a woman, but because this process is in no sense fixed, it is possible to become a being whom neither man nor woman truly describes. This is not the figure of the androgyne nor some hypothetical "third gender," nor is it a transcendence of the binary. Instead, it is an internal subversion in which the binary is both presupposed and proliferated to the point where it no longer makes sense. (p. 173)

In the subversion of the hegemonic heterosexual frame, Butler tends to disassemble heterosexuality as well as homosexuality and reassemble them in the cultural context to construct temporary identities. Along with the "dynamic field of cultural relations" (p. 173), identities present their dynamicity. Butler suggests "a thoroughgoing appropriation and redeployment of the categories of identity themselves" (p. 174) to render the category permanently problematic. There ought not to be any identity in singularity, and identities are

always in pluralism. Those complex identities, in the meantime, diminish the role of power relations in practice.

In the matrix of heterosexuality, gender is signified. That is to say, for gender, heterosexuality is a prediscursive, ontological segregation. The segregation appears in two layers: first, it segregates heterosexual and nonheterosexual groups; second, it segregates men and women on the presumption of binary genders. As normativity, heterosexuality sets the gender roles of, for example, wife and mother, through the control and exploitation of women (Richardson, 2000) with its political function. Butler (2006) argues that "the binary regulation of sexuality suppresses the subversive multiplicity of a sexuality" that forms heterosexual hegemonies (p. 26).

Beauvoir: Becoming a Woman

Gender Trouble by Butler (2006) begins with Simone de Beauvoir's claim, "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (p. 1). The statement was also quoted by Butler in her journal article in 1988. The process of "becoming a woman" lays the foundation of her gender performativity theory. Beauvoir's statement acknowledges women's biological differences from men, but denies the social role of women should be determined by being female. Writing in 1949, Beauvoir historically narrated the development of women's situation worldwide. Some men condemned women as physiological structured differently than men, with smaller brains, less strong bodies, and lower learning capability (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 166). When "the idea that women are inferior to men is naturalized and, thus, legitimated by reference to biology" (McNay, 1992, p. 17), the opportunities for women to be educated or to participate in political events are constrained. The exclusion of women from education and social events leads to women's restriction in the patriarchy for they are less knowledgeable and experienced than men (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 156). Similar unequal treatment shows in rules and policies as laws thus are embedded in normal life as social norms and customs, and virtuous and moral restrictions. Therefore, Beauvoir (1997) argues that the female sex is marked as an Other (p. 105). For Beauvoir, although females are Other, it is the Other that constructs the males. This relation shows that the dominant position of males is constructed on the recognition of females. By this means, originating from anatomical sexual differences, the Othering of women makes gender inequality, and gender division of labor, natural, rationalized, and legitimated.

Based on Beauvoir's notion of being born females and "becoming" women, Butler extended her doubt. She confirmed the distinguished contribution of *The Second Sex* in gender formation, but doubted the logical relation of female body and the gender "woman." The statement of Beauvoir implies a distinction between biological sex and gender. And if "being" female is ontological, how come being woman is epistemological? How do fixed female bodies develop into various gender possibilities? Butler (1986) writes,

> As its limit, then, the sex/gender distinction implies *a radical heteronomy of natural bodies* and constructed genders with the consequence that "being" female and "being" a woman are two very different sorts of being. (emphasis added; p. 35)

Therefore, for Butler (2006), the word "becoming" in Beauvoir's statement represents a construction. Gendered discourse implies the essentialism of sex, and the gender formed from the prediscursive sex. For Beauvoir, this process of becoming would never come to an end and no one could possibly and finally "become a woman" (p. 45). If a subject is born with female anatomical features, she has to learn how to be a woman through her entire life because she is defined by those features, and she may never achieve the goal of "being" a woman till the end. Thus, the process of becoming a woman is consistent with the identification of subjects in contextualized social discourse. For Butler, it contradicts the claim that gender is constituted but sex is prediscursive for the elimination of the *continuity*. Butler continues to infer,

> If gender is the cultural meaning that the sexed body assumes, then gender cannot be said to follow from sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests *a radical discontinuity* between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. (emphasis added; p. 9)

Acknowledging the constitution of gender, Butler challenges the claim from Beauvoir that gender is the result of becoming, on the basis of sex. If gender can be constituted multiply in culture, it is possible that one's gendered performative acts are inconsistent with one's anatomical sex, which makes "a radical discontinuity" (p. 9). This discontinuity in being female and being a woman departs from the claim that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one."

If the emergences of sex are historical, it helps to prove the constructedness of sex (Butler, 2006, p. 10). Butler (2006) argues the "seemingly fixed" (p. 8) surface of sex becomes "political neutral" and "prior to culture" (p. 10) to form the basis of the hierarchical power relationship in gender as "the strategies of domination" (p. 50). Butler clarifies,

> This very concept of sex-as-matter, sex-as-instrument-of-cultural-signification, however, is a discursive formation that acts as a naturalized foundation for the nature/culture distinction and the strategies of domination that that distinction supports. The binary relation between culture and nature promotes a relationship of hierarchy in which culture freely "imposes" meaning on nature, and, hence, renders it into an "Other" to be appropriated to its own limitless uses, safeguarding the ideality of the signifier and the structure of signification on the model of domination. (p. 50)

Imposing meaning on anatomical sex builds a basis of future power operation. By prediscursively casting the dualism in sex, "the internal stability and binary frame for sex are effectively secured" (p. 10). If the sexes are regarded as binary, to politically categorize one of them as the Other by assigning significations to this category simplifies the "the structure of signification on the model of domination" and constructs and maintains the sexual politics "concealed by discursive production" (p. 51). The "unconstitutionality" of sex is constituted by social discourse to rationalize the power relations in the discursive production (p. 10). The prediscursive as well as the pregiven description, which is discursively constructed, enhances the unconstitutionality of sex by overlooking the process of gender constitution. Therefore, this fictiveness of sexual politics resonates with the "sex fiction" coined by Wittig which is explored in the next section.

Gender Identity: A Fictive Concept

From a poststructuralist perspective, "Foucault proposes an ontology of accidental attributes that exposes the postulation of identity as a culturally restricted principle of order and hierarchy, a regulatory fiction" (Butler, 2006, p. 33). No matter how identity is constituted, it is changeable depending on the discursive field. Therefore, Foucault points out the fictiveness of identity. For the concept of gender identity, there are two layers of fictiveness. For one, gender is the "cultural fictions" (Butler, 1988, p. 528) which originate from culture. For another, identity, as a performance or an expression, is reproduced by the experiences and self-knowledge of the subject. Weedon (2004) claims "identity is made visible and intelligible to others through cultural signs, symbols, and practices" (p. 7). For Butler (1988), gender is not stable but "an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (p. 519). She refuses the fixability of gender identity, but insists it is dynamic under the operation of social discourse. By subversion of the notion that gender is expressed according to gender identity, she writes,

> There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results. (Butler, 2006, p. 34)

For Butler (2006), gender identity is a "result" rather than an origin of gender. The latter indeed expresses the former by stylized performances. This statement clarifies the formation of identity and gender: identity does not produce gender, but is the result of gender expression. Therefore, in many of the Butlerian narratives, she separates the concepts of gender and identity. Butler further explains,

> In this sense, gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. (p. 34)

Butler insists that gender is performative. When gender is produced, it is epistemological performance. The claimed identity, however, is the temporary performance of gender. Thus, there is not a preexistence of gender identity, but it is constituted in a stylized repetition of gendered performance dynamically. And these performances are constantly produced in the alignment of discourse and agency. This temporary gender identity is usually influenced by gender norms and regulation, which produce collective performative acts, a standard normalization.

Gender identity is a fictive concept, although individual agency is constrained by gender norms (Lester, 2011). It is a momentary status which is always forming. Gender identity is not stable, but is temporarily formed in the moment of being performed or being spoken. In this construction, Butler (2006) argues for the fictiveness of gender, meaning gender could be formed by any possibility under the regulatory fiction (p. 44), which is also consistent with the "permanent possibilities" (Butler, 1992, p. 13) of subjectivity. The concept of gender can be seen as "a constituted social temporality" (Butler, 2006, p. 191). It will be shaken or broken in a short time, by the constant production and reproduction of discourse and the power relations. In this case, gender identity is like a shooting star or a ripple in the lake, when its performance is seen or its articulation is heard. The fictiveness of gender identity is perpetual in its constructedness; however, its performance and articulation are perpetual as well to make it visible or recognizable. The visibility is the evidence and component of the construction. In this study, I use the concept of gender identity as a

momentary status to demonstrate the career of women academics. I claim its instant presentation in an analytic category as well as its constant fluidity through poststructuralist lens. In this research, the data analysis investigates the temporal identities of the Chinese women academics and traces their change at the same time.

Academic Identity: A Means of Performativity

Identity refers to how subjects understand who they are and who other people are (Jenkins, 2004). I theorize identity in a feminist poststructural stance, as to be constructed, negotiated and performed through discourse, rather than fixed and stable (Butler, 1997). In this way, academic identity is fluid, slippery, fragmented, and multiple (Barrow et al., 2022), constructed and negotiated in certain contexts. This study analyzes academic identity of women academics using Butlerian Performativity Theory. Though academic identity originates from education in relation to the process of schooling and learning (Ai, 2019), this study primarily investigates academic identity of Chinese women academics from their doctoral study to academic career to answer the research question. Like gender identity, academic identity has been described as points of "temporary attachment" (Hall, 1996, p. 6), which enables women academics to constantly adjust their perception of themselves to respond to institutional expectations. This process constitutes "a stylized repetition" (Butler, 1988, p. 519) to form their stylized academic identity as women.

From a poststructural perspective, academic identity is formed mainly "in the interplay of outer social discourses and inner processes of subjectification" (Grant, 2007, p. 37). The outer social discourse that shapes subjects by power relations. The inner processes of subjectification show constant adjustment and negotiation, reflecting the relation with the subjects themselves. Moreover, the outer discourses shape the inner processes of subjection, while the performances of subjection interfere the discourses by offering variations. Notably, in a poststructural stance, the influence of discourses appears to be dominant, and thus "identity undergoes continual re-construction within a complex environment" (Billot, 2010, p. 711). Butler writes:

> Indeed, the source of personal and political agency comes not from within the individual, but in and through the complex cultural exchanges among bodies in which identity itself is evershifting, indeed, where identity itself is constructed, disintegrated, and recirculated only within the context of a dynamic field of cultural relations. (Butler, 2006, p. 173)

For Chinese women academics, their construction of academic identity is in the interplay of social and institutional discourses and their subjection of themselves - how they think they are as Chinese women academics in this "dynamic field of cultural relations" (Butler, 2006, p. 173). Women academics experience the intersection of gender and academic expectations, as a "matrix of intelligibility" (Butler, 2006, p. 24), while their lived experiences in Chinese higher education context are inextricably linked to their perceptions and performances of academic identity (see Billot, 2010).

To construct academic identity, subjects have to depend on the existence of the Other to build "singularity" (Butler, 2001, p. 22) as well as "coherence" and "continuity", maintaining norms of intelligibility (Butler, 2006, p. 23). As a means of performativity, exclusion becomes the necessity of identification to maintain its uniqueness in power relations. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction (Butler, 2006, p. 6). With this exclusion, academic identity goes through "a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988, p. 519) to reach a temporality in its construction. This study aims to explore the academic identity of Chinese women academics by excluding the identification of the Other. To identify with some identity means that women academics consider the unidentified parts uncertainty, academic Others or the nonacademic (see Grant, 2007). To be intelligible in Chinese higher educational context, women are "subjected to a set of social regulations" to construct their academic identity by exclusionary practices as their "hermeneutic principle of self-interpretation" (Butler, 2006, p. 130).

Core Theoretical Concepts That Inform How I Interpret My Data

Butler (2006) argues gender is a performative act, is mundane, and is legitimated. The construction of gender in repetition is based on social regulations as gender norms, which are shaped by regulatory power formed in social discourse. How does this construction occur and how is it maintained? How do the subjects identify with the operation? Is there any chance that gender could be subverted? In this section, I explain some core theoretical concepts of gender performativity theory to respond to these questions and use those concepts as the theoretical locus to investigate the doctoral education, career development and the work–life balance of Chinese women academics in the Chinese higher education context.

Gender Production: Regulatory Power, Gender Norms and Normativity

For Butler (1988), gender is performed by the "tacit collective performance" (p. 522). This performance is acted by a large number of subjects based on a tacit agreement. However, in what way do gender norms work to discipline subjects? Gender norms are more likely to be implicit and contextualized in their operation. It may not be identified in social practice, but the result of the operation can be seen "clearly and dramatically *in the effects* that they produce" in the operation (Butler, 2004, p. 41). For example, as a way of presentation of gender norms, clothes can cover and articulate the body (Butler, 2006). However, subjects who identify themselves with the same gender tend to follow a similar style of clothing. It is the similar dressing style, acting as a collective performance, that shows the effect of gender norms in social practice. Butler (2006) names these gendered appearances "naturalized knowledge, even though it is based on a series of cultural inferences, some of which are highly erroneous" (pp. xxiii–xxiv). The social practice of stylized gender features constructs specific gender norms that have been embedded in individual behavior. For Butler (2004), norms may not be as explicit or tangible as specific regulations, for example, rules or laws. She explains,

> A norm is not the same as a rule, and it is not the same as a law. A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of normalization. Although a norm may be analytically separable from the practices in which it is embedded, it may also prove to be recalcitrant to any effort to decontextualize its operation. (p. 41)

In this operation of gender norms, Butler doubts the preexistence of gender subjects. In fact, she argues that, in the particular form of subjection to regulation, the gendered subject is produced (p. 41). For her, sex and gender are performative acts rather than original beings, for there ought not be any ontological presumption. And the performativity is constructed by the "regulatory fiction" (Butler, 1988, p. 528) of society and culture. When "a body shows or produces its cultural signification," it denies the prediscursive existence of "an essential sex" (Butler, 1988, p. 528). It seems that cultural signification originates from the body, but this signification is indeed the performance of the body shaped by the culture. The body plays the role of a platform and a mediator, not an initiator. Thus, Butler (2006) writes, "not biology, but culture becomes destiny" (p. 11).

How do gender norms work in social practice? Butler (1988) argues, "gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions" (p. 527). In gender performance, the regulatory power is practiced through

various forms, and gender norms are constructed with certain standards, some of them quite specific. When gender is produced and reproduced by subjects in culture, subjects have to be subjected to regulatory power to become subjects. The circulation of gender reproduction constitutes united forms of gender. In the resistance and violation of gender norms, regulatory power works "to identify those actions as inappropriate and problematic" (Lester, 2011, p.145). Any violation of the norms or performance below the standards in the real social convention could court punishment, which is demonstrated in various forms or in an implicit way. Through this constant correction and adjustment under regulatory power, subjects are regulated and inscribed by the culture constructed in the social discourse and are more likely to form a homogenous performance, which is "the stylization of the body" (Butler, 1988, p. 519). This stylization is normalized to the regular but normative way of behavior. Butler draws on Althusser to argue that the operation of gender norms is naturalized in the interaction between discourse and subjectivity. Butler (1988) writes,

> Gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (p. 519)

Through the identification with gender norms, subjects perform the collective construction and normalize and rationalize it by making connections with the performance. In Butler's description, subjects and performances are intertwined to form this gender illusion. When the manifestation of gender norms is in "the mundane way" (p. 519), its embodiment naturalizes the operation of regulatory power.

For Butler, the regulatory power, which is exercised and maintained by discourse, is discursively created, and enhanced in a poststructural paradigm. As Foucault (2010) points out, the occurrence of the statement/ discursive event does not "synthesiz[e] operations of a purely psychological kind," but is "able to grasp other forms of regularity, other types of relations" (pp. 28–29). Since discourses tend to have important institutional locations (Foucault, 1981, p. 11), in practice, the exercising of power relations, navigated by discourses, in an institutional context, regulates the inside subjects. Butler (2004) provides the view of Foucault that power regulates the preexisting subjects as well as the productive subjects, and that the becoming of subjects by a regulation is to be "subjectivated" by it (p. 41). However, she refuses to accept the broad historical characteristics of regulatory power, but thinks that "gender requires and institutes its own distinctive regulatory and disciplinary

regime" (p. 41). The becoming of subjects is built in the subjection to regulation. In the subjection, they exercise and produce the regulated norms, and they are transformed to the roles of discipliners for themselves and other subjects simultaneously.

Gender Presentation: Bodies and Cultural Inscription

Given the edifice of gender inequality is built and legitimized on the biological differences in bodies, on a fundamental level, the concept of body is considered as the central notion to the feminist analysis of gender oppression (McNay, 1992, p. 17). Male and female are discursively produced identities demonstrated by bodies, producing the characteristics, known as masculinity and femininity, that signify gender and support the male and female roles (King, 2004). Binary gender presentation is seen as legitimate for it stems from natural bodies with anatomical differences. McNay (1992) writes "the 'natural' body must be understood as a device central to the legitimation of certain strategies of oppression" (p. 21). Butler (2006) echoes that the effect of gender performativity is achieved by the naturalization in the context of bodies (p. xv). Therefore, the gender binary develops from the anatomical differences of bodies spontaneously. Although this internalization of representation of the female body has been fundamental to the formation of feminine identity, it should not be understood as unproblematic (McNay, 1992, p. 24).

With the markers of sex, the body is shaped by political forces with strategic interests (Butler, 2006, p. 175). The body is "a surface inscribed with culturally and historically specific practices and subject to political and economic forces" (King, 2004, p. 30), which makes the body "a blank page" (Butler, 2006, p. 177). For Foucault, the body is "more than a locus of subjectivity; it is the very condition of subjectivity," and it is "central to subjectivity and agency" (McLaren, 2002, pp. 82–83). While Foucault (1984) sees the body as an object of discipline, and "an inscribed surface of events" (p. 83), Butler (2006) takes the body as a constructed demonstration. She extends the constructive body to a medium in politics:

> "The body" appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself. (p.12)

Butler (2006), described the body as passive and prediscursive (p. 176). She claims "It is through the body that gender and sexuality become exposed to others, implicated in social processes, inscribed by cultural norms, and apprehended in their social meanings" (Butler, 2004, p. 20). In the construction of gender politics, discourse normalizes the presentation of

the body, which makes the body a surface for cultural demonstration. Does this prove that the body is ontological? Butler (2011) argues that the body is an antiessential term and a means of manifestation without being prediscursively defined. She emphasizes that, to be seen as existent prior to a sign, the body is signified as prediscursive, which makes the body the production of its progress and preexisting to the action (p. 6). If the binary differences of biological bodies are admitted, gender is hence politically irreducible, so is the cultural construction of bodies. Indeed, the boundary of bodies is set by the signification. This construction of stable bodily contours, therefore, ensures the fixed sites of culture inscription.

If the body is static, does it mean that the body can only develop a certain kind of performance? In the process of socialization, shaped by culture, the body becomes an expression. McNay (1992) argues that the examination of the body shows the most specific and concrete forms of power effects, and the power relation inscribes on the body (p. 15). Thus, in power relations, the body is constantly shaped and reshaped by the intersected forces (p. 15). For Butler (2011), this uncertainty enables the body to be materialized in "positing as its constitutive condition" (p. 6). When the body is given other meanings through different ways of performing, it shows infinite possibilities. Butler (2004) writes:

> These practices of instituting new modes of reality take place in part through the scene of embodiment, where the body is not understood as a static and accomplished fact, but as an aging process, a mode of becoming that, in becoming otherwise, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone. (p. 29).

Serving as a politic representation, the body could be constructed by a subject under norms shaped by distinctive discourses. Performances through the body signify gendered features and thus construct the demonstration of the body. From a poststructural perspective, Butler (2018) argues, "as body is formed in discourse, it eludes any referential act that seeks to capture what it is" (p. 245). She disagrees that the prediscursive signification of gendered body enables its emancipation and possibilities. When the body is formed and inscribed by the norms, it becomes the cultural inscription. This "tacit collective agreement" of gender performances, conducted by the body, is manifested by the material production with credibility (Butler, 2006, p. 190). The body embodies and deflects the stylization which is historically gendered and punitively regulated (Butler, 2006). In the repeated performances of gender, the body enables the reproductions of the norms in the materialization under power relations.

Gender Subversion? Drag and Parody

Butler (2006) introduces a theoretical way to perform gender differently, which is to perform *drag* and *parodic* acts. The concept of drag can be traced to the performance in early North American theater (Levitt et al., 2018) and describes the drag performers who imitate gender figures by employing "gender-blending" to challenge binary gender expressions, or present a comical, exaggerated parody of certain gender (Levitt et al., 2018, p. 368). In contemporary society, drag performance occurs in the entertainment industry, like *Drag Queens* and *RuPaul's Drag Race* in the US. For Butler (2006), drag stands for the imitation of gender as a cultural performance (p. xxxi) which may fully subvert "the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (p. 186). Butler (1988) makes the comparison between theatrical and nontheatrical gender performance by gender performativity. The theatrical performance can only challenge the "existing ontological assumptions about gender arrangements"; however, in the nontheatrical, real context, "there is no presumption that the act is distinct from a reality" (p. 527). In the latter claim, there is no social convention to make the distinction between act and reality, so the lack of separation makes the performance the reality. Butler (2006) adds that, in the social discourse, that "the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (p. 185). It indicates the political message embedded in drag performance in real life for the subversion of normative binary gender.

For Butler (2006), "gender is an 'act'" (p. 200). She claims "the notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities" (p. 187). Therefore, drag is one of the cultural practices of gender parody. Butler argues "the notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate" (p. 188). Indeed, gender parody is based on the assumption of gender identity, which is constructed and fictive as a fantasy. For Butler, parody does not aim to mock the original but has the characteristics of "ulterior motive," and "latent feeling that there exists something *normal*" (Jameson, 1983, p. 114). "Parody by itself is not subversive" (Butler, 2006, p. 189), but the disruption of the parodic repetition implies its violation of a matrix that is considered the normativity of culture hegemony (Butler, 2006).

Despite the revealing of "fundamentally phantasmatic status" in gender identity, the notions of drag and parody enhance the presumption of gender binary as "a privileged and

naturalized gender configuration" (Butler, 2006, p. 200). The effect of drag and parody is built on the categorization of gendered features. In the meantime, drag and parody not only prove the performativity of gender, but its fluidity. The repetitions of gender "become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony" (Butler, 2006, p. 189). However, does this fluidity of gender performance subvert the cultural hegemony of the gender binary? Butler doubts this claim. She takes drag as "not precisely an example of subversion," because drag does not mean that one can dress freely to perform a gender but indicates the presumption of those "perceptions as the 'reality' of gender" (Butler, 2006, p. xxiii). For Butler (2006), the existence of drag is "to show that the *naturalized* knowledge of gender operates as a pre-emptive and violent circumscription of reality" (emphasis added; p. xxiv). Butler uses the expression of "reality" to describe the performance of binary gender in culture. "A pre-emptive and violent circumscription of reality" (p. xxiv) suggests the ontological perception of the hegemonic gender culture in the society shaped by the regulatory power. Butler explains that drag is a means to show the structure of gender from the perspective of the real world and the possibility to shake it. She writes,

> I would suggest as well that drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity … In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency. (pp. 186–187)

For Butler (2006), drag cuts the link between the inner recognition and outer performance of gender. When drag is conducted, gender is deconstructed. It proves the productivity of gender in social discourse and denaturalizes the "fabricated unity" of sex and gender by a performance (p. 186). It makes gender no longer "the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity," but "a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies" (p. 186). The possible imitation proves the fictiveness of sex and gender and enables the gender redescription as well as political implication, Butler continues:

> The redescription of intrapsychic processes in terms of the surface politics of the body implies a corollary redescription of gender as the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body's surface, the construction of the gendered body through a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences. (p.184)

For Butler, as performance of the "surface politics," the "play of presence and absence" is made through drag and parody (p.184). The gender features can be visible or invisible through drag and parody in performances. Given the changeability of the body

materialization, Butler confirms the "fictive sex" proposed by Wittig (1985, p. 3) and points out the regulation of gender is presented by "figures of fantasy" (Butler, 2006, p. 184). However, the fictiveness of sexual characteristics has been naturalized by the culture through "disciplinary production" to construct "the gendered body," forming "a false stabilization" (Butler, 2006, p. 184). In drag and parody, some of the originally constructed features of gender are excluded, denied, and replaced, which make "the field of bodies" disorganized and disaggregated (Butler, 2006, p. 185).

Gender parody zooms into the "citationality" part in the repetition of gender performativity. It adds another layer to gender performative acts, and turns citationality to "imitation." The only difference between those two steps is the object-subject repeats the performance from the same gender but imitates performance from the other gender. This knocks the two genders into multiple gender possibilities. The interchangeability deconstructs gender and the parody of gender, and makes "the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self" present (Butler, 2006, p. 188). This process itself is an imitation of gender construction as well. The object they are imitating is also an illusion, a fantasy, and, as Butler (2006) writes,

> In the place of an original identification which serves as a determining cause, gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of *imitative practices* which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction. (p. 188)

Drag and parody reassemble the binary gender components regulated by the social discourse, and then represent them with a subverted performance. Therefore, when Butler doubts the gender subversion of drag and parody, she does not mean to deny this function, but to expand its meaning to a deeper layer. It may seem that the subversion of gender makes gender fluidity possible, and it is more likely to subvert the heterosexual frame of gender constructed by culture. However, for Butler, the subversion happens when the body becomes "a variable boundary" after the performance of drag and parody, which unravels the heterosexual gender "boundary," and makes binary gender norms disruptive and troubling (p. 189). These performances "enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself" (p. 189). In the meantime, the discipline of gender construction is questioned.

Gender Interpellation: Names

To name and to be named are the linguistic actions inaugurated by subjects. Through ascribing the agency to language (Butler, 1997, p. 1), subjects perform and achieve their

subjectivities through the means of naming and being named (Henderson, 2015). When one responds to a name, one has been framed as well as given a social existence, through which one may make sense of oneself.

> One is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call. Thus, the injurious address may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response. If to be addressed is to be interpellated, then the offensive call runs the risk of inaugurating a subject in speech who comes to use language to counter the offensive call. When the address is injurious, it works its force upon the one it injures. (Butler, 1997, p. 2)

How do interpellation and naming work? They may arrive without an actual speaker but, for example, by written documents, producing a terrain of discursive power through "the bureaucratic and disciplinary diffusion of sovereign power," which constitutes subjects in its operation (Butler, 1997, p. 34). Butler (1997) takes interpellation as an invisible mark that may not require the explicit consciousness in the constitution of subjects. When one is recognized by an authority, identity is inaugurated and conferred in this circuit of interpellation (Butler, 1997). Therefore, interpellation and naming produce identity during subject constitution.

Interpellation and naming are performative acts. Through performative acts, naming and being named are transferred from linguistic utterance to mark the body in the force that they exercise on bodily productions (Butler, 1997). "Subjects are called from diffuse social quarters, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellation" (Butler, 1997, p.160). In this inauguration, subjects are produced and reproduced in those collective performances to adapt to the social classifications. It is in this way that interpellation and naming are given meaning beyond language, making them a social effect. Butler (1997) writes, "power works through dissimulation: it comes to appear as something other than itself, indeed, it comes to appear as a name" (p.36). Naming becomes an instrument in the working of power relations. When a name is articulated, the power relations are exercised. For Butler, a name is the presentation of power, rather than the production. It makes the underlying power relations explicit and reforms those relations in

language. Butler claims "the power to 'race,' and, indeed, the power to gender, precedes the 'one' who speaks such power, and yet the one who speaks nevertheless appears to have that power" (p. 49).

When one is speaking power by interpellation and naming, one is operating power. However, one is less likely to have this articulated power. That is to say, though interpellation and naming produce and convey power, the subject who takes those actions is merely the one who was framed, or confined, by this power as well. Therefore, from a gender perspective, the one who speaks in interpellation and naming becomes the agent of exercising the gendered power relations, though one may perform as "the origin of that utterance" (p. 50). Indeed, this very citation, for example, of gender norms, gives one a fictive perception that one produces but does not perform this power. The connections between subjects and interpellation and naming are usually operated by implicit and diffusive power relations.

Butlerian Theory in Socialist Chinese Society

Butlerian theory was introduced into China after *Gender Trouble* was translated into Simplified Chinese and published in 2009, soon followed by *Undoing Gender* and *Bodies that Matter*. From January 2000 to November 2021, Chinese scholars had 282 research publications on Butlerian theory in domestic academia, of which 205 have been published in the last decade. It shows the research interest on Butlerian theory among Chinese scholars is increasing. Those studies are mainly in the research fields of sociology (31.68%), world literature (29.37%), and philosophy (8.25%). Notably, a large body of the Chinese Butlerian research is doctoral and master's theses, which means the study of her theory might be burgeoning with young Chinese academics. The research focus of Chinese literature is mainly on feminism (e.g., Fei, 2016; Z. Jiang & Yuan, 2021; B. Liu, 2020; P. Shi, 2016; L. Yang, 2021) and the cultural and political exploration of Butlerian theory (e.g., Qi, 2021; W. Xiao, 2020). In this section, I briefly review the research on the placement of Butlerian theory in socialist Chinese society in three aspects: the integration of Butlerian theory in the Chinese context, the analysis of literature using Butlerian theory in domestic academia, and critiques.

The use of Butlerian theory is an encouragement for Chinese local feminism to jump out of the box of normativity. Butler (2006) writes,

> Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are

> alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure. (p. 22)

For Butler, gender is a complexity and a temporal, open assemblage. The discussion of gender does not have to be constrained by the discursive field but rather is determined by the purposes at hand. On this basis, without a definite definition, some Chinese scholars combine Butlerian theory with Marxism and socialism to construct the knowledge structure of Chinese women's liberation (Qi, 2021; H. Wang, 2021; L. Yang, 2021). Qi (2021) claims that Butler translates culture by generating gender performativity into the strategy of cultural political practice, and thus advocates for social reform. Chinese women's liberation is also a performative act in the Chinese social context (H. Wang, 2021). L. Yang (2021) argues that with the shared purpose of capitalist social structure deconstruction, Butlerian theory does not betray grand Marxism, but the former mainly concentrates on the branch of gender. Gender trouble is not a social phenomenon in structure but a historical scene determined by relations of production (L. Yang, 2021).

Moreover, to respond to Hershatter (2020), the deconstruction of power relations in social structure can be seen in the analysis of the fictional characters in literary work. For example, Bai (2014) interprets the drag performance and its subversive power in *Cloud Nine* to show the deconstruction of gender norms. An actor is dressed as a woman character to show the audience that the manifestation of gender is a fictional act. T. Li (2018) analyzes the transformation of gender roles in theatrical and nontheatrical contexts in the movie *Farewell, My Concubine.* The hero plays a woman on the stage but acts like a man in real life to show the fluidity of gender. X. Liu (2021) explained the repetition and reinforcement of constructed women characteristics in traditional Chinese society in *A Dream of Red Mansions,* through the resistance and sacrifices of the main women characters.

In prior research, many Chinese scholars have introduced and made comments on Butlerian theory, and have also raised critiques. A small number are about the theoretical disagreement with Butlerian definitions. For example, though Butler takes individuals as the subjects to express discursive power and performativity (L. Yang, 2021), she overstates identity construction among individuals and therefore shows separation between theory and practice (P. Shi, 2016). It may hinder the reconstruction of materialization of bodies in practice rather than in the change of discourses (Z. Jiang & Yuan, 2021). B. Liu (2020) argues that Butler overlooks the anatomical differences between males and females, which therefore may lead

to the disempowerment of feminist actions. Another group of the critiques concentrates on the contested contexts between the socialist Chinese society and the cultural translation from Americanized French theories in Butlerian theory (Qi, 2021). The localized feminism, to an extent, limits the research focus of Chinese feminist researchers. Spakowski (2011) writes:

> The empowering effect of a long tradition of commitment to women's issues and Chinese (feminist) history as a legacy and "resource." Many of the scholars discussed here are wary of cutting ties with pre-reform history, which has left deep imprints on the political life of China. (p. 48)

For Spakowski, the concern of Chinese scholars is primarily the incompatibility of Chinese feminist theory (see Chapter 1) and Butlerian theory in their different origins and distinctive ways of operation, which may challenge loyalty to the local culture. Those critiques on Butlerian theory connect to the Marxism perspective that the scholars used to take, while Butlerian theory is from a poststructuralist perspective. Hershatter (2020) argues that Chinese feminists are more likely to be "neither univocal nor uncritical of contemporary gender arrangements" (p. 924) and this is connected to the attempt to deconstruct social structure in Butlerian theory. Furthermore, their work is centered on the establishment of women's consciousness of being subjects of transformative political activities with little challenge on the category of gender (Hershatter, 2020). For the different theoretical schools the two theorists belong to, disagreement inevitably occurs. For example, Z. Jiang and Yuan (2021) argue that Butler only sees the oppression of women from discursive practice but overlooks the relations of production in practice, which is emphasized in Marxist theory.

To sum up, compared to the international academia, current Chinese literature shows little preference for empirical study using Butlerian theory. The partial disconnection with Chinese social ideology (see Spakowski, 2011) might be one of the reasons for the limited use of Butlerian theory in Chinese empirical studies.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the theoretical framework of poststructural feminism and the gender performativity theory of Judith Butler. Also, I have provided an overview of the formation of performativity theory. Some core concepts in performativity theory have been explained. In the data analysis chapters, I use these concepts to interpret the data from the women participants. It sets my perspective on the discussion. In the end, I sketch the Chinese

research on or using Butlerian theory to give a panorama of the Chinese study, especially on the use of Butlerian theory in socialist Chinese society.

The perspective this study takes is that gender is performed. Therefore, this is the lens through which women academics' attitudes and choices in career development are examined. Through the narratives and responses of the participants, they are constructing institutional and social discourses. In the path of these women becoming academics, and their career development, their performances are regulated by the power relations produced in these discourses. They may experience the tension in the intersected discourses while identifying or not identifying with the norms. As women academics, they are confronted with the gender norms in and out of the workplace; as academics in elite universities, they embrace the agency of making a difference in their academic career. Chinese women academics have been seeking the way to self-achievement in the neoliberal socioeconomic climate (Clayton, 2015) and maintaining subjection to a male hegemonic discursive operation. In this situation, I investigate the gender performances of these women academics through their subjectivity and identity formation and how they respond to the male-dominated social and institutional discourses as subjects. In this study, I analyze the data through the lens of gender performativity theory to explain the experiences of Chinese women academics, and to investigate the impact of Chinese academia and social ideology embracing these questions: How does discourse construct women academics in Chinese higher education? In what ways are Chinese women academics showing their sex and gender constituted by social discourse in the working context? How are they subject to or resistant to discourses and why? Before turning to discuss these questions in relation to my data, in the following chapter, I provide an overview of my methodological considerations and methods employed within this feminist critical study.

CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to demonstrate the range of methodological considerations that have been brought to bear on this study. I have sought to acknowledge the intertwined theories and methodologies in the practice of this research and structured those approaches informed by my engagements with the participants, the data collection, and the data analysis under the feminist poststructural paradigm. Feminist assumptions and methodologies "have been generated within social experiences, relations, traditions, and historically and culturally specific ways of organizing social life" (Nelson, 1993, p. 147). This complexity of women's experiences in this feminist research in Chinese higher education context is investigated by carefully designed methods.

After the demonstration of my research standpoint in the next section, I offer an overview of the methodology and methods employed within this research and my rationale for undertaking this research within feminist qualitative research methodology and related methodologies. Further, I explain how I involved participants in this study and the methods I used to analyze the gathered data. Lastly, I explore the issues relating to the trustworthiness of the research findings and examine some key ethical issues relating to this study.

The Researcher's Standpoint

My approach as a researcher and my choice of research questions, methodology and method are shaped by my stance in relation to this research. My 10-year working experiences in a Chinese university turned my research interest from English-language teaching to higher education. On the path to this doctoral education, I started to be interested in how the power relations work on the construction of this political higher education discourse and how this hierarchical structure is maintained. Moreover, I have experienced and witnessed the expansion of Chinese higher education since my undergraduate and graduate study. After the expansion of higher education institutions (see Chapter 1), the pursuit of high-quality development repositioned the academics and thus made those institutional discourses stratified at different levels of universities.

Besides my working experiences and the environmental change, my approach to this study was also shaped by the experiences of being a woman. I observed Chinese higher education

and universities from a feminist perspective. As the only child in an intellectual family, I was taught to be a knowledge pursuer, and was encouraged to receive further education. However, I was still confronted with the gendered social expectation after graduation with my master's degree. Moreover, working in a Chinese university constructed by Chinese social discourses, I took the lack of women academics in senior positions for granted until I visited an American university from 2015 to 2016. Coming back to the university I work in, I started to pay attention to the development of Chinese academics from a phenomenological lens. It was seen that, on the one hand, women academics and staff disproportionately stayed in lower positions in both academic ranks and leadership positions. Women were less likely to be promoted to senior positions, which constituted the male-dominated policy maker groups, even in female-dominated disciplines. On the other hand, many of my colleagues, women academics, and staff, actively gave up the possibilities and opportunities to ascend the ranks, though many of them could have made a difference. The controversy of women's situation in the workplace drew my attention to feminist theories and urged me to conduct this research project within a feminist framework to investigate the experiences of Chinese women academics, through their narratives.

On the basis of my personal experiences, I conducted this research on the basis of feminist standpoint theory. Standing in the research standpoint of the "oppressed group," I could see the world "behind," "beneath," or "from outside" the oppressors' institutionalized vision (Harding, 2012, p. 7) with the conviction that the change must start at the root of society (Grant & Giddings, 2002). This perspective enabled this research to "go against the ongoing political disempowerment of [an] oppressed group" (Harding, 2012, p. 7), and to empower the marginalized group. The political practices operated by the dominant group are knowledge producing, which, in turn, provides resources to maintain its power and to make the real world they desire (Harding, 2012). Feminist research calls for the oppressed group to become a group "for itself" but "in itself" (Harding, 2012, p. 7), rather than in the gaze of others (Jameson, 1988). Standpoint approaches transform and strengthen the "strong standards for objectivity, rationality, and good method" (Harding, 2012, p. 14) to open the way for collective experience in the production of knowledge (Jameson, 1988). My life experiences as a Chinese woman working in a domestic university provide the "grounds" of knowledge in the whole social order, giving a necessary starting point in doing this research (Harding, 2012, pp. 56–57). Articulating this logic of feminist standpoint theory enables me to grasp the strengths of this approach more clearly (Harding, 2012).

Harding (2012) continues, “standpoint approaches have had to learn to use the social situatedness of subjects of knowledge systematically as a resource for maximizing objectivity” (p. 67). To question the nature of gender means to examine how gender and other categories of difference are “produced and reproduced through dominant understandings of what the world was, is, or should be” (Segall, 2013, p. 484). Foucault argues that knowledge brings power (see Chapter 3). The process of producing knowledge could also be the empowerment of the researchers as well as of the women academics participating. As a woman researcher working in Chinese and Western higher educational contexts, I embraced the knowledge of the academic policies in both domestic and international academia, and the social rules in these higher education institutions. This knowledge enabled me to interact with the participants effectively. What is more, my standpoint, as an insider, was more likely to gain trust from the participants to make the interviews a communication and a conversation. Feminist standpoint theory ensures mostly full articulation of the participants as well as the researchers (Harding, 2012, p. 54).

When studying the nuances inherent in forms of power and authority, one’s personal subjectivities and politics are embedded in any research act (Lather, 1992), especially in qualitative research. As it is not “from an object conceptualized from outside the group,” “objectivity” in social science research is considered as a too broad notion (Harding, 2012, p. 60). This perspective required me to be explicit about this epistemological guidance and the particular selections in doing research under this guidance. It is necessary that researchers locate themselves in the power relations while narrating the research nature and findings (Segall, 2013). When gender performativity theory is applied to these research findings, it also underlies in my research endeavors (see Segall, 2013). For one, I positioned myself in social and institutional discourses with the awareness that I had been shaped by the gender and academic norms. For another, I repeatedly interacted with the participants and had dialogues with data interchangeably when I conducted this research to form stylized performative acts under the operation of power in order to make myself intelligible to the participants as well as to the readers of this research (see Chapter 8).

My orientation of this study was also connected with the choice of methodology. Methodologies take more subjective approaches to analysis and interpretation in feminist research, and other critical methodological forms of qualitative practice. With the aim of giving freedom to the oppressed group, feminist research tends to challenge and contest the power relations and reproduce the subjectivity. “Feminist scholars [use] reflexivity and

consciousness-raising as techniques to uncover contradictions between the ideal and the real" by "critiquing taken-for-granted aspects of gender relations" (Bailey & Fonow, 2015, p. 56). Researchers "must adopt a reflexive posture in order to show as much awareness of that embeddedness as possible" (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 21). As a poststructural researcher, my recognition of knowledge construction—situated and shaped by my positionality—was necessarily reflected in this work.

Methodological Orientations

This study is conducted from a feminist critical perspective that pays attention to social inequality concerning gender. This perspective is to view social and political relations in organizations through the dominant group's privilege (Blackmore, 2013). Women academics are facing both academic pressures from universities as well as social inequality. The research reflects their special situations related to the contemporary Chinese academic environment and developmental policies in domestic higher education.

Feminist Qualitative Research Methodology

This study investigates the perceptions of women academics in Chinese leading universities through the feminist qualitative research methodology, which aims to stand inside of power relations within context (Allan, 2012, p. 99). Feminist qualitative inquiry enables the researcher to think beyond data and to see the implication in ontological questions in the deconstruction of the binary logics (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013) in sex and gender. It is consistent with the research purposes and largely draws on women participants' narrations. The open-endedness of qualitative research echoes with the multiperspective of feminism, which contains class, age, experience, social power and so forth in multiple dimensions. One dimension is shaped by another in "historical linkages and systemic interrelationships" (Dill & Zambrana, 2017, p. 185). The intersected dimensions may show "diversified, contentious, dynamic, and challenging" features (Olesen, 2011, p. 129) in this feminist qualitative research to unmask the power through participants' political space and help researchers "march against the barricades" (Christians, 2011, p. 74) for Chinese women academics. Given women usually use silence to show resistance to oppression, qualitative data may be the best or even the only means to assess the phenomenon under a feminist study (Tolman & Szalacha, 1999). This feminist qualitative study considers political, ideological and "social processes that constitute and buttress inequality" (Andersen, 2003, p. 121) in qualitative analysis.

Feminist Storytelling

I employ feminist storytelling in this research to gather Chinese women academics' perceptions, values, and stances formed by their experiences and stories, with one of the main purposes to describe their career development. As a primary way of presenting detailed information, this inquiry "called for the collection and organization of rich, descriptive stories" of women participants and provided "a strategy to interpret their stories to detail" (Sandekian et al., 2015, p. 364). The "biographical style" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) of feminist storytelling is appropriate for me to look inside the picture and provide insight. In feminist narration, the relationship the women have built with culture, economy, and politics are reflected (Thorne & Varcoe, 1998). The "collusive or resistant strategies that narrators develop" (Chase, 2011, p. 430) to the constraints produced by gender inequalities are explored. On the other hand, storytelling can be used as "a means of not being silent (or silenced) about difficult-to-articulate things (love, hope, disillusionment, death, and loss) in the current discursive environment" (Kelly, 2015, p. 1). The intersected methodology of feminism and storytelling enables women to articulate their perspectives and interpretations from their contextualized agency (Pitre, 2011) to reveal their interactions with society.

Through the restorying of lives, subjects keep revising the meaning of the tales they have been immersed in, and construct new storylines to help them exert control over the possibilities, ambiguities, and limitations of life (Bochner & Riggs, 2014). The reconstruction of the life story enables women to be more powerful while reorganizing their life stories. Bochner and Riggs (2014) write, "a storied life is a negotiated life collaboratively enacted and performed in dialogue with the other characters with whom we are connected. Thus, the stories we live out are a relational, co-authored production" (p. 196), which gives women a space to perform a dialogue with others as well as with themselves in their lives and generate stories from fragmented life experiences by transferring discontinuity to continuity. The stories in the meantime form interrelations in women's lives.

The knowledge in storytelling empowers women as subjects. The subjectivity of women is embodied in their production of life stories. Stories could be seen as models for redescriptions of the world and of the narrator themselves (Badley, 2016). When the participants articulate, they are reconstructing the world and themselves in the context. Narratives are a means of confronting real life to understand life and to live life in discourses. Badley (2016) writes,

> Each re-description is another story about how we see ourselves, how we compose our identities, and how we see the world. We can then decide which of these stories matter for us, which are more or less useful for our particular purposes. However, we can't reduce all possible stories to one grand narrative. The point is to keep the conversation going by encouraging more re-descriptions and more stories (more compositions and re-compositions) rather than to search for some chimerical objective truth. From such a stance, there is no description- or language- or mind- or story-independent way the world is. (p. 378)

The situation and context of the interviewed Chinese women academics are constructed and specified in their stories. By investigation of their lived experiences, I may connect and reconnect the knowledge with the participants and their aspirations. Storytelling "describes an ongoing and recursive process, with issues from earlier phases of inquiry being revisited later; in such fluid work, there can be no guarantees of getting things right" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010, p. 270). This constructive fluidity is consistent with the temporal gender identity of the participants, which is always changing, and thus stories are given meaning every time they are told as a way of transferring knowledge. Badley (2016) argues that "a story …matters because it traces new threats to our previously composed identities" (p. 380). The stories narrated by the participants are their feminist conversations with the social and institutional discourses and themselves.

Methods and Research Process

This study consists of 3 main phases: recruiting participants, collecting data, and analyzing data. A variety of methods were employed in this research including collecting biographic information, completing a fictional story, and carrying out semistructured interviews. The data were analyzed using feminist critical discourse analysis. Each phase is introduced in detail as follows.

Research Participants

The participants are 20 Chinese women academics of lower middle academic ranks,[19] with doctorates, recruited from double first-class universities in China in June and July, 2020. Half of them received domestic doctorates while the others gained doctorates overseas. The research disciplines of these women academics were not limited to ensure a variation of

[19] Lower middle academic ranks refer to lecturers (*jiangshi*) and associate professors (*fujiaoshou*) in Chinese academic ranking system.

doctoral programs and university institutional culture. Academics with lower to middle academic ranks are likely to be in their beginning or developing stages of their career. These 20 participants were recruited through online advisement, via my personal social network and the network of my colleagues in Chinese double first-class universities. This participant group was made up of a wide age range from late 20s to early 60s. Those participants are the narrators of their life experiences of doctoral education, academic career, and work–life balance in motherhood.

Biographical Information of the Participants. Based on the biographical information forms, the general biographical background of all the participants is presented in Tables 1(participants with domestic doctorates) and Table 2 (participants with overseas doctorates). All the participants are listed in the chronological order of being interviewed in each group. All the information was reported by the time of the interview. In the domestic group, all the participants received doctoral degrees in double first-class universities; almost all of the participants in the overseas group took doctoral education in the world top-ranked universities[20]. Nine of them were associate professors, and the other 11 participants were lecturers—the initial academic rank in Chinese universities for doctoral graduates. Twelve of the participants were from social science disciplines, four from humanities and arts, and four from sciences. Most of the fields are the same for both groups. Table 1 lists the overseas exchange study experiences of participants during their doctoral study, and Table 2 lists the country in which participants received their doctorate, which indicates the diversified background culture the participants were in. Overseas doctorates were gained in eight different countries/districts. Only four of the 10 participants in the domestic group had overseas study experience, taking part in international joint programs, which are encouraged by the Chinese government (Chinese Scholarship Council, 2021). Those academics with exchange study experiences in dual countries are more likely to provide distinctive opinions with a comparative lens. Among the participants[21], 13 of the participants are married, 12 of these have children. One of the participants was divorced. None had children before marriage.

[20] In Chinese higher education context, world top-ranked universities refer to the top 200 universities in the four international university ranking lists introduced in Chapter 1.

[21] None of the participants reported being homosexual. The discussions in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, refer to the legal partners of the participants as husbands, and partners in romantic relationships as boyfriends.

Table 1

The Biographical Information of Participants with Domestic Doctorates

Pseudonym	Age	Year received doctorate	Academic rank	Discipline	Overseas exchange in doctoral education	Marital status	Age of children
Ming	39	2006	Associate professor	Psychology	–	Married	10
Naya	37	2010	Associate professor	Sociology	10 months, US	Married	8 and 3
Taozi	37	2016	Associate professor	Education	12 months, US	Married	5
Fu	30	2012	Lecturer	Anthropology	6 months, Australia	Single	–
Danni	29	2018	Lecturer	Literature	–	Single	–
Xixi	29	2018	Lecturer	Broadcasting	–	Single	–
Shi	35	2015	Lecturer	Psychology	–	Married	3
An	38	2009	Associate professor	Sociology	–	Married	7 and 4
Yang	39	2012	Associate professor	Psychology	12 months, US	Married	6
Zhong	49	2015	Associate professor	Linguistics	–	Divorced	23

Table 2

The Biographical Information of Participants with Overseas Doctorates

Pseudonym	Age	Year received doctorate	Academic rank	Discipline	Country (district) received doctorate	Marital status	Age of children
Jiao	28	2019	Lecturer	Communication	UK	Single	–
Hong	31	2015	Lecturer	Sociology	Germany	Married	1
Kadi	36	2010	Associate professor	Psychology	Hong Kong SAR	Married	3
En	33	2017	Lecturer	History	Singapore	Married	4
Chang	29	2018	Lecturer	Political Science	UK	Married	–
Ou	32	2016	Lecturer	Communication	US	Single	–
Rui	38	2017	Associate professor	Education	New Zealand	Married	6
Bai	31	2018	Lecturer	Ethics	Belgium	Married	5
Pan	59	2005	Associate professor	Humanity	Japan	Married	30
Luna	30	2016	Lecturer	Social Science	Hong Kong SAR	Single	–

Participants, Narrators, and Knowing Subjects. In the interviews, the participants, as narrators, perceive their self-identities as a biographical "reflexive self," when they are "asked to conduct a self-interrogation in terms of what is happening" (Giddens, 1991, p. 76), and therefore their lives can be understood through a recounting and reconstruction of the living experiences (L. Ye & Edwards, 2017). I aimed to have "experiences parallel to the phenomenon of interest that prompts further inquiry." (Mueller, 2019) from the participants in their narratives. For example, the doctoral study experiences they reflected on might be nuanced from their description during doctoral education, yet they are reproducing the doctoral education in retrospect and retrospecting prospects, which stands for the memories of the future (N. Brown & Michael, 2003). When the participants articulated as narrators, they built a dialogic relationship with themselves on the basis of their "reflexive inner dialogue" (Archer, 2007, p. 63). These narratives gave space as well as "speaking time" (Butler, 1997, p. 28) to the participants to recollect their life experiences by having the conversations with themselves. As L. Ye and Edwards (2017) write,

> As individuals create, maintain and revise the biographical narrative of who they are, they are better able to make sense of their daily life, to achieve ontological security (or order and continuity) and move toward self-actualization through life planning. (p. 867)

In this formation of subjectivity and identities during narration, the language they used became an instrument for meaning to convey the knowledge from their experiences. When participants provide value and opinions in interviews, they are translating their experiences into language. The way they make sense of the everyday, taken-for-granted experiences draws attention to feminist storytelling (Bailey & Fonow, 2015). This self-articulation tends to empower the participants with autonomy in those narratives. Though Foucault claims that language makes the narrators speaking subjects, Butler (1997) claims that this articulation may enable the participants to control the language with agency:

> What he [Foucault] fails to emphasize, however, is that the time of discourse, even in its radical incommensurability with the time of the subject, makes possible the speaking time of the subject. That linguistic domain over which the subject has no control becomes the condition of possibility for whatever domain of control is exercised by the speaking subject. Autonomy in speech, to the extent that it exists, is conditioned by a radical and originary dependency on a language whose historicity exceeds in all directions the history of the speaking subject. (p. 28)

The participants performed as knowing subjects when describing their experiences in the narratives. The articulation of the participants is meaningful under certain power relations in the social discourse. The subject is constrained and limited by the power relations. Butler (2005) writes:

> It means only that the "I," its suffering and acting, telling and showing, take place within a crucible of social relations, variously established and iterable, some of which are irrecoverable, some of which impinge upon, condition, and limit our intelligibility within the present. (p. 132)

In this "crucible of social relations" (p. 132), the intelligibility of subjects is limited, mostly unconsciously. Those limitations tend to be unchangeable and irresistible to subjects. Therefore, the acts and speaking presented by subjects have already been shaped and modified. For the naturalized undergoing process, subjects usually lack the awareness of this limitation, which makes them assume they are being *knowing subjects* holding the instrument of language. However, "neither the self-conception nor the knower-conception can claim absolute authority" (Code, 1993, p.38), for the process is constrained by the limits of self-consciousness. Weedon (2004) writes:

> In commonsense discourse, people tend to assume that they are "knowing subjects," that is sovereign individuals, whose lives are governed by free will, reason, knowledge, experience and, to a lesser degree, emotion. They are subjects who, in Althusser's terms, work by themselves. As sovereign, knowing subjects, they use language to express meaning. They acquire the knowledge that they convey in language from their socialization, education and experience of life. (p. 8)

The participants, the Chinese women academics, had been shaped by various "crucibles of social relations," whose repetition constructed their performative acts. The truth they presented, also, is constituted by these power relations. Compared to the oppression through which women are "*produced* as 'objects of knowledge-as-control'" (Code, 1993, p. 32), in the articulation, the participants positioned themselves as knowing subjects and sovereign individuals. They were constructing worlds through articulation in language; however, those worlds were still limited by their intelligibility of the truth. The experiences of being women academics they described originated through the constitution of power relations. If the knowing subjects are governed, is language a fictive construction? How can the articulation be justified?

Recognition and Connection. Researchers' experiences are the ontological position in their storytelling (Caine & Estefan, 2011). As a qualitative researcher, I attempted to place the temporality and sociality of the life stories and experiences of the participants within my own stories with a narrative lens (Caine & Estefan, 2011). The representation of the research data is described as a "crisis of representation," for scholars claim that feminist qualitative research risks portraying participants as Other, leading to the silence and marginalization of women during research (Allan, 2012, p. 100). In this research, narratives are only explained through making a connection with researchers in a certain social context, which forms a "collaborative venture" between researchers and participants (Caine & Estefan, 2011). Researchers are responsible for positioning themselves in the narratives with a participatory action by making themselves subjects in the discourse rather than in the research (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Frank (1995) argues that the researcher should theorize with stories instead of about them and respect the integrity of the story as a story (p. 23). He continues:

> The first lesson of thinking with stories is not to move on once the story has been heard, but to continue to live in the story, becoming in it, reflecting on who one is becoming, and gradually modifying the story. (p. 163)

Frank encourages researchers to generate themselves in the stories by becoming a member and an insider. This way of immersing oneself in stories enables researchers to resonate with the Other (Frank, 1995). As the Other, the "storyteller gains value and meaning of the expectation from the expectation that the Other may learn, benefit and be guided" (Bochner, 2001, p. 149). In this dialogic relationship, researchers, listeners, and readers are all the collaborators in the frame of constructing meaning (Bochner, 2001).

Bochner (2001) claims that life stories are based on facts but not determined by them. For researchers, authenticity is not originality, or uniqueness, but responsibility, choice, and vigilance (Bochner, 2001). Researchers need to be responsible to the stories and to give these silenced voices spaces by making connections with the participants. Moreover, the construction of language inevitably makes self-narrated stories inauthentic for they could be distortions, misrepresentations, or even lies (Bochner, 2001). In other words, inevitably, the truth they think they are telling may not be the facts but may be constructed in the way those subjectivities are produced. The participants are performing the self that they would like researchers to see, to know, and to investigate. In this situation, how can we deal with the inauthenticity in the narratives? Does it affect the validity of the interviews? Poststructuralism aims at the exploration of how identities and subjectivities are constructed

rather than what the facts are. Narratives do not "measure up to the experiences, the selves, or the lives" participants seek to present (Bochner, 2001, p. 153). These distortions and misrepresentations form the inconsistency of the manifestation and the authentic story. Language, as a cultural medium (Bochner, 2001), fills the gap and gives refined meaning to subjects. This discursive reworking is indeed shaped by the power relations in social discourse.

In the narrative of oneself, narratives are seen as the process of reproduction. The requirement of narrating "what is not mine" to make oneself "recognizable and understandable" raises tension with "the narrative authority of the 'I.'" This implies, to be recognized by others, the subject has to show substitutability by conforming to the norms. They make themselves "become recognizable through the operation of norms" (Butler, 2001, p. 25). This conformity in the meantime challenges the "singularity" of one's story. Butler (2001) writes:

> If I try to give an account of myself, if I try to make myself recognizable and understandable, then I might begin with a narrative account of my life, but this narrative will be disoriented by what is not mine, or what is not mine alone. And I will, to some degree, have to make myself substitutable in order to make myself recognizable. The narrative authority of the "I" must give way to the perspective and temporality of a set of norms that contest the singularity of my story. (p. 26)

In this research, the participants performed gender norms to get recognition in the social discourse and they were also confronted with the agency of being accomplished academics. Their narratives were mostly in tension between being "substitutable" and being "mine" to give accounts of themselves. The demonstration of these narratives originated with this desire of the participants. In gender performativity theory, the construction of gender identity is a fictive concept and constantly under construction (see Chapter 3). This research retains an open and tolerant attitude to interpret the construction of identities and subjectivities, as a temporal frame (Bochner, 2001) being articulated by the participants.

Data Collection

In this qualitative research, I collected data through a variety of methods including biographical information forms, fictional story completion, and semistructured interviews on the basis of feminist storytelling. The participants were given ample spaces to narrate their personal experiences. These methods and the means of conduction are outlined as follows.

Biographical Information Forms. Before the interview, each participant was asked to fill out a biographical information form to report basic personal information (see Appendix A). This included age bracket, academic rank educational background information and other research-related individual information, including multiple-choice, blank filling, and short-answer questions. All forms remained anonymous and were only numbered to match recordings. In data analysis, the information in the form was used to categorize participants for contrast and comparison. Meanwhile, this distinctive biographical information, or "first grid [,] represented some of the different elements of the participant's various stories in an apparently straightforward way" (Haggis, 2004, p. 339). These "grids," therefore, are the different starting points with dual functions of classification and uniqueness of the participants in data analysis. For Haggis (2004), the thematic analysis aims to capture "what the narratives have in common," and the grids are for the differences (p. 348). The educational background, academic ranks, and personal status they reported are the basis of the data analysis chapters.

A Fictional Story Completion. Developing in the past 2 decades, the explicit use of fictional stories in qualitative research is related to the effectiveness of increasing the potential to get in-depth findings (Leavy, 2012). Evans (1998) writes her own stories to share experiences with other colleagues in action research. When she comes to ethical issues, she points out that one fictional character exploring solutions in real situations seems to be more practical. She creates a fictional story, with five characters, about a dilemma, holding a group discussion after reading. Kelly (2009) conducts a comparison of three fictional texts to illustrate students' expectations in supervision relationships, which enables students to recognize their subject position in the narration (Knights, 2005). Though values are embodied in participants' answers to the interview, the distinctiveness of individuals is formed by their complicated background. The method of using stories as a means to explore characters' differing values could also work in my research, which aims to examine Chinese women academics' different perceptions of career and life.

This research was developed on the basis of poststructuralism and gender performativity theory, as was the fictional story I created. During the first half of the interview, I presented the participants with a written story spanning the undergraduate study to work life of two fictional Chinese women academics. They are in different life trajectories, in that one completes her doctorate domestically and the other overseas, but they both work in double first-class universities eventually. These experiences might be familiar to the participants so

that it was more likely to touch on their common experiences. Compared to real-life narratives, the fictional basis of the story gave the participants the space and possibility to be free from ethical issues and daily constraints to enable them to express themselves more freely with less effort to make themselves "recognizable" (Butler, 2001, p. 26). There were four dilemmas positioned in a thick background plot and rooted in the context of Chinese higher education, which provided ample information to the participants. To answer the research questions, those dilemmas were developed from the published academic studies on women academics as well as my experiences of working in the university, including choices about overseas research opportunities, academic positions, leadership positions, and childbirth, to stimulate the participants to draw on their real feelings and values for the answers. Participants were asked to make decisions from alternative options in online documents and explain their reasons by speaking in the interview. The close relations between the fictional story completion and the semistructured interview gave the participants a smooth transition and made the latter an in-depth extension of the responses to the former. The completed stories and reasons were recorded for analysis combined with biographical information forms and semistructured interviews.

Feminist Semistructured Interviews. I conducted feminist semistructured, in-depth interviews with a specific group of women participants as the second half of the interview, seeking to understand their "lived experiences," which allowed me to "access the voice of those who are marginalized in a society" (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 118). Semistructured interviews provide "an opportunity for creating and capturing insights of a depth and level of focus" (Forsey, 2012, p. 364) with the participants to find what is not known otherwise. This interaction enables the production of knowledge with immediate follow-up and response from the interviewer, as well as their participation, as Brinkmann (2014) writes:

> Compared to structured interviews, semistructured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee; as well, the interviewer has a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself, rather than hiding behind a preset interview guide. (p. 286)

In this conversation, listening is portrayed as the most core skill for an interview project (Forsey, 2012) to encourage more narrative production (Elliott, 2012, p. 285). Active

listening encourages the inner thoughts of the participants "out into the open" (Forsey, 2012, p. 372). During the interview, "clarity about the product of the research project is crucial to both outcome and conduct of the project" (Forsey, 2012, p. 364).

Feminist interviews can provide "all manner of information that only those with certain experiences can know" (Ackerly & True, 2010, p. 168). They also provide women participants with spaces to tell their stories, to think and reflect, and to discover the meaning and essence of personal experiences. Besides the interviews' research purposes, they can also benefit participants. Compared to surveys, a much larger proportion of women participants in feminist interviews mention that they gain positive things during the process (Campbell et al., 2010). In feminist research, interviews are reported as therapeutic for participants, who gain from the process by reorganizing narration (Sinding & Aronson, 2003; Wolgemuth et al., 2015). Wolgemuth et al. (2015) state that participants experienced emotional cleansing, became knowledgeable, connected with the broader community, and helped someone down the road, which aligns with the "raising awareness" purpose of this feminist research. This resonates with the findings of Sinding and Aronson (2003) that participants in feminist interviews may allegedly be empowered, and their self-awareness of practices tends to be generated. Ideally, the interaction in the feminist storytelling shows a mutual and caring collaboration between the researchers and participants (Sandelowski, 2007, p. 162). In this dynamic process, a feminist researcher is not an outsider but "an active participant in the weaving and meaning-making process" (Stockfelt, 2018, p. 1018) in data collection. The interactive cooperation and production largely ensure the effectiveness of interviews.

Feminist semistructured, in-depth, narration-centered interviews not only gave flexibility to the narratives of participants but also effectively served the research question with my purposeful guidance. If both interviewers and interviewees are women, as in this research, interviews often contain a discussion of both individual and social aspects embracing the motives of producing knowledge (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 287). With this aim, all the questions led the participants to generally "talk about certain *themes* rather than to *specific* opinions about these themes" (Brinkmann, 2014, p.285). The participants were encouraged to describe their experiences with a widespread phenomenological perspective (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 287).

During the semistructured interviews, I asked participants open questions following fixed protocols, followed by "more emotionally and politically challenging questions" (Ackerly & True, 2010, p. 169). A slight adjustment of interview questions might have occurred depending on the verbal and nonverbal responses of participants, for instance, probing questions about feminism were skipped if participants showed unfamiliarity with the term. Optional follow-up questions were asked if participants mentioned relevant information. For example, if a participant said she lost the opportunity to be the department dean by taking maternity leave, I asked more about gender equality in academic career development and motherhood. I left enough space for participants to narrate and guided them naturally when necessary. Although all whole interviews were recorded, I also took notes during the talking to write down keywords and participants' nonverbal signs. Open questions or prompts were efficient and helped probe for specific detail (Mueller, 2019). All the participants were encouraged to recall their experiences in doctoral study and connection with academic career and family. In the narratives, the participants related their experiences in retrospect by connecting their previous doctoral study experiences with their current academic career. They were ascribing meaning to their experiences by articulation in the space provided by this research. These stories were constructed as a recollection of the participants' life experiences and were combined for coherence (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008).

All the interviews were undertaken in Mandarin, although all academics with doctorates working in Chinese universities have already received at least 15 years of English-language training, and some of them gained degrees from English-speaking countries or countries using English as a working language. Despite the participants' good or excellent English proficiency, participants' mother tongue is more likely to provide for ease in self-expression to avoid difficulties and limitations in expression. The interview schedule was translated into Simplified Chinese without changing meaning, and impromptu follow-up questions might have occurred based on the conversation as mentioned.

The interview did not start until every participant had been given the participant information sheet with a general introduction to the research, the whole procedure of data collection and analyzing and their rights (Appendix B), and signed a bilingual consent form (Appendix C). Because of the pandemic, all the interviews were conducted online via video or audio meeting. I discussed meeting times with participants in advance and arranged them at the participants' convenience. A comfortable, relaxing, quiet, and uninterrupted environment was necessary and beneficial to interviews (Bullock, 2016). The overall purpose of the

interview questions was to answer the research questions with a focus on the Chinese women academics' strategies to thrive in academia, and how their experiences of doctoral education had shaped their career paths. Some indicative questions were:

- Why did you choose to complete a doctorate overseas/domestically? Did you ever consider the other option?
- How has your doctoral study influenced your career development? Can you please give examples?
- What was your early academic career like? /How do you deal with the obstacles in your career?
- Have you ever felt being a woman positively or negatively affected your academic career development?
- Can you please give a metaphor for your academic life and explain it?
- What is the expectation for the next 5 years in your career development?

Conducting Interviews. The interviews were conducted between July and September, 2020. Before the interviews, once the participants decided the online meeting platform and meeting time, I asked them to sign the consent forms and sent them the meeting link. I then sent the participants the biographical information forms (in Simplified Chinese and English) (see Appendix A), the questionnaire of the fictional story completion and the interview schedule (in Simplified Chinese and English; see Appendix D). If the participants had personal information and/or curriculum vitae on the official website of the university they worked in, I completed the biographical information forms for them to ease their workload. The fictional story completion questionnaire was provided in one language to limit its length. The shorter length reduced the reading duration and made it convenient for the participants to answer the questions on their cell phones. All the participants were given the fictional story completion in Simplified Chinese and were told that the English version (see Appendix E) could also be provided if they asked. The participants were advised to finish the fictional story completion ahead of the interview. Before the interviews started, all the participants were informed that the interviews were separated into two steps: the fictional story completion and a semistructured interview. They were free to choose to do them on one or two occasions. All of them chose to do the two steps at one time. I started with the choices in the fictional story completion, followed with the semistructured interview. The interviews ran from 45 to 183 minutes. For the ones who showed interest in this project but were not selected, I sent each of them a Thank-you letter (see Appendix F). Among the

20 participants, I interviewed 18 of them for one time. I conducted follow-up interviews with 2 of them.

I usually opened the interview by asking the participants about their summer holiday, given the interviews were conducted mostly in the annual summer holiday in 2020. Such questions signaled an interest in the participants and the story they were about to tell, and also helped warm the participants to the topic and the process (Forsey, 2012). Most of the participants started to talk about their life in family and work, which are the topics closely related to this research. I also asked the participants to briefly introduce the policies in the university they worked in, because understanding the local scene is significant to understanding and interpreting their narratives (Briggs, 1986; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995. Most of the questions were open ended using everyday language (Elliott, 2012), and the questions were asked with "a 'knowing' naivety" (Forsey, 2012, p. 371). Compared to the "what" questions, I tended to ask the participants to explain "how" and "why" based on their narratives, especially when the participants were providing answers closely related to the research questions, to probe their underlying consciousness in those narratives. In the semistructured interviews, I guided rather than shaped the interviews with the research schedule to prevent the interviews from going completely free (Forsey, 2012, p. 372).

Butler (2001) argues, "If we say that the self must be narrated,… only the narrated self can be intelligible, survivable" (p. 35). In the narratives, the participants were expected to make conscious utterances with intelligibility. Their knowing stands were more likely to explain the viewpoints they made in those interviews. By this means, they became intelligible to me by their articulation, and my research becomes intelligible to readers through my investigation and explanation. Butler continues, "it accepts an unconscious, accepts it as something which is thoroughly recuperable by the knowing 'I,' as a possession perhaps, believing that the unconscious can be fully and exhaustively translated into what is conscious" (p. 35). My probe in this interview attempted to make the unconscious of the participants float to the conscious. This translation might add the depth to the interviews.

All the interviews were conducted online. Internet technologies have been used in qualitative studies as a research medium in recent years (Hanna, 2012). Online meeting platforms may complement or extend researchers' methodological options (Archibald et al., 2019). In this research project, all the interviews were conducted using various meeting platforms. Opening more possibilities in terms of geographic access to the participants, online meetings

save travel times and are less likely to disrupt the life schedules of the participants while carrying out the interviews (Seitz, 2019). Before the online interviews, sufficient preparation of the facilities is advocated. The visual background should remain clear and simple when the online video meetings are conducted, to set a formal tone (Seitz, 2019). To lessen the anxiety and pressure of private meetings for both the interviewers and interviewees (Seitz, 2019), this form can also approach a conversational format that resembles an in-person interview (Brinkmann, 2014). Although, in an online meeting, unexpected background noises may affect the conversation (Seitz, 2019), in this feminist research, interruptions from the participants' end, for example, children's noise, can be a natural reflection of their normal lives. These did happen in my interviews and I took them as nonnarrative data after gaining the consent of those participants (see Chapter 7). To reduce the emotional barrier when the participants were narrating personal stories, I responded to them through the utterance of verbal responses, for example, resonating with them in the conversation (Irvine et al., 2012), and by body language, for example, nodding, to demonstrate my presence and understanding (Seitz, 2019). The participants of online meetings do not report difficulties in establishing rapport with the researchers (Archibald et al., 2019; also see Irvine et al., 2012) or in substantive understanding, although clarifications and comprehensions may be required more than for face-to-face/in-person interviews (Irvine et al., 2012).

All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed to texts in Simplified Chinese. At least two recording devices were used. I downloaded an automatic transcribing application as efficient assistance and notified participants before interviews (Bullock, 2016). I selected relevant paragraphs and sentences and translated them into English for data analysis. All audio recordings and biographical information forms were numbered to match with each participant. To eliminate personal identification, all participants were given pseudonyms. These qualitative data collection means aim at glimpsing the complexity of character, origins, as well as the logic of culture, but also seek representatives of distinct samples in groups (McCracken, 1988).

Data Analysis

Qualitative research aims at interpretation to transform the world into visible presentations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). To manage and give meaning to the discursive and contextualized data, appropriate approaches need to be selected for systematic analysis. Feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) methodology is employed in data analysis. Understanding the

meaning of the participants' multiple, controversial, and perspectival descriptions demands careful interpretation (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 288).

In this study, I analyzed selected data from the fictional story completion and semi-structured interview in response to the themes and theoretical concepts that arose from my initial comprehensive reading of all the data and my ongoing reading of feminist theory. This selection process meant the two different data sources were not evenly distributed in each analysis chapter, with the preponderance of data coming from the interviews.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. In this research, FCDA was utilized in data analysis. In poststructural feminism, women's experiences are "shaped by discursive practice" and "inextricably linked with discourse" (Leavy, 2007, p. 96). As Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) explain, "[F]CDA provide[s] a crucial theoretical and methodological impetus" and "concern[s] itself with relations of power and inequality in language" (p. 447). Feminist critical researchers aim to expose and critique oppression, domination, and power inequities, which limit women's participation in society, politics and economy (Browne, 2000; Kushner & Morrow, 2003). They intend to give voice to the silent group, to reveal the invisibility, and "to identify the interaction between social actors and their multifaceted world" (Pitre, 2011, p. 54). Poststructural feminist researchers employ FCDA on "patriarchal and male-centered ways of looking at the world" by analyzing "language, symbols, ideology, and so forth" (Leavy, 2007, p. 91). Feminist critical research is dedicated to "empower[ing] the powerless" and "openly profess[es] strong commitments to change, empowerment, and practice-orientedness" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 449), which is in line with the purpose of this study.

Data Analysis Process. Due to the complexity of discourses, deconstructing how power relations work on and with individuals is consistent with the poststructural paradigm of theorizing the subjects through investigation of subjectivity and identity formation. In the data analysis, a two-step method is employed to interpret and explain discourse as follows.

Before writing the data analysis chapters, I did a preliminary qualitative data analysis and thematically sorted the transcripts of six participants and then categorized these more than 20 small themes into three overarching ones to extract themes that answer the research question. After that, I wrote the data analysis chapters based on these themes driven by Butlerian theoretical concepts. All the transcripts were read repeatedly while writing data analysis chapters. FCDA was applied in the analysis following Fairclough's (1995) three-

dimensional approach, considering inequality and power as a new critical paradigm. Fairclough sketches a three-dimensional approach for discourse analysis: 1) discourse-as-text, 2) discourse-as-discourse-practice, 3) discourse-as-social-practice. The first dimension focuses on language forms from a linguistic perspective to give meaning; the second and third dimensions view discourse in a social context (Fairclough, 1995). From the text dimension, I coded discourse from the use of linguistic features, for example, synonyms and antonyms, and the way the interviewees address people or events to analyze the underlying meaning. From the discourse dimension, I extracted and interpreted metaphors, sayings, quotations, and figures of speech to analyze underlying value. From the social-practice dimension, I explained the intersected relations of the previous coding in social aspects to analyze opinions, social norms, and power.

In the data-selection process, I firstly described "the patterns across the objective set of experiences and identify and describe the stories into a chronology" to "classify codes into themes" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 199). After reducing quotes to themes, "developing and assessing interpretations" by "locating epiphanies within stories" and "identify[ing] contextual materials" was followed (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 199). Then, I represented the data to "restory and interpret the larger meaning of the story" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 199). Based on the overview, I referred back to related transcripts frequently and extracted paragraphs from transcripts for detailed analysis. All extracted transcripts were translated into English and further analyzed to limit the nuances in language translation.

Second, I further analyzed the discourse using a social ideological perspective of the Chinese context. Ideology serves as an essential part of human society. All the aforementioned three dimensions of discourse analysis point to ideology through an implied interactive connection, mutually relying on each other. To deeply explain the connections and interactions, I extended ideological analysis based on codes and data extracts to reveal the formation of discourses in contextualized academia. As Kelly (2013) writes, to analyze text in higher education, it is significant to retain "a sense of *context*" (p. 72). This explanation of ideology is necessary when an invisible or unobvious social structure is detected. Butlerian theory was used to explain how the Chinese women academics' subjectivities and identities were formed and reproduced in the discourses with "a consciousness of the functions of the power" (p. 73).

Third, to investigate power relations and deconstruct the gender binary matrix, I introduced gender performativity theory as the theoretical framework in this research in Chapter 3. Driven by this theory, I retained a critical approach to the theory in the data analysis and discussion, kept interactive with the theory (Hage, 2016) and examined this European-context theory from a Chinese higher educational context. Butler (2011) argues that gender categories "change and expand under the pressure of women's own demands" (p. 466), and those changes can and do happen using very specific language in social agents who do not have to be Western.

In the last stage of data analysis, the discursive construction of power relations in gender performances were investigated "to construct and reconstruct—to compose and re-compose—what we think we know about the past and what we may hope for the future" (Badley, 2016, p. 378).

Trustworthiness

One of the key considerations of a research project is its trustworthiness, which is the most appropriate criterion for qualitative research evaluation (Maher et al., 2018). To address trustworthiness, I implemented three approaches in the research. All the research methods and processes are centered on the principles of trustworthiness to make the research meaningful. This research was conducted in a rigorous process to validate the claim of its findings (Biggs & Buchler, 2007). By employing two qualitative research methods in data collection, as introduced, on similar topics from different perspectives, the narratives resonated between the fictional story completion and the semistructured interviews, mutually validated the articulation of the participants. During data analysis, for one, I kept an open mind and put aside any expected research conclusions; for another, I rigorously compared the raw data, data transcripts, translation, and data interpretation. From the participants' recruitment to the thesis writing, I conducted a thick description by rendering a deeply detailed account (Barusch et al., 2011) of the participants for this research which was specific in a particular context (Maher et al., 2018). I tended to use thick, direct quotes from the participants to develop explanations (Barusch et al., 2011). With my standpoint, I "immersed" myself in the data as much as possible so I could explore all the possible nuances and view data from various perspectives, in order to support the theory generation (Maher et al., 2018). In this feminist, critical, qualitative research, which was strictly based

on the research question, methodologies, and research process, I made the findings trustworthy by adopting self-reflexivity, member checking and peer debriefing.

For self-reflexivity, I retained a self-critical attitude (E. Thomas & Magilvy, 2011) to understand my position and suspend research bias (Creswell & Miller, 2000). My internal and external dialogue (see Tobin & Begley, 2004) was ongoing during the whole research process. Before data analysis, I was aware of my own intersected identities as Chinese, a woman, and an international doctoral student in education who used to work in a Chinese university as staff as well as an academic. My personal background and values guided this research, along with the methodologies. The combination of lenses shaped the data collection and analysis process. I kept a research journal to observe the reflectivity with systematic analysis at each phase of the research (Borkovic et al., 2020) to record my reflection.

For member checking, I repeatedly refined and carefully designed the research process with my supervisors and advisor, going through all the interview questions and the fictional story one by one. The multiround revision assured the quality of practical strategies. In data analysis, my supervisors and advisor closely tracked my process. We had ample discussions on reviewing the themes and theory generation in the data analysis. we discussed disputable parts as a group to reach an analytical agreement (Borkovic et al., 2020).

Some parts of this thesis were subject to peer debriefing to provide an external check (Nowell et al., 2017) on this research. Before the research was conducted, the research proposal was reviewed by two experienced academics in a relevant field and they both provided constructive comments. During the thesis writing, the first chapter and some of the main findings were shared with my writing group members in the Faculty of Education and Social Work, the University of Auckland, which consists of about 10 doctoral students and my main supervisor, who are all doing qualitative research on education. The first chapter and some data analysis excerpts were reviewed publicly in writing group meetings. The group members gave opinions and suggestions on the structure and informativity of my introduction chapter, and the validity of my data interpretation. They also challenged me to seek possible alternative explanations of the data. Moreover, I introduced the theory framework of this research in a presentation and shared my whole research process in an academic poster with my doctoral group, consisting of about eight doctoral students, two postdoctoral fellows and my supervisors, who are all doing qualitative research using

poststructural theories. They provided constructive comments which inspired me to use theory effectively to explain the data. Moreover, I presented some of the research findings to disinterested peers, and frequently discussed with my doctoral colleagues to think aloud in doing this research. These strategies required me to engage in the process of questioning my work in a consistent and systematic fashion (Barusch et al., 2011).

Ethical Considerations

In this section, I consider the ethical dimensions of this research as how I have undertaken my project in a way can be understand as moral, and proper, in the engagement of and interaction with the participants and presentation of the research findings. In feminist research, with the aim to challenge the social discourse, ethical issues appear to be complex and centralized. Bochner (2001) explains:

> I can live with a scientific and/or cultural sociology that analyzes and examines narratives as a mode of social analysis applying canons of methodological rigor as long as this agenda does not exclude and may, in fact, encourage an ethical, political, and personal sociology that listens to the voices of ill, disabled, and other silenced persons telling, writing, and/or performing their own stories in order to destigmatize, empower, open up dialogue, challenge canonical discourses, engage emotionality and embodiment, and give sociology a moral and ethical center. (p. 152)

The specific ethical procedures are listed in three steps: before interviews, during interviews and after interviews, strictly following the guidelines of University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC). I mainly discuss the ethical considerations from the perspective of anonymity and consent, and the feminist ethics and responsibility as follows.

Anonymity and Consent

Ensuring anonymity could empower women in taking part in research, and help them to share their life experiences freely with fewer concerns (Gordon, 2019). When I was spreading the advertisement for this research (see Appendix G), the anonymity of participants was guaranteed and emphasized. Potential participants were always reached through third parties. I ensured those third parties also respected the confidentiality of participants.

During interviews, I stick to the anonymity principle to treat every participant with dignity and respect. Anonymity is especially worthy of critical reflection when the research is

conducted on women, the group which experiences inequality and oppression (Gordon, 2019), especially when women are challenging gender power relations (Baez, 2002). The assurance of anonymity could prevent individuals from being harmed, protect their privacy, and enhance the accuracy and integrity of the study (Baez, 2002). By this means, women's voices are more likely to be amplified (Gordon, 2019). To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, all the participants were assigned a pseudonym which intentionally started with a different to their legal name. Some participants provided English pseudonyms for the research; but, after careful consideration, I did not use any of those provided names for some of them sounded similar to their legal names or were their assumed English names. Besides this, any identifying information they mentioned in the narratives, for example, location and street names, was blurred, modified, or replaced by fake names to protect participants' confidentiality.

Participants were well-informed by the relevant information with the formal consent form (see Appendices B and C), which was in limited length, presented with bullet points and paragraphs to convey the key message. They could freely consent to participation after careful reading. Even if they signed the consent form, they retained the right to withdraw with no specific reason at any point. The consent and other necessary printed materials were bilingual, in both English and Chinese Mandarin. I informed the participants about privacy both through the consent form and in the online interview to ensure the protection of answers to all questions if they were concerned about sensitive ones (Dusek et al., 2015). The identities with detailed personal information of every participant remained with me. Each interview did not start until the participant agreed that she had a clear understanding of this research. After the interviews, I stored the electronic audio recordings on a personal computer with a password. The data were never uploaded to the Internet or shared with others. All hardcopies of biographical information forms and my notes during communication were locked in private cabinets. My supervisors, advisor and I were the only persons who had access to the data. The data will be destroyed in 6 years.

Feminist Ethics and Responsibility

Feminist ethics has become part of mainstream practice in qualitative research (Forsey, 2012). A feminist ethics of care is "value-based and recognizes the dependencies, partiality, political commitments, and personal involvement of researchers" (Leurs, 2017, p. 138). In the maintenance of the feminist care, researchers need to view the study from a

macroperspective, as Butler argues that feminist ethics "should be committed to making life more livable" (Tohidi, 2017, p. 463). Leurs (2017) writes:

> A feminist ethics of care demands attention to human meaning-making, context-specificity, inter/ dependencies, temptations, as well as benefits and harm. A moral focus is on relationality, responsibility, inter-subjectivity and the autonomy of the research participants. (p140)

Keeping explicit attention to this moral focus, in this research, before interviews, I designed the interview questions and fictional story properly to ensure the research question could be answered, but with data minimization to collect limited personal information. In the interviews, reflections of the participants were needed to keep the taken-for-granted ethics of this data-driven research problematized (Leurs, 2017). Therefore, given the participants "inhabit diverse circumstance and locales" (Bailey & Fonow, 2015, p. 67), imposing universal standards on them might be problematic. Feminists need to develop ways to honestly deal with the power relations between researcher and subjects in diverse contexts (Bailey & Fonow, 2015, p. 67). This argument is echoed by Allan (2012) who claims that one of the major ethical issues is how power should be controlled between researcher and participants (p. 99).

In this research, the participants were seen as independent individuals for their "singularity" (Butler, 2001, p. 26). However, they embraced some substitutable features, for their shared identity as the Chinese women academics, which was one of the research aims. Notably, when probing the life experiences of a marginalized group, the in-depth interview might bring out some unpleasant experiences and demonstrate the underlying power relations that construct the subjectivities and identities of the participants, which was indeed what this research emphasized. However, with the aim of challenging the taken-for-granted power relations, feminist research is more likely to critique the subordination of women in order to resist their oppression, and it may raise some moral justifications (Jagger, 1992). The narratives from the participants were showed in a phenomenological manifestation, and the data were analyzed with the recognition of contextualization.

The ethical claim is also for "a dialogic relationship with a reader or a listener that requires engagement from within, not analysis from outside, the story" (Bochner, 2001, p. 149). As narrative inquirers, researchers have obligations to the stories and experiences of the participants by taking a particular view (Caine & Estefan, 2011). The researcher retains control of the data selection, interpretation, and the research findings (Gordon, 2019). As

discussed, moreover, “prominent in much qualitative research is the idea that the researcher, through reflexivity, can transcend her own subjectivity and own cultural context in a way that releases her/him from the weight of (mis) representations” (Pillow, 2003, p. 186). As the researcher, my subjectivity would inevitably affect my analytical writing. Taking this risk into consideration, I attached much weight to member checking and peer debriefing to keep the trustworthiness of this research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an overview of the methodology and methods employed within the study. It has outlined my reasons for undertaking this research using feminist qualitative research methodology and the underpinned theories. In the examination of the experiences of the Chinese women academics, the data collection was based on biographical information, a fictional story completion and semistructured interviews and has provided sufficient data resources. I particularly explored the relation between the researchers and the participants. The process by which the participants give accounts of themselves through narratives is also emphasized. In the data analysis, FCDA was applied to interpret the data from different perspectives using Judith Butler’s gender performative theory. Finally, I introduced the trustworthiness and the ethical considerations of this feminist critical research.

Following this chapter is the first data analysis chapter, which focuses on the Chinese women academics in their doctoral education. I investigate the gender norms that shaped their gender and academic subjectivities throughout their doctoral education, which may in turn affect their academic career development in the very early stages.

CHAPTER 5
PERFORMANCES OF SUBJECTIVITIES: DOCTORAL EDUCATION AND GENDER NORMS

Introduction

As the highest level of university degree education, doctoral education forms one's academic thinking patterns and guides one's academic career (Schwabe, 2011). In the women academics' reported experiences, gender norms shaped their academic subjectivity formation throughout doctoral education. Because the women academics gained doctorates in different countries, the manifestation of gender norms varies in their performances.

In this chapter, I aim to explore the women academics' perception of their doctoral education and their changing performances constrained by gender norms throughout their doctoral study to see how gender norms construct their academic and gender subjectivities, and the mutual effects between the dual subjectivities, mainly using the data collected from semistructured interviews. The reasons and underlying logic of gender norms in different contexts are explained by the Butlerian theoretical concepts of repetition, drag and parody through repeated performative acts (Butler, 2006, p. 192). By repetition, parody and drag, these women academics performed gender norms in the contexts of domestic and overseas doctoral education. In particular, during doctoral education, the women academics "parodied within the cultural practices of drag" (Butler, 2006, p. 187) as their strategies to yield to the social discourse. The social discourse is explored in monitoring the change of gender norms. To clarify, the academic and gender subjectivities are discussed separately for the women academics who received doctorates domestically and those who received them overseas to explain their similarities and differences, despite the intersectionality of the two subjectivities on subjects.

First, I investigate the women academics' academic and gender subjectivities formation in domestic and overseas doctoral education contexts beginning with the literature review of doctorates as a route to becoming an academic in leading Chinese universities. Then, I analyze their tension in gender and academic subjectivities throughout doctoral education from the two aspects of geographical mobility and their struggles in resistance and conformity. Next, I discuss how the gender and academic subjectivities are constructed in both domestic and overseas doctoral education, and the reasons why gender norms fluctuate throughout doctoral study.

Why Doctorates Become a Route to Chinese Leading Universities.

The increasing requirement of qualifications and the number of publications for those who are willing to work in Chinese universities is closely related to the recent growth of the higher education strategic development policies in China. Compared to the leading development mode of higher education systems in developed countries, Chinese higher education is going through a transformation from quantitative to qualitative development (G. Xu & Wu, 2020). It has undergone three stages of development. The first one is a difficult initial development. With the foundation of the PRC in 1949, Chinese higher education began its development with a very limited number of academics and college students (An et al., 2020). After the Opening-up policy in 1978, the Chinese government started to localize educational resources (An et al., 2020). The second stage was quick expansion. From 1999 to 2005, the quantity of college students in the Chinese higher education system rapidly increased to 9,500,000 with the gross enrollment rate increasing from 6.5% (1995) to 11% (2010) (G. Xu & Wu, 2020). In 2001, to accelerate the process, the aim was changed to improve the gross enrollment rate to 15% in 2005 (G. Xu & Wu, 2020). The third stage shows the concept of "connotative development" (*neihanshi fazhan*) in contemporary Chinese higher education, in which Chinese government aims to build world-leading universities through double first-class programs (see Chapter 1).

Problems are also shown in this development. The primary one occurred in the expansion of the second stage—the number of academics did not proportionally increase with the number of college students (G. Xu & Wu, 2020). The same shortage of supervisors could also be found in Chinese graduate education (Y. Wang & Ye, 2020). In order to meet the demand for academics, this meant Chinese universities no longer required doctorates for recruitment. In this research, some senior participants were recruited to academic positions in universities holding a master's or even a bachelor's degree. However, high-quality research achievement is needed to build double first-class Chinese universities. Therefore, in the leading Chinese universities (see Chapter 1), doctorates and a minimum number of research publications started to become the gatekeeper for newly recruited academics to ensure their research capacity.

Geographical Mobility: Performing Dominant Gender Subjectivity

Doctoral education significantly shapes academic subjectivity formation (see Ai, 2019; C. Mitchell, 2019; Huang, 2020; Schwabe, 2011), while gender subjectivity has shaped women

for years before the establishment of academic subjectivity. In Chapter 2, I claimed that the expectations for women and academics are often contested. In this section, I explain how their gender subjectivity drives their choices of doing local or international doctorates. Although, compared to domestic study, overseas doctoral education may bring more obstacles to international students (e.g., Elliot & Kobayashi, 2019; Elliot et al., 2016; Huang, 2020; L. Xu & Grant, 2017; L. Xu et al., 2020; L. Ye & Edwards, 2015), in the Chinese academic employment market, overseas research experiences tend to advantage the applicants (Pu, 2019). Nevertheless, women academics may not prioritize the potential advantages for career development when they face opportunities.

"Girls Don't Make the Choice": Facing Contested Time

Some of the Chinese women academics struggled with overseas and international doctoral study opportunities before doctoral education. A couple of women academics did consider seeking overseas doctoral education for the possibility of "*better development*" (Naya, domestic, initial interview) in their future academic career. However, in seeking doctoral study opportunities, the women academics were likely to be subject to gender norms. Naya saw the comparatively longer length of international doctoral education as the *cost* for women doctoral students when she was making the decision. She said,

> *I needed to consider the length. If I went to the US for PhD, it may have taken 5 years or longer. And in the second year of my master's study, my supervisor asked me if I wanted to continue with my doctoral study under his [or her][22] supervision. I was thinking, since I've got the "easy mode," why take the "hard" one? ... If I went to the US, it might have taken me 5 or more years to graduate, but I finished my doctoral study here in 3 years.* (Naya, domestic, initial interview)

The study "*length*" in the American doctoral education system may be 2 or more years longer than domestic doctoral study. Although this overseas doctoral education may have paid back in her future academic career, the couple of years after doctoral graduation is critical for women to fulfill their expectation of starting a family and giving birth to children. In Chinese social discourse, women doctoral students are at the "best ages for marriage and childbirth" (Gui, 2017). A failure to complete the mission at "a proper age" would be seen as socially unacceptable (Gui, 2017, p. 1928). Naya (domestic) added, "*My boyfriend and I were in a long-distance relationship, and it was impossible for us to keep long-distance for years.*

[22] In Chinese Mandarin, the pronunciation of he and she is the same.

Therefore, I considered all the factors." Naya chose to do her doctorate domestically mainly because she wanted to maintain the relationship with her boyfriend. When the personal pursuit of academic development had the potential to shake the relationship with her boyfriend, Naya hesitated and did not take the risk to lose her potential marriage. Moreover, compared to the unknown overseas doctoral study opportunities, Naya took the less challenging study option—to continue her doctoral study with her master's supervisor. The potential doctoral research topic extended on her master's thesis could also build the "*easy mode*" to leave her more space for the nonacademic concerns of performing "a subordinate, heterosexual femininity" (Mattsson, 2015, p. 697). Nevertheless, this "*easy mode*" may help less with the development of an academic career. The "*easy mode*" also provided her the opportunity to have two children before she was 35.

As well as the decision to go abroad for doctoral education, the women doctoral students were also confronted with this dilemma when they made decisions after doctoral graduation. My dialogue with An shows how she and her women doctoral colleagues perceived the options after doctoral graduation,

> *An: I think if I listened to my boss*[23] *and did an overseas postdoc, I could've been better [in my academic career development].*
>
> *Researcher: Do you think it may relate to your female identity?*
>
> *An: Yes, it does.*
>
> *…*
>
> *Researcher: You said many of your men colleagues took the overseas postdoc opportunities, is it because their research capacity [is better than femen counterparts] or were those just their choices?*
>
> *An: Actually, everyone can have this opportunity, but girls don't make the choice … If they do a postdoc abroad, they are likely to be a research fellow in the same university afterwards. It takes too many years [to stay in a foreign country]* (An, domestic, initial interview)

In An's narrative, in the top domestic university she studied in, compared to men, women doctoral graduates were less likely to take overseas postdoctoral positions, and they regarded men taking these positions as a norm although they were academically qualified to receive equivalent overseas postdoctoral appointments. Postdoctoral research experiences

[23] In China, some graduate students call their supervisors "bosses," because their supervisors pay for their living stipend.

contribute to early-career development (Webber & Canche, 2018). Compared to their men counterparts who take overseas postdoctoral appointments, the conservative choices of women doctoral students after doctoral graduation are more likely to constrain their academic capacity development and their career development (e.g., Leung, 2017).

Those women doctoral students showed their conformity and loyalty to gender norms by *making sacrifices* or *compromises* for their future career. Furthermore, similar to their women senior doctoral colleagues, An and her women peers were repeating their way by not seeking overseas postdoctoral positions. In this case, this gender norm is maintained and enhanced by the homogenous performance of women doctoral students in An's university.

An continued, "*overseas research experiences also give women academics higher career aspirations*," which may result in their social and academic dislocation back in domestic academia. Among Chinese academics, men usually have higher career aspirations than women (Y. Ma, 2009). Ambitious performances and being too successful in career development is less encouraged for women, for their threat to gender norms (Mattsson, 2015). On the other hand, because of their interchangeable working locations and the uncertain length of time of overseas research positions, the women doctoral students who become overseas postdoctoral fellows are less likely to start a family in *proper* time (see Gui, 2017) than their women colleagues who stay in China. This forms another challenge to the gender norms.

Through these repeated performative acts of gender norms, the women doctoral students tend to or have to choose conservative career development paths, which may start to widen the gender gap before their academic career. Afterall, did the participants know what their decisions might lead to? Did they unconsciously conform to gender norms? An provided her explanation:

> *Sometimes, we [me and my women doctoral colleagues] realized it [dropping the opportunities for overseas postdocs] was a sacrifice, but this thought made us unhappy. We cannot think of it [in this way]. Yet every step, every choice determines the future [career] development. These are all turning points.* (An, domestic, initial interview)

An and her women doctoral colleagues understood the possible consequences brought by their decisions; nevertheless, they embarked on this path. Identifying with the gender norms, An and her women peers categorized themselves as part of the group of women to make "*a*

sacrifice", even though they were aware that it might hinder their career development. They performed the stylized repetition of gender norms by making decisions that may less benefit their careers.

"To Be Honest, I Am Very Traditional": Making Compromises in Space

For Chinese women academics, family obligations and long-term relationships tend to hinder them from studying abroad. Zhong (domestic) reported, "*If I had my doctoral education in US or Canada, I would have had little income during doctoral study. It was unacceptable, because I have to raise my daughter.*" The contested family responsibility constrained the possibilities of Zhong in doctoral education. She had to consider the financial issues of supporting herself if she studied overseas. Even though Zhong dreamed of studying abroad for her doctorate, especially after being a 1-year visiting scholar in the US, she eventually chose to continue with her doctoral study in the university she was working in, not only for the salary but also because "*My ex-husband would not let me see my daughter if I went abroad. I can't leave her in China."* For Zhong, to be a doctoral student overseas was a huge commitment. It would require family sacrifice and might bring trouble to her maternal duty. Zhong's decision came from her parental love; a father might also make a similar decision, yet mothers are more likely to give up the opportunities of geographical mobility (e.g., Lorz & Muhleck, 2019; Suarez-Ortega & Risquez, 2014).

Similar to Zhong, when some of these women academics were making decisions about doing doctorates, they were willing to fulfill the social expectations of women during doctoral study as well. Like Rui (overseas) said, "*You have to reach a consensus with other family members. You cannot just leave the family for doctoral study.*" Pursuing a doctorate away from their partner or family might sabotage the relationship or be irresponsible to their family. Therefore, Rui took her family overseas for her doctoral education and continued to be the main caregiver for their daughters. Standing at the crossroad of career development and family responsibilities, Zhong and Rui both performed gender norms by prioritizing family responsibilities.

Zhong never considered not doing a doctorate, but the decision of where to do it was not merely based on her own situation. Zhong's consideration of doctoral study and her care responsibilities mirrored her academic and gender subjectivities. She thought it was a "*rational choice*," though she was clearly aware that doing a doctorate overseas might be beneficial to her academic career. In other words, Zhong was making compromises on her

academic subjectivity in order to fulfill her gender subjectivity. And she knew that, in the negotiation of two subjectivities, self-sacrifice was inevitable, but she still performed gender norms under the regulation of social discourse. However, it was her quest to maintain her "social visibility and meaning" (Butler, 2006, p. 22) by prioritizing her ontological subjectivity, because, she claimed, "*I feel better when I am concerned about other family members*."

This concern about not satisfying social expectations was also felt by Bai (overseas). In her case, what hindered Zhong's path to overseas doctoral study was her catalyst. Bai described the company and encouragement from her boyfriend at that time:

> *Another important reason was my husband [her boyfriend at that time] had been planning to study abroad for years … I was influenced by him. The first time he said we should apply for overseas doctorates together, I thought it was incredible, I never thought about this option … To be honest, I am very traditional … Though I was going to pursue a PhD, if the big issue in life hadn't been tackled, I would have been a little scared. Actually, I am easily influenced [by other people], to care about what others are thinking [about me].* (Bai, overseas, initial interview)

Before the start of doctoral study, Bai's concern was her possible failure to fulfill the social expectation of being a woman, which is to be married or have a serious long-term relationship at "a marriageable age" (Gui, 2017, p. 1924). Bai was scared about her potential violation of the social discourse because she was "*very traditional*." For women, to start a family is "an indispensable and highly time-sensitive step in every individual's life trajectory" (Gui, 2017, p. 1936). Bai's worry about how others saw her reflected the power of social discourse in shaping her gender subjectivity. She added, "*Many of my old friends didn't pursue doctorates, and they got married and had kids [when I was doing my doctorate]*." Thus, she felt that she needed to fulfill gender expectations to perform a "tacit collective agreement" (Butler, 1988, p. 522) by following her friends' life trajectory. The overseas doctoral education she took was built on this presumption of *proper* repetition of gender performances. The pressure she put on herself indicates Bai was reproducing the gender subjectivity. However, on the other hand, a tentative explanation is Bai's success in receiving her overseas doctorate also shows opportunities and support are likely to overturn the "missing agency" of women in professional development (see Aiston & Fo, 2021, p. 145).

In Chinese ethics, women's sacrifice for family is encouraged and admired (L. Sun, 2017). The "*big issue in life*" (*rensheng dashi*) in Bai's narratives refers to marriage, which is

prioritized in Chinese culture (Gui, 2017). In marriage, Chinese rural people have been used to patrilocal residence for decades, which means married couples should live with the husband's family (Fei, 2019, p. 104). With urbanization and the increasing cost of living, patrilocal residence has been simplified to living with the husband's family or living in the same city as them. The dominant phenomenon of patrilocal residence reflects the dominant role of men in families (M. Wu & Peng, 2017). Therefore, the concept of patrilocal residence still constrains women's mobility in contemporary Chinese society. It shows that when the women academics were making decisions for doctoral study, most of them were considering or following the mobility of their male partners (e.g., Naya and Bai). With the decision Naya and Bai made, they were reproducing the gender norms.

The domination of social discourse after graduation emphasizes the performance of gender norms in women doctoral students. At the end of doctoral study, An's decision was gendered:

> *If I were a man, if I didn't have a partner to care about, I might have made a different choice. [In real life,] if I went abroad [for the postdoc], we would have had to be [in a] long-distance [relationship]. It would have been inconvenient. I took the easier way. And at that time, a good university in my hometown held out the olive branch*[24] *to me.* (An, domestic, initial interview)

An was considering her boyfriend in the transition between doctoral study and her academic career, which is consistent with the concern of avoiding social consequences. Danni's story of her doctoral colleagues resonated with this:

> *When some of my women doctoral colleagues were looking for academic positions, they accommodated themselves to the working locations of their husbands. Therefore, they went to some platforms in lower level [universities], compared to their academic capacity. It makes their future academic career development harder. I am not very optimistic about them.* (Danni, domestic, initial interview)

Danni gave the examples of her doctoral peers to show the relation of their choices to future academic career development. Danni believed if these women doctoral students started their academic career in higher ranked universities, their academic performance would be better. She also described the regret of her doctoral supervisor, "*She [one of Danni's women doctoral colleagues] was very smart in doctoral study. How can she stop doing research after having two children?*" (Danni, domestic, initial interview) This stylized performance

[24] In Chinese, it means to offer an opportunity, to send an invitation.

of the career development path for women doctoral students repeats after graduation because of the compromises they made in career development.

Resistance Versus Conformity: Struggling in Dual Subjectivities

Based on the previous section, the intersected academic and gender subjectivities of women academics emerge after doctoral study. When these Chinese women academics narrated their experiences throughout doctoral study, they showed the contested gender and academic norms brought by the tension between their dual subjectivities. Compared to the women who perform gender throughout their doctoral education, some of them were struggling to resist the gender norms. In this section, four women academics responded differently to the gender norms during their doctoral education. I explore the competing dual subjectivities in women academics in the doctoral education context.

"I Disagree": Danni and Luna's Resistance to Gender Norms

Danni was one of the participants who paid attention to gender norms in academia. She recalled the experiences during her doctoral study to show her firm resistance to gendered bias. She described:

> *Some women doctoral students may accept their incompetence for their gender. They think men should concentrate on career development, and women can step back and live a relaxing life with less ambition … Even my doctoral supervisor sometimes said that women doctoral students may go less far [in academic career development] for they have other choices in the future. You don't have to pursue your career. When I was doing my doctorate, every time I heard him say these words, I refuted immediately: I disagree.* (Danni, domestic, initial interview)

Dominated by gender subjectivity, women doctoral students are more likely to meet the expectations of gender norms and hence may threaten their academic performance. Luna, who gained her doctorate in Hong Kong, SAR, provided a similar narrative to Danni. When her women doctoral colleagues performed gender subjectivity after doctoral graduation, they were disadvantaged at the very beginning of their academic paths. This feature of women doctoral students in academic development was also noticed by Luna's doctoral supervisor. Luna claimed:

> *In recent years, men doctoral supervisors in my department accept fewer women doctoral students, because some of our women doctoral graduates did not proceed with their academic career after becoming academics. They concentrated on their*

families. It made them [men doctoral supervisors] feel that their effort to train these women doctoral students was wasted. Therefore, in the years I did my PhD, the proportion of new men doctoral students was increasingly larger in our department. (Luna, overseas, initial interview)

The intersected gender and academic subjectivities guide women doctoral students in different directions, which may reduce their agency in being accomplished in their academic career. On this basis, some women doctoral students are shaped by gender norms to be less ambitious. More importantly, this tendency is reinforced by supervisors, who are the representative of authority with power over doctoral students. The attrition of women doctoral students in future academic career development brings negative experiences for doctoral supervisors. Danni's supervisor showed less confidence in women doctoral students in career development, while Luna's supervisor found women doctoral students were more likely to be less productive compared to their men counterparts after graduation. Therefore, both the two men supervisors implicitly and explicitly truncated the opportunities of women receiving doctoral education by undervaluing the endeavor of women doctoral students (Danni's supervisor) and limiting the enrollment of women doctoral students (Luna's supervisor).

To resist this bias in practice, although prior research claims that academic housework tends to be a disadvantage for women academics (see Chapter 2), Danni (domestic) became the one who was willing to take on this housework during her doctoral candidature. She had been an experienced part-time administrative assistant in her department. Before she started to intensively write her doctoral thesis, she planned to give this job to another junior man doctoral student, who had little pressure to graduation for he already published more than 10 journal articles. However, the man doctoral students refused her repeatedly:

He refused me without hesitation. I told him several times that it is fine if you don't know how to do it, I can teach you … He thought he had his ambition elsewhere, and his working capability was indeed quite weak … Yet he excelled in doing research. It is very difficult in our discipline, maybe one out of dozens of doctoral students [can have such academic achievement]. I thought, since his academic achievement was so impressive, he could allocate some energy to this [assistant job], but he said no. (Danni, domestic, fictional story completion)

When Danni reported this story, she was complaining about the insufficient socialization of this man doctoral student. Nevertheless, her experience was implicitly gendered. The

contrast between Danni's participation in service work and the man doctoral student's refusal is consistent with the institutional gender norms. The willingness of this man doctoral student to continuously refine his research capacity, despite his superior academic performance, clearly shows "*his ambition*" (Danni, domestic, fictional story completion). This experience of Danni suggests the imbalanced service and caring work allocation in the academic career and the different career aspirations of men and women (Y. Ma, 2009). In the institutional discourse, women and men's performances are largely shaped by gender norms. Chinese women doctoral graduates have obviously lower career expectations and aspirations than Chinese men doctoral graduates, which may be caused by traditional gender roles (Y. Ma, 2009). When this man doctoral student resisted this service work, he, indeed, showed less interest in mothering other members of this academic community. However, when Danni took this service work, she considered it as "*an opportunity to know how a university operates*" (Danni, domestic, fictional story completion) to form her academic subjectivity. In the interview, her aim of being a prestigious scholar in the future was very specific. The ambition gave her more sense of responsibility for the multiple roles senior women academics tend to take in institutions (see Misra et al., 2011).

"We Need Research Fellows, But We Prefer Men": Jiao's Complex Performances of Gender

When Jiao graduated with her doctorate in the UK, she encountered an academic position provided for Asian women. However, after 8 months of work, she chose to give up the foreseeable advantage and come back to China after graduation, diving into the competitive academic labor market. Jiao was clearly aware that she, a Chinese woman, was a privileged scientific researcher in a British university as a minority in both ethnicity and sex. She reported the main reason:

> *On the one hand, as a foreigner, the glass ceiling [in career development] can be seen; on the other hand, because of political correctness, they [British universities and research institutions] provided Asian women certain opportunities … I could have taken advantage of this, but I didn't want to.* (Jiao, overseas, initial interview)

For Jiao, using her distinctiveness to pave the way for her academic career development might emphasize her marginalization, which was the thing she least wanted at that time. During the overseas study, Jiao had been trying to get along with local colleagues for years, but she still felt they took her as a foreigner. Despite her outward performance of having been integrated into British mainstream society, she was feeling out of place inwardly. To

be "*looked at like others*," Jiao was strongly willing to "*identify with the culture*" (Jiao, overseas, initial interview). Hence, after weighing the pains and gains, she showed resistance to the social discourse by leaving the country with an unfinished research fellow contract. Her leaving showed the collapse of her gender subjectivity constitution in the host country.

After Jiao came back to China as an academic returnee, her path of seeking academic position zigzagged. Not being in the privileged group anymore in the Chinese academy, she came across an unexpected response:

> *[When I was seeking domestic academic jobs,] someone asked their supervisors or bosses for me if they needed new blood. The answer was we need research fellows, but we prefer men. Women of this age are more likely to give birth to children, [it would be] too troublesome … Unless they [women] are very, very, very excellent.* (Jiao, overseas, initial interview)

In Jiao's case, the employer used "*troublesome*" to describe women employees, which was obviously offensive but echoes the careless neoliberal culture in marketized higher educational institutions (see Chapter 2). Alas, the unfriendly feedback reduced Jiao's possibility of working in this university. In the Chinese academic job market, employers are not allowed to show gender preferences explicitly in recruitment because of Chinese laws, and hence many women academics in this research did not report, or could not identify, similar gendered experiences. As En (overseas) said, in the academy, the discrimination against women academics is "*implicit*" and "*unidentifiable*," and "*when the policy makers are making decisions, you can't tell if it is related to gender*" (initial interview). Jiao received the accurate message because of her inner social connections. This honest response was not a good start of her academic employment but gave Jiao a signal about her disadvantaged position. When job seeking afterwards, she started to intentionally release the information that "*I not interested in having children*" (Jiao, overseas, initial interview).

After that, Jiao began to be concerned that if she did not perform her loyalty to work commitments *explicitly*, she might lose more academic positions for the "*implicit*" decision, even though she was an academic returnee, which is likely to be preferred in Chinese academia (e.g., Pu, 2019; X. Ye & Liang, 2019). The way Jiao pandered to this preference for men enhanced the social discourse in employment and helped construct her gender subjectivity as well. In this process, individual subjects identify with "the identities on offer" (Weedon, 2004, p.6, p. 12) by the internalization of particular meanings and values to take up the identity. From this experience, Jiao internalized the value that women are less

welcomed in academic employment, and she took up the identity to hide her femininity (potential childbirth) under the scrutiny of the authorities.

In these two quotes from Jiao, she performed complex gender subjectivities in two different ways. When she was in the UK, she refused to take the academic position provided for her female identity. In China, she was refused for her female identity by the employer. Her gender subjectivity was constructed in two contested discourses. In contrast to Jiao, An (domestic) did not claim she or her women doctoral colleagues were disadvantaged during the competition with men counterparts in academic job seeking because "*it is a female-dominated discipline*" (initial interview). Jiao preferred to make herself intelligible by her academic subjectivity, yet the academic labor market saw her as a woman rather than an academic. She eventually took an academic position in a leading university in a first-tier city as the degendered and careless ideal neoliberal subject (Amsler & Motta, 2019) she performed.

"I Can't Lose by My Look, so I Wear Pants": Chang and her Tension in Dual Subjectivities

Chang, a woman academic who gained her doctorate overseas, started the doctoral education in a male-dominated discipline. She explained:

> *When I was applying, I thought about the discipline. I think cultural study and feminism are too feminine. I didn't know what I would do after graduation [if I took those disciplines] … If I took political science, if I couldn't get academic positions, I could go to an industrial company.* (Chang, overseas, initial interview)

Chang classified the disciplines into feminine and masculine with different prospective career development. Among those disciplines, for Chang, feminine disciplines have comparatively "intrinsic uselessness" and "lack of career relevance" (Grant, 2002, p. 222). She preferred a discipline which she could take more advantage of. Butler (2006) claims, "the feminine is the signification of lack, signified by the Symbolic, a set of differentiating linguistic rules that effectively create sexual difference" (p. 38). For Chang, the feminine disciplines signified lack and insufficiency, which were not ideal choices.

Her objection to feminine disciplines reflected her refusal of the weakness in female identity. Studying in this male-dominated discipline, Chang encountered many difficulties. Her tension between gender and academic subjectivities peaked in her doctoral education. She narrated:

> *When I grew up in China, I wanted to look good by dressing myself up. Since my enrollment in doctoral study, I haven't worn a skirt or dresses in public … Even in my wedding, I wore custom-made pants for my wedding dress … Because my discipline is male-dominated, they are interested in, like oil industrial policy, very masculine research field. Almost every researcher is male. I really think if I dress like that [wearing skirt or dress], their trust in me would decrease through my outfit and my look … I think it may be psychological. I always feel that if I wore a skirt or dresses, I would lose my confidence. When we Chinese girls are brought up, [we are] usually told that girls can't … or girls do not have to work hard. Your competency is often unrecognized. This oppression, in the White world, [becomes] Asian women being gentle and submissive…Therefore, when I am working among men colleagues, I have to [show my capability], I can't lose by my look, so I wear pants. This change of habit gives me more confidence … I don't want to be looked down on, or to be told that you were not good enough. Then I have to prove myself. I don't want to influence others' first impression.* (Chang, overseas, initial interview)

In Chang's narrative, she was trying to perform her competency by abandoning skirts or dresses, which are the most understandable as well as the one of the most stubborn female icons (Ueno, 2015). Whereas most men have no choice other than pants, women can choose from skirts or dresses and pants, which means women are performing their gender when wearing skirts or dresses (Ueno, 2015). By saying "*I can't lose by my look*," she indicated women are more likely to be underrated in academia because of their gender. If she dresses *like a woman*, she is going to be judged by her appearance rather than by her academic performance.

Meanwhile, as an international student in Western culture, Chang was hoping to overturn White people's stereotype of Asian women. She was aware that the change of outfit could not actually improve her capability, but having the same homogenous look as men helped build her confidence in her workplace. She connected the gender norms with the categorization of disciplines. Her repetition of men's dress code was a means to empower herself, because she, through the gender subjectivity formed in social discourse, conformed to the norm that men represent superiority and privilege. Thus, Chang actively chose to not perform her gender in the workplace. She was challenging the gender norms by making herself look like the privileged group—the men academics. To be a member of a male-dominated discipline is Chang's proof of her personal capability as a woman. When Chang

said "*I don't want to be looked down on*," taking drag as a means, it meant she wanted to "engage in public discourse with men as part of a male homoerotic exchange" and to "pursue a rivalry that has no sex object or, at least, that has none that she will name." (Butler, 2006, p. 71). Although Chang showed resistance to the gender norms by her special dress code, she also enhanced the binary gender norms through keeping distance from *feminine features*. She performed her gender subjectivity under the exclusion of femininity (Butler, 2006).

Butler (2006) proposed parody and drag as a paradigm of women's performance of gender norms. Chapter 3 introduced parody and drag as ways of repetition. As Butler (2006) describes, "it is a production which, in effect—that is, in its effect—postures as an imitation" (p. 188). The processes of repeating others and being repeated by others "construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction" (p. 188). In the above quotes, Chang's imitating men's way of dressing constructed her illusion of gendered self to feel confident. To drag like one gender or drag unlike the other, it was possible for Chang to gain the confidence as well as other privileges of being a man. Instead of *proving herself* to everyone, she tended to show up in a *powerful* look. By dressing like a man, Chang seemed to have the privilege as a member of the group. For Chang, looking like a woman meant to lose "*the first impression*." This self-proof of having power by parody and dragging exposes the lack of power for women doctoral students in the doctoral education context. Because gender is not politically neutral, Chang wanted to be seen as an "*ordinary*" doctoral student in the university with no tag on gender. Her dragging performance affirms her avoidance of the "exclusion of marginal genders" (Butler, 2006, p. 200).

In Chang's performance of dual subjectivities, she *acted* to be as powerful as her men colleagues by her resistance to gender norms. As Butler (2018) explains, "the knowing subject" is affected by the exterior world inevitably, and "the limited intelligibility can be accounted for by the fact that its impressionability is partially unconscious" (p. 247). Therefore, Chang was and is affected by the gender norms from which she was willing to escape. Because of the partial unconsciousness, she internalized those gender norms, although she disagreed with them. For Chang, skirts and dresses were rendered as Other and "alien elements," and she expelled the signal specialty of gender (wearing dresses) from her body (Butler, 2006, p. 181). Through the "not-me" exclusion, she established a boundary and hence was empowered to make a difference in academia, for it is considered "*a particularly masculine project*" (Chang, overseas, initial interview), reproducing her gender

and academic subjectivities. The gender drag represents the social recognition. It seems that her way of expression in deconstructing gender indeed enhanced the constructed binary gendered differences by acknowledging the higher expectations of men in academic performance. Her wearing the pants serves as her political expression in applying for a spot in academia.

Performing Gender While Doing a Doctorate

The gender subjectivity of the women academics was formed by gender norms, which have been affecting them throughout their lifetimes. Therefore, as analyzed, gender subjectivity is established before academic subjectivity and hence the former is more likely to be predominant. When these Chinese women academics entered doctoral education, to receive the degree, academic norms turned out to be dominant, and in this process academic subjectivity was formed. After becoming academics, these women academics had to strike a balance between the contested gender and academic discourses. This coexistence of both subjectivities produces tension. In social norms, doing a doctorate stands for gaining high-level professional skills, which were especially for men decades ago. Therefore, they may perform gender by giving up opportunities that benefit their study and career. These choices maintain their less satisfied places in this field, though they have made efforts to gain the entrance ticket.

Their reported experiences show the women academics' formation of academic and gender subjectivities when they were domestic and overseas doctoral students. Even though I discuss academic and gender subjectivities separately to emphasize the dual subjectivities the women doctoral students constructed, it is noteworthy that multiple subjectivities intersected in subjects, forming the uniqueness of women doctoral students. The interaction between the two subjectivities constructs the tension of the women academics. Their performative acts are shaped by the intersected subjectivities at the same time. For example, academic subjectivity can be also gendered (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 6); when the participants resist one gender norm, they might be subject to another gender norm (e.g., Jiao, overseas). They are more likely to perform their academic subjectivity explicitly but perform the gender subjectivity implicitly, which tends to be evidence of conformity to the social discourse. The women academics performed academic and gender norms interchangeably throughout their time of doctoral study. By imitating other academics, the women academics performed academic capacity. In the meantime, gender norms were also intersected in the

process, and drove the women academics' agency. To present the comparison of international and domestic discourses, the two groups of women academics are separately discussed from an academic and gender lens respectively, and the seemingly wobbling gender norms are also explained.

Academic Subjectivity in Domestic and Overseas Doctoral Education Context

The phallogocentric signifying economy prevails in academia, and it is burgeoning in the doctoral education context. The aspiration of Chinese women academics to be accomplished academics urges them to perform like men. For example, Chang refuses to wear skirts and dresses. In this way, they make themselves recognized and intelligible to male-dominated academia.

However, they form their academic subjectivities by abandoning the gendered performance of women but pick up the gendered performances of men, or at least they blur the gender boundary. In Chapter 3, I claimed that gendered features and structures are constructed by the social discourse so that they are epistemologically fictive from a Butlerian perspective. Their deconstruction of ontological gender differences gives meaning to the women academics through particular performative acts. Butler (2006) writes:

> On the one hand, masquerade may be understood as the performative production of a sexual ontology, an appearing that makes itself convincing as a "being"; on the other hand, masquerade can be read as a denial of a feminine desire that presupposes some prior ontological femininity regularly unrepresented by the phallic economy. (p. 64)

When the women academics were dragging and performing parodic practice in their doctoral education, they were denying the feminine style of clothing (Chang) or expectation of having children in the future (Jiao). They were performing like men to show disinterest in these domestic affairs because those are signified as feminine by "the phallic economy" (Butler, 2006, p. 64). In other words, this economy classifies femininity and masculinity, which originate from the "sexual ontology" (Butler, 2006, p. 64). Femininity was perceived by some of the women academics as the tendency of being less competent in academia. Therefore, the women academics intentionally reduced the performances of femininity to gain recognition from the phallogocentric academia.

In the performance of gender and academic subjectivities, why do women academics have to challenge their gender subjectivity to form academic subjectivities? Why do the two

subjectivities contradict each other? Gender norms emphasis the different performance of binary genders. Since academia is male-dominated, the academic norms are more likely to be formed based on the performances of men (see Chapter 2). Women academics found that if they abandoned some of their female desire, they were more involved in academia. This female desire, inevitably, is constructed on the basis of heterosexuality as well. Those gender norms which women academics were challenging in order to establish their academic subjectivity are fictive and nonontological (see Chapter 3). Nevertheless, these women academics performed gender norms in a mundane, naturalized manifestation of culture (see Butler, 2006). When they attempted to perform academic subjectivity, they violated the gender norms, and thus the tension occurred. This tension is more likely to be deconstructed along with the deconstruction of the gender binary.

Regarding the tension in the doctoral education of the women academics, Butler (2006) writes,

> If the symbolic nature of exchange is its universally human character as well, and if that universal structure distributes "identity" to male persons and a subordinate and relational "negation" or "lack" to women, then this logic might well be contested by a position or set of positions excluded from its very terms. (p. 53)

Doctoral education is structured. The universal logic in academia tends to attribute to women academics a subordinate and relational "negation" or "lack" (p. 53). This logic is internationalized by women and men academics through stylized repetition; however, it will be contested by the logic of this structure. Some of these women academics, who were subordinate to the academic logic, tended to perform gender throughout their doctoral education. For example, Naya and An gave up the opportunities to study or work overseas. Chang and Danni, who were outside of this structure, performed like a man to challenge the logic in doctoral education.

When the women academics were doing doctorates in an overseas doctoral education context, the tension may have been stronger. In Chinese academia, overseas research experience gives the doctoral graduates more advantages, for it brings "*more additional value of research skills and international advanced research capacity*" (En, overseas, fictional story completion) and it is a "*larger space for career development*" (Kadi, overseas, fictional story completion). Therefore, in the narratives of An, her men doctoral peers were the ones who did postdoctoral research programs overseas. Compared to domestic doctoral study, overseas doctoral study requires more disruption of gender norms. In this situation,

the women academics' reaction to overseas doctoral education was "*I never thought about it*" (Bai, overseas, initial interview), and "*I was thinking about this, but I didn't know what to do*" (Xixi, domestic, initial interview). Being more challenging, overseas doctorates are a signification of "the phallic economy" (Butler, 2006, p. 64).

The drag and parody of the women academics explain that gender norms are mimicked through stylized repetition. If the women academics perform academic norms to fulfill the expectation of masculinity in academia, they may be advantaged by enacting these norms of men. For example, Jiao gained a position in academia, and Chang constructed her academic identity through exclusion of femininity in a male-dominated discipline. Therefore, any gender is repeatable. When subjects are repeating gender, they are given meaning by what they perform in this repetition.

Notably, the women academics who received doctorates domestically and overseas all showed strong willingness to complete doctoral study by sharing academic goals to meet the graduation requirements, for example, the completion of a doctoral thesis. The two groups of women were both shaped by the academic discourses they were in, and hence their performative acts in doctoral study were directed by the different academic norms, which are likely to be phallogocentric, resulting in their construction of academic subjectivity.

Performing Gender Norms in Domestic and Overseas Doctoral Education Contexts

The fact that none of the women academics reported gender differences before and during doctoral study in the academic discourse suggests they did not think or feel they were treated differently for being women, but they still performed gender norms throughout doctoral education in either social discourse. Unlike doctoral study, gender norms are influenced by culture. The gender norms the women academics experienced are discussed respectively in both discourses with the influence of the academic discourse. However, in both overseas and domestic doctoral contexts, as women doctoral students, they took more additional nonacademic responsibilities. For example, Danni (domestic) took the work of administrative assistance in the department; Rui (overseas) was still the main caregiver to her children during doctoral study. The performances of gender norms mirror the social and institutional discourse (see Chapter 2). Meanwhile, the performance of gender norms also enhances gendered social and institutional discourses (see Aiston & Fo, 2021). Thus, the women academics might not be treated explicitly differently during doctoral study, but they carried out unconscious performative acts based on their internalized gender norms in

doctoral study. For example, when Naya, Zhong, and An made decisions about geographical mobility in overseas doctoral study, they performed gendered choices and stayed in China.

The women academics who studied domestically performed gender norms in the Chinese doctoral education context in a homogenous way. They faced less confusion of gender norms than the women academics who studied overseas, and yet had fewer opportunities to perceive gender norms from other cultures. Individuals are driven by gender norms defined by context and culture (Lester, 2011). If they conformed to gender norms, their performances made the women doctoral students the exercisers of the social discourses. However, going against gender norms may lead to consequences, say, doing an overseas doctorate is likely to lead to the break-up with the domestic boyfriend (Naya, domestic; An, domestic) and it challenges the domestic social expectations of women. In this way, the inconsistency of social and academic discourses with different expectations built the tension of the women academics' subjectivity for those who with domestic doctorates. They performed the gender norms in the intersected discourse, which causes tension as well as fluidity in subjectivity formation. Compared to the women academics who gained doctorates overseas, the discursive field which the domestic women academics were in seems simpler; nevertheless, they were facing fewer variations of developing their agency (see Butler, 2006) and hence they were less likely to show resistance.

In an overseas doctoral education context, gender norms are constructed culturally in the host countries. The Chinese international doctoral students perceived the host gender norms through their Chinese background. Though they were exposed to the social discourse of the host country, the gender norms in Chinese social discourse had been internalized by years of repetition (e.g., Jiao, overseas). Although they studied and lived in host countries, they were still constrained by the gender norms from their home country. For example, like Bai said, many of her friends had started families, which made her anxious for being "*left behind*." Though she was studying overseas, she still tried to keep the same pace with her female friends to meet the home gender norms. However, if the two sets of gender norms are partially contradictory, the women academics tended to perform gender norms in the host social discourse, despite their collapse of gender subjectivity formation, to prevent them from being marginalized. The women academics who gained overseas doctorates also experienced the tension between two sets of gender and academic norms. Though they were in the intertwined social discourses of different cultures, gender norms regulated their agency in various ways. Those women academics with the perception of gender norms of

dual countries are in performative acts. When Jiao came across the gender preference in job seeking, her agency was paralyzed by gender norms when she lacked the ability to show resistance (see Lester, 2011).

Fluctuating Gender Norms Throughout Doctoral Study

The manifestation of gender norms is not only closely related to social discourse, but is also determined by the stages which the women doctoral students were in. The fluctuating manifestation can be attributed to institutional norms, ideology, and so forth. In the findings, the women doctoral students' gender norms were hard to see or even invisible during doctoral study, mainly because of dominant academic and institutional discourse for doctoral students. Every one of doctoral students was committed to fixed years of intensive study with specific goals to a degree. Everyone, without exception, had to meet the academic normativity and graduation requirements to gain a degree. The narrow but equal standard for doctoral students dimmed the performance of gender norms. During doctoral study, gender norms were not eliminated but were hidden. They were like the dry seeds underneath the earth, always ready to emerge if it rains. In Chinese culture, universities are usually compared to an ivory tower, which stands for a haven away from real life (People's Daily Overseas, 2015). This metaphor shows gender norms during doctoral study are operated implicitly. Although limited awareness of gender norms was reported during doctoral study, the women academics noticed the decreasing proportion of women academics to women doctoral students in their disciplines (Danni, domestic). Thus, when the temporarily invisible gender norms sprouted after graduation, the women academics started to ask questions. Naya asked in the interview, "where are the women doctoral students after graduation?" Danni proposed a similar inquiry in detail:

> *Where are the women colleagues now? When I was doing my master's and PhD, there were a lot of female students, and it was not a male-dominated world. Where are they? When I am in an academic conference of 50 people, the proportion of women academics was generally between one fourth and one third. However, in my doctoral study, the proportion of female students was more than a half.* (Danni, domestic, initial interview)

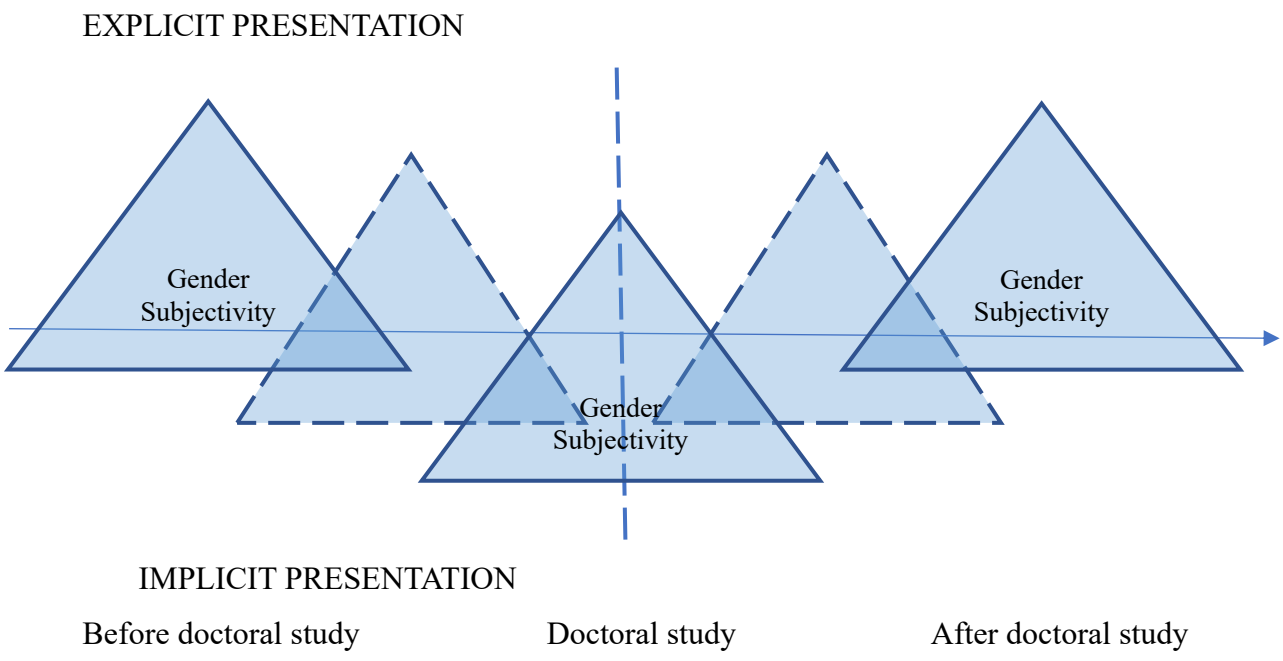
Naya and Danni were concerned about the disproportionate participation and presentation of women academics in academic events as well as in academia. The shift from female-dominated classrooms to male-dominated workplaces in Danni's account shows the *marginalization* of female-dominated disciplines. For example, men in female-dominated

fields usually have a great risk of being devalued (Shen-Miller & Smiler, 2015). The underrepresentation of women academics at the higher levels enhances their invisibility in academia. After doctoral education, the women doctoral students started repeating gender norms which were already being shaped in social discourse to form their gender subjectivity. Their academic subjectivity was reformed to satisfy social expectations of women. Through the subversive reproduction of dual subjectivities, the participants identified themselves with the social expectations by operating the norms. As Butler (2001) writes, "I become recognizable through the operation of norms" (p. 25). The participants performed gender norms in order to make them "recognizable." However, their gender subjectivity overshadowed academic subjectivity in their pursuit of gender recognition. With the accumulation of gendered choices, as An (domestic) said, the future career development was determined, or at least was framed.

In doctoral study, both men and women students are driven by the goal of academic achievement and building academic subjectivity. However, gender norms burgeon after graduation from doctoral study, since the gender subjectivity of both men and women academics starts to be influenced by social discourse under respectively different expectations. I respond to Naya and Danni's shared inquiry through the iceberg model in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Iceberg Model of Dynamic Change in Women Academics' Gender Subjectivity



The women academics' gender subjectivity fluctuates in different stages. In this chapter, though the participants did not report adequate performative acts of gender norms in their doctoral education, gender norms are more observed in the transitions before and after doctoral study than in the middle of doctoral study. Under the exposure to social discourse, the women academics' implicit performances of gender norms turned explicit through the transition from doctoral study to academic career. In Figure 1, the motion of the triangle represents the dynamic change of women academics' subjectivity from doctoral study to academic career. Along with the transition between life stages, the dominant discourse changed from academic discourse to social discourse, which led to the transformation of the women academics' demonstration of gender norms from implicit demonstration to explicit. During doctoral study, gender norms are merely presented as the tip of the iceberg in women academics' subjectivity, as in Figure 1. It was so implicit that the women academics usually claimed that, in their doctoral study, they were not treated differently from men doctoral students, or they outperformed their men counterparts. Later, after doctoral graduation, academic discourse became dominant. The women doctoral graduates went through the transition until the social discourse became dominant, and the iceberg of gender norms started to float. Therefore, in that stage of their academic career, women academics were more likely to be distinguished from men counterparts by being invisible in academia, and so forth. Their subjectivities had been dynamically changing as well.

Notably, the participants' gender norms fluctuated in different stages. In the exposure to social discourse, their implicit performance of gender norms turned explicit, as gender norms are more likely to show before and after doctoral study. Along with the transition between life stages, the dominant discourse alternates between academic discourse and social discourse, which led to the emergence of gender norms presentation in their gender subjectivity. The participants usually claimed that they were not treated differently from men doctoral students, or they outperformed their men counterparts during doctoral education, but they also did not emphasize their achievements before or after their doctorate. This shows that gender norms do not disappear but are dimmed when women and men doctoral students are dominated by academic discourse. Later, after graduation, academic discourse was overshadowed while social discourse became dominant, and the participants started to perform gender again. Therefore, in retrospect, these Chinese women academics tended to be at a lower starting point than men in their academic career, and the gender norms continued working afterwards, which may answer the question "*Where are the women academics now?*" (Danni, domestic).

According to the interviews, the dominant academic discourse indeed forms a less gendered utopia in doctoral study. Even Danni and Chang's gendered performances were to empower themselves. In doctoral study, the women academics saw the doctoral study opportunities as "*a very ideal environment for doing research*" (Taozi, domestic, initial interview), "*intensive mental work with high intensity*" (Yang, domestic, initial interview), and "*a process full of uncertainty*" (Xixi, domestic, initial interview). During doctoral study, the women academics" narratives of doctoral education were connected to their current academic career. For the women academics in this research, doctoral education was a route to an academic career. Yang summarized what doctoral study brought her,

> *The 6 years I was seeking the doctoral education and doing a doctorate were the hardest time of my life, but the 6 years also were a stunning transformation, and a qualitative leap*. (Yang, domestic, initial interview)

It was her doctorate that provided her with the opportunity to work in a Chinese double first-class university. For most of the women academics, doctoral study formed their dream of being a scholar in the future, and rewrote their life stories. They were at the same time negotiating gender norms by challenging and compromising. In this process, their dual subjectivities were reproduced. Regardless of the doctoral education the women academics received in different systems, they "*reached the same goal by different routes with different*

advantages" (Ou, domestic, initial interview), yet they survived in Chinese academia by different living strategies in the Chinese double first-class universities. Throughout doctoral study, the participants constantly negotiated with multiple academic and gender norms to construct academic and gender subjectivities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained the women academics' performances of gender and academic subjectivities throughout their doctoral education. As privileged women, the women academics were empowered by their doctorates in the Chinese higher education system. The academic subjectivity of the women academics was likely to advocate for their doctoral study. However, they had to meet the challenge of doctoral study in academic discourses with gendered performances to respond to the social discourse, which may have caused tension to their subjectivity as doctoral students.

In these women academics' narratives, gender norms that constrain women academics in higher education institutions were institutionalized and contextualized as well as fluid and fluctuated. Therefore, the manifestation of gender norms throughout doctoral education was inconsistent and discontinuous. The fluctuation of gender norms throughout all the stages in doctoral education was dominated by the different expectations, and constructed by different discourses. Before and after doctoral study, these women academics were likely to fulfill the social expectation to be normative women. During doctoral study, they formed their academic subjectivity in the academic discourse, which was the dominant discourse at that time, and hence their gender subjectivity was dimmed. It was inevitable that they still showed gendered constraints during the period, like the experiences of Danni (domestic), Jiao (overseas) and Chang (overseas), but the agency of their performances aimed to empower themselves. On the contrary, before and after doctoral study, when women academics were dominated by the social discourse, their performance of gender norms was likely to disempower themselves.

In the next chapter, I explore the intersection of the gender and academic identities in the career development of Chinese women academics under the operation of regulatory power, in which those women academics construct their intersected identities. I examine their academic career development to draw a picture of lived experiences from these Chinese women academics who received doctorates domestically and overseas.

CHAPTER 6
FUSION OF IDENTITIES:
CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN CHINESE ACADEMIA

Introduction

In the last chapter, I investigated the dual subjectivities under the navigation of gender norms and the fluctuation of gender norms from doctoral education to academic career based on the narratives of the women academics. After entering academia, the gender gap becomes increasingly obvious with career development, which can be seen in academic ranks (e.g., Blithe & Elliott, 2020), research productivity (e.g., Y. Zhu & He, 2016), leadership positions (e.g., F. Lu, 2020), and so forth. In this chapter, the negotiation of identities constructed by different discourses is explored. From the narratives of gender differentiation in academia, the "leaky pipeline" in Chinese academia is visible. Consistent with women academics in international academia, the Chinese women academics working in double first-class universities face attrition. Despite their agency in career development, they are expected to yield to the socially discursive regulation of women. In this process, their intersected identities are continuously reproduced.

Academia is gendered (e.g., Aiston & Fo, 2021; Blithe & Elliott, 2020; Lester, 2011). In Chinese patriarchal society, gender identity in the ideological social discourse prevails, which also shapes institutional discourse (see Shah, 2018). Despite the gender norms in both discourses, the academic standard is of no gender specificity. Both men and women academics are subject to the same written institutional policy. However, it means the dominant gender is assumed (see Chapter 2). The different social expectations and institutional culture for women academics affect their academic career development, causing their negotiation of intersected identities.

In this chapter, I use Butlerian theoretical concepts of names and regulatory power to analyze how the women academics' identity is constructed by society and academy, and how the identity influences their career development. "Being called a name is also one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language" (Butler, 1997, p. 2). Women academics' constructed identity advocates the dynamic process of naming. Based on Butler's (2006) example of naming men, I would like to rewrite the sentence for women, "bearing different names, they particularize themselves within this all-encompassing" feminine cultural identity (p. 55). Women academics, shaped by these names, identify with the social

culture through their *performance of femininity*. This process is ongoing with regulatory practice. For Butler, people are governed by regulatory practice to form their identity. Women academics are shaped by social and institutional regulatory practices. They are regulated by the social discourse in the expectation of being *unified* women and by the academy in, for example, promotion to academic ranks and leadership positions. Under these regulatory practices, the women academics develop "self-shaping and self-limiting" (p. 20) practices to show conformity. The refusal to be categorized by the regulatory power or self-exclusion might lead to regulatory consequences (Butler, 2006).

I firstly specifically review the literature on disadvantages in academic development and leadership positions of women academics. I then examine the academic performances of Chinese women academics, how they climb to higher academic ranks, and their perception of leadership positions using theoretical concepts of names and regulatory power. This is followed by the discussion of the negotiated identity of women academics, their intersected identities formed by regulatory practices, and the names of women academics with overseas doctorates.

Academic Women and Career Development

The hindrance of the career development of women academics has studied by international and Chinese researchers. They are concerned about the institutional norms for women academics which build narrower developmental paths to senior academic ranks and leadership positions under the male-dominated, gendered working culture. Women academics and their career development have been being investigated by international researchers, and have drawn increasing attention in Chinese research (see Chapter 2).

Disadvantaged Positions of Women Academics

The academic subjectivity of Chinese women academics is constructed in the male-dominated academia, which is more likely to be consistent with the social expectations of gender roles (C. Zhou & Zhang, 2020). Chinese women academics are "slower climbers up the higher education ladder" (P. Chen & Hsieh, 2019, p. 773), and a similar situation can be seen in Western countries. Compared to men colleagues, women academics face disadvantages in employment and disciplinary location (Phibbs & Curtis, 2006). Even though women academics make great efforts in doing research, they may still find it difficult to gain higher academic ranks because of the norms previously formed mainly by powerful men (Elg & Jonnergård, 2010).

The institutional norms expect more from women academics to "compensate [for] the 'handicap' of being female" (Elg & Jonnergård, 2010, p. 221). Some Chinese literature may attribute the lower research productivity of women academics to their incapability (e.g., Y. Ma, 2009; K. Yu & Wang, 2014). B. Liu (2009) argues the social and institutional discourses, not the research capacity, that hinder the career development of women academics have to be taken into consideration. However, many women academics show conformity to gender norms despite their acknowledgment of the discriminatory nature of these norms, their dissatisfaction in performing the norms, and their disadvantaged position in tenure track and promotion (Lester, 2011). One of the explanations might be naming and being named, bring about the formation of subjectivities which change the constitution of subjects from the outside (Henderson, 2015). Therefore, the underrepresentation of women academics both in senior academic ranks and leadership positions is legislated and naturalized by the discourses as well as by themselves (X. Yu et al., 2012).

Perception of Leadership Positions

Leadership positions are significantly dominated by men which affects women's network structure (Obers, 2015). Chinese higher education lacks women leaders and the situation has been paid limited attention (Y. Wang et al., 2013; J. Zhao & Jones, 2017). The shortage of women leaders and role models means insufficient attention has been paid to building the self-esteem of women academics, which may affect their academic advancement (Obers, 2015). The lack of Chinese women academics in leadership positions is likely to be the consequence of similar institutional norms, which rationalize the exclusion or marginalization of women in administrative roles (K. Yu & Wang, 2014).

The leadership style of women academics is discussed by researchers. Researchers agree that women leaders demonstrate specific working styles compared to men (e.g., S. Acker, 2012; Larsson & Alvinius, 2020; Lester, 2011). Women academic leaders are more highly sensitive for interpersonal communication and have higher flexibility in adopting different leadership styles based on the context (Larsson & Alvinius, 2020). Women academics can struggle with the gender implications of leadership positions, when an outstanding women leader might be labeled as masculine despite her feminine appearance because she is carrying power (S. Acker, 2012). The norm of leadership in higher education is more likely to be a male norm, requiring being rational, meritocratic, and completely dedicated to work (Carvalho & Diogo, 2018). S. Acker (2012) echoes that leadership is implicitly constructed according to privileged male norms and masculine values. Because their leadership style

differs from the male norm, women are more likely to be seen as problematic under the regulation of the dominant discourse in leadership positions (Carvalho & Diogo, 2018). However, Lester (2011) argues if the power structure and norms of the institution are challenged and resisted, the dominant leadership style would change as well. There is some room for women leaders to perform their distinctive way of leadership, for example, communication skills, as long as the male-dominated leadership norm is not challenged (Carvalho & Diogo, 2018). Aiston and Fo (2021) argue that despite the external barrier of social discourse, for women academics, the internal hindrance plays a significant role in their sense of themselves as academic leaders. Bearing this tension, women tend to reject leadership opportunities in highly masculine institutional cultures (e.g., Morley & Crossouard, 2016).

Although, in recent years, women have started to break the glass ceiling and to rise to upper levels in the institutional hierarchy (Rudman & Phelan, 2008), women in academic leadership positions face different dominant cultures that impose multiple conflicting expectations (Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2017). S. Acker (2012) claims that women academic leaders constantly face the conflicting roles that make their subjectivity and identity fluid in the gendered institutional structure. Because of social expectations of gender roles, women leaders are also expected to work in more "caring, domestic, and consultative ways" (S. Acker, 2010, p. 134) in altruistic service roles with few direct rewards (S. Acker, 2014; Hanasono et al., 2019). After women academics become leaders, they tend to change and challenge the current institutional norms and reproduce the oppressive aspects (S. Acker, 2010). The tension between academic work, administrative duties and family responsibilities causes persistent conflict for women leaders and may lead them to a hard situation with few institutional supports provided (S. Acker, 2014).

Limited Opportunities: Variable Standards of Academic Performance

Academic performance was discussed the most in the interviews by the women academics. Those women academics working in double first-class universities had strong career aspirations for academic development, but most of them were not satisfied with their academic performance, or the academic context they were in, which may relate to their gender identity. As introduced in Chapter 1, the statistics from the Ministry of Education in recent decades show the proportion of women academics declines as the academic rank rises. However, women academics' research productivity is likely to be lower than their men

counterparts (e.g., Y. Zhu & He, 2016; see also Chapter 2). Chinese men academics publish more higher quality academic journal articles than women (Y. Zhu & He, 2016). Those research findings show overall lower research productivity of Chinese women academics. However, can this research performance be attributed to the incapability of women academics? This section interprets how the interviewed women academics view research performance from a gendered perspective.

"It Is Very Subtle": Snowballing Deprivation in Career Development

When En was asked if she ever felt different as a woman academic, she considered seriously and replied:

> *It is very subtle in the workplace. For example, you are going on a business trip; if the leader is male, he would take a male academic with him for convenience. It is understandable and doesn't negatively influence you [immediately]. However, would you lose some opportunities? We can't say no. It is very hard to describe. It is on some, probably, implicit, or subtle aspects.* (En, overseas, initial interview)

Taozi provided another example:

> *In this kind of academic event, all the prestigious scholars are men in their 50s. When they are smoking together in the tea break, how can women join them? In this moment, you will find more men academics are prestigious. I am not saying that there are no women, there are some, but men are more. Women academics disappear gradually [in higher levels in academia].* (Taozi, domestic, initial interview)

In both narratives, women academics are not restricted by any policies or confronted with any conflict, but they are deprived of some social opportunities, like fewer business trips or less networking at academic events. The lack of social network, regarded as one of the most important social structure reasons, affects the research productivity of Chinese women academics (Y. Zhu & He, 2016). The lack of connection with research institutions, international academic networks and cooperation are the three main reasons for the lower research productivity among women academics (Y. Zhu & He, 2016). Informal social networks also shape norms in promotion (Elg & Jonnergård, 2010). Business trips and academic events may bring opportunities to meet potential academic collaborators and communicate with prestigious scholars. In the interviews, Rui (overseas) and Zhong (domestic) also reported social networking was vital for getting publications and funding, especially in Chinese academia, since research productivity is the most significant evaluation criteria in academic-rank promotion (Y. Zhu & He, 2014). The women academics

in the interviews agreed that their research outputs proportionately affected their social status, prestige, and income. This loss of opportunities initially excludes women academics from social network expansion, which also leads to the marginalization of women academics.

At the same time, the quotes from En and Taozi show that men take opportunities from women, but in a more "*implicit, subtle*" (En, overseas) and gradual way that feels natural and normal. The deprivation may not show consequences at that moment, but, in En's narrative, the shortage of opportunities for women academics is snowballing. The accumulation may result in the gender gap in academia. During the years of marginalization, women academics tend to be less productive than men in research performance (Y. Zhu & He, 2016), which is related to the lack of women academics in senior positions (Bao & Tian, 2022).

Besides the negative influence on social networks, Taozi then described the women academics' position in Chinese society:

> *Therefore, I think, in this male-dominated society, in many fields, the negotiation of gender is easy to be seen. Males are more likely to be outstanding, while females tend to be ignored, right? Because males need career development. If you are a woman in some [male-dominated] social scientific disciplines, they won't consider you. There are enough men, why consider women? They are inclined to ignore women. There is no solution. It is controlled by the environment.* (Taozi, domestic, initial interview)

Fu gave a lived example:

> *In some universities, it is said when the academics are applying for higher academic ranks, the leaders suggest, you women academics should give the opportunities to men. Why? Because men must support their families. It seems like women academics don't have to support the family. It is outrageous, because everyone takes the thing [academic ranks] very seriously.* (Fu, domestic, initial interview)

Bearing different social expectations, the meaning of career development differs for women and men academics. In Taozi and Fu's narratives, the dominant discourse indicates women academics' career development is seen as a *bonus*, while men academics' career development is a *must*. In the two quotes, Taozi and Fu described the regulatory practice that shows the gendered social expectations. As mentioned in Chapter 1, "men, the breadwinners; women, the housekeepers" is still applied in the contemporary academy. The description of men with higher career accomplishment is rationalized as a regulatory practice from by

institutional authorities. The words "*need*" and "*have to*" represent the way of power operations in the institutional discourse. In this context, men are required by the social discourse to shoulder the obligation to support their families, and thus their promotion contributes more to the social expectation. In contrast, instead, women are expected to be the main caregivers in their families. In the academic zero-sum game, to allocate opportunities to men academics means taking them away from women. In these male-dominated institutional norms, women academics are expected to perform gender to give possibilities of career progression to their men counterparts.

Moreover, compared to the above implicit description of preference for men in opportunities, Fu thought the claim that "*women academics should give the opportunities to men*" was unacceptable because men academics unfairly take opportunities from women explicitly. It shows that when the regulatory power in operation, it is usually exercised in "the mundane way" (Butler, 2006, p. 191).

Women academics are not only deprived of opportunities by the regulatory practice of academia, at the upper levels, but also by the students. They are expected to perform more *motherly features* as women to be recognized by the students (see Lester, 2011). As Taozi noted:

> *If a woman academic shows seriousness, they [the students] would wonder how she could be like that [hard to communicate with]. However, if a man academic does this, they tend to follow him.* (Taozi, domestic, initial interview)

Women academics may face different comments from men when they express aggression and assertion (see K. Mitchell & Martin, 2018). Students tend to expect women academics to have feminine characteristics to show their care and tenderness in communication as well as masculine features to show authority and credibility in knowledge (e.g., Lester, 2011). In evaluations, the students are more likely to assess women instructors on aspects that are unrelated to teaching, rather than their intellectual skills (Smele et al., 2021). Compared to men academics, women are referred to as *professors* in fewer comments from students and they tend to be rated lower (K. Mitchell & Martin, 2018). It may also negatively influence their promotion. Therefore, women academics are more likely to be walking on thin ice during teaching and supervision. The word "*follow*" used by Taozi means the students tend to identify with the men academics when they are serious or even have a tough attitude. If women academics fail to satisfy the students' expectations, they may face, for example, lower evaluation scores, which may also negatively influence their promotion (Jackson &

Mazzei, 2012). This regulatory power from students deconstructs and then reconstructs women academics' performance. To fulfill students' expectations, the women academics may have to perform uniformly to construct the ideal image of women academics. These performative acts, to some extent, manifest the women academics' conformity to the regulatory power, which in turn enhances the gendered institutional expectations of women academics. As academic careers are bound by the factors of academic ranks, leadership positions, research productivity and so forth, this institutional preference for men constitutes gendered career development.

"If You Are not 1.5 Times as Productive as Men": The Compensation for Being Women

Women academics are confronted with fa

mily affairs and social obligations after entering academia, and they may not be able to prioritize their academic identity all the time (e.g., S. Acker & Armenti, 2004; Amsler & Motta, 2019; Blithe & Elliott, 2020; Dickson, 2018; Henderson & Moreau, 2020). However, when they are going in the opposite direction to the institutional regulatory practice, they are more likely to be marginalized by others or self-marginalized in career development by the disadvantage of gender. Therefore, to meet their aspirations for career development, they have to aim to increase research achievements to compensate for their gender.

It is widely acknowledged that women academics face difficulties in career development as academia is male dominated (e.g., S. Acker & Wagner, 2019; Aiston & Fo, 2021; Carvalho & Diogo, 2018; Elg & Jonnergård, 2010; Grant & Elizabeth, 2015). However, as En, who did her doctorate overseas, said, "*the discrimination [in academic career] is implicit*." The major consideration of women academics is the conflict of childbirth and academic development. Jiao stated her point of view from an employer's perspective:

> *If the employer offers you a 3-year contract, if you complete the contract in the first 2 years, you can give birth to a child in the 3rd year. However, if you are performing the same as, or less than, men in the first 2 years, and women may have more emotions in the romantic relationship, the first 2 years' productivity may be equivalent to men's 1 and a half years. If you are going to have a child in the 3rd year, [the employer] would be dissatisfied … If you are not 1.5 times as productive as men, if you are just a little bit more productive, they will still prefer men.* (Jiao, overseas, initial interview)

For Jiao, women academics have to compensate for their maternity leave by being much more productive than men. Jiao took men academics' productivity as a standard to set up a new standard for women, which marginalizes women academics by requiring them to contribute more to gain opportunities to stand at the same start line with men. Also, another of her presumptions was that women were emotional and it would negatively affect research productivity. It is in line with the stereotype of women in social discourse, which has hindered women academics for years from taking on men-dominated professional work (see Sheppard, 1989).

Taozi then provided her lived experience from a student's gender preference in choosing supervisors:

> *Taozi: For example, when the students are selecting supervisors, [they think,] compared to male supervisors, female supervisors allocate less time to work. A student said, "female supervisors may provide me less academic guidance. I prefer male supervisors."*
>
> *Researcher: So blunt?*
>
> *Taozi: Yes. It was my experience. One of my colleagues recommended a [undergraduate] student to me for graduate study. The student replied, "She [Taozi] is good, but I think I want a male supervisor." ... Actually, I understand the student because most women academics disappear [in higher academic ranks] after middle age. I can understand the student, but I was still thinking, look, this gender discrimination comes from a female student.* (Taozi, domestic, initial interview)

The student viewed Taozi as an academic who would have trouble committing to work, especially to supervision, because of being a woman. When she said Taozi is good, she drew this conclusion from the online curriculum vitae. That is to say, Taozi has a good academic performance. However, the student cast doubt on Taozi's supervision capacity merely on the basis of her gender. This naming conferred Taozi the identity as a supervisor who was not qualified enough, or as a questioned academic. The student's naming was putting Taozi into place by categorizing academics to two groups: men academics and women academics. This naming is consistent with the preferred allocation of opportunities to men academics explained in the last section.

Beside this discursive naming in language, Taozi, whose research interest includes elite academics, presented a finding in her study, showing concern for domestic women academics' situation based on her research data:

> *In A University [one of the top universities in China], women academics' educational background is better [than men academics]. This is the requirement for women, right? They [women academics] are making up [for being women] through their effort [in more research productivity]. This is an implicit expression. Among national youth-funding receivers, women's academic performance is better. Women academics are using their [better] achievement, academic performance and so on to make up [for their gender], aren't they? You must be stronger [than men] to stand out. There are lots of obstacles in front of us.* (Taozi, domestic, initial interview)

Compared to Jiao's acceptance of women academics' compensation, Taozi showed resistance to the implicit higher requirement for women academics. After the description of the women academics' stronger background in A University, Taozi cited some research to prove the disadvantages of women academics in domestic academia. The women academics' performance stands for the acceptance and the resistance of male-dominated academia. However, it is notable that, whether the women academics choose to resist or accept the rules of the game, they have to perform to a higher standard to gain a similar academic reputation to their men counterparts. When they show resistance, they may need more publications to prove their excellence, which makes the resistance a conformity, like Taozi's attitude in this quote. When they conform to the norm, they are willing to compensate by having more publications, like Jiao's being more productive than men. Jiao and Taozi were aware that better research achievement is their only path to be visible in academia. Under this regulatory power, no matter how women academics regard the path, they are performing the same to draw a higher start line to stop the gatekeepers, usually men, from questioning their capability.

The compensation for being women is operated by the regulatory practice as well as by the women academics. When the regulatory practice regulates women academics with higher academic requirements, they are at the same time punishing the women academics or job seekers who are not meeting the higher standard. Meanwhile, the women academics endorse the regulation by gaining more academic achievements. If they fail to do so, they may not be able to compete with men with, say, a similar number of publications, as Jiao said "*they would prefer men*."

Complex Perception: Chinese Women Academics in Leadership Positions

Women have been disproportionately underrepresented in leadership positions of Chinese higher educational institutions for years. The gendered academic leadership structure is precarious (e.g., F. Li & Wei, 2018). In 2014, of 6,765 university leaders, the number of women leaders was 770 (11.4%), of whom only 134 (7%) had chief positions (K. Yu & Wang, 2014). In 2017, among 100 nondouble-first-class universities, the percentage of women presidents was 8% (X. Wang, 2017). In 2018, only 4 (3.7%) of the presidents were women in 108 universities of the 211 program (F. Li & Wei, 2018). Women leaders in Chinese universities are more in deputy leadership positions, showing vertical gender segregation (K. Yu & Wang, 2014), which is similar to the leadership structure in other Chinese work places (B. Liu, 2015).

Moreover, even though some women academics have stepped into leadership positions, they may still experience exclusion from leadership social networking (J. Zhao & Jones, 2017). Network support plays an essential role in academic leadership promotion; however, women academics may have fewer mentors to seek advice from (P. Chen & Hsieh, 2019; also see Obers, 2015). This male-dominated norm largely shows the gendered constraints on leadership positions in Chinese higher educational institutions (K. Yu & Wang, 2018, p. 134).

When the women academics were asked about leadership positions, in the interviews, they usually made comments that marginalized themselves. Compared to academic work, leadership is less likely to be a necessity for women academics. Kadi explained:

> *Personally, I would give up [the opportunities to become a leader] … In psychology [her research field], we emphasize self-achievement and self-power. I am much more interested in self-achievement, compared to power. However, based on my domestic working experiences, I can see, for example, sometimes if you are in an administrative [leadership] position, you may have more opportunities. Yes, but I would choose to give up. If I am giving advice to others, I would say, you can take it [applying for leadership positions] into account, or you can fight for it. It will bring you better opportunities. (Kadi, overseas, fictional story completion)*

More importantly, the women's silence and submission emphasized the discourse (see Aiston & Fo, 2021). Rationally, Kadi admitted the benefit of leadership positions. Knowing this, she still personally walked away from the positions for a lack of leadership skills. When Kadi was asked to explain the underrepresentation of women academics in leadership positions, she narrated her childhood experiences:

> *I think one of the problems is the leadership of women … Many women have no interest in being leaders for the lack of leadership education in the childhood. When I was little, because I am a girl, my family didn't cultivate [my leadership]. It may relate to my family. For example, my mom thinks she is not a leader, neither am I. Thus, she never thought of [teaching me how to be a leader]. She thinks she does not have the ability naturally … My dad was always saying, [it is good for you] to be a primary school teacher after undergraduate study, and to get married and have children as soon as possible. See, their original expectation of me was not that high. However, as far as I know, many families taught their sons how to be leaders among children, and how to get others to listen to them from their childhood. They encouraged boys to be student leaders in the classes, too.* (Kadi, overseas, initial interview)

The regulatory practice in Kadi's family shaped her career development. She was not named as a leader from childhood. The regulatory practice and naming truncated her agency of being a leader in academia. Shaped by the regulatory power formed in social discourse, she was aware of her lack of possibilities in leadership development. As Butler (2006) describes,

> The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist"—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either sex or gender. (p. 24)

In Kadi's description, the "certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist'" (p. 24) because her identity of being a woman academic excluded the option of being a leader to fit "the cultural matrix" created by the society and her family. Notably, Kadi's viewpoint was not rare among the women academics in the interviews. Many of them admitted the benefit of being leaders in academia, but they tended not to apply for leadership positions. Among the participants, Ming was the only woman academic who had the experience of being an academic leader. Some early-career academics had experience of doing service work. None of the women academics reported experiences of competition for leadership positions. However, in the fictional story completion, when they were asked to provide the suggestion of whether the fictive woman academic should apply for a leadership position, seven out of 20 women academics advocated her application for a leadership position. The complex perception of leadership positions is analyzed from two aspects: leaning in and walking away from leadership positions.

"Better Resources, Better Development": Leaning in to Leadership Positions

As the only one who reported leadership experience, Ming thought highly of this position:

> *The experience was very good practice. The required capability of communication and coordination differs from a purely research environment. Your work may have conflicting interests. Another aspect is the disciplinary development, if you are doing research in a disciplinary platform. It is impossible to acquire [if you do not take any leadership positions] … In addition, it may give you more platforms or opportunities. The advantage is, if you plan to march forward [in academic development], you may need bigger research programs. You must have the collaborative capability to work with many people.* (Ming, domestic, fictional story completion)

For Ming, doing research was not only about academic skills, but also about "*cooperation, coordination, and overall situation consciousness*" (Ming, domestic, fictional story completion). The comprehensive skills are more likely to be gained through leadership experiences to enhance research productivity. Fu echoed Ming on future academic development:

> *It is mainly because, when you are in the position, you can gain more resources and more information. It would be good for your future survival and development [in academia] … In China, academia is like you are fighting alone, no matter how good you are, you have to rely on some social network and resources … The career development is not proportionately related to the effort you take, but your resources. Better resources, better development.* (Fu, domestic, fictional story completion)

Fu believed, even if one has high research capacity, one is less likely to be academically successful without support. Ming and Fu bounded academic development and social connections to explain the academic career path in Chinese higher education. They supported having leadership positions because of the potential benefit to one's personal academic career. Neither of them spoke of the foreseeable economic or political benefit or the hierarchical power they might gain in leadership positions. It may suggest the women academics faced challenges of doing research in male-dominated institutions, so that they needed more support to empower themselves. The women academics conformed to the regulatory practice in the institutional discourse in their way of climbing to the top of the pyramid.

Compared to Ming and Fu who were experienced academics, some early-career women academics who had been working for less than 3 years, like Chang, Bai, Xixi and Danni,

reported their experiences in service work, which was unpaid or low paid. Danni and Bai took service work as "*an* opportunity *for learning and communicating with undergraduate students*" (Danni, domestic, initial interview), and "*small* possibilities *in the early stage*" (Bai, overseas, fictional story completion). Danni took over the position of student advisor for about 120 undergraduate students. Xixi taught undergraduate students how to write sociological reports. Xixi related:

> *My definition is, I am not the one who sit at the desk and do research all day. I hope to try some social things … Although I did not think of the administrative positions, if there are opportunities, I am willing to try, because I like to do something that I have never done.* (Xixi, domestic, fictional story completion)

Xixi defined herself as "*not that academic*." Besides the service work bringing more career possibilities, she was interested in trying new things. In Chinese universities, it is common for early-career academics to be invited to do service work, but they are entitled to decline. In the interviews, none of the young women academics ever complained about their service work even though it was trivial and irrelevant to teaching or research. Instead, they took the service work as an opportunity for them to get to know the workplace. Though not every one of those young women academics did give specific meaning to their service work, like Ming and Fu to the leadership positions, they believed that these experiences would be beneficial. They were willing to devote extra time and energy to complete the extra potentially rewarding work. They were paving the way for their future academic career.

The repeat of the words "*opportunity*" and "*possibility*' indicates the women academics' aspirations in career development. For Ming and Fu, *opportunity* and *possibility* may stand for higher quality publications and research programs. The four young academics took the two words as the discovery of their early academic career. The reasons for the women academics to lean towards leadership positions were mainly linked to their agency of improving their academic career. The women academics took leadership positions *as a bridge* to prospective academic development in Chinese academia. They did not merely name themselves as academics, and they tended to respond to other opportunities in the institutions. Their agency of career development went along with the variations of the regulatory practice of being academics to expand the possibilities.

"If She Were a Man, She Would Take the Opportunity": Glass Ceiling for Women *and Glass Elevator*[25] for Men

With the agency in career aspirations, some of the women academics were taking (potential) leadership positions to assist with their academic development. However, though the other group of the women academics did not deny the benefit of leadership positions, they were unlikely to identify themselves as potential leaders. A considerable number of Chinese women academics actively reject a leadership identity in middle management positions, as well as in early-career stages (J. Zhao & Jones, 2017). Morley and Crossouard (2016) find a similar phenomenon in a study of Asian women academics in the UK where they mentioned the distractions more than the attractions of leadership. Furthermore, the unsatisfied academic achievement aspirations hinder the career path of Chinese women academics by decreasing the possibilities for their promotion to academic ranks and leadership positions (K. Yu & Wang, 2018, p. 134). For example, Naya and An quoted a traditional Chinese saying of *a good scholar will make an official*[26] (*xueeryou zeshi*) to show that they were not academically successful enough to be leaders. Another tentative explanation is women academics tend to feel that they are not good enough, and this long-held feeling shapes the sense of themselves as well as the relations with their colleagues (Grant & Elizabeth, 2015).

Besides their research performances, in the male gaze, women academics are disadvantaged by their high involvement with family responsibilities, as described by Naya:

> *When the leaders choose the potential people to promote, they are expecting the people to have no family considerations and be available anytime. They don't want to hear "Sorry, I have to pick up the kids" or "I'm afraid my son got a fever" when they call people outside work. If this thing happens twice, or for a third time, these people are not going to be considered [for promotion].* (Naya, domestic, initial interview)

Naya categorized family affairs as the constraints on leadership positions. The flexibility in working hours makes women academics combine more with family responsibilities (Lorz & Muhleck, 2019). The caring duty of mothers reduces women academics' flexibility as well as their time devotion to work. Moreover, the preference for men leaders might also be

[25] Glass elevator, a metaphoric concept, means someone is privileged in promotion as if they were taking an upward elevator. The elevator can be seen by women, but they can never get in (e.g., Abney et al., 2011).
[26] This Chinese saying means if one's academic achievement is good enough, one can be an official. It is developed from the ancient Chinese society. *Official* in this saying stands for leaders nowadays.

related to the current leaders' recommendations, which is consistent with the international research on the boys' club in academia (see Rhoads & Gu, 2012). In this situation, women academics are less likely to be recommended as they are excluded from this club.

In the Chinese academy, men academics disproportionately take leadership positions in male-dominated as well as female-dominated disciplines (e.g., B. Liu & Li, 2009; K. Yu & Wang, 2014). This phenomenon is also international. Women are more likely to be deterred from being leaders in men-dominated disciplines, but this also happens in women-dominated fields (Lorz & Muhleck, 2019). In the interview, Rui, who was working in a female-dominated discipline, provided her view:

> *It is because a male leader is more needed in a female-dominated world … Another reason is, everyone is in competition with each other. We are all women, and we have similar educational background. So why should I be a leader?... When men work with women, it may help with effective communication.* (Rui, overseas, initial interview)

Rui made the explanation with reluctance when asked. She tended to perceive the gender norms in academia by admitting "*male leaders*" are more welcomed or are "*needed in a female-dominated world*." In her narrative, women themselves became the ones who created male-dominated leadership positions in a female-dominated world by showing preference. By actively giving opportunities to their men counterparts and naming them as leaders her women colleagues were named as nonleaders. The exclusion of women (see Rhoads & Gu, 2012) reflects the misidentification and devaluation of the group they are in. The disconnection of women and leaders in Rui's narrative was internalized.

Han resonated with Rui when she was asked whether the woman academic in the fictional story should take a potential leadership position. She rejected the option at first glance; however, she then assumed another situation:

> *If she were a man, she would take the opportunity. It is not biased, but in our culture, we have this role setting … The space for career development in men is definitely larger than for women.* (Han, overseas, fictional story completion)

Han's attitude towards leadership positions was gendered. She divided men and women academics into two groups. Han applied the gender roles to women and men in academia, and hence, shaped by social expectations, allocated women and men academics to different career paths. If the social division is internalized, when a woman academic is asked to give herself a name, she tends to name herself as a woman who happens to work in academia

rather than as an academic who happens to be a woman. Her gender identity overshines the academic identity. This woman academic who has been named is expected to fulfill her gender role in the first place. Therefore, the women academics respond to *the hailing of leaders* by not turning back because they excluded leaders from their names.

Notably, when Chinese academics take the positions of leaders, they are confronted with paralleled identities, called "double-shoulder tasks" (*shuangjiantiao*), meaning one has to shoulder both professional and administrative work at the same time. The two full-time jobs undoubtedly require more devotion (Rhoads & Gu, 2012), as Yang described:

> *From my experience, I have witnessed our dean's academic development being hindered by trivial administrative responsibilities. Thus, I think few people can do both positions well. There are very few people who excel in academia as well as in administration. It is quite hard.* (Yang, domestic, fictional story completion)

According to Yang, because of time limitations, it is common to see administrative leaders' declining research productivity. Because women disproportionately take care-work responsibilities (Blithe & Elliott, 2020), and motherhood is one of the main causes of women's stagnation in early-career development, by consuming their research time (F. Lu, 2020), the strategy of time allocation will be harder for women academics if they are leaders. They may fear "feeling locked into the associate role" (Blithe & Elliott, 2020, p. 759) if they take on too much service or administrative work. In this situation, their agency of being involved in leadership positions is more likely to decline.

Kadi provided a similar reason:

> *Like us, especially women, you have to think about it. You have three obligations. You can consider administrative positions, and you must do your job [teaching and doing research], right? You have to take care of your family. If you are doing an administrative position, since it takes much time, it would influence your family, more or less. If I need to choose, I'd rather choose to do my job well, and take care of the family, if I have to choose two items out of the three.* (Kadi, overseas, initial interview)

For Kadi, except for her job of teaching and doing research, she is willing to spend the rest of her time on family obligations rather than taking leadership positions. When she encountered the dilemma of family and leadership positions, she tended to "*put the energy on the more important thing*" (Kadi, overseas, initial interview). In the regulatory practice, Kadi learned that, for women, taking care of family appeared more important than being

leaders. Though men and women academics both take family responsibilities, women academics, usually as the main caregivers, are more likely to be constrained from earning leadership promotion in the early stage of their academic career (P. Chen & Hsieh, 2019). Being leaders would add another layer of tension for women academics for they have to compete with more identities (e.g., Y. Shen, 2010; Y. Zhu & He, 2014). Therefore, women academics tend to struggle more under the negotiation of being mothers and their academic work, unless their spouses are supportive enough to foster their success in academic leadership (Ha et al., 2018).

Kadi's attitude to not taking leadership position implies that these opportunities could be given to men counterparts. However, when a man colleague was explicitly sent to the glass elevator in her department, she made some comments:

> *Kadi: We have a male academic who gains obviously more opportunities. This academic, to be honest, doesn't perform very well in his work. However, maybe because he is male, he is given an administrative position.*
> *Researcher: Do you think there is any reason behind this phenomenon? Why is that?*
> *Kadi: I think, er, I am not sure. For one, I think it is not because of motivation. I know some of the women academics are very competitive, very ambitious, and are willing to be outstanding, but they don't have opportunities. And another reason is gender. If there are some opportunities, they [the current leaders] think male leaders are better. Maybe it is because he is male, I feel like many academics in our department have taken him as the future dean.* (Kadi, overseas, initial interview)

In this narrative, this man academic took the glass elevator toward the leadership position, while women academics, blocked by the glass ceiling, were not considered for promotion. Rui, Han and Kadi all offered similar narratives about men taking charge of leadership positions in the workplace, where these women academics and their women colleagues showed acceptance. It seemed that they took men leaders for granted but the presence of women leaders "contests the place and authority of the masculine position" (Butler, 2006, p. xxx). The absence of women in leadership positions is accepted by both men and women.

Compared to the women academics who are deprived of the opportunities for leadership positions, some of the women academics gave up on the chances in the first place. When the women academics had actively given up or stood aside from leadership positions, they were more likely to express their decision in negative terms as if they had made a rational choice

after serious consideration. Besides the self-naming of nonleaders, the women academics also showed resistance to the leaders' involvement in social activities, as Rui said:

> *As a leader, you have to be engaged in social activities, including the welcome and farewell occasions, the social interaction with other peer leaders and your leaders. If you and the collaborators are in a good bond, you have to go to bars and other places, right? I don't really like it.* (Rui, overseas, initial interview)

Rui considered a leader's social activities as a burden. This perception may be inherited from ancient China. When women do not receive education, they are encouraged to do "girly" things at home, like sewing and knitting, with little knowledge about the outside world. Thus, they are less likely to make comments or provide personal opinions. In this case, ancient Chinese women saw "showing their face in public" (*paotou lumian*) as a source of shame, which formed the ancient appreciation of beauty as submissive, quiet, and weak. The situation has been overturned in contemporary China. However, the gender norms, still more or less affected by the ancient social discourse, tend to not encourage women to be active in public. Women also internalize this social expectation as well by showing resistance to social activities.

Marginalized Women Academics

As introduced in Chapter 2, the attrition of Chinese women academics also shows the leaky pipeline. With the escalation of academic ranks, the downward trend in the proportion of women is significant, from 56.02% (middle level) to 31.52% (senior level) (Ministry of Education, 2020; also see Chapter 2). Lack of required academic achievement was reported as the major reason preventing women academics from academic-rank promotion. Nevertheless, adequate academic achievement is not the guarantee of higher academic ranks, either. In the interviews, I sought the answers from the women academics to the question, "where are the women professors?"

"I Decided to Retire as an Associate Professor": The Difficult Journey to Professor

As introduced in Chapter 1, the proportion of women academics in senior positions shows a downward trend. Their lack of mentorship was also reported by the Chinese women academics. In academic paths, when they explore in darkness, it mainly causes their near-sightedness in career development. The lack of role models means this group is not valued, which may cause decreased academic capacity of women academics (Obers, 2015). An early-career woman academic, Bai, described the lack of guidance in her narrative:

> *Is there someone [successful] who is nearby who can be my role model? I haven't found anyone yet. This kind of role model is very important. I want to find a woman academic who is a real person nearby, so that I can take her career development as a reference.* (Bai, overseas, initial interview)

Rui, who had been an experienced domestic woman academic, expressed a similar need as well:

> *When I look back, I found that I took a lot of detours, because I didn't have a good guide … I didn't have a good example … The guide is not necessarily academic-based, she could be the expert on anything [related to academic career development].* (Rui, overseas, initial interview)

In the two narratives, the lack of proper role models may have or had led to obstacles in career development. In mentorship, women are more likely to "graduate in or under average time span" (Gu, 2012, p. 195) and pursue an academic career if they are mentored from many perspectives periodically. Dennehy and Dasgupta (2017) find same-gender peer mentoring, which served as a "social vaccine" through "exposure to ingroup experts and peers" during the developmental transition, promoted women academics' success and retention (p. 5965). "Female-to-female" mentors also enabled the mentors and mentees to share some life components as well as research-related issues (Gentry, 2004). As the number of women professors is limited, women academics are less likely to follow a path to the mountain top and the possibilities of having a same-gender mentor significantly decline. When the regulatory power constrains the career development of experienced women academics, it also affects young women academics by providing few possible paths for them.

The shortage of senior women professors enhances the institutional male-dominated culture. Working in the male-dominated institutional norms in universities, women academics tend to be less ambitious for their career development when they see slim opportunities to become a professor. Meanwhile, with the ambition of higher international university rankings, Chinese universities emphasize "managerialist practices" to require high-levels of academic performance, especially in research productivity (Guo et al., 2020, p. 3). Pan, in her 60s, who was going to retire as an associate professor, told her story about her academic performance:

> *I thought about the future of my [academic] career, but I can't abandon my research interest … I tried to cater to the national funding application. I tried to, but I can't. It can't work. I can't receive any national funding … The only thing I can do is to*

> *continue my research without pursuing recognition. Therefore, I dropped out, I decided to retire as an associate professor.* (Pan, overseas, initial interview)

Pan's failure to attain enough academic achievement was the main restriction on her way to the highest academic rank. She claimed, "*this perspective is different [from the research done by men]*." Despite the research capacity Pan has in her field, the obstacles to academic development from her research topic, which attracts few male researchers, shows the marginalization of female-dominated disciplines. This devaluation of female-dominated disciplines resonates with Danni who reported a similar challenge in terms of having research publications in the prestigious journals of her research field, which is also female-dominated. The story of Pan suggests that, because of the gendered structure, an academic must meet the unified academic norms, which are set by men, regardless of the lack of opportunities in certain disciplines.

Nevertheless, adequate academic achievement is not the only guarantee of a higher academic rank. Zhong (domestic), in her 50s, was still an associate professor. At the end of 2020, Zhong had again not received a promotion to professor. She sighed:

> *It is my 4th year [of failing to get a higher academic rank]. In the 1st and 2nd years, I showed some frustration when I was talking about it. Because I had been working for it for years. I published some SSCI indexed journal articles, and received some national and provincial teaching awards. I thought it would be enough [to be a professor]. Moreover, my academic achievement exceeds the requirement of professor and it is higher than some colleagues who are already professors.* (Zhong, domestic, follow-up interview)

Despite the academic excellence of Zhong, she did not get sufficient votes[27] for her promotion to professor, mainly because of her lack of powerful social connections which had directly led to her repeated failure for years. A strong academic social network is more likely to favor men academics in the gendered hierarchical structure in institutions (e.g., Elg & Jonnergård, 2010; R. Thomas, 1996). In this situation, Zhong encountered a hindrance in her career path from being an academic *outsider* (Wager, 1998).

The narratives of the two women academics are constrained by the regulatory power. The narratives of Pan and Zhong suggest that it is difficult for women academics to become

[27] In Chinese universities, the promotion of academic ranks is usually determined by a voting process. A group of peer-reviewed members vote for the qualified candidates mainly based on their research performance.

professors, but not because of their lack of research capacity. In contrast, those women academics embraced the desire to be academically successful, but they were constrained by nonacademic reasons. When the women academics were confronted with academic norms, the few opportunities in Pan's marginalized research interest and Zhong's lack of academic social connection hindered their career paths. It suggests that if one fails to fit into (Aiston & Fo, 2021) this male-dominated academia, one may be disadvantaged in academic rank ascendance.

It may suggest the few men participating and not being involved in social networks in male-dominated institutional norms are disadvantages for women academics. Pan and Zhong showed their disappointment in this regulatory power in academia by stopping naming themselves as potential women academic professors.

"To Be Burnt Out, or to Be Reborn": Where Are the Women Professors?

The title of professor stands for the highest level of academic rank. The women academics made enormous efforts with the publications and gaining research funding mainly for the promotion up the academic ranks. Besides the social status and reputation being a professor brings, it also stands for more power in academia, which means more opportunities of being financially, professionally, and practically supported. In the Chinese pension system, professors will receive more compensation than associate professors every month after retirement. The women academics were eager to ascend these academic ranks to show they were recognized by the academy. It is another way of naming constructed by social discourse, when the academic rank has been generalized as a symbol for knowledge and power in public.

An investigation of Chinese female PhD employment suggests that doctorate receivers, regardless of their sex, are at the top of the job-market pyramid (F. Li, Chen & He, 2012). This research finding is in line with the viewpoint that sex segregation in employment declines when the educational level and professional competence requirements increase. In the interviews, the women academics expressed the difficulty of receiving national research funding, which is considered as the "doorstep," accelerating the process of moving into higher academic ranks. Therefore, publications, funding, and academic ranks, which intersect with each other, compose the academic path of the women academics.

The title of associate professor is what the women academics are fighting for in the early academic stages. First, it is the first academic-rank early-career academics can possibly

achieve. In the Chinese academic ranking system, academics with doctorates are ranked as lecturer once they step into academia. Normally, after at least 2 years, they are qualified to be ranked as associate professor if they have the required academic achievement. Usually, the quota for associate professor every year is smaller than the academics who are qualified, which leads to competition. To win in the competition, the contestants need to present with more academic achievements than required. Second, associate professors are more likely to have opportunities in academic development, for instance, in journal article publication, funding applications, academic cooperation, and so forth. Those two reasons are the most common from the participants' interviews to support the women academics' desire to get promoted, or I may say, to get accepted and recognized in academia.

Pan was about to retire from a double first-class university with the title of associate professor because of less research production. Other than her social network, the competitive environment may have contributed to the situation as well. In most Chinese universities, academic rank promotions are awarded across related disciplinary groups. For example, academics from linguistics may have to compete with academics from education for five spots of professors in a year. The imbalanced chances for publications in different disciplines negatively influence the weak side(s), leading to fewer spots in certain disciplines, even though one's academic achievement is competitive inside the discipline. Moreover, academic rank promotion also is affected by nonacademic reasons. For example, Rui quit her previous academic job in a good university because she had to give the promotion to other academics who were more experienced, though her academic achievement was far more competitive than other candidates'.

Zhong and Rui were also aware that they were completely qualified for a higher academic rank, and the ones who got the positions appeared to perform lower than them academically. Thus, they both showed resistance to the situation. Zhong changed her goal, while Rui changed her workplace. Neither of them lost confidence when they felt underrated in the competition, for they were recognized by academia through their academic publications. They had their academic identities initially constructed during the recognition. Though the institutional discourse shrank their academic identities, it could not overturn them since they decided to react by resistance.

The effort the women academics were making for publications, funding, and academic ranks were closely related to the qualification for tenure, or gaining academic promotion in double

first-class universities. Compared to Zhong, who tactically shifted the purpose of being a professor after hard work and careful consideration, some women academics truncated their possibilities in their academic path by giving up doing research. Naya attributed to the key period in career development after becoming associate professors:

> *There would be usually 5 to 10 years from associate professor to professor … It is a shunt for women academics. If women academics stop here, it would be acceptable. It is not a shame to retire as associate professor. Associate professor and professor, just one word difference, right? After being an associate professor, women are involved in family affairs … your passion would decrease … However, the torture of family affairs would be for limited years … Thus, I think in the 5 to 10 years, there are two routes, to be burnt out, or to be reborn.* (Naya, domestic, initial interview)

For Naya, the academic rank of associate professor was acceptable and "*not a shame*." Naya acknowledged the *family penalty* on women academics, though it is for limited years. And she thought it would be the major obstacle for women academics' career development, because the period is likely to overlap with academics' working years with high productivity (e.g., F. Lu, 2020). Naya's example showed some associate professors terminated their career development to fulfill the social expectations for gender.

Moreover, Taozi explained the social reason for women academics to stop at associate professor in depth:

> *It is not really [because of] others' expectations, it is because what they [the group of women who do not pursue the highest academic rank] are influenced by while growing up, or because of the society, and they are aiming at stable jobs. They have eliminated themselves from this option. Thus, the pursuit of academic career is for the stability they imagine.* (Taozi, domestic, initial interview)

Taozi agreed with Naya's reasons, but she thought more women academics were walking away from their academic paths. Taozi believed the attrition of women academics is not just because of outward restrictions, but also the internalization of the restrictions, which is *self-expectations*. The social discourse that women are aiming at having "*stable jobs*" rather than meeting work challenges prevails. Women are expected to perform as good wives and mothers more than as fruitful academics. Some academic positions are tenured after recruitment in China, even in today's academic market, so academics may not have to devote themselves to research productivity in their early career to secure their jobs. By this means,

the stability and flexibility of work time are favored by some women graduates, who are not very enthusiastic about doing research. It explains "*stable jobs*" in Taozi's narrative.

Danni, who was in her very early academic career, echoed Taozi:

> *In most universities, if you are an associate professor, your job is secure. Most people [the women academics] are at this stage, Maybe, even when they are still quite young, round 35, they are at this stage. Sometimes I witness these stories. My [previous] supervisor used to complain, "Ah, why doesn't she [one of Danni's doctoral colleagues] continue doing research? She was such a smart student. Now she stopped doing research for her two children."* (Danni, domestic, initial interview)

Danni reported her tactic:

> *Yes, this process is attrition. I usually say to my close women colleagues and friends that we must hang in there. We don't want to be out for ourselves in the process [of academic development].* (Danni, domestic, initial interview)

In Danni's narrative, the stagnation at a lower academic rank for women academics, "this stage" as described by Danni, was commonly seen, because they had been secured by tenure. It is hard to say whether they were doing research in the early stages for a secure job or for their long-term career development, but the academic rank of associate professor could be a signal of a secure job for this group of women academics. It may be consistent with the social expectations of women; however, Danni's previous supervisor felt very regretful for the women academic who gave up her academic career development for her family. It may bring the side effect that doctoral supervisors have second thoughts when they are recruiting women doctoral students for the higher possibility of them quitting academia in future. Similar concerns occur for career development as well. Danni and her academic peers were encouraging each other to remain involved in academia and pursue career development as academics. It is a gesture that they were naming themselves women academics with long-term career aspirations through unnaming themselves as women academics who stop doing research after being associate professors.

Fusion of Identities

Compared to doctoral study, an academic career becomes a bumpy road for women academics. It is likely to see the progress of women academics' career development challenged by the patriarchal social discourse and the male-dominated working discourse. In society, they are expected to complete the social expectations of women, while, in the

academy, they are expected to be productive academics. In the women academics' career development, they perform gender in academia by embedding their gender identity in their academic identity. Because of the constraints of gender norms, they perform academic identities in limited perspectives. The social expectations of women are more likely to lean to being family oriented. Women academics' identities are the combined performances of their academic identity and gender identity, which are constantly negotiated in social and institutional discourses.

Women Academics' Negotiated Identities

Chinese society and institutions are both male-dominated (e.g., J. Wang, 2005; X. Yu et al., 2012; C. Zhou & Zhang, 2020). As discussed in Chapter 2, the organizational culture is entrenched in the patriarchal social structure (Hakiem, 2021; see also J. Wang, 2005). In this structure, women are expected to be less ambitious for career progression in two layers. For one, women ought to take more family responsibility in the level of social labor division. For another, women are more likely to allocated work that is less beneficial to their career development in institutional norms. Therefore, women academics tend to be marginalized both in society and the institutions. The agency of women academics is paralyzed by gender norms (Lester, 2011). Intersected by the academic identity and gender identity, the identities women academics perform have been negotiated, and they make concessions to strike a balance between those identities. The performance manifested in women academics is shaped by the contested gender and academic discourses to meet both requirements simultaneously after negotiation. This negotiation does not merely originate from women academics under regulatory practice. When they are named by multiple identities in different discourses, they respond to those names, and they name others to reproduce the structure. This performance of being named and naming maintains the coherence of institutional norms and social structure and forms the negotiation of individual identities. For Butler (2006, p. 34), the coherence of gender is created under "the regulation of the attributes." In the institutions, the gender performance of women academics is regulated to be coherent with their sex as well as the gender roles they ought to play in society. Women academics also shape their performance under this regulatory practice to perform the gender they are expected to be like. The interaction and negotiation between regulatory power, formed by institutional discourse, and the performance of women academics aim at constituting the identity they are purported to be. By this means, the patriarchal symbolic (see Butler, 2006) in the institutions is constructed and strengthened.

In women academics, their academic and gender identity construct the main roles in negotiation. As analyzed in Chapter 5, they have to perform their academic identity in the navigation of gender identity. I present the negotiation in Figures 2 and 3 as follows. In the two figures, I assume the academic identity is in the same color (medium blue). After negotiation with the gender identity bred in different social discourses, shown as medium blue when it is consistent with the academic identity, and white when it is inconsistent with the academic identity, the identity may become stronger (in darker blue) or weaker (in lighter blue) after negotiation. If gender identity shares similar goals with academic identity, for example the academics are encouraged to make career achievements when they are in the social discourse, they are more likely to be driven by a more powerful joint force in career development, as in Figure 2. However, when they are encouraged by their gender identity to depart from academic success, the academics are less likely to achieve career-friendly identity negotiation, as shown in Figure 3. As a result, the negotiated identity shows distinctively different color compared to the same medium blue in the original academic identity through thinning or strengthening by gender identity. In career development, when the women academics are doing academic work, they have to do gender at the same time, for example, to walk away from leadership positions (e.g., Kadi, overseas; Rui, overseas), and to be the main family caretaker during the career development time (e.g., Naya, domestic; Zhong, domestic), though the ways of doing gender negatively affect their career development explicitly. The colors of negotiated identity in the two figures suggest the potential two different paths of academic career development in the future.

Figure 2

When Gender Identity is Consistent with Academic Identity

Figure 3

When Gender Identity is Inconsistent with Academic Identity

Identities Formed by Regulatory Practices

In the narratives, the women academics are constrained by the regulatory power from the institution as well as from society. The regulatory practice works on the women academics through forces from different directions, and thus truncates their agency (Lester, 2011). As discussed in the above section, women academics actively negotiate their identity between academic and gender identities, and those identities are shaped by the regulatory practice.

Women academics are restricted by the regulatory practice of institutions and academia. They have to conform to the standard of academic performance evaluation in institutions and Chinese academia to get academically promoted. The academic regulatory practice is more likely to function by published policies or written regulations. If women fail to be ambitious academics, they are punished by the policies, say, to retire with the academic rank

of associate professor (Pan). In contrast, gender is regulated and maintained by social discourses in a *seemingly voluntary* means as Butler (2006) describes,

> Discrete genders are part of what "humanizes" individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right … Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (p. 190)

If women academics "fail to do their gender right," they are punished by the regulatory power of society. Because of the individual reliance on gender construction processes, the regulatory power tends to "compel" the women academics to complete the gendered performative acts. Without specific regulation as academic regulatory practice, to produce gender requires unified belief and performance. On the one hand, women academics have to show performative acts to maintain gender production and to avoid punishment in the social discourse; on the other hand, the women academics are making compensations for doing gender in academia by, for example, showing little resistance to higher academic requirements (Jiao, overseas).

Therefore, women academics usually do not develop stable academic and gender identities, but are "tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through *a stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler, 2006, p. 191), as do their negotiated identities. In this dynamic process, the academic performance the women academics experienced has been continuously challenged for the usually inconsistent goals of their academic and gender identities. At the same time, the formation and changes of women academics' negotiated identities appear to be temporal with constant fluidity (see Chapter 3). Chinese women academics demonstrate their identities through repeatedly performative acts.

Layers of Naming in the Women Academics with Overseas Doctorates

If the women academics who received domestic doctorates were confronted with the fusion of academic and gender identities domestically, many women academics who received doctorates overseas reported an inability to adapt to the reconstruction of both gender and academic identities as Chang said:

> *You know what, the women [academics] like me, who come back from foreign countries, have to resist the gender, the pregnancy, that stuff. You also have to resist*

> *the Chinese developing [academic] system. There are conflicts. You cannot live like that.* (Chang, overseas, initial interview)

Chang categorized the women academics who gained overseas doctorates as a marginalized group in two layers: gender and academic career paths. They were in the male-dominated discourse and their future career development tended to differ from the domestic women academics. Fu (overseas) echoed Chang in describing the lack of social network in academic development in Chinese academia. Indeed, this conflict could also be seen in the small number of women academics who held domestic doctorates (e.g., Zhong, domestic). Butler's (2006) explanation of being willing to become a part of a "unity" of individuals describes this tension. She writes:

> Related efforts to determine what is and is not the true shape of a dialogue, what constitutes a subject position, and, most importantly, when "unity" has been reached, can impede the self-shaping and self-limiting dynamics of coalition. The insistence in advance on coalitional "unity" as a goal assumes that solidarity, whatever its price, is a prerequisite for political action. (p. 20)

In this tension of being unified, the women academics with overseas doctorates were more likely to fit into their gender identity and perform less of their academic identity. This group of academics is named as women academics for their gender identity, which is thought to be their ontological identity, before their overseas experiences were visible. They may have felt obligated to fit into the domestic social and institutional discourse by "self-shaping and self-limiting" (p. 20) to maintain the unified gender norms by showing their conformity. Meanwhile, under the name of women academics, if they failed to perform gender norms in the domestic social and institutional discourse, their intelligibility reduced.

On the other hand, academic identity was epistemological for the women academics with overseas doctorates. Those women academics experienced the reconstruction of academic identity, which may not have been quite coherent with the domestic academic norms. Trained by distinct academic norms, the two groups of women academics constructed different academic identities. Women academics with overseas doctorates found it was difficult to make themselves intelligible (Butler, 2005; see also Butler, 2006) in domestic academia. In contrast to the domestic doctorate receivers, the women academics who were trained in the Western academic discourse tended to develop two different strategies towards domestic academic norms: fit in or drop out. As an enormous country, China has been in its own academic evaluation system for years. Being academic returnees (see Chapter 2), the

women academics holding overseas doctorates did have some advantages in domestic career development from their international academic training. Although the women academics obtained the skills of academic writing in an international way, compared to the domestic doctoral education, overseas doctoral education is not designed to serve Chinese academia. Therefore, on some occasions, they were alienated by being named academic returnees.

The solidarity of academia is ensured by the "unity" and thus constructs the political structure in institutions. Those women academics who were not being intelligible in the unity with *proper names* were more likely to become the challenger of the solid structure of academia. These challenging actions tend to bring regulatory power. For example, the academic returnees performed the inability to adapt to the academic culture in domestic universities. The women academics with overseas doctorates showed resistance to the domestic academic norms by having only international publications. This academic performance may have led to the stagnation in academic ranks and little personal prestige in domestic academia as punishment. They had to cross two barriers of being women and adopting international academic norms to perform the *correct* domestic academic norms constructed by Chinese men academics. Another tentative explanation is this group of women academics were doing gender in academia by truncating their academic performance to not challenge their men counterparts. They were compensating for the violation of gender norms in their geographical academic mobility. These substantive gendered performative acts were constructed on the basis of ontologically different gender identities and their constitution provided the precondition of institutional hierarchal structure and potential political actions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the intersected identities of Chinese women academics in their career development from the limitation of academic opportunities, the leadership positions, and the marginalization of women academics. When these women academics were making compensation for being women academics, they were willing to make more academic achievements and do more service work. Generally, the exclusion of leadership positions and senior academic ranks among those women academics' career development enhances their marginalization in institutions and academia. The guidance and restriction rooted in institutional regulatory practices developed from the social structure might be the major explanation. Another tentative explanation is that, to respond to the names in social

and institutional discourses, the women academics perform gender in academia by intentionally giving better opportunities to men as a part of the compensation. Their absence in leadership positions indicates the lack of power in the group of women academics, for example, in making policies. This underrepresentation is likely to constrain their career development and restrict their achievement in senior academic ranks, increasing the underrepresentation of prestigious women academics. When women academics are absent in the regulatory power, they are regulated by men. The complex net needled by regulatory practices is likely to advocate women academics to perform gender in institutions to enhance the structure. In this way they complete gender obligations, but they are more likely to encounter obstacles in their future academic career paths. This suggests that women academics are more likely to make less competitive achievements in their concession to dual discourses.

On this road, women academics must respond to the name of *women* academics, instead of just "academics," to be *particularized,* or *singled out* in academia, while men academics are named as academics. It may put women academics at a disadvantage for being segregated from the mainstream. By this means, women academics have to perform both as women and academics to negotiate a fusion of identities. If a woman academic has an overseas doctorate, she might be expected to perform the fusion of woman as well as both domestic and overseas academic. In the next chapter, I concentrate on the work–life balance in motherhood of Chinese women academics to explore the tension between family and career development in the Chinese higher education context.

CHAPTER 7
INSCRIBED BODIES:
WORK–LIFE BALANCE IN MOTHERHOOD

Introduction

Like women academics worldwide, Chinese women academics hold multiple identities (e.g., Aiston & Fo, 2021; P. Chen & Hsieh, 2019). They are professionals in the workplace, while most of them are mothers and wives at home. The tension of going back and forth between the two spaces was widely reported by the participants in the interviews. Though women academics' intersection of public and private spheres has been well-documented in international academia, there are few studies on how Chinese women academics are constructed and shaped by their work–life balance in international or domestic academia. Chinese women academics' perception of motherhood is constructed by social and institutional discourses. Furthermore, these perceptions are dynamically based on personal experiences as well as the changing of Chinese society in recent years. As rearing children becomes one of the major obligations in marriage, which is likely to cause tension between the allocation of domestic responsibilities and career development, social expectations of childbirth and childrearing largely influence their perceptions of the public and private spheres. This chapter aims to investigate the competing roles of Chinese women academics in their work–life balance in motherhood. According to the biographical information of the participants (see Chapter 4), 13 of them are married,[28] 12 of them have one or two children, one has no child. One of them is divorced with an adult child. Six of them remain single.[29]

I interpret the lived experiences of these Chinese women academics in social and institutional discourses to explain how their bodies were inscribed by normativity and what their responses were using Butlerian theoretical concepts of normativity, cultural inscription, and the body. Though prior research tends to categorize women as Other, they are not only the ones who are constrained by the normativity of social discourse but are also inevitably the subjects who reproduce the normativity. As Butler (2006) writes, "If a subject becomes a subject by entering the normativity of language, then in some important ways, these rules precede and orchestrate the very formation of the subject" (p. 135). Women academics are

[28] None of the women academics said they were homosexual. Therefore, in this chapter, when talking about marriage, childbirth, and childrearing, I name their partners *husbands*.
[29] Chinese culture does not advocate women to have children outside marriage. In this research, none of those single participants has children.

at the center of normative discourse "by entering the normativity of language" (p. 135). Every time they show conformity, they are internalizing the inscription more deeply, and hence they are producing normativity simultaneously. In the other way, the normativity inscribes their bodies through conformity. The conformity is usually presented as cultural inscription on the body. Butler (2006) writes:

> On some accounts, the notion that gender is constructed suggests a certain determinism of gender meanings inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies, where those bodies are understood as passive recipients of an inexorable cultural law. When the relevant "culture" that "constructs" gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation. In such a case, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny. (p. 11)

As introduced in Chapter 6, the career performances of the women academics were ruled by the intersection of social and institutional regulatory power, which is the "inexorable cultural law" (p. 11). In their private lives, women academics are more likely to be affected by the power produced in social discourse. I also argue that there is tension between social and institutional discourses for the women academics. When the tension occurs, which usually hinders their career development, women academics may show resistance through yielding to male-dominated academic normativity to challenge the social discourse and conform to the academic discourse. Butler agrees with Foucauldian theory that "the constancy of cultural inscription as a 'single drama' that acts on the body" is built on a body "prior to that inscription, stable and self-identical, subject to that sacrificial destruction" (p. 177). The cultural inscription has to be on the "anatomically differentiated bodies" (p. 11).

In this chapter, I aim to explore the work–life balance in motherhood of the women academics in the contemporary Chinese society using Butlerian theoretical concepts of normativity, cultural inscription, and the body. The data are analyzed to investigate how the women academics are expected to perform and how they cope with the expectations in intersected discourses as (prospective) mother academics. I first briefly review the literature on Chinese women in society and the social construction of Chinese women doctorate holders. Then, I analyze the data from the aspects of culturally inscribed bodies in being mothers and the male-dominated normativity in being academics. In the end, I discuss the boundaries of Chinese women academics' bodies in these contested discourses.

Chinese Women in Society

The work–life balance and motherhood of international women academics have been widely discussed in prior studies (e.g., Aiston & Jung, 2015; Dickson, 2018; Diksha, 2015; Yoon & Kim, 2019). However, far too little attention has been paid to the conflicts between Chinese women academics' career development and family responsibilities from a feminist perspective in the Chinese context. Moreover, in the recent rapid development of the Chinese economy and higher education, Chinese social and institutional discourses of work–life balance and motherhood have been dynamically reproduced (e.g., M. Chen, 2018; X. Lin, 2018). Chinese women are constrained by intersected discourses to form normative performances of women, especially when they have families.

Discursive Restraints on Chinese Women

After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the identity of Chinese women has become complex and diverse, from "people in family" to "people in society," also known as "the country's people" (Xing, 2016, p. 29). Chinese women tend to take co-responsibility with their husbands in family support (W. Li & Zhai, 2019). However, notably, this motherhood is still being reproduced (F. Li, 2019). That is to say, the function of Chinese women in family has been transformed and is transforming. The standard has changed from merely "taking care of husbands and teaching children" (*xiangfu jiaozi*), to taking care of husbands and high-quality teaching of children (F. Li, 2019). It is seen that the imbalanced allocation of childrearing and family chores still traps women in the supportive and devoted roles of motherhood.

Constructed by social discourse, family is vital in Chinese culture. In the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the concept of "good life" was put forward for the first time (People's Daily, 2017). J. Wang et al.'s (2019) survey of nearly 20,000 Chinese people finds that family is one of the key words describing happiness. In the survey, the words in high frequency about family include "reunion, warmth, love, family affection, love, company," and so forth (J. Wang et al., 2019), which are all established on the basis of family relationality. Thus, the family constructed by social discourse is a microenvironment with love and the parent–child relationship as the core. T. Li (2018) claims that children's well-being is positively related to their parents' perception of happiness, which is the basic state and an important component of a better life. Through the publicity of social media, the authoritative endorsement of experts and the daily communication of people, the important position of the family in a better life is constantly

being repeated, and hence becomes standardized. By this means, to establish a happy family represents a normative life constructed by social discourse as a mainstream value in Chinese society (Liao & Zhou, 2020).

Ethics of Being Women in Family

In private life, women are named mothers, wives, daughters, and other feminine identities. These roles are often tied together, or intersect. In the Confucian culture, the dominant ideology in ancient China, the emphasis on family responsibility for women constrained women in the private sphere. On this basis, Chinese traditional values construct the primary responsibility of married women as to support the career success of their husbands (Cooke, 2005). Women are seldom encouraged to participate in the public sphere. In movies and television series, mothers are usually related to the features of greatness, sacrifice, devotion and so forth, and always expect nothing in return (F. Li, 2019). In those expressions, the image of mothers is constituted by the social discourses to a high moral standard. Hence, those "complimentary" words refer to altruism, and in the same way they overlook the individuality and uniqueness of every woman who is a mother. By this means, motherhood is constructed and maintained by social culture.

Based on this ethical constraint, Chinese women are more likely to perform gender in family under social discourse. They tend to internalize the normativity of motherhood and gendered labor division (see Chapter 1) from the construction of social discourses and mass media, and hence they dedicate themselves to becoming *qualified* mothers (M. Chen, 2018). They tend to reduce their devotion to work to meet the social expectation of being a good mother (Tao, 2013). In recent years, domestic scholars have paid more attention to Chinese women's marriage and motherhood. In the patriarchal society, family affairs are regarded as private, imperceptible, trivial, and unworthy of mentioning (L. Cai, 2015). The reproduction of power in marriage helps solidify the social status of Chinese women. X. Lin (2018) argues that implicit power relations in the family create the ideology to which its members are required to conform. In constructed domestic normativity, taking good care of family members is established as the responsibility of women (X. Lin, 2018).

Social Construction of Chinese Women Doctorate Holders

For a long time, women doctorate holders have been negatively constructed by Chinese social discourse (see Chapter 1). These highest degree receivers are regarded as a special group of people who challenge the social order by doing *men's work.* They are named "the

third gender," complementary to the normative binary gender concept. The alienation of women doctorate holders shows the social consequences when they are invading the space of men's competition (Y. Shen, 2010). Being in *men's competition*, the group of women indeed revolutionarily change the traditional gender roles, thus facing many obstacles. Therefore, the stigmatization of women with doctorates is established under the gaze of men and the normativity of women. Notably, women doctorate holders may survive this boundary-crossing competition with their female body inscription.

The rebellion against gender roles has been a barrier for Chinese women doctorate holders, because it narrows their choices in seeking husbands. Chinese marriage usually follows an explicit "gradient" in that men tend to marry women who are younger and have a lower educational level than them (Luo & Ren, 2011); women *should* marry the men who are *better* than them. That is, in ideal marriages, men ought to have a higher educational level, better financial situation, and so forth, than women, or at least men and women are at the same level (H. Yang, 2019). Therefore, women doctorate holders are more likely to encounter disadvantages in the traditional marriage culture (Luo & Ren, 2011). By this means, the "patriarchy in public" is extended to the "patriarchy in family," creating traditional gender roles (Luo & Ren, 2011), which enhances the patriarchy in society. This is in line with the view that society constitutes women's substantive status by physical, psychological, and economic features in the gender system and makes women internalize the "consciousness of her own femininity" (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 80). Nowadays, Chinese people are more open to different choices in marriage, yet the gradient marriage rule of women being slightly below men in age, education, and occupation still prevails (Gui, 2017).

Culturally Inscribed Bodies in Being Mothers

The responsibility for motherhood enhances the cultural inscription of "women, the housekeepers," even though they take highly professional positions in workplaces. In prior research, for women, the private sphere represents the family life while the public sphere indicates their occupation (e.g., Elg & Jonnergård, 2010; Villanueva-Moya & Exposito, 2021). Their profession in the public sphere may add to their autonomy, but they still tend to perform gender norms in the private sphere (Villanueva-Moya & Exposito, 2021) since women academics are widely reported to be responsible for the majority of childcare and housework (Cho & Ryu, 2016; Dickson, 2018). This prediscursive allocation of responsibility enhances the gender roles of women.

Chinese women academics are less likely to gain objective success in their careers (Cho & Ryu, 2016). When those women academics are performing the normativity of academia, they usually show lower self-efficacy than men (Firoz, 2015), especially in their early-career stage because of the contradictory normativity. However, even if they are trying to make a difference in academia, the cultural inscription of running a happy family is deeper than having a successful career for many women academics. Driven by this aspiration to establish a family and to have children, Jiao said:

> *From the perspective of life, work is not the only thing. It is important to have a life. If you are applying for the rank of associate professor a few years later, you will have it eventually. You don't have to be so hurried. You just received the doctorate and got a job. You have reached a milestone already.* (Jiao, overseas, fictional story completion)

Having just achieved her doctorate, Jiao tended to regard the degree as "*a milestone*," and thought this was the time for her to concentrate on family duties. As Cho and Ryu (2016) argue, Chinese women academics tend to be satisfied with their position with little further career development, even though they perceive gender inequality in comparison with the career development of their men counterparts. It shows women academics may think that they have already been successful when they gain the opportunities of standing in the same place with men.

Meanwhile, as Danni proposed, "*women academics are continuously negotiating the normativity they perceive*." Some of the women academics showed resistance to gender roles (e.g., Danni) by setting boundaries between career and family to minimize the negative effect of family obligations to their career development. However, those boundaries may marginalize the women academics for their betrayal of gender roles. Hence, the women academics are constantly making links between their identity as women and as academics to strike a balance.

"I Work Late at Night": A Seesaw Struggle with Time

Constructed by domestic social discourse, Chinese women are encouraged to give birth to their first child between the ages of 25 and 30 (Y. Shen, 2010). In this situation, the women academics with doctorates are more likely to be left behind because of the years they have spent studying. As Shi said:

> *After doctoral graduation, it was already late. The two things [career development and childbirth] are contradictory. You are aiming for associate professor, and you have to do other things [childbirth].* (Shi, domestic, initial interview)

Danni added:

> *The cost of marriage and childbirth happens not only to us [but to all women], but it is more obvious to [women] academics … You have to become an associate professor in 3 to 5 years. However, it is contradictory to the best age for childbirth.* (Danni, domestic, initial interview)

The adjective "*late*" stands for the *abnormal* pace of life among women doctoral students compared to the women who do not pursue doctorates. Normally, the youngest doctoral graduates receive their degrees around their 30s, which is contradictory to women's "*best age*" to "bear and rear better children" (*yousheng youyu*) in Chinese cultural normativity. Because of the one-child policy, couples are eager to have a healthy and clever child because it is the only opportunity to have offspring. Moreover, gaining academic achievements is also vital for early-career academics. Therefore, the overlapping *time arrangements* of the social and institutional discourses leaves academic women on a very tight schedule. In this situation, if women academics are not willing to challenge any normativity, they have to complete both of the tasks simultaneously. The description of Shi shows the acceptance of the power relations in the social network. When women academics respond to society, either in behavior or in the discourse they have created, they start to reproduce power.

Naya gave birth to her second children at 35, and then got promoted to associate professor during childrearing. In October 2015, the Chinese government implemented the "two-child policy" (Party School of the Central Committee of CPC, 2015), which enables families to have up to two children. Looking back on her comparatively low productivity in childbirth, Naya described in calm:

> *My [previous] supervisor told me: it was the most important for you to march at an average pace in these years. Don't think of going forward, it is impossible, because you are taking your energy to take care of the children. You need to march at an average pace … By marching at the same place, it means keeping up with your peers. For example, you can complete the average number of publications … To keep to the average is definitely to keep working, it's not to stop working; yes, keep working, but don't work like crazy.* (Naya, domestic, initial interview)

Naya emphasized the importance of working pace in her two maternity leaves. She saw this "*slowdown period*" as "*a chance to [make] academic accumulations*" (Naya, domestic, initial interview). After these years, she could march forward with her accumulation with a faster pace. For Naya, the strategic acceptance of the motherhood penalty was the most beneficial to balance career and family, and highly consistent with the family-centered perception of the Chinese women academics (S. Xiao, 2014). Her previous supervisor's suggestion, which represents the authority through the repetition of the normativity in social discourse, reinforced and justified her performative acts. The authority also reminded Naya that her culturally inscribed body was unable to handle intensive childrearing as well as academic work at the same time. Performing gender normativity, Naya thus accepted her slow career development. Moreover, in Chinese social discourse, when Naya made her sacrifice, she was encouraged and even praised for placing her career in second place.

Being different from Naya, Kadi was unwilling to sacrifice her career for family. Raised in a family with traditional culture, Kadi was expected to marry and have children in an early age, but her agency in academic career development was trying to challenge gender normativity by postponing marriage and childbirth. However, constrained by social discourse, Kadi confirmed the importance of the time to start a family. She claimed:

> *Like getting married, having children, actually, if you miss the timing, it would be a little difficult … I always put work at the first place. I have been postponing my marriage, childbirth, and purchasing the apartment as long as possible … if you ask me, I admit things like marriage and childbirth have their time limit. If you miss the best years, yes, the options will be much poorer*. (Kadi, overseas, initial interview)

In the narrative of Kadi, the words "*difficult*" and "*poorer*" are used to describe late marriage after the "*best years*." In contrast, Kadi implied, if a woman gets married and gives birth to children at the *proper* time, she is more likely to gain happiness, otherwise her life may become "*difficult*" and "*poorer*." The contrast of positive and negative adjectives Kadi chose reflected her perception of social normativity. The words *difficult* and *poorer* used by the academic women indicate that they were avoiding the risk of not having a happy life. Though Kadi put work in the first place, she conformed to the social discourse eventually to be *a family-centered independent woman*.

The time conflict urges the women academics to have solutions. With strong agency in both career development and motherhood, they develop strategies to use time in specific ways. When I was scheduling with the participants for interviews, some of them replied they could

only do the interview after putting the children to bed. Naya and Kadi were two of them. Naya was the main caregiver of two children. She briefly explained the daily schedule of her children and asked me if I could wait until they were asleep. It was about 9 at night when we started the interview, which is also the normal time Naya started her academic work, her strategy for her "*slow-down period*." This situation could be "seen as having 'stalled out'" in her academic career development by making "strategic choices" in fulfilling the obligations of family and career (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016).

Kadi was a visiting scholar in the US with her child and her mother while being interviewed. She also started her interview at night with very short notice, because her child was with her mother, and it set Kadi free. During the pandemic, she had to adjust her working schedule for childcare when they were all at home:

> *Kadi: Because I am working from home, in the daytime, I have to be with my child, I hardly have time to work. So, sometimes, I work late at night…*
>
> *Researcher: Oh, it is not an easy life!*
>
> *Kadi: Right, however, I think it is a common problem for all the women academics around the world. My supervisor told me, some very prestigious international women academics in my research field live like this. Every day, they get up at 5 to write papers for 2 hours before having breakfast with their families.* (Kadi, overseas, initial interview)

The interview was finished almost at midnight, and Kadi planned to continue with her academic work after it, which was normal for her. She had some working time at home because her mother was around to help with the childcare, and hence she did not have to wrestle with time as much as the women academics she described. Kadi further explained her time-management strategy:

> *Nowadays, women academics have no choice but to sacrifice their time. If you sacrifice the children's time, you really don't want to be a successful academic, while the children are messy. The only thing I can do is to squeeze my time for sleeping, my time for entertaining, and my leisure time … Basically, it is the only strategy. There are no other solutions. Because one's time is limited, even if someone is very academically successful, one cannot take 1 minute as 2 minutes.* (Kadi, overseas, initial interview)

Han enhanced this explanation by giving a specific example:

> *Another way, I think, is to squeeze time. For example, when the child is sleeping, just stay up late. There is no better way … no other solutions, just improve your efficiency, no other ways.* (Han, overseas, initial interview)

Kadi and Han followed the normativity in academic competition, because they did not want to be left behind in academia. In this situation, they developed the strategic actions of giving up private time and staying up late to do research. Their repeated expressions of "*no other solutions*" showed they had no choice but to "*give up*" or to "*sacrifice*" when encountered problems, which is in line with the ethics of women in the traditional culture introduced in the previous section. They made compromises to take care their children to fulfill the social expectation of mothers. Meanwhile, they squeezed more time and made full use of this precious time to work with "*efficiency*." Those women academics attempted to resist the cultural inscription on their bodies and thus lessen the interference of time conflicts through going back and forth between the two discourses.

"I Am Willing to Do This Well": Overloaded Mothers with Academic Careers

In the narratives, many of the women academics agreed that, in the first 2 or 3 years, mothers are irreplaceable to children. As some of the women academics described, "*Dads cannot do the breastfeeding*" (Xixi, domestic, initial interview); "*My daughter only wanted mom when she was little*" (Ming, domestic, initial interview); "*At that time [from newborns to toddlers], probably some mother's responsibilities cannot be substituted by others*" (Yang, domestic, initial interview). This social expectation gives the women academics agency to become the major caregivers to children, especially in the first few years after childbirth, and none of them claimed their academic workload was lighter than other colleagues in the institutions. Therefore, bearing this tension between motherhood and academic career, the women academics craved for shared responsibility to offload the pressure of the *second shift* (e.g., Dickson, 2018). Instead of making more effort to meet the dual expectations of motherhood and career, Yang was the only woman academic who shared how she escaped from childcare and returned to her academic career after the first 3 years of childrearing and transferred the childrearing responsibilities to her husband. The parental duties of husbands were hardly described in the narratives of the other women academics. Yang said:

> *At the first 2 or 3 years [after the childbirth], I think I was the one who contributed more [to the family]. The situation overturned after 3 years…he [my husband] felt good during the process of [childcare]. He enjoyed the happiness of taking an important role and being a caregiver, which gave him the sense of existence and*

> *value … Because I am the kind of person who values career development very much, I give it priority. If I am asked to make a choice [between family and career], I will definitely prioritize career development.* (Yang, domestic, initial interview)

The cultural inscription on the body of Yang is less obvious compared to normative mothers. By challenging the social normativity, Yang claimed "*the identity of women has a negative impact on academic career development*." Yang identified herself as a career woman, and hence she devoted an enormous amount of time to academic writing during the pandemic, while her husband, who is also an academic, took care of their 6-year-old daughter and family affairs. The deconstruction of motherhood reduced the pressure on Yang by making the role of mother substitutable and thus empowering other family members (F. Li, 2019). In marriage, though gender roles in social discourse still affect family affairs, the subjectivities of family members are reconstructed through the reallocation of housework. Through empowering her husband, Yang successfully reassigned the childcare responsibility, saving herself more time to do research. The empowerment of her husband in childrearing was indeed the empowerment of herself in career development.

While women academics' research productivity dropped drastically worldwide in the pandemic (Vincent-Lamarre et al., 2020), Yang's research productivity raised as did men academics' as shown in the statistics. In 2020, Yang and her research team made tremendous academic achievements by having publications in international top journals. Because of her social contribution to her professional field, she received the provisional award of "pioneer against COVID-19." Despite her achievement, and although she took fewer childcare responsibilities compared to the first few years after childbirth, she still desired to meet social expectations. She frequently posted about her daughter as well as her academic work on a social media platform to perform the normativity of being a perfect mother and an accomplished academic simultaneously. In Chinese social discourse, childrearing is considered as the center of family (S. Xiao, 2014). Yang cared about her performance in creating a family. She added:

> *I am willing to do this [childcare] well. Sometimes if I do not do this well enough, I feel quite guilty and blame myself. Thus, I have been living in a very contradictory situation … I think it is similar to [academic] work. Since I am responsible to the job [motherhood], I have to do this well*. (Yang, domestic, initial interview)

The reason why Yang was in this "*contradictory situation*" was mainly the contested power relations in the discourses. As introduced in Chapter 2*,* views on academic career and family vary among women academics, due to their agency and personal preference (Y. Shen, 2010). However, to be perfect mothers is the ideal aspiration in patriarchal society (F. Li, 2019) for women, including Yang. Yang clarified to me that she wanted to be a good mother, but emphasized her academic career development as well. In the fictional story completion, 13 out of the 20 women academics prioritized family over career development. For Butler (2006), gender is "the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body's surface" (p. 184). Yang displayed the presence of motherhood to reproduce the figure of fantasy to be a good mother under the discipline of social discourse.

If women academics *"do both [academic career and family] very well, they must have family members for help"* (Yang, domestic, initial interview). In social discourse, women remain the subjects in family responsibilities and anyone who cooperates with them is the help. The dated norms of women associated with childcare are still operating on women academics (S. Acker & Armenti, 2004). In ancient China, Chinese parents shared the responsibility of childrearing based on the rule of "strict father, kind mother" (*yanfu, cimu*), which means mothers take care of children's physical and emotional needs whereas fathers emphasize children's moral, knowledge and skill development with little emotion shown (S. Xiao, 2014). Nowadays, these parental roles are inherited and intersect with the saying "men, the breadwinners; women, the housekeepers." Chinese fathers tend to interpret their responsibility for raising children as financial support though they are not the only family providers (Cao & Lin, 2019). This perception of fathers' role in childrearing mirrors mothers' role of taking the domestic responsibilities, which is in line with the narratives by the women academics in this research. The prediscursive allocation of responsibility determines the gender roles of women. On the other hand, the extent of tension between motherhood and career commitment depends on the availability of others to help with childcare, especially husbands (e.g., Yang, domestic).

With the same goal of maintaining academic work in children's early years, some women academics seek help from their parents. As the interview started, Han apologized because her parents happened to go out at the last-minute that day. Thus, she had to complete the scheduled interview with an infant in her arms. The interview was hard to proceed with because of the continuous interruption of the baby until her parents got back home. Han was

so relieved, "*Great, they are back*." The little anecdote reflected the dependence on intergenerational help during childcare to maintain the full-time work pace for academic mothers. Grandparents' participation in the childrearing of grandchildren has been historically recorded from ancient China (S. Xiao, 2014). The shared caring responsibilities with the grandparents enabled Han to complete the interview. Similar to Han, Kadi could participate in this research because of the help from her mother in childcare. Compared to the anxiety Han showed in the interview before her parents returned, Kadi was calm and talkative in a light mood. The contrast of their performative acts reflects the reliance on domestic support of women academics and this cultural inscription on their bodies reduces their autonomy. Effective domestic support empowers them in academic work participation (see Y. Shen, 2013).

Unlike those women academics who got help from family members in childrearing, Naya did not report any assistance though she has two children. She drew a conclusion about family and career in retrospect:

> *It is about family affairs and chaos. I think, in a comparatively long time, 5 to 10 years, if you could hang on there, the torture of the family affair would be time-limited. For example, when the children are small … So, I think in the 6 to 10 years, there are two paths, you either are burnt out, or [stand out] slowly, bit by bit… We, women academics, are attacked by the combo boxing of work, family and children. There is no other generation, I think maybe there is no other generation of academics who lived a harder life than us.* (Naya, domestic, initial interview)

Naya demonstrated two paths for women academics—to "*be burnt out*," or to "*stand out*." As prior research shows, in the work and research lifetime of men and women academics, getting married and giving birth to children do not affect the total spent time on work (Y. Zhu & He, 2014), and mother academics do not have lower research productivity (Aiston & Jung, 2015). Therefore, from a lifetime perspective, women academics' production of teaching and research as well as the time they spend on work may be similar to men. Notably, it was widely reported by the interviewed women academics that in the first few years after infants were born, mothers' time was severely occupied and interrupted by childcare, thus their research productivity dropped drastically. In the narrative of Naya, the women academics had to take years to resume research productivity from this motherhood penalty, and to keep up with career development. What is more, women academics tended to make extra efforts to dispel the hindrance brought by family commitments through spending more

personal leisure time on doing research (Aiston & Jung, 2015). This strategy is not only applied after childbirth, but is extended to the following years. As time goes by, as Naya claimed, the effect of motherhood is likely to drop gradually, which means women academics would have increasingly more time to spend on their academic career. However, the interruption of the career development may reconstruct their agency and produce the group of "*burnt-out women academics*" categorized by Naya. Her explanation may help understand the disproportionate attrition of women in senior academic positions. If a woman academic could survive in the "*combo boxing of work, family and children*" (Naya, domestic, initial interview), she may march forward on her academic path with a faster pace to regain her autonomy. That is to say, the cultural inscription on the women academics is not permanent but shows a downward trend as children grow up. For Butler (2006), "*woman* itself is a term in process," "an ongoing discursive practice" (p. 45), and it makes cultural inscription an ongoing process as well.

Male-Dominated Normativity in Being Academics

The women academics were moving between private and public spheres every day. The competition in academia requires the women academics to devote as much as they can to working, because of the careless culture in neoliberalism (see Chapter 2). Ming, an experienced woman academic, concluded:

> *These are the two roles for women academics: one is the working role, and the other is the childbirth and the gender [role], a creating and raising role ... The former belongs to the social competition, and the latter the natural responsibility of childbirth, double layers of pressure ... If the society builds a wall for you [the women], say, because of women's special identity in social competition, considering the extra social contribution of childbirth, [the policy makers] provide you with extra benefits, it would be different. However, there is no such thing. When you are applying for funding, or a higher academic rank, you have to show competitiveness like men, so you have to give up something at the early stage.* (Ming, domestic, fictional story completion)

In Ming's description, woman academics are expected to behave "*like men*" to be recognized in male-dominated normativity in academy. For Ming, being a woman academic is likely to mean one is tangled in the private and public spheres, which elicits a heavier workload and more distractions. Though women academics are facing "*double layers of pressure*," they still have to be evaluated by the same academic standard as men who are encouraged to

contribute much to work in the institutional discourse. The tension of academic career and family becomes more obvious.

The intensive demands of motherhood and career development for women academics have overlapped for years. Ming was exhausted by taking care of her father when she was interviewed, and her 10-year-old daughter was around talking to her occasionally during the interview. She explained:

> *For the life plan, a good plan is to keep strength in both career and family. In childrearing, the role of women is to be responsible, though it may sacrifice their research productivity*. (Ming, domestic, fictional story completion)

Ming took "*being a woman*" as a destiny. As Butler (2006) explained, "gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation" (p. 11). Gender and the obligations that come with gender, like childcare, are considered as preexisting facts that come with biological sexual features. Thus, for the women academics, it is "not biology, but culture, [that] becomes destiny" (p. 11) to the women academics. The cultural inscription on the bodies of the women academics determines what they ought to do as normative performances.

"My Multiple Roles Intersect": Mothering and Working in the Same Space

In academia, the institutional normativity performs in an egalitarian way by regulating individual academics with the same set of rules, for example, the flexibility of the academic work schedule (see Chapter 2). However, it may lead to more workload in family affairs for women academics for their expected domestic roles. Moss (2004) argues that time and space in the higher education context usually connect with power and inequality. The seemingly friendly working system provide flexible work time of women academics, and thus increases their possibilities to maintain caring work. Rui claimed she was the main caregiver at home because her husband "*usually went on business trips*." She admitted that her working efficiency was extremely low at home. Another woman academic, Shi, echoed Rui. Shi claimed the caring work inevitably drained her working time, especially the time for doing research and academic writing, and it also restricted her mobility. Shi described the ambiguity and contradictions in detail:

> *Actually, the occupation of academic is an advantage for women to take care of the family. Yes, the flexibility. However, it is a disadvantage as well … If you are going to work every day, you can only accompany the children after work. Compared to this, being an academic is advantaged, but the advantage would trap you from*

> *walking out [for working]. For example, [if] I plan to work, I have to look for another place, such as my office … The work time of academics is implicit. Although we don't have to stay in the office, we may have to get prepared for the courses, programs, applications, so we struggle. Whatever you do, you are thinking about the thing [work]. But when you are writing, you have to keep an eye on the time to see if I should pick up the kids, or I should do some other things.* (Shi, domestic, initial interview)

An ideal subject in neoliberalism is always on call and flexible, which fits the academic identity but challenges the mothering duty (Amsler & Motta, 2019). The autonomy of academic work seems to advocate family affairs. However, this advantage becomes a double-edged sword to Shi. Taozi reported the same reservations about the advantages of flexible academic work in a more specific experience. When Taozi was pregnant, her university exempted her from teaching but kept the annual requirement for research publications. Given that this evaluation has to be completed each calendar year, she struggled with exhaustion during the maternity leave at home:

> *I was thinking about the work requirement every day. I felt my mental status was not good either at that time. I could not forget work when taking care of the baby, and could not forget the baby during work. There was not a single thing at that time that I did that made me feel good, no.* (Taozi, domestic, initial interview)

The anxiety of Taozi was apparent even in her narrative. She had to meet the academic requirements to secure her job, and she also had to take good care of the infant to be a good mother. Though she was on leave, she was still confronted with the same goal of research publications as the ones who were working full-time. The seemingly egalitarian normativity implied that one should be an energetic, healthy individual in any occasion (e.g., Amsler & Motta, 2019). The assumption restricts the agency of the women academics for it is physically impossible to maintain the workload around childbirth. In the case of Taozi, the exhaustion was caused not only by the institutional policy but also by the flexibility of academic work. The reason of keeping evaluations for academics on maternity leave shows a lack of consideration of gender differences from the university, but it is established on the flexibility academic work.

Similarly, Han found it hard to work and do the childcare in the same place. She held her baby when she was doing the interview with me. We paused at times because her baby was about to cry or was making some noise to attract her attention. Notably, Han expressed her

guilt when our conversation was distracted by the infant, though I repeated it was no problem. She was not relaxed until I told her it could be valuable data for this research. When Han apologized about her child in the interview, she may have thought that she should not mix work and family. A normative women should take care of the children as a full-time job, and a normative academic should work with full concentration. Her way of taking the interview, like working, while doing motherhood violated two kinds of normativity at the same time, which may have been her source of embarrassment.

While Han was performing both public and private normativity in the same space, An switched her two kinds of normativity rapidly based on the different spaces separated by a single door. Moreover, though many of the women academics resonated with the advantage of flexible working time and space, An pointed out the side effect from the perspective of academic work. She described:

> *When I was doing online teaching [at home], I had to close the door of my bedroom or my study. And my children were pounding at the door with their hands, "Mama, mama!" At this moment, my multiple roles intersected. Close the door, I teach classes; open the door, I cook for the family and take care of the children… [When I was taking care of the child], I could not say that I had no time. I had some, but very fragmented. If you want to do research, you want to write, it would be impossible. You need time for intensive writing, but now it is too hard to get into that situation.* (An, domestic, initial interview)

An performed her gender and academic normativity in different discourses according to the space she was in. In the social discourse, she was doing her motherhood to be the caregiver of her children. In the institutional discourse, she performed as a professional academic, providing knowledge to the students. In this situation, her multiple identities were directing which obligation she should complete in the different spaces. The door became her separation of the two sets of normativity. Moreover, when the online teaching workload was assigned, it assumed a prediscursive, suitable environment for the academics, which is more likely to belong to the ones who do not have care duties. The intersection of normativity in social and institutional discourses is inevitable when the workplace overlaps with the private sphere. If An performed her agency in both sets of normativity, it would be more demanding for her, and hence it might have truncated her agency in research productivity. As she complained, "*intensive writing*" was "*impossible*" to the limited environment. In this

situation, her reduction of research productivity hindered her career development during the pandemic.

After An's narrative about her performance during the pandemic, she provided one of the reasons for the restriction. For working women who are in other professional fields, their public life may be guaranteed by the space separate from their private life. However, the women academics' working space is more likely to overlap with their private life for flexibility. Their conflicting agency resulted in their swinging between private and public spaces. The intersection of space is more likely to deprive women academics of autonomy through the undervaluing of caring work in private sphere. To limit the hindrance of womanhood, An took a risk with her culturally inscribed body in the public sphere:

> *When I was carrying my second child, I went to the oral defense for the competition of associate professors. I finished the defense in the morning, and gave birth to the baby at night [on the same day]. It was very risky. Yes, one of my women colleagues, who just gave birth to her baby, attended the defense, too.* (An, domestic, initial interview)

An and her woman colleague risked their health to compete for the academic promotion. Their conformity to both social and institutional discourses is presented by the discipline of their bodies. The unnegotiable date for self-defense reflects the careless culture of neoliberal academia (see Chapter 2), and it gives a hard time to the women academics who are experiencing childbirth in those days. The intersection of working and mothering is equivalent to what I analyzed in the previous section, with the women academics staying up until midnight to do research through the discipline of their bodies, and the extra effort to meet the standard requirement is another type of discipline as well. The restriction narrows down their career path, and it may lead to their gendered development.

On the other hand, the autonomy of academic work brings women academics advantages. Rui reported the benefits of making an individualized working plan in teaching and researching:

> *The university isn't like a corporation, which requires fixed working time or space. Working in the university, if you teach fewer courses, you need to read more and publish more [research journal] articles to guarantee your overall workload. That is to say, you can start to plan from the very beginning … It will be more convenient.* (Rui, initial interview)

The women academics' fluid working schedule enabled them to fulfill both gender and academic expectations in the same space. It helped keep Rui's autonomy during her childbirth but it required a carefully designed schedule to ensure the normativity was *accurately* performed. She maintained her flexibility in working space by having more research publications and less teaching. By this means, she changed the cultural inscription of the body on academic work to guarantee her performance in motherhood.

"I Am Very Hesitant": Not Having Children to Perform Like a Man

As discussed, academia is constructed by male-dominated normativity (e.g., Shah, 2018). The women academics had to fit in through performing like men not only in their academic achievement but in the way they behaved (see Aiston & Fo, 2021). As academics in a highly competitive organizational culture, they refused the penalty brought by the performance of womanhood in the workplace. When Jiao entered academia, she was aware that she might be marginalized by the institutional discourse for potential childbirth. She then reacted in her way:

> *When I was appointed, I was a bit anxious. I was concerned about if they [leaders] were worried you might give birth to children for you are a woman. So you have to perform as you are not interested in having children at all. Until I found the [women] associate professors in our department posted their children's photos in the social media, I felt relieved, thinking, it may be acceptable*. (Jiao, overseas, initial interview)

Although Jiao did not even have a boyfriend yet, she still took her body as inscribed, and she knew this inscription was likely to put her in a disadvantaged place. In this situation, she intentionally showed no interest in having children in the institution to claim her loyalty to the academic position and to draw a line to separate herself from women who would possibly take maternity leave in their early career. She was trying to perform a degendered ideal subject in neoliberalism (Amsler & Motta, 2019) with complete involvement and high productivity in academic work though it conflicts with the domestic responsibility of academic mothers (Lynch, 2010).

Differentiated from Jiao's cautiousness, some of the women academics were facing the dilemma of the reality of their resistance to the motherhood penalty. Bai gave birth to her first child during doctoral study, and she was hesitating about having a second child in the early stage of her academic career. She was clearly aware that the coming 5 years was the key period to getting promoted to associate professor. "*My college recruited four new*

academics that year [when I was recruited]. It is too competitive" (Bai, overseas, initial interview). She further explained this dilemma:

> *After all, if I have another baby, I have to take maternity leave. My productivity, or my working efficiency will be low, for 1 or 2 years … [the academic research] definitely will be incoherent … I have had a child, and I really want another one, but I can't make the decision … I am not good enough to be irreplaceable [in the academy]. I feel this kind of pressure. [If I] disappear for months, something will be replaced. I have some peer pressure.* (Bai, overseas, initial interview)

In her early academic career, Bai was not merely confronted with 2 or 3 years of slow career development, but she was indeed facing a potential threat to her academic survival: competing for limited opportunities of higher academic ranks. Her academic career may have been threatened by having a child. This concern was not merely found in Bai, a young academic, but also was seen in Ming, who had been an associate professor for years:

> *Young academics may face the problems of early or late childbirth, but another group of academics are confronted with the choice of childbirth or not. To me, I gave birth to my child at a late age… Now I am in my 40s. The national policy changed. I was wondering if I should have another child. However, I am very hesitant, because another time of childbirth would affect my research productivity. Alas, I have been an associate professor for years. I want to be a professor, for it's the highest academic rank*. (Ming, domestic, initial interview)

Similar to Bai, Ming raised a similar dilemma between having the second child and being promoted to professor. She concluded it was the "*dilemma of women's fertility and career development*." From the experiences of having their first child, Bai and Ming were aware of the motherhood penalty of a few years' stagnant or slow career development, because motherhood has to be prioritized over the other affairs in their lives (L. Cai, 2015). In the marketization of Chinese academia, the mother academics show increasingly more consequences of the motherhood penalty than nonmothers as the competition becomes fierce (C. Shen, 2020). It leads to the pressure for women to perform the *masculine behaviors* to resist the disempowering of normative femininity (Clayton, 2015). Therefore, with the developing pace of Chinese academia, compared with the situation when they had their first child, Bai and Ming were likely to be confronted with a more severe motherhood penalty in career development, because of the higher standard in neoliberal academia. As Ming claimed, "*you [women academics] have to show competitiveness like men*." With this *proper* attitude

in career development, mother academics with low research productivity are more likely to be marginalized.

The distinguishing of mother academics is developed from the cultural inscription on their bodies. Jiao showed rejection of this inscription because of its violation of institutional normativity for academics; Bai and Ming postponed their childbirth to maintain their institutional normativity. For Butler (2006), the boundaries of the body become "the limits of the social *per se*" (p. 179). The women academics set the boundaries of their bodies to keep up with the pace in the male-dominated competition. They were making efforts to lighten the cultural inscription of (potential) mothers on them by not performing gender intentionally. Butler further explains the view of Mary Douglas as a poststructural way to see the boundaries of the body as "the limits of the socially *hegemonic*" (p. 179). Therefore, by blurring the body boundaries, the women academics thought they might shake the gender hegemony in academia.

Despite some of the women academics trying to reduce the effect of motherhood on their career through constant negotiation, the prediscursive production of the female body constrained their development in institutions. The "social per se" constructs the boundaries of the body, and hence marginalizes the female body through the operation of authority. Some institutions provided concrete suggestions on childbirth:

> *Like me, when I was appointed, my leader implied, it is better for you to have a strong academic development in the early stage, and do not consider childbirth in at least the first 2 years. They have this kind of discrimination.* (Shi, domestic, initial interview)

Fu gave a similar example:

> *The leaders in one of my doctoral colleagues' working university said to her, don't have children early. Consider doing this after you make some achievements.* (Fu, domestic, initial interview)

These suggestions may sound unfriendly for the women academics for the violation of their autonomy. When Shi regarded it as "*discrimination*," she was resisting the marginalization of mother academics. However, the institutions are maintaining the cultural fictiveness that women academics behave *like men* in academic competition. Childbirth deconstructs this imaginative degendered culture in academia, and thus pulls the women academics back to gendered spaces. In the binary heterosexual matrix, the performance of femininity stands for the loss of masculinity, which is more likely to bring disadvantages to the women academics.

Actually, to postpone childbirth, which has been a tactic, is not rare in academia for untenured women academics (e.g., Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2015). In the interviews, some of the women academics claimed that they would not have children until they were secure in their academic position (e.g., Shi). The temporary elimination of the cultural inscription of body may help with competition. The way of putting on masks implies the desire of the women academics to challenge the social normativity. Butler (2006) writes:

> One possible interpretation is that the woman in masquerade wishes for masculinity in order to engage in public discourse with men and as a man as part of a male homoerotic exchange. (p. 71)

By challenging the normativity, the women academics were willing to "engage in public discourse with men" (p. 71) and so to be a part of the dominant group. Shaped by the social and institutional discourses, the universities enhance the formation of normative academics through the explicit repetition of normative male-dominated expectations. The women academics had to reduce their cultural inscription to show their determination to make academic achievements to fit male-dominated institutions.

Living as Mothers, Working as Academics: Bodies with and Without Boundaries

Institutions adopt the male-dominated discourse from society (e.g., Shah, 2018; R. Thomas, 1996, also see Chapter 2). It is in those discursive fields that academics mainly form their academic identities through interaction with other academics. On the other hand, the autonomy of academic work enables family affairs to permeate careers anytime and anywhere. This overlapping of the family and career is likely to discipline the bodies of the women academics. The strong adhesion to family responsibilities prevents the women academics from meeting the normativity of institutions, especially in this neoliberal academia. It is in line with "some prior ontological femininity regularly unrepresented by the phallic economy" (Butler, 2006, p. 64), and hence the women academics are more likely to be inscribed with *femininity* in the social discourse. The context of the male-dominated academia, which is less friendly to women academics who are constrained by family affairs, reduces their competitiveness in career development. Therefore, women academics have to constantly coordinate family and career to respond to the competing dual discourses.

In the narratives of the women academics, they faced either–or choices when they were walking back and forth between family and career, even in the same time and space, because the boundaries of the body needed to be maintained. For Butler (2006), "the construction of

stable bodily contours relies upon fixed sites of corporeal permeability and impermeability" (p. 180). Butler explains this statement from the perspective of sexuality, yet it also may explain the social performance of women academics under different discursive navigations. The women academics are constrained by the "fixed sites" of the body with "permeability," whereas they also sometimes challenge the "impermeability" of bodily boundaries (p. 180).

Gendered Performances in "Fixed Sites"

Work–life balance has been one of the most widely discussed topics about women academics in international academia (e.g., Aiston & Jung, 2015; Beddoes & Pawley, 2014; Blithe & Elliott, 2020). To fit both sets of the normativity to strike a balance, driven by their agency, women academics may have to adjust their performative acts to conform to the boundaries of their female bodies. Butler (2006) writes,

> This demarcation is not initiated by a reified history or by a subject. This marking is the result of a diffuse and active structuring of the social field. This signifying practice effects a social space for and of the body within certain regulatory grids of intelligibility. (p. 178)

The boundaries of bodies become a mark that signifies the structure in the "social field" (p. 178). The women academics make themselves intelligible if they are regulated and marked through this "demarcation" (Butler, 2006, p. 178). They are signified by those boundaries and at the same time produce those boundaries in performance. In this way bodies are socially constructed.

The women academics are rapidly drawn into the whirlpool of the hegemonic heterosexual matrix once they are navigated by social discourse. After they are ontologically inscribed with the femininity in sexuality, the ontological inscription has been transferred to epistemological, and the culture inscription on the female body has been operated in a mundane way. Cultural inscription is raised through the repetition of femininity. In data analysis, Bai and Ming were the representatives of showing resistance to the motherhood penalty. Also, the cultural inscription on the body was extended to the potential motherhood penalty. That is to say, young women academics, who are potential mothers, are watched and guarded by the institution from the day they enter academia. The female body inscription, which is decontextualized, is on them whether they are about to give birth or not. This ontologically and epistemologically cultural inscription on the body constructs the culture, and the culture inscribes more bodies in reverse. Butler (2006) writes,

> Cultural values emerge as the result of an inscription on the body, understood as a medium, indeed, a blank page; in order for this inscription to signify, however, that medium must itself be destroyed—that is, fully transvaluated into a sublimated domain of values. Within the metaphorics of this notion of cultural values is the figure of history as a relentless writing instrument, and the body as the medium which must be destroyed and transfigured in order for "culture" to emerge. (p. 177)

In the operation of culture, the anatomical boundaries of bodies are emphasized to stabilize the social structure. The significations of cultural inscription have to be constructed on the medium of expression of the body. Through the perpetual construction of the surface politics, the boundaries of bodies are reproduced, so is the culture. The bodies of the women academics become the surface of cultural expression. As Rui (overseas) said, "*I am subjected to my identities.*" For Butler, the destruction and transfiguration during this subjection may distort the body, but they may shape the body with new meanings as long as the effects of events are inscribed to continue the signification of the female body.

Notably, there were few differences in agency between the women academics who had and had not started families. That is to say, the women academics were immersed in the social discourse when they developed their agency in public and private spheres. The construction occurs anytime in the women academics' life experience before they enter academia. Though the women academics were willing to keep a work–life balance, most of them implicitly prioritized family responsibilities, even they did not encounter this dilemma. They were culturally inscribed by the traditional gender roles, regardless of the context they were in. As Naya said, the conflict of the two identities could be periodical. Women academics may be able to prioritize their performance of academic identity when they complete most of their family obligations. However, the gender gap is more likely to be quite visible in the accumulation of imbalanced development in early academic career.

A Zero-Sum Game: Wandering Between Dual Normativity

The major stress of women in academia is work–life balance (Blithe & Elliott, 2020) and the tension of work and family also gives Chinese women pressure (Gao, 2020). Women academics are likely to fulfill their family responsibilities in order to gain happiness constructed by the social discourse. When they are shaped by the two distinctive sets of contested normativity at the same time, they have to properly position themselves.

Many interviewed women academics pictured their ideal lives as "*a stable job, a happy family*" (Shi, domestic, fictional story completion). For this reflection of normativity, the women academics developed performative acts to balance the expectation. When the women academics entered their careers, they did not leave family but kept wandering back and forth between the two sites. Mostly, they performed as they were expected to have "*a happy family*." For example, some interviewed women academics claimed that they gave up academic conferences for their children. Despite some of the women academics performing gender in their academic path (see Chapter 6), they were also willing to equip themselves by performing *like men* to compete for the opportunity of "*a stable job*" in career development. The mutual inscription on their bodies restricted their performance in dual discourses. In this situation, the women academics took actions to become *invaders* (Sheppard, 1989) in male-dominated academia. By this means, gender was performed to construct the normativity. For Butler (2006), the performance of normativity is constituted by "*social temporality*" (p. 191) in a collective dimension, and it helps maintain gender within the binary frame. The differences of the performative acts in social and institutional discourses among women academics enhances the gender binary frames. In the constant zero-sum negotiation, the women academics were always in the process of subjectivity constitution, which also resulted in their hesitation and confusion in their career development. Meanwhile, their subjects were consolidated in the constitutions, as was the tension in the gender binary frame. Butler explains,

> The redescription of intrapsychic processes in terms of the surface politics of the body implies a corollary redescription of gender as the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body's surface, the construction of the gendered body through a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences. (p. 184)

For Butler, the bodily expression is disciplined by the figures of fantasy. When the women academics were performing femininity in family, they were excluding masculinity to construct gendered bodies, and vice versa. It was "a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences" (p. 184) that made the family and career of the women academics a zero-sum game. In this game, the women academics inevitably break bodily boundaries and demonstrate masculinity to fit in the institutional normativity. This action has "temporal and collective dimensions" (p. 191), but it is still constrained in a binary gender frame.

The women academics are aware that they are violating social norms when they perform the institutional normativity. Therefore, in performative acts, they are conforming to the prediscursive ontology of the female body. In this situation, "femininity becomes a mask that dominates/resolves a masculine identification" (p. 72). To survive in the neoliberal organizational culture, the women academics have to reject their "female Other" (p. 72) and identify themselves with men. This separation requires strong discipline on bodies to maintain the academic workload in the flexible working schedule. The underrepresentation of senior-ranked academic women in institutions evidences the lack of voice in academia. When a large number of the decision makers in the academy are men, their gaze is more likely to be disadvantaging for the women academics, which may enhance the Other of women academics in surveillance of men. Despite the attempt to transform the institutional norms of motherhood for women academics (Manathunga et al., 2020), when women academics integrate themselves into the social and institutional discourses through negotiation, they still have to make themselves "masked." From the interviews, if the women academics were willing to stand out in this masculine competition, they had to change the inscription on their bodies by making the culturally impermeable boundaries permeable. The women academics imitated men's behavior by performing like men to gain the power in professional competition. It explains how the institutional discourse is formed on men's normativity, and women have to perform differently to fit in.

Women academics resist the hierarchical gender binary as well by making changes with the knowledge that the performance of femininity may make them different from their men counterparts, bringing the risk of being *abnormal* (e.g., Sheppard, 1989). For Butler (2006), the "contours of the body [are] clearly marked as the taken-for-granted ground or surface upon which gender significations are inscribed, a mere facticity devoid of value, prior to significance" (p. 176). Women academics challenge the subject of masculinity when they intrude in academia, so this group inexplicably "returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position" (p. xxx). That is to say, this masculine performance of women academics is a temporal action in a subversive pose, and it indeed enhances the gender normativity in both family and career to maintain a male-dominated discourse.

As discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, women academics experience ongoing tension, originating from the gender binary frame, between their academic career and their gender identity. The analysis of this chapter makes a tentative theoretical explanation. The

irreducibility of the body creates the tension in repetition. The women academics perform differently to meet the dual normativity through being dominated by the different discourses. They attempt to cross the impermeable boundaries of body to be academically successful in male-dominated institutions, when they are doing gender domestically to stay in the sites they ought to be in. Consequently, their bodies are alternatively disciplined in tension. If gender identity is fictive (see Chapter 3), the boundaries of bodies and the cultural inscription are both fictively constructed, but they are effectively operating the power on gendered bodies.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the performances of the women academics in public and private spheres. With the change of expectations under social and institutional discourses, the women academics were experiencing the tension of work–life balance in motherhood. Most of the women academics conformed to the disproportionate allocation of family affairs, and they internalized that bond of mother and child was irreplaceable. Yang (domestic) was the only woman academic who bargained with her husband to gain more time for working. Many of the women academics showed hesitation when they were confronted with the conflict between family and career. They were constrained by the cultural inscription on bodies and put private life ahead of public life when completing family responsibilities. Their agency of career development was truncated during carrying out the duties of being women. In contrast, when the women academics were doing womanhood in academia, it was not encouraged by their institutions. The distraction from the private sphere implicitly and explicitly took away their opportunities in career development, which enhanced the gender gap in academia. To reduce the negative effect of *being women*, some of the women academics consciously performed *like men* through eliminating their femininity in their career. Notably, there was little proof shown in the interviews that this strategy benefited these women academics more than the ones who did perform *like women*. The negative effect of gender normativity and the cultural inscription on their bodies which truncated the women academics did not show after they started their families, but at an earlier time. Another group of the women academics adjusted the tactics of working time and merely focused on academic achievement through less exposure in the public sphere, but this might also have implicitly hindered the development of their academic career. Despite the tension between the social and institutional discourses, the women academics were performing womanhood to seek the balance, not because they had to, but usually because of their

willingness to perform the gender normativity by taking the right seats of women in society. In the next chapter, I make a conclusion by answering the research question, followed by the contributions, implications and limitations of this thesis, and my final words.

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: PROSPECTIVE FUTURE

Introduction

This thesis traces the stories of 20 Chinese women academics working in Chinese double first-class universities. It explores the narratives of those aspects that influence their academic career development. In this final chapter, I look back over the writing of this study and weave together the central arguments I have made across its chapters. I begin by responding to the research question. Then, I summarize the contribution of this research from methodological and theoretical perspectives to answer the research question. Lastly, I identify the research implications and limitations of this study. In the end, I reflect on my feelings about doing this research and some aspirations for Chinese women academics, the participants, and me.

The origins of this research grew out of my interest in Chinese women academics whose experience in higher education has been understudied in both international and domestic academia. Chinese women academics were my initial research focus because I was interested in their academic development and wanted to examine how they face the contested discourses and how they build their voices in this challenging environment. After being an international doctoral student myself, the connection between doctoral education and the academic career development of women academics also drew my attention, and hence guided me to this research question:

> How do Chinese women academics perceive their experiences in academic career development in top-ranking universities in China and does doing a doctorate locally or internationally make a difference?

In this research, through the qualitative methodologies, I found that there are three main aspects of experiences that Chinese women academics perceive as important in academic career development in domestic universities: doctoral education, academic career development and work–life balance in motherhood. Some of those issues can also be found in international academia. From a Butlerian perspective, which emphasizes performativity, Chinese women academics perform their dual subjectivities and identities shaped by the social and institutional discourses in their career development, and academia performs the social structure. I answer this research question drawing on three aspects of performativity in three different data analysis chapters, including exploring the differences, if any, between

women academics with overseas doctorates and domestic doctorates in terms of their career aspirations and issues.

Doctoral Education: To Be Intelligible

Based on the analyses I have undertaken in this study I identified the significance of doctoral education to Chinese women academics. It deeply influences the career development path of the women academics. I investigated the gender and academic norms throughout their doctoral education. Given that Chinese women academics aim to make themselves intelligible and understandable, they perform the fluctuation of gender norms in different stages of doctoral education.

When Chinese women academics are shaped by gender norms in doctoral education, their subjectivities and identities are constructed. Through resisting gender norms, their subjectivities and identities formation temporarily collapse, which is followed by "non-recognition and non-identification" (Weedon, 2004, p. 7). For Weedon (2004), the collapse of recognition and identification initiates the refusal by subjects on this failure of formation and therefore truncates their agency. From a performative perspective, this cycle may occur repeatedly. For individuals, Weedon writes,

> They are often restricted to specific groups, usually on the basis of discourses of class, gender and race, that are exclusive to and policed by the groups in question. Non-recognition and non-identification leave the individual in an abject state of non-subjectivity and lack of agency. (p. 7)

In the data analysis, before and after doctoral education, these Chinese women academics, who have been living in the social discourse, are challenged if they are performing out of this discursive frame. In these practices, they experience collapse of subjectivities and identities formation repeatedly, which leaves them in "an abject state of non-subjectivity" (p. 7). For Weedon, this "abject state" originates from nonrecognition and nonidentification determined by the specific groups of gender norms. When they can barely identify with gender norms in social discourse through the limitation of variations or they identify themselves as transgressors in the male-dominated academia, their agency in academic achievement is less likely to be produced in repetition by performing gender. For Butler (2006), if the possibility of the variation of the repetition is the only condition for agency, the lack of variation would constrain agency. In the repetition of performative acts, the variations are limited under the social discourse, and hence the agency is framed.

Drag and parody are two of the techniques these women academics used during and after their doctoral study to fit into the academic discourse by the exclusion of femininity (e.g., Chang, overseas; Jiao, overseas). They show the temptation of gender subversion in the variation of repeated academic performance. It is the dragging and parodic acts that empower these women academics when they are competing with men counterparts. Some of the women in this study sustain masculine identifications by dragging and parodic acts "not to occupy a position in a sexual exchange, but, rather, to pursue a rivalry that has no sexual object or, at least, that has none that she will name" (Butler, 2006, p. 71).

The comparison of Chinese women academics with overseas doctorates and domestic doctorates is one of the central research interests in this study. These Chinese women academics, with different research backgrounds, received either a local or international doctoral education, which thus contributed to their unique academic career aspirations and lived experiences. What is more, in their doctoral education, the Chinese women academics who gained doctorates overseas tended to perform a mix of the gender norms of their home and host countries. The variations they experienced, produced by diversified incoherent and contested discourses, provided space for agency but also restricted it. They tried to fit into the different cultural norms in their host countries by their gendered performative acts, although the two sets of gender norms were contested (e.g., Jiao, overseas).

Male-Dominated Institutional Norms

Being in the male-dominated discourses of both institutions and society is one of the major career issues for Chinese women academics, no matter which disciplines they are in. In previous research, men academics have more advantages in the workplace in both male-dominated and female-dominated disciplines (see Chapter 2). This research shows that though men academics are advantaged in all disciplines, women academics show limited disadvantages in female-dominated disciplines, in which the gender norms are more likely to be invisible or lightened (e.g., Rui, overseas; Pan, domestic; Yang, domestic). When Chinese women academics are working and living in male-dominated discourses, they are likely to form their subjectivity and identity through two ways: acceptance and resistance. As Weedon (2004) writes,

> We repeatedly perform modes of subjectivity and identity until these are experienced as if they were second nature. Where they are successfully internalized, they become part of lived subjectivity. Where this does not occur, they may become the basis for

> dis-identification or counter-identifications which involve a rejection of hegemonic identity norms. (p. 7)

Based on the findings of this research, for Chinese women academics, the acceptance and the resistance of subjectivity and identity formation develop in parallel. When they adapt the gender normativity in male-dominated social discourse, they usually partially reject the "hegemonic identity norms" (p. 7) as well. This tension may cause these Chinese women academics to struggle and swing between discourses so that their subjectivity and identity become temporal and fluid. In academic career development, the interviewed Chinese women academics experienced possibilities as well as obstacles. Overall, they were committed to their career and mostly aimed at higher academic ranks in the following 5 years. I interpret the obstacles and the possibilities respectively as follows.

The male-dominated institutional and social discourses are more likely to hinder women academics in their path of career development, which prevent them from being visible and successful. On the one hand, Chinese women academics are expected to do more academic housework in institutions when they are in professional positions like their men counterparts. Many of the participants (e.g., Chang, overseas; Xixi, domestic; Zhong, domestic; Danni, domestic) reported that they had the experiences of helping with trivial administrative work even though they are not interested in taking administrative or leadership positions. Some research indicates that women academics disproportionately take caring responsibilities in academic work, which may not help with their research productivity (e.g., Aiston & Jung, 2015; Misra et al., 2011). On the other hand, the lack of women academics in senior positions dims the light for early-career women academics. As some of the women academics claimed in the interviews, in the longitudinal academic career development, the lack of proper guidance or same-gender role models may have led to delaying their academic-rank promotion. Finally, when the Chinese women academics were asked to show their opinion of taking administrative positions or seeking promotion on leadership positions, they did, indeed, hide their agency which was truncated by the gendered discourses. Working in male-dominated institutions, Hong (overseas) and Kadi (overseas) categorized those decision-making positions as *men's jobs*, though being in leadership positions may help their academic career development. When they give up opportunities to study or work aboard, they are performing their subjectivity shaped by the social discourses to identify with discursively constructed women, the specific group they are in. They think they need to take more family responsibilities to do a *women's job*.

Possibilities also are reported by Chinese women academics. First and foremost, those Chinese women academics, who are academically well-trained, have strong agency over their career development and many of them claim that they are doing the things they like for a living. They show significant desire for academic achievement and promotion up the academic ranks. Many of them claim that they are interested in doing research and are curious about their research fields. Chang said, "*I like my job. I like to write research papers*" (Chang, overseas, initial interview). An academic career provides these women academics a space to be accomplished and earn prestige, which forms their academic subjectivities and identities with limited gendered expectations. This involvement in academic work and interactions with peers enable these women academics to produce academic and intellectual pursuits. This agency, consistent with the institutional discourse that urges academics to make academic achievements, is preserved in their workplaces. The women academics are empowered in doing academic work, when they develop the self-recognition, the "I," as academics. These possibilities, given by academia, repeatedly resignify the women academics and resist the gender norms through challenging the social discourse.

Second, these Chinese women academics enjoy interaction with their students because it, to a large extent, constructs their academic subjectivity and identity. Naya said, "*The interaction with the students is interesting. The feedback they give us is quite true, very inspiring*" (Naya, domestic, fictional story completion). They discover possibilities in their academic career in their interaction with students. Another possible reason for women academics being fond of teaching and supervising students is that this work requires a rigid time schedule. Its inflexibility helps to temporarily emancipate the women academics from family issues, and gives them the chance to concentrate on the work they are interested in. Communication with students can prevent these women academics from such as, potentially discriminatory practices (Murray & Kempenaar, 2020) in institutions and society, and thus empower them.

Despite having established an academic reputation in international academia, those Chinese women academics who gained overseas doctorates are less likely to find themselves intelligible in the domestic institutions and academia because of the partially different academic norms they perceive in doctoral education. In institutions, academics make themselves intelligible by conformity to academic norms. When the women academics start their early career, they make efforts to be recognized. Shared academic norms help with this process. However, the women academics who gain overseas doctorates may encounter

obstacles for they do not embrace the same academic norms as those who do doctoral study domestically. Therefore, it is difficult to make themselves recognizable in domestic academia. For example, the lack of a domestic academic social network was broadly reported by the women academics with overseas doctorates (e.g., En, overseas; Rui, overseas; Pan, overseas); the lack of domestic research capacity might be another issue for this group (e.g., Chang, overseas; Ou, overseas; Jiao, overseas). In the narrative of Naya (domestic), those two disadvantages intersected in the career development of women academics, but may fade with time.

Work–Life Balance in Motherhood: Hegemonic Heterosexual Frame

The hegemonic heterosexual frame, under which lies a set of gender roles and labor divisions, becomes one of the major obstacles that constrains the work–life balance of these Chinese women academics. This internalization of the gender binary results in their agreeing to labor division in their public and private spheres. Therefore, these women academics tend to be influenced by these social constraints.

In the discussion of work–life balance, the women academics advocate for the autonomy of academic work. For them, institutional discourse is contested by the social discourse in the roles of academics and of women, respectively. Therefore, work–life balance has become an eternal negotiation for women academics. The self-decisive time arrangement gives them opportunities to try to strike a work–life balance. As Rui said, "*When I was pregnant, I focused more on research publications and reduced my teaching workload*" (Rui, overseas, initial interview). These women academics can keep pace with peers' academic development while they are giving birth to their children by adjusting their academic work. However, even though a small number of them claimed that they emphasize their families, these women still plan to keep up an average research productivity compared to their colleagues. This balance between family and career appears to be periodically dynamic based on the life stages they are in. Therefore, as Yang said, the flexibility of the academic work can also be a double-edged sword which enables women academics to compromise their devotion to research, for the contested expectations of women in social and institutional discourses. When the participants were asked about their prospective 5-year plan in the semistructured interviews, all of them valued their academic career development, though some of them prioritized family responsibilities. For instance, Xixi (domestic), as an early-career academic, claimed that she was going to devote time to starting a family.

While the autonomy of women academics has benefits, it can also certainly create obstacles. Indeed, while the flexibility of time arrangement enables women academics to strike a work–life balance, it is unfriendly to academic career development (e.g., Gu, 2012), because of the contradictions between institutional and social discourses. As women shaped by social discourses, work–life balance is always related to their career development. The limitation of time and energy constrains the possibilities of, for example, the duration of doing research in a work day, for Chinese women academics, and thus negatively affects their career paths in this neoliberal academia.

Notably, different attitudes towards family responsibilities are barely seen between the women academics who received doctorates domestically and overseas. In the discussion of work–life balance in motherhood, both groups of women academics tend to perform gender. A tentative explanation may be overseas doctoral education has a limited influence on the perception of gender normativity among women academics in their private lives. However, some of the women academics reported the tolerance of intersected motherhood and career in overseas institutions. For example, when Rui (overseas) took her daughter to an international academic conference, it was acceptable; likewise, Bai (overseas) received sincere blessing and support from her supervisors when she gave birth to a child during overseas doctoral study, while these things might not be so acceptable inside China.

Thesis Contribution: Chinese Women Academics in Their Academic Career

The thesis makes three contributions to our collective knowledge about Chinese women academics and their academic career development in double first-class universities as follows.

The first main contribution is the extension of knowledge of Chinese women doctoral students in both the Chinese and international higher educational context. This research identifies the fluctuating gender norms throughout doctoral education and constructs gender and academic subjectivities in Chinese women doctoral students on the basis of different dominating discourses in different stages. As a result, given the explicit gender norms before and after doctoral education, women doctoral students are more likely to start at a lower rank than men counterparts when obtaining academic positions. This difference lays the foundation of their gendered academic career development paths, and this influence may directly lead to the attrition of women academics at higher academic ranks.

The second major contribution to knowledge comes from the intersection of identities under regulatory power. In institutions, regulatory power shapes the identities of Chinese women academics and at the same time truncates their agency (Lester, 2011). The mechanism of regulatory power adjusts the performances of women academics to maintain the male-dominated institutional structure by preventing most of the women academics from climbing to the top of the academic ladder (Bao & Tian, 2022). This means of maintenance has been naturalized and become a mundane operation. However, when Chinese women academics provided feedback on this implicitly gendered positionality, they showed little resistance. In contrast, many of them showed superior academic performance to compensate for being women to gain equivalent opportunities to men academics. This compensation indeed enhances the operation of regulatory power in academic career development.

The third key contribution to knowledge I have made in this thesis is to show how some of the cultural inscription on the bodies of Chinese women academics is fading in male-dominated normativity. They choose to reduce their gender culture inscription to meet the normative expectations in academia. The culturally inscribed body is constrained by the aspiration for career achievement. In this situation, some of the bodily boundaries are erased from the surface and thus the women academics may perform institutional normativity by showing the absence of female cultural inscription and the elimination of the disqualification of being women. This need for blurred bodily boundaries reflects the constraints of the gender norms that navigate the development of women academics. Chinese women academics have to wander between the bodies with and without boundaries to fit with the normativity of being women and being academics.

Methodological Contributions: Fiction in Reality

This thesis investigates the perception of the Chinese women academics by mixed explorations of a fictional story and their real experiences. I applied both methods in data collection from the perspective of two fictional Chinese women academics. The lived stories based on the self-exposure of participants is somewhat contradictory with the traditional Chinese culture, which advocates people be introverted. In this situation, with the consideration of research ethics, I kept seeking effective methods which could elicit more revelations from Chinese women academics while protecting them as participants. Having their experiences of living and working in domestic universities gazed upon through the research process, these women academics are likely to be concerned about their safety to

narrate personal stories when their identities are known by the researcher. Therefore, I employed the fictional story completion (see Chapter 4) as one of the methods of data collection to ensure in-depth contributions the participants while largely keeping their privacy.

On the other hand, by conducting this method, I aim to construct a performative act by building a discursive field to show how those two fictional characters are shaped by the social and institutional discourses. These discourses are formed by my story writing and the comments and suggestions made by the research participants in the interviews. By this means, the participants are the subjects who are driven by the social and institutional discourses in reality, and they are also empowered to form the normativity for other subjects – the two characters in this fictional story. This change of roles gives the participants opportunities to step back from their experiences and elicit more reflective narratives.

Similar methods of data collection may be employed with people from marginalized groups or people with traumatic experiences. Those methods are also a good choice of ice breaker with participants who are strangers.

Theoretical Contribution: Butlerian Theory Employed in Chinese Context

Butlerian theory, which is becoming more influential in social scientific research, is widely discussed by scholars worldwide. To date, qualitative empirical studies in the higher educational field using Butlerian theory are still limited, compared to the theories of Foucault and Bourdieu. Butlerian theory, especially gender performativity theory, is regarded as a milestone in contemporary feminist theory. In this project, Butlerian theory is employed throughout the data analysis chapters to explore the lived experiences of the Chinese women academics.

Inevitably, Butlerian theory brings controversy to international academia, mainly for its Eurocentric perspective and the refusal to accept the determining status of anatomical differences in gender. Segregation of Butlerian theory and the Asian culture has been studied by researchers (e.g., Spakowski, 2011). The departure from the Asian cultural context may bring more distance for Chinese researchers (Spakowski, 2011). However, these arguments do not show Butlerian theory is *improper* for Chinese empirical study. In contrast, I take Chinese traditional cultural norms and social discourses as the objects of this study. The employment of Butlerian theory, by this means, provides me with a fresh view of how society is structured, especially in the Chinese higher educational context.

The contested Western discourse in Butlerian theory and Chinese social discourse also provided opportunities and possibilities in the development of this research from an unconventional perspective. This study seeks to present an investigation of Chinese women academics from Western sociological perspectives, and thus it may add to the quite limited studies on Chinese higher education using Butlerian theory. It may also encourage scholars and doctoral students to employ sociological theories in higher education context.

Non-Stop Philosophical Discussion: Construction and Subversion

In the discussion of the hindrances and possibilities, it is key to draw attention to the construction of gender. The engagement between the social discourse and the theorists never ends. Butler (2006) argues the law, as other regulations in social discourses, is constructed on the basis of the ontological notion of gendered subjects and conceals this means of construction by making it naturalized,

> In effect, the law produces and then conceals the notion of "a subject before the law" in order to invoke that discursive formation as a naturalized foundational premise that subsequently legitimates that law's own regulatory hegemony. (p. 3)

If this discursive formation is known as the natural foundation among the subjects, the development of it would be more reasonable, and thus would be enhanced by this regulatory hegemony in legitimation. If the formation is presented as a social performative act, it is conducted on the subjects and hence forms one's subjectivity and identity. Butler continues,

> The performative invocation of a nonhistorical "before" becomes the foundational premise that guarantees a presocial ontology of persons who freely consent to be governed and, thereby, constitute the legitimacy of the social contract. (p. 4)

Butler questions whether "there may not be a subject who stands 'before' the law" (p. 4). That is to say, the ontological woman may have not existed. However, the foundation of the law has to be on the basis of subjects with "ontological integrity" (p. 4), which, for Butler, is constructed by the law.

Therefore, to shake the structure of gender is to "reflect within a feminist perspective" (p. 7) in order to cast doubt on the notion of feminist subjects:

> Within feminist political practice, a radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity appears to be necessary in order to formulate a representational politics that might revive feminism on other grounds. (p. 7)

In this research, when I was doing the interviews, I constantly heard narratives like, "as women, we…" or "you know, women academics have to take care of their families." These narratives, articulated by contemporary Chinese women academic who are well-educated, are likely to be the representative normativity in social discourse. Behind these mundane narratives, constructed by the historical social discourse, *a benchmarked traditional woman* is hiding under the mask of the highly professional position of women academics. It is difficult to tell if these notions are constructed by the social discourse, or whether they are the presumptions of the social discourse. What I can confirm is that these notions are internalized by subjects when the latter think they are acting with free will. To shake and to deconstruct the dominant gender structure requires a large number of variations in the repetition of the gendered language and social structure.

Equipped as a Researcher

In this research, Butlerian theory enables me to deconstruct Chinese social discourse from a feminist critical perspective. When I was learning this theory and made attempts at data analysis, it provided me with a fresh view to scrutinize the social structure that I had seen as mundane before.

This research comes out through my stylized repetition of performative acts (Butler, 2006). In my writing process, I have adopted academic norms. As a novice researcher and a prospective woman academic, I am subject to both academic and gender norms. When I positioned my voice in data analysis of women academics in doing this research project, I constantly had dialogues with my supervisors, with my participants, and with my doctoral colleagues as well as reviewers. These dialogues were developed on the basis of my exposure, which helped me build the academic identity that made my work intelligible and recognizable. Yet the singularity of this study remained to establish my uniqueness. Butler (2001) writes,

> Exposure, like the operation of the norm, constitutes the conditions of my own emergence as a reflective being, one with memory, one who might be said to have a story to tell. (p. 39)

Along with the exposure, this writing has become a dialogue between my academic self and my previous experiences. Through "the operation of the norm" (p. 39), I constitute my reflexivity by relying on my experiences and rejecting them at the same time. This reflexivity enables me to examine my writing critically and repeatedly. Meanwhile, I am

producing this writing as if I am telling a story with both intelligibility and singularity. I keep aware of my role as a researcher, an outsider, as well as a participant, an insider. This alternate switching of roles is challenging but intriguing. I also witness my construction of academic identity by renewing myself through every exposure and by receiving feedback from academic normativity. As Butler claims, "in the making of the story, I create myself in new form, instituting a narrative 'I' that is superadded to the 'I' whose past life I seek to tell" (p. 39). This new academic form of myself I create each time in writing this thesis is added to my old self, and thus my academic subjectivity and identity are shaped and reproduced.

Nevertheless, adopting a feminist critical theoretical orientation is not without challenges. Alongside its complexity and the requirement of rigorous reflexivity, I became aware of how central my voice is to this research, and how I dialogue with the participants as well as the theory in writing. I understand, in qualitative research, the project is navigated by the writer, and thus the writer's voice becomes significant. I was cautious of not being biased by repeated critical examination of this writing. To consciously follow the academic norms, I learned to think aloud and make my thought explicit.

Research Implications

I recognize this work within a poststructural feminist space, in which there are some insights that can be taken from this study which may be useful for Chinese government, higher education institutions, and prospective as well as current women doctoral students and academics to understand more about gender and the academic career development within the changing landscape of contemporary marketized academia.

First, for national policies, I call for more advantageous policies for women academics, especially for the age limit for funding applications and academic positions. Women academics are more likely to encounter the time conflict in the early stage of their academic careers. Shouldering both academic and social responsibilities, they are more likely to fall behind after their doctoral study. Father-involved childrearing could be strongly advocated. A more double-blind audit system is called for to limit the negative effect of boys'club and other gender-oriented academic networks.

Second, for Chinese universities, especially research-intensive universities, the institutional discourses largely shape the performances of women academics. Due to the social discourse, they may show less desire to be competitive in academic career development, but there is something that institutions can do. To start with, family-friendly policies, for example,

building childcare centers, could be beneficial to help reduce the childcare responsibilities of women academics because they are likely to take on more family duties than men. Moreover, more participation of women academics in leadership positions as well as policy making needs to be emphasized in practice. Lastly, academic mobility should also be encouraged in policies, particularly among women academics, given that they tend to give up those opportunities for family responsibilities.

Third, for the prospective doctoral students and potential academics, I would like to emphasize that where you do your doctorate may be significant to your future academic career development. Every option has pros and cons. In this research, it is easy to see that the women academics who pursue doctorates domestically face different problems from the group who gained doctorates overseas. Therefore, the doctoral education you receive empowers you as well as bringing disadvantages to you in future career paths. There is hardly any perfect solution to this question.

Last, but not least, for women doctoral students and academics, being able to recognize the taken-for-granted gender norms and think out of the box may contribute to your career development. The way of being "different" from others may be a little hard and may bring you some trouble, but it may give you more choices. I hope that you may see the underrepresentation of senior women academics as a social issue but not a personal situation. Though Chinese women occupy a place in the public sphere, they are still significantly influenced by social and institutional discourses, which may constrain their career development. This awareness may support your lifelong academic career development, and thus you are eligible and capable to be ambitious to be in any position if you want.

Study Limitations

Throughout this research process, my reflections have led me to identify some limitations of my approach. I identify these aspects of my study with the hope that I may be able to help future researchers in this area to develop their approaches.

A limitation of this study lies in the imbalance among the disciplines of the research participants. As a qualitative study, I do not claim that my findings are generalizable or representative. However, I believe a more proportional mix of participants from different disciplines, for example, more participants from the engineering disciplines, may have strengthened this research, for they may have provided different perspectives or narratives from male-dominated disciplines.

Another limitation also lies in the data collection. The interviewed women academics are all voluntary participants. Most of them are interested in the gendered issue of being academics, and they are keen to express themselves as women academics. They are willing to share their stories with the awareness of being a woman. For example, "*I am confused by some gendered issue in the workplace*" (Taozi). Thus, what the women academics reported in the interviews was largely related to the topic and was more likely to be feminist. Compared to the women academics who take gender inequality for granted in workplaces and families, they may have been better prepared for noticing and articulating gender limitations.

The elements constituting women academics' subjectivities and identities are numerous. This research merely focuses on doctoral education, career development, and motherhood. The personal experiences and family background of every woman academic are unique. A limited number of interviews cannot show the whole picture of these women academics. Moreover, due to the limitation of the data collection method, based on the actively reported lived experiences of the participants, it is impossible to identify if the experiences are modified, or some significant information is neglected. They presented what they wanted me to know during the interviews.

Further, the women academics in this research are all from double first-class universities. They are the elite academics in Chinese higher education with strong agency in personal career development. However, they are not the representative of women academics in Chinese society. Out of over 2,000 Chinese higher education institutions, only 42 are double first-class universities. Thus, the majority of women academics are in nonelite universities, many of them do not have doctorates, and their perception of career development and motherhood and marriage may be very different from those women academics in double first-class universities. In future research, a different group of participants may be considered for comparison and contrast.

Lastly, in the data analysis, I inevitably analyzed the data based on my understanding of Chinese higher education and social development. It definitely includes some of my biased or projected understanding of the data. As a tremendous, as well as hard-to-understand, philosophy, Judith Butler's theory is worth reading repeatedly. However, due to the limitation of my knowledge, her theory may not be fully expressed in this research.

Final Words

This research, based on limited prior literature, is an attempt to qualitatively explore Chinese women academics in depth. When I work in a university, I hope someone will speak for the women academics, and they are encouraged to participate more in the universities as they are more than capable of taking higher positions. Today, with the completion of this thesis, I become the one who "speaks for" women academics, even though this articulation is not loud enough.

In this research, I discuss the possibilities as well as hindrances for Chinese women academics in their career development. In past decades, China has experienced rapid development, and the women's liberation movement has also been effective. Chinese women have stepped out of their homes and become "half the sky" in Chinese society. Admittedly, there is still gendered career development in Chinese society. With the recent implementation of the national "three-child policy," there may be more disadvantage for Chinese working women, including women academics. However, with the development of the economy and the connection with world countries, the Chinese government is increasingly aware that gender equality is desired by people in society. In contemporary Chinese society, women academics may still be in disadvantaged positions, but, along with raised awareness, Chinese women academics may be able to reshape the institutional norms in the future academy (see Manathunga et al., 2020). Therefore, it is an upward trend for feminism in China, moving forward through twists and turns.

When I asked the Chinese women academics about their future in the interviews, they were all positive about their career development with strong agency in making a difference in their research field. In this situation, what I can do is to make this power stronger in a social scientific way. Therefore, I call on academics, women academics in particular, to put more emphasis on the gender study of Chinese women. In my future academic career, I will continue with the research on Chinese women academics to make them visible in international academia.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Personal Biographical Form

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FORM

Name: Date:
University:

Preferred Pseudonym		**Department & Discipline**	
Current Title		**Current Position**	
Marital Status	Married/ Single	**Child(ren)'s Age(s)**	
Mode of doctoral study	Full-time/ Part-time	**Country of doctorate received**	
Year began working in academia		**Scholarship**	CSC/ Fellowship/TA/RA Partial/ None/Other (specify)
Year received master's degree		**Period of doctoral study (yy/mm)**	From To
Postdoc	Yes/ No	**Period of postdoc (If yes) (yy/mm)**	From To

Your publications before, during and after your doctoral education:

Before Ph.D.	**During Ph.D.**	**After Ph.D. (including postdoc)**
( ) SCI/SSCI/ A&HCI	( ) SCI/SSCI/A&HCI	( ) SCI/SSCI/A&HCI
( ) CSSCI	( ) CSSCI	( ) CSSCI
( ) Core/SCD	( ) Core/SCD	( ) Core/SCD
( ) Conference presentation	( ) Conference presentation	( ) Conference presentation
( ) Authored book	( ) Authored book	( ) Authored book
( ) Book chapter	( ) Book chapter	( ) Book chapter
( ) Translated book	( ) Translated book	( ) Translated book
( ) Edited book	( ) Edited book	( ) Edited book
( ) other Chinese or English journal articles	( ) other Chinese or English journal articles	( ) other Chinese or English journal articles
Other(Please specify):	Other(Please specify):	Other(Please specify):

The number of courses you taught in the past year:
The hours of course teaching in the past year:
The number of students you supervised in the past year:
postgraduate students ( ) undergraduate students ( )

Appendix B. Participant Information Sheet

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

SCHOOL OF CRITICAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Epsom Campus
Gate 3, 74 Epsom Ave
Auckland, New Zealand
T +64 9 623 8899
W www.education.auckland.ac.nz
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92601
Symonds Street
Auckland 1135
New Zealand

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Chinese women academics' career development

Principal Investigator: Barbara Grant
Co-investigators: Frances Kelly, Linlin Xu
Main researcher: Li Bao

Introduction

The main researcher, Li Bao, who is a doctoral student in the School of Critical Studies in Education, has worked as an academic in a Chinese university in Nanjing for eight years and has a research interest in various aspects of higher education, feminism, and academic careers.

Research project

This project will explore how early to mid-career Chinese women academics perceive the experience of doctoral education impacting their academic careers in top-ranking universities in China. All the research procedures will be carried out online due to COVID-19. The participants will decide the platform with online meeting function at their convenience. If they are able to accept any platform, either Tencent Meeting (a Chinese platform) or Zoom will be the preferred option. Four phases are designed to address the research aims:

Phase 1: A preliminary online meeting (30 minutes) with prospective participants to explain the project and answer questions. The PIS and CF will be presented as well. At this time, the prospective participants will be asked to sign the consent form to agree to participate. The date, time and the online platform for the following phases will be confirmed with the participants in the meeting.

Phase 2: An online biographical information form (less than ten minutes) will be administered to all participants to gather basic personal information; an online semi-structured individual interview (60 minutes) will be carried out with each participant subsequently. The focus is to gain an in-depth understanding of how early to mid-career women academics perceive doctoral education in career development as well as their strategies to address career pressures and challenges in academia.

Phase 3: An online fictional story (60 minutes) will be completed by all participants. This fictional story is about two women academics' doctoral study and early career. Participants will be asked to make four choices by pressing or clicking the button on the screen through the link the researcher sends.

Phase 4: An online follow-up interview (60 minutes) based on the previous interview and the story completion to clarify or elaborate issues emerging.

The researcher is seeking participation during the period of July 2020 to July 2021. The data collected through this project will be used to inform the researcher's doctoral thesis, as well as conference presentations and research publications.

Project procedures and participant rights

Your participation in the research will involve:

- Filling out an online biographical information form (as above).
- Attending an initial online semi-structured interview (as above).
- Completing an online fictional story (as above).
- Attending an online follow-up interview (as above).

Participants will be selected from Chinese "double first-class" universities. They will be selected on a first-to-reply basis along with an effort on the part of the main researcher to include a more or less equal number of participants in relation to receiving their doctorate inside or outside China. For this reason, some prospective participants may not be accepted for inclusion and will be notified of this by the researcher sending a Thank-you letter.

The interviews will be digitally audio recorded, subsequently transcribed by speech-to-text software, and proofread by the researcher. The participants will be given the opportunity to read and edit their transcripts to double-check its accuracy or make other comment before data analysis. Any changes or comments must be completed and returned to the main researcher within two weeks of receiving the transcript.

Right to withdraw from participation

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. As a participant, you have the right to withdraw yourself from participating in the research at any time without giving a reason; you have the right to withdraw your data from the research up to 1 July 2021 without giving a reason.

Data storage, retention, destruction, and future use

The data will be stored for a minimum of six years on a password-protected University of Auckland computer, backed up by a server. After the minimum storage time has elapsed, the data will be destroyed by the deletion of files. The consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet separately from the data.

Confidentiality

The identities of participants will be known only by the main researcher. Pseudonyms will be used in the study, and no identifying information collected from the research will be disclosed to a third party.

This research is for a doctoral thesis. Therefore, the doctoral student (who is referred to here as the main researcher), the supervisors and the advisor will have access to participants' biographical information, the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews, the story completion, and the follow-up interviews. However, the identities of all participants will be known only by the main researcher.

Enquiries about the research, and questions for clarification, can be made to:

Main researcher, Li Bao, lbao171@aucklanduni.ac.nz School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Auckland Main supervisor, Associate Professor Barbara Grant, bm.grant@auckland.ac.nz +64 (09) 373 7999 ext. 48272 School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Auckland Co-supervisor, Senior Lecturer, Dr Frances Kelly f.kelly@auckland.ac.nz +64 (09) 373 7599 ext.86786 School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Auckland Advisor, Research Assistant, Dr Linlin Xu linlin.xu@auckland.ac.nz School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Auckland	Head of School, Professor John William Morgan John.morgan@auckland.ac.nz +64 (09) 373 7999 ext. 46398 School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Auckland

For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, at the University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 ext. 83711. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON (2020) for three years, Reference Number(024731).

Appendix C. Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

CRITICAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Epsom Campus
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New Zealand

CONSENT FORM

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Chinese women academics' career development

Principal Investigator: Barbara Grant
Co-investigators: Frances Kelly, Linlin Xu
Main researcher: Li Bao

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and I have understood the nature of the research.
I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in the research – filling out a biographic information form, attending a semi-structured interview, completing a fictional story exercise, and a follow-up interview.
- I understand that the fictional story exercise and interviews will be digitally audio-recorded.
- I understand that the data recorded will be transcribed by software and proofread by the researcher.
- I understand participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw myself from participating in the research at any time without giving a reason; I have the right to withdraw my data from the research interviews at any time up to 1 July 2021 without giving a reason.
- I understand that the researcher, her supervisors and advisor will have access to all the data collected but that it will be anonymised by the researcher.
- I understand that the data will be kept for six years, after which time they will be destroyed.
- I understand that, although every measure will be taken to protect my identity in any publication arising from this project, there can be no guarantee that some readers may not identify the participant(s).

☐ I would like to receive a transcript of my interviews for editing (please tick). If you have ticked this box, please leave an email address here:

☐ I would like to receive a copy of the final report/research paper from the study (please tick). If you have ticked this box, please leave an email address here:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON (2020) for three years, Reference Number (024731).

Appendix D. Interview Schedule

Chinese women academics' career development

Interview schedule for the first interview

The overall purpose of the interview questions is to answer the research questions with a focus on how Chinese women academics perceive the experience of doctoral education impacting their academic careers in top-ranking universities in China. Some indicative questions are:

- Why did you choose to complete a doctorate overseas/domestically? Did you ever consider the other option?
  您为何选在国内或者国外完成博士学位？您有考虑过另外一个选择吗？
- • How has your doctoral study influenced your career development? Can you please give examples?
  您的博士学习是怎样影响您的职业生涯的？您能举出例子吗？
- What was your early academic career like? /How have you dealt with the obstacles in your career to date?
  您的早期职业生涯是怎样的？/从事学术职业以来，您如何处理职业中的困难？
- Have you felt being a woman ever positively or negatively affected your academic career development?
  您觉得您的女性身份曾对您的职业生涯有积极影响或者消极影响吗?
- Can you please give a metaphor for your academic life and explain why you chose it?
  如果要比喻，您会将您的职业生涯比作什么呢？请您解释这样比喻的原因。
- What is your expectation of the next 5 years in your career development?
  您对您的职业生涯未来五年的规划是怎样的？

Appendix E. A Fictional Story Completion

Chinese women academics' career development

Fictional story completion exercise

This fictional story is about two women academics' doctoral study and early career. Participants will be asked to make four choices in total (two for each fictional woman). The participants will only see the open paragraphs before the first choice at the beginning through the link sent. The steps are as follows.

Step 1: The participants will see the opening paragraphs introducing the background and the beginning of the story of the first fictional woman.
Step 2: The participants choose the next pathway via a link.
Step 3: The next paragraphs are open to view and, in the end, the participants make the next choice.
Step 4: When the participants finish making all four choices, they will describe to me the prospective five-year career development of the two fictional women academics.
Step 5: All the participants are asked to explain to me the reasons for the choices they made for the two fictional women academics.

All the processes will be digitally audio-recorded and transcribed.

The fictional story and the choices are as follows.

Nancy and Zoe are cousins, growing up together. They have been playing with each other since childhood and growing up in a big family. They spent their time in primary school, junior high school, and senior high school together. From childhood, they may not be the top students in the class, but they were creative, smart, and well-behaved.

It's time for Nancy to take the college entrance examination. In a scorching June, Nancy, like all the examinees, experienced the trilogy of a college entrance examination, waiting for the score and application submission. Sure enough, she was admitted by a good university in a neighbouring city, only an hour away from home by car. Her parents were very satisfied.

"Nancy, are you tired of studying at university?" Zoe asked Nancy curiously.

"If you want to be outstanding, you have to work harder to get good grades. If you don't care about the GPA, you can be very relaxed. But no matter how hard it is, it's much easier than getting prepared for college. Like me, those who want to enter the master-doctor combined program will have to get high marks in every course." Nancy replied.

"What is a master-doctor combined program?"

"It's a master-doctor combined program in a five-year duration. After graduation, I can get a doctor's degree directly. Ms. Zhang just included me in her research program. If I do well in the exams and get into the program, she said she could be my supervisor." Nancy made a "five" gesture with fingers.

"That sounds amazing." said Zoe enviously.

Indeed, after being encouraged by Ms. Zhang, Nancy worked harder in all courses. Finally, at the beginning of the senior year, she ranked second in the major in terms of credit score and got the quota for the master-doctor combined program. At the second year in her

postgraduate study, she successfully passed the qualification examination and became a doctoral candidate. According to her supervisor's plan, she began to prepare the subproject of her doctoral dissertation since the beginning of the postgraduate study, which was already in the early stage of research.

At the end of a doctoral group meeting, Ms. Zhang asked Nancy to stay and said openly: “Our university has a joint training program in Switzerland, and our team got a quota to study in Geneva for one year. The supervisors there are very competitive with impressive academic achievement. Your research interest is very close to theirs, and your English proficiency is good enough for communication. Do you want to think about it?"

Nancy was caught off guard by this unexpected opportunity. Before she could answer, Ms. Zhang added, “However, if you enter the joint program in Switzerland, you will have to postpone your graduation for one year. With your current research progress, the required journal articles had also been published. If you don't go abroad, you have great hope of graduating on time, but going abroad has its advantages.”

Nancy nodded, “Thank you, Ms. Zhang. Can I go back to discuss with my family?”

Choice 1: Please decide:

• Nancy chooses to be a visiting student and postpones her graduation for one year.

• Nancy turns down the opportunity and graduates on time.

If the participants choose “• Nancy chooses to be a visiting student and postpone her graduation for one year” in choice 1, they will see the following:

Nancy discussed with Zoe and listened to her own parents' opinions. She decided to take the opportunity of studying abroad.

Life in a foreign country was very fresh, but also more difficult. She had to start cooking to soothe her stomach since there were few Chinese foods in the cafeteria. It felt like going back to the high school, shuttling between the office and the library every day. Fortunately, Nancy worked hard enough during her undergraduate and postgraduate years and did not encounter too much difficulty in fitting in.

The supervisors abroad were very satisfied with Nancy. With two SCI-indexed journal articles published, she also liked the atmosphere where students from different countries cooperated. The whole research team performed like a small United Nations.

A year flies by. Nancy finished her last year of study in China, successfully graduated with the doctor's degree, and was recruited by a "double first-class" university in the capital city of her province as a young academic.

Giving up weekends and holidays, she finally became an associate professor after two years.

One night, she was proofreading an article in the office. Professor Xu from the next door came in, “still busy, working so hard? How about the classes of this semester?”

“Hi, Prof Xu, thanks for asking. They are kind of challenging. I was learning and teaching at the same time. The students’ questions inspired me a lot. “

Professor Xu smiled approvingly and sat down in the chair opposite to Nancy. “It is good to keep the learning spirit. Next month, there is going to be a vacancy of deputy head in our School. Would you like to have a try?”

Nancy hesitated, “I know, but…”

“You know you are excellent in academic achievement and good with colleagues, and students love you, too.”

She smiled, “Prof Xu, do you know the main responsibility of this position? I read the job description, but it was too general.”

“Well, there must be some administrative responsibilities to deal with. You are in charge of the School. However, there are many opportunities when we have great responsibilities. When President Liu was young, he also was the deputy head of the School. “

“Thank you, Prof Xu. I'll think about it.”

Choice 2: Please decide:

• Nancy applies for the position.

• Nancy does not apply for the position.

• Nancy’s third option, please specify

Back to Choice 1, alternate pathway:

If the participants choose “• Nancy turns down the opportunity and graduates on time” in choice 1, they will see the following:

After thinking about it, Nancy asked her parents for their advice and decided to stay in the country to continue her doctoral study. She had the required journal articles published. The dissertation is making progress.

A year flies by. Nancy finished her last year of study in China, successfully graduated with the doctor's degree, and was recruited by a “double first-class” university in the capital city of her province as a young academic.

Giving up weekends and holidays, she finally became an associate professor after two years.

One night, she was proofreading an article in the office. Professor Xu from the next door came in, “still busy, working so hard? How about the classes of this semester?”

"Hi, Prof Xu, thanks for asking. They are kind of challenging. I was learning and teaching at the same time. The students’ questions inspired me a lot. "

Professor Xu smiled approvingly and sat down in the chair opposite to Nancy. “It is good to keep the learning spirit. Next month, there is going to be a vacancy of deputy head in our School. Would you like to have a try?”

Nancy hesitated, “I know, but…”

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She smiled, “Prof Xu, do you know the main responsibility of this position? I read the job description, but it was too general.”

“Well, there must be some administrative responsibilities to deal with. You are in charge of the School. However, there are many opportunities when we have great responsibilities. When President Liu was young, he also was the deputy head of the School. ”

“Thank you, Prof Xu. I’ll think about it.”

Choice 2: Please decide:

• Nancy applies for the position.

• Nancy does not apply for the position.

• Nancy’s third option, please specify

No matter which one the participants chose, they will see the following.

Zoe did a good job in the college entrance examination as well. She went through the application guidebook and selected a university that she needs to arrive by plane. Ever since Nancy told her about the master-doctor combined program, a seed has been planted in her heart. Yet she looked further to another country.

“If I want to apply for a Ph.D. in the United States, I will be eligible to apply with a bachelor's degree.” When the two girls had dinner together in the summer vacation, Zoe said to Nancy.

“The United States? Are you going so far? How many years?” Nancy opened her eyes widely.

“At least four or five years, I don't know, but I want to try.” Zoe was playing with the spoon in her hand, “I have signed up for the TOEFL test.”

In this way, Zoe began to fight with TOEFL and GRE when she was a sophomore. She submitted ten applications in the first semester of her senior year, communicated with potential supervisors, introduced her research interests, and made initial research plans. Finally, she received the admission of two doctoral programs and accepted the one with a TA fellowship.

Zoe set foot on the land of the United States with excitement, marching towards her dream. A male Chinese doctoral student, David, in the group took good care of her like a big brother and often drove her to the supermarket. As time goes by, they fell in love with each other in a foreign country.

Both of them have faith in doing research and devoted themselves to learning. There was a lack of researchers in the Department, and their research achievements were outstanding among their peers, so they went on for post-doctorates. Finally, Zoe and David came back to China for marriage in the summer vacation before the end of the contract. They also signed an employment agreement with the same domestic university. After that, they packed their bags and went back to China, starting their academic career.

Zoe, who was worried about going nowhere after graduation, now faced a sweet bitterness. She got two job offers in two “double first-class” universities and needed to choose one from two almost equivalent working places. The one is a teaching-research position, while the other is a research position. The teaching-research position requires the academic to instruct a certain number of courses each semester, which means less time will be spent on research but more time to spend with students; the research position takes the research as the whole work, which means more publications and funding but less interaction with students. As a brand new and young academic, she got confused.

Choice 3: Please decide:

• Zoe chooses the teaching-research position

• Zoe chooses the research position

If the participants choose "• Zoe chooses the teaching-research position" in choice 3, they will see the following:

Zoe decided to be an academic with teaching and research going simultaneously. The discussion and communication with students made her feel younger and vigor. It has been several months since she settled down in the university's apartment. Nancy, who had been working for several years at that time, teased her in a visit, " Finally get there. Do you consider bringing a small person to our family?"

Zoe replied with a smile, "Why hurry me up? You should be my role model."

Nancy was joking with her as usual, and they were chatting about something else later on.

However, at the new year's feast, the parents and in-laws raised the same question, which made Zoe couldn't help thinking: is it really necessary to start planning?

The next day, she asked her husband, "What do you think?"

David started to talk with hesitation, "we are all on our thirties, and it's not surprising that parents are thinking about this. But you just entered the university, if you make full use of the first two or three years to publish some journal articles and apply for a few funded projects, you are more likely to be an associate professor. If we have a child now, the progress will be prolonged to God knows when."

Zoe was worried about the same problem: It took her so long to receive the doctorate, moving to a new stage of life. Before she can take a breath, she needs to stumble forward. If they have a child before being an associate professor, she has to take half a year's maternity leave, plus a few years of baby care. She doesn't know if she has the energy to handle career and childbirth simultaneously. However, if she takes another two or three years for academia, let alone the pressure at home, her biological clock is ticking as well.

Choice 4: Please decide:

• Zoe chooses to have a child before complete for the title of associate professor.

• Zoe chooses to give birth to a child after being an associate professor.

• Zoe's third option, please specify

If the participants choose "• Zoe chooses the research position" in choice 3, they will see the following:

Zoe decided to focus on research. She devoted herself to reading and writing during workdays. It has been several months since she settled down in the university's apartment. Nancy, who had been working for several years at that time, teased her in a visit, " Finally get there. Do you consider bringing a small person to our family?"

Zoe replied with a smile, "Why hurry me up? You should be the role model."

Nancy was joking with her as usual, and they were chatting about something else later on.

However, at the new year's feast, the parents and in-laws raised the same question, which made Zoe couldn't help thinking: is it really necessary to start planning?

The next day, she asked her husband, "What do you think?"

David started to talk with hesitation, “we are all in our thirties, and it’s not surprising that parents are thinking about this. But you just entered the university, if you make full use of the first two or three years to publish some journal articles and apply for a few funded projects, you are more likely to be an associate professor. If we have a child now, the progress will be prolonged to God knows when. “

Zoe was worried about the same problem: It took her so long to receive the doctorate, moving to a new stage of life. Before she can take a breath, she needs to stumble forward. If they have a child before being an associate professor, she has to take half a year’s maternity leave, plus a few years of baby care. She doesn't know if she has the energy to handle career and childbirth simultaneously. However, if she takes another two or three years for academia, let alone the pressure at home, her biological clock is ticking as well.

Choice 4: Please decide:

• Zoe chooses to have a child before applying for the title of associate professor.

• Zoe chooses to give birth to a child after being an associate professor.

• Zoe’s third option, please specify

No matter which one the participants chose, they will see the following.

After reading the stories of Nancy and Zoe, what do you think of the two young women academics’ career development in five years? What obstacles will they encounter on their way forward, and how will they resolve them? Please think boldly and describe in detail.

Appendix F. Thank-You Letter

CRITICAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Epsom Campus
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T +64 9 623 8899
W www.education.auckland.ac.nz
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92601
Symonds Street
Auckland 1135
New Zealand

A Thank-you letter

Dear Participants,

Thank you so much for taking an interest in participating in the study. Due to the sufficiency of recruitment/ the need to balance participation, I regrettably notify you that you are not selected for the study. The selection process is fair and unbiased, and on a first-to-reply basis of participants.

Nevertheless, I greatly appreciate your intention to participate in the study.

If you have any questions, please contact me by Email: lbao171@aucklanduni.ac.nz. I will be happy to reply.

Best regards,

Li

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON (2020) for three years, Reference Number (024731).

Appendix G. Advertisement for Participants

Advertisement to be used in social media groups/platforms and Chinese academic forums

Chinese women academics' career development

Desperately seeking Chinese women academics:

If you, or someone you know, currently work as an early to mid-career women academic in a double first-class university and you have a doctorate, I'd love your help. I am interested in finding out how you perceive your doctoral education in your career development as well as your strategies to address career pressures and challenges in academia.

Participation in this project will involve completing a biographical information form, a semi-structured individual interview, a fictional story completion exercise, and a follow-up interview. All activities will be conducted via the Internet.

If you would like to find out more about this study or to participate, please contact Li Bao via email at lbao171@aucklanduni.ac.nz. (Li Bao, who is a doctoral student in the School of Critical Studies in Education, has worked as an academic in a Chinese university in Nanjing for eight years and has a research interest in various aspects of higher education, feminism, and academic careers.)

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