

A STUDY OF THREE CHINESE WOMEN
ACADEMICS' SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY

By

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To

my parents

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CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of this poststructuralist feminist research project that seeks to explore subjectivity and agency within the life histories of three women academics in China. This chapter includes the background of the study, research problem and a purpose statement, guiding research questions, an overview of the theoretical framework informing this study and the research methodology, and finally, the significance of the study.

Background of the Study

My interest in conducting a study of Chinese women academics' subjectivity and agency stems from my own experience as a former woman academic in China and a current doctoral student interested in women's studies, making women academics' experiences "both familiar and strange" (Britzman, 1992, p. 29) to me.

Having grown up in a socialist country that has advocated equality between women and men, I truly believed Chinese women had achieved the goal of "hold[ing] up half the sky" proposed by Mao Zedong. During my early teaching years I was proud of my identity as a woman academic and took great pleasure in imparting my knowledge to my students, feeling a sense of "authority, knowledge and power" (Munro, 1998, p. 1) in

my teaching role. Then I came to the United States for my doctoral studies with a purpose of gaining more knowledge and began to take a series of courses that address gender issues. These courses helped me reflect on my own teaching experiences and I gradually began to detect the hidden and latent mechanisms undermining women academics' equality in areas ranging from professional development opportunities to social recognition, academic career and marriage and family relationships. I realized these issues present areas of stress and concern for many women academics and I began to rethink the issue of gender equality in China.

After I began to get acquainted with and allied with poststructuralist theories, which hold that knowledge is inextricably related to power (Foucault, 1984/1983, as cited in St. Pierre, 2000), and understand that poststructuralist theorists work to analyze and disrupt the “regimes of truth” which operate to subjugate women and other marginalized people (St. Pierre, 2000), I realize that as a woman working in a male-dominated institution such as university, I am not a knowledge holder, but merely a knowledge imparter. I began to interpret my decision to go abroad for further studies through a poststructuralist feminist lens. My decision to travel abroad to pursue an advanced degree in Education reflects my deeper desire of making sense of my identity as a woman academic and my unconscious resistance to the dominant patriarchal discursive practices at the university. Then I began to wonder about women academics in China who are still committed to their career obligations. Do they have similar experiences and conflicts as I used to have? What would be their way of negotiating their self identities and their way of creating agency and resistance? As a researcher who has embraced subjectivist and poststructuralist feminist epistemologies, I also wonder how considering these issues can

increase our understanding of the ways of re-envisioning women's agency and resistance in higher education.

One vignette shared by a female teacher during my doctoral studies also intrigued me to delve into the present topic. I interviewed one woman teacher about her teaching experience for one of my course assignments. Although I told her before the interview that the interview was about women teachers' status, she denied experiencing any gender bias in her teaching career and attributed seemingly unequal treatment of women teachers to different credentials. I was surprised since I had expected her to tell me how women teachers were discriminated and oppressed in schools. I began to wonder if my interviewee's opinion was commonplace or whether it was because we all take various forms of discrimination and oppression in our daily life as the way things are or a thing in the past (Rothenberg, 2007), or as Munro (1998) suggests, "gender is such an implicit part of our lives, that we often take it for granted" (p. 124).

Moreover, in the United States historically, teaching was regarded as "women's true profession," which is undergirded by the ideology of women's nurturing nature so it is "too easy to be of much value" (Kaplan, 1994, as cited in Munro, 1998). How did this powerful ideology, I wondered, compare and relate to those for women academics in China, a country where the Confucius ideology that ignorance is women's virtue had dominated China for centuries and then was challenged during the New Cultural Movement in the mid 1910s and 1920s and finally supplanted with the socialist feminist discourse of gender equality? How would Chinese women academics perceive their status and identities and how would their multiple identities shift in such male-dominated institutions as colleges and universities? Are they acutely aware of their gendered

identities? Or are they grossly unaware of the gendered practices in China's higher education? To answer these questions, I need to understand how they construct their subjectivity, or their sense of their selves (Weedon, 1987), and how they negotiate understandings of self both within and against the dominant discourses of higher education and gender.

In Western scholarship, the notion of women's subjectivity has been explored through the lens of Marxism, feminism, interpretivism, Neo-Marxism, and phenomenology (Munro, 1998). However, Munro (1998) rejects these theoretical perspectives while doing her research on women teachers' subjectivity and resistance for the reason that they are still embedded in humanist conceptions of subjectivity as unitary, power as a possession and resistance as opposition. Rather, she draws heavily on poststructuralist notions of "subjectivity as non-unitary, of power/knowledge as circulatory and of gender as a complex social construction" (p. 27), which "offers possibilities for reconceiving the subject, resistance, and agency in more complex and powerful ways" (p. 28). This enticed me to follow her footsteps in constructing women's complicated and fragmented life histories and re-envision their subjectivity and resistance through the theoretical lens of poststructuralist feminism.

Research Problem

China is traditionally a patriarchal society. Chinese women were traditionally regarded as docile, obedient, and submissive, and have been marginalized and rendered silent and invisible in mainstream Chinese society for centuries. Women's liberation movement began in the second half of the 19th century and was accelerated during the

New Cultural Movement in the mid 1910s and 1920s. After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, Chairman Mao Zedong declared that "women can hold up half the sky", a metaphor derived from the ancient Chinese mythology about goddess Nüwa who was said to have propped up the sky in order to prevent it from falling. This ideology soon became the dominant discourse for the following decades and greatly transformed the Chinese society and institutions. Gender equality has thus become a seeming truism and is taken as a privilege of socialism ever since, creating a sharp shift of Chinese women's status from being oppressed to being masters. Chinese women have ever since been given equal rights to employment, marriage, and family property through various legislations and governmental regulations (Hershatter, 2004; Fan, 1998).

A key indicator of the elevation of women's status in China is evident in the arena of education. Chinese women had been deprived of access to education for centuries and teaching had been traditionally a male profession in China for centuries. Women did not enter into teaching profession until the beginning of the 20th century as a means of westernizing the Chinese educational system and revitalizing the nation (Donald, 2004; Peterson, Hayhoe, & Lu, 2001). After 1949 increasing numbers of women chose to become teachers to contribute to the socialist construction of the country. This created another sharp shift from the discourse of "ignorance is virtue" to the discourse of "mastery of knowledge is virtue" for Chinese women and another dichotomy.

Apart from the dominant discourse of gender equality, Chinese women academics are enmeshed in varied other discourses and are subjected to tremendous social changes due to China's internationalization and rapid but uneven economic development in recent years. Since 1999, China has witnessed unprecedented development in its higher

education systems, both in terms of the number of enrolled students and in terms of the campus expansion and construction, which has resulted in sharp increase of recruitment of faculty and staff and correspondingly a growing number of women academics in China. With a series of reforms carried out to ensure the quality of higher education and strengthen research, higher qualifications are imposed on women academics in China, such as acquiring an advanced academic degree and annual academic publications, which pose new challenges for them (Wang, 2008; Wang & Li, 2009)

Undoubtedly tension exists between these dominant discourses of gender and higher education in China and women academics' own experiences as women. Also, such dichotomies and contradictions obscure the complexity and richness of women academics' life experiences, and exclude the many new meanings these women may have created for themselves within changing social structures. Kathleen Weiler (1988), a feminist educational scholar, argues that women teachers "are not simply acted upon by abstract 'structures' but negotiate, struggle, and create meaning of their own" (p. 21). The varied competing discourses offer multiple, conflicting subject positions for women academics and also "a site of discursive battle" (Weedon, 1987, p. 96) for them to create agency and resistance.

Moreover, despite the growing number of women faculty in China, their existence and status has not received sufficient attention from the academic world. Research on them is scarce in Western scholarship. Though a number of studies have been conducted since the 1990s about this growing population in China, the majority of them focus on academic women's role conflicts (e.g. Huang, 1996; Qu, 1995; Wei, 1995; 2002; Wu & Yao, 2002), their physical and mental health problems (Liu & Liu, 2002; Zheng, 2004),

and their social status (Li, 2002; Qu, 1995; Zhang, 2001). These studies take subjectivity as singular, fixed, and unitary, thus essentializing Chinese academic women's experiences and reinforcing a totalizing and essentialized self that suggests women are plagued by various difficulties in institutions of higher education so they need rescuing. Little is known about how these dominant and conflicting discourses function in Chinese women academia's process of subjectivity construction and what strategies Chinese women academics use to embrace certain subject positions while rejecting others. To address these important areas of research, we need to employ new theoretical perspectives so that we can envision new ways of creating power and resistance for Chinese academic women.

Therefore there is a need to examine the ways in which women academics in China negotiate dominant discourses and create new meanings for themselves and for their work. Through a poststructuralist feminist study of the work of various social historical discourses on individual woman, we can explore women academics' subjectivity construction processes, which are never unitary, fixed, or coherent, but multiple, shifting and contradictory, and gain a better understanding of the meaning they give to their daily lives.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to apply poststructuralist feminist theory to the life histories of three Chinese women academics to understand and critique how these women negotiate and construct their subjectivities within various discourses. Proceeding from the poststructuralist concept of subjectivity as multiple, shifting and contradictory, this study

will aim to examine how discourses function during such processes, with a hope to expand the theory about women academics' and subjectivity and challenge our assumptions about women academics' resistance and agency. Because of the unique historical and cultural discourses in China, Chinese women have had different experiences from their counterparts in the West. Therefore this study will enrich existing feminist scholarship.

Research Questions

The focus of this study is to examine three Chinese women academics' life histories and deconstruct how their subjectivities are constructed and shift within various conflicting and competing discourses in which they are enmeshed. There are three primary questions that I investigated for this research project:

1. What discourses are visible in the three Chinese women academics' narratives to construct their identities and subjectivity?
2. How do Chinese women academics negotiate their subjectivity with/in and against these various discourses?
3. What are the implications of the study on our understanding of resistance and agency?

To answer these questions, the focus of this study is on the three women academics' narratives of their life histories. Because language plays a central role in "wording the world," it is believed that this study revealed what is important and significant for them and for their subjectivity construction process. How they embrace

some discourses while rejecting others and create new meanings for them is a manifestation of their subjectivity.

Theoretical Framework

These questions are explored using poststructuralist feminism as the theoretical framework, which is informed by scholars such as Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Chris Weedon, and in the field of education, Patti Lather. Poststructuralist feminism works to “trouble both discursive and material structures that limit the ways we think about our work” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 477), to “trouble the subject of humanism” (St. Pierre & Willow, 2000, p. 6), and specifically, to trouble the category of “woman” and keep it “unstable and undefined” (p. 7) since “the agency of the subject lies precisely in its ongoing constitution” (Butler, 1992, p. 13, as cited in St. Pierre & Willow, 2000). Traditional theories such as phenomenology and critical theories reify the traditional view of an autonomous self that is always single, unitary, fixed, and “free from the material forces of social structures” (Munro, 1998, p. 23), and pose a neutral, non-gendered world. Poststructuralist feminism is in conversation with these traditional theories as well as feminist scholars more closely rooted in interpretivist and critical theories, and it is used as a productive tool for exploring subjectivity, resistance and power.

According to poststructuralist feminism, language and discourse play important roles in our efforts of negotiating and constructing our subjectivity (Lather, 1991; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1987). By utilizing poststructuralist feminism as the theoretical lens guiding this study, I tentatively explored women academics’ subjectivity through

analyzing how discourses function in such a process, being aware of the complexities and uncertainties of women academics' everyday lived experience and their subjectivity construction process.

Feminists have grappled with the need to claim woman as a subject since it reifies an essentially patriarchic category (Gilmore, 1994, as cited in Munro, 1998, p. 30). However, feminists grappling with the implications of poststructuralism ask, if we reject the notion of subject, how can we envision women's resistance and agency? Derrida proposes deconstruction as a critical practice that aims to "dismantle the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work, not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another way" (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 482). This offers us a new way of re-envisioning the old concept of subject, thus seeking new space of resistance and agency. For this reason, I am enticed to make the effort to reinscribe women academics' subjectivity through an analysis of the various discourses they are enmeshed in and their agency of accepting and/or rejecting multiple and possibly contradictory subject positions by employing the theoretical framework of poststructuralist feminism. In this process, I am cognizant of both the vitality and limitations of applying concepts forged within Western feminism to study Chinese women in their cultural context. Equally importantly, since the concepts of identity and subjectivity are relatively new in China, it is essential to note that my analysis of Chinese women academics' subjectivities is inevitably influenced by my academic training in the United States.

Methodology

Sikes & Everington (2001) point out that the criteria for choosing appropriate research methodology are research questions, research focus and context, all the people involved, ethical considerations and paradigmatic consistency. Taking these factors into consideration, I adopted life history methodology to serve the present research purposes for two main reasons. First, life history research can penetrate the “subjective reality of the individual” and allow “the subject to speak for himself or herself” (Munro, 1998, p. 9). It thus has the potential to highlight gendered constructions of power, resistance and agency (Munro, 1998). Life history is generally conducted within the interpretivist paradigm in a quest for understanding lives that have been historically marginalized and silenced. Because of these features it has been used by feminist scholars to accomplish the feminist mission of giving authentic voice to women, and assume a position against masculinist research history. However, more recently, scholars have reconceptualized life-history, life-story, and oral history methodologies for use in research endeavors grounded within other paradigms. Munro, for example, who is a poststructuralist feminist, used life history research methods to study women teachers’ subjectivity and resistance. Middleton (1993) and Sykes (2001) also employed life history methodology to conduct poststructuralist feminist studies.

Second, life history studies people’s own unique history and their interpretation of their history, bridging the micro and macro interface of people’s history and thus revealing the dialectic relationships between the individual and society (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Life history differs from life story in that life history is closely connected with the wider social, historical background (Sikes & Everington, 2001) in which women are positioned, so this methodology can best serve the present purpose of how women

academics negotiate their self-identity and construct their subjectivity through accepting some discourses while rejecting others. Moreover, life history offers opportunities to tell stories that are always fluid and shifting (Sikes & Everington, 2001) and therefore is suitable to study subjectivity which, in my theoretical framework, is also fluid and shifting. While adopting life history methodology within a poststructuralist framework, I hold that knowledge is always situated, fluid and shifting as well.

Hatch & Wisniewski (1995) contend that “individual constructions of ‘self’ or of ‘a life’ are complex, situational, fragmented, non-unitary, nonlinear, non-coherent, and constantly in flux” (p. 122). Subjectivity is seen through our use of language at play, and within language is the play of discourses, tensions, and selves (Phillips, 2002). Therefore, the individuals’ expression of self and their life stories can serve as appropriate data for any poststructuralist feminist project of studying women’s identity formation and subjectivity construction. The focus of such a project is on how language and discourse work to produce subjects.

Moreover, poststructuralism critiques the humanist notion of fundamental or essential self, contending that “we can only ever speak ourselves or be spoken into existence within the terms of available discourses” (Davies, 2000, p. 55). In this sense human beings are subjects of various social, cultural and political discourses, and their language will be the key data for study. The storied self is neither singular nor fixed, and such story-telling moments can be powerful moments to reveal how discourses function in the process of my participants’ construction of their subjectivities and offer them multiple and even contradictory subject positions to take.

While using life history methodology, Munro (1998) warns that it is important to move beyond the romanticization of voice and assumptions of innocence that can emerge in some uses of interpretive methodologies, and embrace a notion of life history as useful for exploring the fragmentation and contradictions of lives. Instead of being committed to representing the original moments and an “authentic self” and “a stable story” as proposed by Goodson (1998), I would argue that the attempts to establish a cohesive and solidified representation of “truth” from life history research is a betrayal of the storyteller’s multiple shifting subjectivities.

Significance of the Study

This study will use poststructuralist feminist theory to study such key notions as subjectivity, power, agency and resistance in the Chinese context, and use this theoretical lens to illuminate how woman academics construct their subjectivities in multiple and complex ways. Also, at the site of the individual, this study might also help women academics become more aware of how their self identities can be negotiated and shifting. Conceived in this way, this study can broaden the ways of envisioning women’s resistance and agency.

Furthermore, it is of great significance to study women academics’ lives. “Education has long been a fruitful site for feminist work” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 477). Goodson (1981) also argues that “in understanding something so intensely personal as teaching, it is critical we know about the person the teacher is” (p. 69, as cited in Sikes and Everington, 2001). Therefore, a life history study of women academics is indispensable for a better understanding of how to further teaching and learning. Now

with another wave of China's internationalization and tremendous reform both at the societal level and in the educational arena, a study of how women academics construct their subjectivities and add new meaning to this profession will be fruitful and shed new light on the studies of the ramifications of social influences on education in China.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Three bodies of literature inform this study. To understand the three Chinese academic women's creation and negotiation of the meaning of being both a woman and an academic, it is important to situate Chinese academic women in their historical, social and cultural contexts. Therefore I provide an overview of the current discussions in scholarship of women in education both as students, as teachers and as academics, which is indispensable background knowledge for us to better understand women and academic women's role and identity in history and in contemporary society. Since this study employs a poststructuralist feminist lens, the second body of literature concerns the major theories and key notions of poststructuralist feminism and how such a theoretical lens informs the research on education and women teachers. The last body of literature reviews life history research methodology.

Chinese Academic Women: A Historical Review and Current Situation

Chinese Women in History

Chinese women in history have been stereotyped into images of submission, oppression, the bound foot, and passive victims of patriarchy (For example, Ko, 2001, 2003; Kingston, 1989; Lee, 1994; Mann, 1997; Tsai, 1996). Such stereotypical images of Chinese women can be explained by considering China's historical, social, and cultural realities in the past. China is traditionally a feudal, patriarchal society. Ever since Confucianism became the state religion in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.), it has governed and regulated Chinese society for centuries. To be specific, Confucianism firmly established the absolute authority of men over women. Abiding by Confucian teachings, men ruled the country and family while women stayed home to manage the household. Women were destined to occupy a subordinate position to men and should follow the Confucian precept of the "Three Obediences" (*sancong*) and "Four Virtues" (*side*). The three obediences regulates that a Chinese woman was expected to obey her father at home, her husband after marriage, and her son when widowed. The four virtues required of Chinese women were chastity and obedience, reticence, pleasing manner, and domestic skills. Such ideas about gender order have endured until the end of the 19th century. The stereotypical picture of Chinese women is that of one "in servitude or being the plaything of men" (Lee, 1994, p. 1).

However, not all agree with these dominant ideas and teachings. Some scholars have attempted to contest this notion and sought to unveil other belief systems that reveal Chinese women's creation and negotiation of the new space for their identity (For example, Ko, 1994; Lee, 1994; Teng, 1996; Wang, 2007). According to these scholars, the position of women in China throughout the history has been a contradictory one. The general dominant picture is that women were oppressed and "atrociously treated" so as to

be kept in servitude and made “the playthings of men” (Lee, 1994, p.1). Yet there are also powerful women in Chinese history that have exerted lasting influence in all fields. Among them are women scholars and writers such as Ban Zhao, Xie Daoyun, Li Qingzhao, and Ding Ling, women serving in the militia such as Hua Mulan, Liang Hongyu, Qin Liangyu, the women in the Red Army, and women entering the political arena such as Empress Wu, Empress Cixi, and the Soong sisters. Moreover, despite the Confucian teaching of “three obediences” and “four virtues”, Chinese women often did exert their power over their husbands and their sons and grandsons, so there is another image of “strong mother” in Chinese history (Wang, 2007). Examples include Empress Wu Zetian and the Dowager Empress Lü Zhi. The matriarchal power that these women exercised is displayed through their unusual capability of “fighting in wars, taking parts in revolutions, managing public affairs and sometimes even ruling the nation” (Lee, 1994, p. 3). Therefore, despite the fact that Chinese women lived in a patriarchal society for centuries, there is always space where both eminent women and what Maxine Hong Kingston (1989) has termed “no name women”- faceless women who have disappeared into history could break away from the fixed identity imposed by their male members of the society, and negotiate and reconstruct their identities and subjectivities.

Chinese Women in Modern China

The patriarchal foundation of Chinese society wasn't challenged until in the second half of the 19th century (Peterson, Hayhoe, & Lu, 2001). In order to fight against the western imperialism, the socialist reformers advocated equal rights for women and called on women to walk out of their private sphere to join men in their efforts to “save the nation”. At the turn of the 20th century with China's modernist process the dominant

gender order of men outside women inside (*nanzhuwai, nūzhunei*) that has reigned Chinese society for centuries was under challenge (Croll, 1978). Gender equality became one powerful signifier of modernity in China and women's liberation was seen as an important means of building a modern nation (Hsiung, 2001; Wang, 2000). Women's liberation movement gained even stronger momentum during the New Cultural Movement of the mid 1910s and 1920s, a period when women's liberation and equality between men and women were heatedly debated (Ko & Zheng, 2006). Since then, Chinese women's liberation movement became one of the major topics on the agenda of the social transformations of China.

After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the socialist Chinese government promoted the policy of gender equality as an indicator of the supremacy of socialism. Among the dominant discourses of gender equality are the Maoist ideology of "women hold up half the sky," "women and men are the same," "equal opportunities," which functions to define Chinese women's social status. These discourses construct a new gender order in which men and women share equal responsibility in the affairs of the world (Lee, 1994), and regulate women's equal participation in every aspect of social life. On the other hand, this ideology was also framed within the Engelian concept that women's liberation and gender equality can only be achieved through participation in social and economic construction (Tsai, 1996). Law was made to ensure equal rights to women (Hershatter, 2004). Women's social status was enhanced because of their increasing employment opportunities (Wang, 2000).

Women's Studies in China

Since the 1980s the study of women in China has expanded quickly and has been enriched by scholars both abroad and in China (Hershatter, 2004). The studies have been cross-disciplinary and have been conducted by historians, anthropologists, sociologists, scholars of contemporary literature and educators. These studies cover a wide range of topics, including family and marriage (Hershatter, 2004), sexuality (Brownell & Wasserstrom, 2002; Evans, 1997), gendered differences and identity (Croll, 1995), labor and employment (Granrose, 2005; Wang, 2000), women's entanglement with national modernity (Chow, 1991; Hsiung, 2001) and involvement in globalization (Barlow, 2001, 2004).

Chinese feminism has never been an isolated endeavor but has always been entangled with wider social realities and has been shaped by the general concerns of a particular period (Barlow, 2004; Li, 2002). This is undoubtedly true. In the first four decades of the 20th century, women's liberation was closely connected with nationalism and modernity (Hsiung, 2001). After 1949 China maintains the Marxist feminism that capitalism is the source of women's oppression and women's employment contributes to women's emancipation (Engels, 1884). Under Maoism, gender relations and gender role were defined by class and political considerations, and sexual discrimination was countered by an official rhetoric insisting on the equality of men and women, through "the denial of woman as a distinct, collective gender" (Dai, 2002, as cited in Kloet, 2008). In the post-Mao era, no significant achievements have been made to further Chinese women's rights, compared to the previous decades. One reason is that economic development has been put on the top of the agenda of the socialist construction and gender equality is treated as something less urgent than class struggle and economic

development (Lin, 2003; Wang, 1998). Therefore to conduct feminist studies we need to connect gender issues in China with other issues, such as political democracy, economic reform and globalization.

One particular focus of scholarly attention is on the question of woman as subject. Both the term “gender” and “woman” are pervaded with ambiguities in Chinese history and culture. A key point is that “man” and “woman” are not real categories, but socially constructed categories (Barlow, 2004; Brownell & Wasserstrom, 2002; Li, 2002). So Li (2002) embraces the choice of using *xingbie* (gender) instead of *shehui xingbie* (Social sex difference) for the reason that *nü* (woman/female) and *nan* (man/male) are already understood as social beings. Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002) echo Li as well, further pointing out that the most important task for “acting as women” was the maintenance of difference (*bie*) between men and women which is regulated by Confucian doctrines. Sexuality in China is only “one principle among many (e.g., kinship, generation and class) that determined a person’s position in the family and in society” (p. 26), and one’s role in the family is more important than one’s sex in the production of gender (Kloet, 2008). This is different from some Western feminism that regards sexuality as a key factor in the production of gender (Brownell & Wasserstrom, 2002).

One more central issue in contemporary Chinese feminism is that equality is interpreted as sameness by Chinese government, especially Maoist ideology of “women holding up half the sky” neutralize Chinese women, thus treating Chinese women according to an unexamined standard of male normalcy (Meng, 1993, p. 118-119). This practice was dominant during the Cultural Revolution when gender differences were eliminated and ignored. Young women were proud of being “Iron Girl” and working as

hard as men in the field. Abiding by masculine norms, they didn't have gender consciousness, and even develop "misogynous identity" (Hsiung, 2001, p. 435). Hsiung (2001) points out that though such a gender discourse "brought up a generation of successful professional and intellectual women whose achievement shatters the conventional, stereotypical notion of women's inborn inferiority" (p. 435), these women suffer from double burden of both domestic duties and professional demands, which cause them to realize that achieving gender equality through being men's equal actually "deny and suppress their own femaleness" (p. 435). Therefore some women look for "a female-centered subjectivity that sets women free from the male-centered imposition in the Maoist approach to women's liberation" (p. 435).

Since the 1980s there have been efforts to raise "women's collective consciousness" and individual woman's "self-discovery, self-recognition and self-development" (Hsiung, 2001, p. 436). Dai Jinhua is a key figure in this effort. Through literacy and film critics, Dai attempts to make visible female subjectivity in a culture dominated by stories of paternal heroes (Barlow, 2004). Dai argues that Chinese woman cannot be represented because the social conditions are not yet ripe to accommodate her (Barlow, 2004). Barlow (2004) is consistent with Dai's view, contending that the term "women" is in itself unfixed and unknowable, constantly "imposed, escaped, superimposed, displaced, reimposed, or perhaps exhausted" (p. 11), therefore she insists that women is "a concept-metaphor without an adequate referent" (p. 15), or historical catachresis, that needs exploration and deconstruction.

While gender equality is loudly proclaimed in China during the post-Mao era (1978-), deeply entrenched patterns of gender inequality still persist in Chinese society.

Similar to the United States, for example, gendered employment hierarchies still retain women in a subordinate position, and women have more limited employment opportunities and are more easily laid off than men (Wang, 2000). Also, the one-child policy instituted in China to control China's burgeoning population has had great effects on women's reproductive rights (Greenhalgh, 2001). Infanticide and abandonment of female infants are still practiced (Chen & Wu, 2005; "Ignorance Triggered", 2004; Yan, 2008), resulting in the unbalanced ratio of men to women of 106.9:100. In some provinces this ratio reached 135:100 (Zhong, 2008), implying that women are still less valuable to Chinese society and less valuable as a sex than men. Those statistics also point to the necessity of critiquing and deconstructing the discourse of gender equality in China.

Chinese Women's Education

Education in China

Education has been valued highly throughout China's history. The importance of education to Confucian Chinese society is well documented. Education is pursued as a means for self-cultivation and recruiting "men of talent" to administer the affairs of the state and glorifying the ancestors. The traditional educational institution is called *sishu* where only male students were admitted with a purpose to excel in *Keju* Examinations and aspire to government positions. This national educational mode was interrupted by the outside imperialism and invasion in the second half of the 19th century. In order to combat foreign imperialism and save the nation from collapse, the Qing government decreed to set up the modern public school system in 1902. After that Chinese public

school system has undergone numerous reforms. Despite all the turbulence in this system, education in China remains steady in serving the nation's interest. After China entered the 1990s the former presidents Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zeming reiterated the importance of invigorating China through science, technology and education.

Despite such social and governmental emphasis on the value of education, Chinese girls had been barred from receiving formal education for centuries. They could not attend the *sishu*, though some rich families hired private tutors to teach their daughters at home (Ko, 1994). Women's education in the ancient time was limited to those in higher class positions or wealthy families and was given with a purpose of cultivating virtuous mothers and good wives (Cong, 2003). For almost a century since the middle of the 19th century Chinese women's education became closely related to nation building and the construction of modern identities (Hsiung, 2001). During the middle of the 19th century the western missionaries had set up girls' schools in China as one of the efforts to promote education for women in China. In 1907 the Qing government cautiously sanctioned separate female education at the primary level and lower normal schools (to train primary schoolteachers). Secondary education for girls was officially introduced in 1912, while female tertiary education was not sanctioned until 1919. Still, the purpose for women's education during this period remains to train better mothers and more efficient housewives to nurture the Chinese nation while preserving traditional female virtues (Peterson, Hayhoe, & Lu, 2001).

However, women were also active subjects too (Peterson, Hayhoe, & Lu, 2001), and created their own forms of agency despite this dominant patriarchal discourse. For example, the women in Xie Daoyun's era (During the third century and fourth century)

were proud of their literacy achievements and actively participated in literati activities (Lee, 1994). Despite the common perception that Chinese women were deprived of the opportunity to receive education in history, new research has showed that in actuality a certain amount of women during the Ming and Qing received education (Cong, 2003). It was not a rare phenomenon for the women born into an official wealthy family to receive education and achieve high literati achievement since the 17th century. In the 20th century, women began to enter public schools, which function as a productive site for women to gain not only academic knowledge and professional training but also a new understanding of their role in Chinese society, and contribute to “a gradual but significant transformation of Chinese society” (Peterson, Hayhoe & Lu, 2001, p. 17). From 1949 the advocate for women’s education was attached to the stated aim of equality between the sexes in revolutionary China, and women’s participation in education increased rapidly (Shi 1995, p.141).

Still, problems exist concerning gender equality in education in China, especially after the economic reform in 1980s with the economic mode transitioning from a planned economy to a market economy. The female illiteracy rate is much higher than that of males. Girls are more likely to drop out of school because of poverty and cultural factors of gender discrimination (Yang, 2008). The percentage of female college students was 39.6% in 1999 (Yang, 2008) and women doctoral graduates in 1999 were only 20% of all doctoral students.

Women teachers in China

China has a long tradition of honoring and respecting teachers, and Chinese classics contain many passages praising the qualities of the ideal teacher and the value of learning. Confucius makes an indelible contribution to establishing the traditional value of respecting the teachers (*zunshi*). Mencius and Xunzi, two prominent followers of Confucianism, further elevated teachers' social status. Teachers achieved such a high status in part because of their roles as contributing to the good of the nation (Zhang, 2000).

The Confucian values of teachers' roles were further developed by Hanyu (768-824 AD), who defined the teachers' role as *chuandao* (transmitting moral values and principles), *shouye* (imparting knowledge and skills), and *jiehuo* (clearing students' puzzles). Lee (2000) observes that "the Chinese people have since cherished this famous dictum as the best characterization of a model teacher" (p. 258). The teachers' roles as knowledge transmitters and moral role models have been deeply implanted and internalized into Chinese culture and tradition. Teachers are often compared to a candle that gives light but burns itself to ashes and also spring silkworm that spills silk to death to make a cocoon.

The place of women as teachers has been shifting and contradictory through the centuries. As Stanley Rosen (1992) and Shi Jinghuan (1995, p.140) have argued, Chinese cultural tradition is like "a slaughterhouse for women's intelligence" that "has not tended to prioritize women in the educational pecking order" (as cited in Donald, 2004, p.132). Ban Zhao (about 49-120 AD) was generally regarded as the first woman teacher in China. However, despite her glamorous achievements, she proposed strong control over women and advocated women's subordination to men (Lee, 1994). In the Ming Dynasty

women began to teach in the inner chamber and this became a common practice (Ko, 1994). These women bravely crossed the boundary deemed legitimate for women at the time and transgressed their proper sphere of home.

With the precarious situation of the late Qing dynasty, reformers began to seek ways of saving the nation and rejuvenating the nation. Because women were celebrated as nurturers and efficient teachers of children, and because men were prohibited from teaching in girls' schools, women began to enter teaching profession (Cong, 2003). Between 1898 and 1907 Shanghai authorities began to implement regulations for the education of women who wished to teach. After the collapse of the Qing government in 1911, Sun Yat-sen established Republic of China and enacted such legislation on education as the Teacher Education Act and the Normal School Regulation in 1912, a distinct system for normal schools was set up for the first time in China's history in order to meet the ever increasing demand of teachers. Women were included in the formal teacher education system for the first time in history as well.

After 1949, the new government greatly expanded teacher education and set it as one of national priorities in order to fulfill its aim of eradicating illiteracy and provide compulsory education for all school-age children. Women teachers gradually became a major teaching force.

Academic women in China

Women's access to higher education is one of the most important evaluation criteria for women's development in a society (Gaskell, Eichler, Pan, Xu & Zhang, 2004; Yang, 2008). Because of the impact of the New Cultural Movement, women began to

enter higher education and teach in universities. Most of the earliest women professors are those who studied in the United States, Britain or Japan. Since 1949 Chinese women have made strides in teaching in higher educational institutions in terms of percentage in the total number of faculty and range of discipline (Zhang, 2000). In 1950 the total number of academic women in China was 1900, accounting for 11 percent of the total faculty population, and this percentage rose to 20.8 percent in 1965 (Zhang, 2000), as a result of both the development of China's higher education and the government's efforts to promote gender equality. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1975), despite the general drop in the total number of faculty, there is a slight rise of the number of women in academia, partly for the reason that there was an unprecedented revolutionary zeal for achieving gender equality. In 1977, the rate of women faculty was 26.7% and it increased to 37% in 1999 (Zhang, 2000). Along with the expansion of higher education in China in recent years, the number of higher education faculty has dramatically increased, especially women faculty. From 1994 to 2004, higher education faculty has risen from 843 thousand to 1.44 million, and the total number of women faculty has risen from 312 thousand to 620 thousand. Women represent 42.5 percent of the whole faculty in year 2004 (Zhao, 2007).

Despite the great progress made by the Chinese government to promote women's numerical equality in education, Chinese academic women are still in a disadvantaged position. Existing literature shows that Chinese academic women encounter various problems. Women are over-represented at the lower ranks while under-represented in the senior posts, and clustered in liberal arts (Huang & Xiao, 2000). Moreover, women faculty members lag behind in academic research and publications (Huang & Xiao,

2000). Retirement age sets another barrier for Chinese academic women to achieve gender equality since the compulsory retirement age was 60 for men but 55 for women. They need to take up multiple roles and have the double burden of domestic duties and professional responsibility, and experience sex-oriented discrimination in job recruitment and promotion (Huang & Xiao, 2000).

Since 1990s scholars in China have approached these gender equity issues from various angles, and offered suggestions on how to solve academic women's role conflicts (e.g. Huang, 1996; Qu, 1995; Wei, 1995; 2002; Wu & Yao, 2002), how to improve their physical and mental health problems (Zheng, 2004; Liu & Liu, 2002), and how to raise their social status (Li, 2002; Qu, 1995; Zhang, 2001). These studies mainly concern Chinese academic women's experiences with identity anxiety, and attempt to explain such role conflicts because of their mother/wife/teacher identity from historical, social and cultural perspectives. However, these studies take identity as fixed, unitary, thus essentializing Chinese academic women's experiences. To expand our knowledge of academic women's experiences, and to expand the type of scholarship conducted, we need to employ new theoretical perspectives so that we can envision new ways of creating power and resistance for Chinese academic women.

With China's further reform both in its socioeconomical aspects and in higher education system, great changes also occurred in China's higher education since the 1980s. Among the reforms the most salient ones are the expansion of college student enrollment, the professionalization of university teaches and restructuring of university administration, which resulted in greater workloads, more emphasis on academic

qualifications and research ability, and less security for faculty. This poses both challenges and opportunities for women academics.

Conclusion

The body of literature covers the history of Chinese women and their education, and Chinese academic women. It can be concluded that Chinese women throughout Chinese history are defined by various social factors and in the meantime reflect the social realities at different times in history. Though women have been oppressed historically, there have also been social changes leading to greater gender equity, and women can also be active social actors to challenge and transform their disadvantaged situation. Then how about Chinese academic women in China today? How would they respond to various social and cultural discourses in contemporary China and construct their subjectivity? A review of feminist studies in China pinpoints the urgency of studying Chinese women's subjectivities and identities, which can not only shed new lights on Chinese women's subjectivity and identity, but also contribute different voice to feminist studies around the world, and achieve "cross-fertilization between global and local feminist activism" (Hsiung, 2001, p. 445).

Poststructuralist Feminism

Postmodernism and Poststructuralism

Although there are varying ways of defining postmodernism and poststructuralism, Lather (1991) provides a general framework. For her, postmodern refers to the cultural shifts of our era whereas poststructuralism as the "working out of those shifts within the arenas of academic theory" (p. 4). To be more specific,

poststructuralism refers to a group of theories that are influenced by the scholars such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray whose work is in conversation with various forms of structuralism. While structuralism and humanism privilege structures and systems, and aim to preserve unity, coherence, and equilibrium, poststructuralism challenges these assumptions and reinscribes the key notions of structuralism and humanism such as language, discourse, knowledge, truth, reality, rationality, and the subject (St. Pierre, 2000). Therefore, poststructuralist theories and methods can be used to examine the function or effects of the structures we have put into practice, to examine commonplace situations and ordinary events or processes, in order to think differently about those occurrences and to open up what seems “natural” to other possibilities (St. Pierre, 2000). Just as Foucault (1997/1981) explains,

“We have to dig deeply to show how things have been historically contingent, for such and such reason intelligible but not necessary. We must make the intelligible appear against a background of emptiness and deny its necessity. We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces. What can be played?” (p. 139-140)

That points to the central task of poststructuralism. Poststructuralist analysis reveals how dominant discourses can trap us in “conventional meanings and modes of thinking” (Davis, 1990, p. 1), and helps make visible the constitutive force of discourses and their relations with subjection and desire (Davies, 2000). Therefore, they work to disrupt the humanist notion of a unitary subject and resistance as opposition (St. Pierre, 2000). Specifically, Foucault proposes a subject as not solely the product of language, but also constituted and regulated through power relations of power and knowledge. And this

offers new possibility to reconceptualize resistance and agency (Munro, 1998; St. Pierre, 2000).

Feminism

Feminism is a politics that is directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in a society and seeking a more just and equal society for all women and men (Weedon, 1987). Historically, in the United States the feminist movement consists of three waves, each of which intensified the contestation about the contemporary gendered social issues. The belief that gender is socially-constructed rather than biologically-based—its meanings produced and shaped in specific societies and cultures—is central to feminist thought (Weiler, 1997).

Feminists take the patriarchal structure of society as their starting point (Weedon, 1987). The term “patriarchy”, literally meaning law of the father, refers to historical practices in which the law bestowed power on the father of the family unit and government leaders. Therefore this term refers to a type of power relations inscribed in familial, state, and cultural policy and practice in which women’s interests are subordinated to the interests of men (Weedon, 1987). There is a range of ways to consider the meanings and implications of patriarchy from within feminism, which has resulted in the production of different forms of feminism. Tong (1995) sorts out seven forms of feminist theory, i.e., liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, and postmodern. Though with different focus, scope and goals, these different strands of feminisms are based on the three assumptions: 1. Sex/gender inequality exists and is central to social relations and the structuring of social institutions;

2. Sex/gender inequality is not “natural” or essential but a product of social relations; 3. Sex/gender inequality should be eliminated through social change (Allan, 2008, as cited in Allan, 2010, p. 18). These feminisms also share a common commitment to eliminating subordination and oppressive conditions in social institutions (e.g., education) and a liberatory belief in a more just and equitable society (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lather, 1991; Tierney, 1992, as cited in Allan, Iverson, & Ropers-Huilman, 2010, p. 2), with a particular interest in examining and including women’s experiences and contributions. Each has their understanding of the basis of women’s subordination and the best strategies to achieve gender equality. And this points to the direction of feminist activism.

Western scholarship on Chinese women has proliferated since 1960s and new works are being published “at a rate previously unimaginable” (Teng, 1996). Though such studies “represent a richness of voices, new empirical material, and new theoretical insights” (Waltner, 1996, p. 410) by applying Western feminist theories to study on Chinese women, Teng (1996) offers some critiques and cautions. According to her, because a number of these studies are informed by Western epistemological assumptions, they can easily be entrapped by the pitfalls of essentialism which is further informed by orientalism. Therefore, Teng proposes a “two-way process” (p. 143) that “Western theory must be incorporated into the study of China and research on China must be used to generate particular theories of gender from the ground up, theories that could either inform or challenge general theories of gender” (p. 143). This proposal is especially insightful for the present study. While applying Western feminist theories to study Chinese women, the researcher should pay special attention to both the vitality and

limitations of such application. In addition, research conducted in China on women's life histories could be used to contribute to further theorizing gender as a construct.

Poststructuralist Feminism

Some feminist theorists find poststructuralist theory of language, subjectivity, knowledge and power can serve their interests and can be used as a productive framework for understanding the oppression of women and seeking ways to change.

There is no fixed definition for poststructuralist feminism. The present discussion of this theoretical perspective in the educational field draws mainly on the works of Judith Butler (1990), Chris Weedon (1987) and Patti Lather (1991, 2007). Judith Butler (1990) challenges the foundational narratives of feminism that assumes an identity and a subject that requires representation in politics and language, and embraces the poststructural notion of subject as fiction, arguing that "the critique of the subject is not a negotiation or repudiation of the subject, but, rather, a way of interrogating its construction as a pre-given or foundational premise" (p. 9). Therefore Judith Butler attempts to construct a feminism in which gender is no longer a reasonable category while working within discourses that adopt it as natural.

Weedon (1987) offers an inclusive and in-depth discussion of poststructuralist feminism. She defines poststructuralist feminism as "a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change" (p. 40). Therefore Weedon finds poststructuralism "a productive theory for feminism" (p. 40) since it enables feminists to "challenge the unified, apparently

ungendered individual of liberalism” which “masks structures of male privilege and domination” (p. 41). Jackson understands Weedon’s (1987) poststructuralist theory of subjectivity as “a way to conceptualize multiple subject positions within varied discourses, a way to give voice to constructed meaning and to rewrite personal experiences” (2001, p. 386). For Weedon, this “opens up subjectivity to change” (p. 32).

In a similar vein, St. Pierre (2000, p. 484) posited that

Feminism’s slogan that everything is political must be joined with the poststructural idea that “everything is dangerous.”... If everything is both political and dangerous, the new are ethically bound to pay attention to how we word the world. We must pay attention to language that ...rewards identity and punishes differences.

Therefore St. Pierre (2000) argues for an alliance of poststructuralism and feminism to combat the oppression of naming and categorization to women. One of the strengths of poststructuralist feminism is that “it continues to reinvent itself strategically, shifting and mutating given existing political agendas, power relations, and identity categories” (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 8). Moreover, poststructuralist feminism decenters hierarchical opposition and dualism in many forms, including gender, and thus is useful for feminism to move beyond the male-female dualism which is a construction of individuals and social categories central to some forms of feminism. Both poststructuralism and feminism question what is considered normative and accepted. Therefore the use of both creates a powerful way of re-envisioning normalized and valorized social discourses.

So the alliance of feminism and poststructuralism is embraced since they pursue “potentially complementary lines of analysis, both posing skeptical and deconstructive questions to normalizing practices and working to destabilize taken for granted truths-of gender subjectivity, of gender relations and relations of power, and so forth” (Lather, 1991; McNay, 1992; Sawicki, 1988). St. Pierre & Pillow (2000) argue that “Feminists and poststructuralists have worked together and separately during the last half of this century to facilitate structural failures in some of foundationalism’s most heinous formations – racism, patriarchy, homophobia, ageism, and so forth-the ruin out of which they now work” (p. 2). Therefore, poststructuralist feminism can be a productive theoretical tool for us to analyze gender issues in education.

However, the combination of poststructuralism and feminism is not without tension and controversy. The debate has been persistently heated concerning whether poststructuralist inquiry can actually be compatible with feminist educational research (e.g., Davies, 1997; Jones, 1997). One problem lies in the contradiction between the poststructuralist understanding of shifting decentered subjects and the feminist advocacy and activism that posits a concrete stable subject as the basis of its advocacy. Some feminists disavow the poststructural critique of the subject as fiction and even the announcement of “the death of the subject”, asserting that it was both bad for women and bad for politics because that it unsettles an already stable subject.

Another key concern is that poststructuralist feminism may be “more concerned with language and discourse than with working to remedy daily acts of discrimination for women” (Allan, 2010, p. 20). In this view, deconstructing language and discourse and its power to constitute subjects is not a legitimate form of action and activism. However,

though poststructuralism proposes a notion of subjectivity as construed through language and discourse, this does not necessarily mean that it is determined by language and discourse or that such notion does not include real concerns with the materiality of the subject. On the contrary, such a process “imparts a sense of agency, reflexivity, and contradiction lost in theories of the unitary self” (Jill Blackmore, 1999, p. 17, as cited in Allan, 2010, p. 21). Similarly, Mills (1997) posits that “engaging with discourse constitutes an interactional relation of power rather than an imposition of power” (p. 88). In an interactional relation of power, women can be active agents in their subjectivity construction process and can intervene on their own behalf through their choices and negotiation of language and discourse.

For these reasons though Poststructuralist feminism is criticized for its lack of intentionality or agency, it has been argued by some feminist researchers such as Munro (1998) and St. Pierre (2000) that poststructuralist feminism offers more possibilities for conceiving of the subject, resistance and agency in more complex and powerful ways than other kinds of feminism. For these reasons the combination has been fruitful and feminists and educational researchers understand it to signal both possibilities and inevitable dangers (Francis & Skelton, 2001, as cited in McLeod, 2008). By the same token St. Pierre asserts that “the relationship of the two bodies of thought and practice is not inimical but invigorating and fruitful” (2000, p. 477). McLeod (2008) clarifies that since the 1990s discussions have become more commonly focused on debates and tensions within a particular area of poststructuralist feminist inquiry and where it is heading, rather than debates about what poststructuralist feminism is and whether such an alliance is fruitful.

Key Notions of Poststructuralist Feminism

Language and discourse

Language is the way we think, speak and interpret the world (Weedon, 1987). It is a key notion of poststructuralist feminism since it is the common factor in the “analysis of social organizations, social meaning, power, and individual consciousness” (Weedon, 1987, p.21). Language is the source of tension, a constant power struggle over the individual, and it is socially constructed so it must be viewed in light of competing social, cultural, and historical discourses (Weedon, 1987). Language as a reflection of larger social and cultural context means that no language can transcend history and social relations of power (Britzman, 1991). Therefore it is imperative for poststructuralist feminist researchers to focus their attention on language and discourse.

Foucault (1972) defines discourse as “a body of anonymous historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function” (p. 171). He notes that discourses become powerful when they are sanctioned by institutions. Discourse is also understood as the “particular language social groups use to interpret events and to make sense of self and the other” (Britzman, 1994, p.73) and “a structuring principle of society, in social institutions, modes of thought and individual subjectivity” (Weedon, 1987, p. 21). In a word, discourse is one where social organizations and institutions compete to give their version of truth and meaning to individual (Weedon, 1987), so is a site where political, cultural, economical and ideological forces are vying for power and legitimacy.

St. Pierre (2000) explained discourse in the Foucaultian sense as “never just linguistic since it organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world” (p. 485). Therefore, discourses are both constitutive of and by the subjects as they speak or act (Barrett, 2005). In this sense, discourse is not fixed and static, but is dynamic and constantly shifting and reformulating. Through complex forces of legitimating and sanctioning, discourse makes some subject positions more prominent and accessible than others and decide “whose social constructions are valid and whose are erroneous and unimportant” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 284).

The effects of discourse are so pervasive that they are usually taken for granted. “Once a discourse becomes ‘normal’ and ‘natural’, it is difficult to think and act outside it” (St. Pierre, 2000). Because of this, poststructuralist feminist understanding of discourse focuses on how discourse both constructs and constrains subjectivity. Therefore we need to examine and disrupt the dominant discourses and see what has been silenced and erased because of the normalized dominance of some discourses.

Subject and Subjectivity

The conception of subject and subjectivity are central to poststructuralist theory (Jones, 1997; St Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1987) and they mark “a crucial break with humanistic conceptions of the individual” (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). Poststructuralism denies the humanist notion of a unitary, fixed and coherent self that has a stable and essential core that transcends history and culture. Instead, their theories of subjectivity propose the self as a site of disunity and conflict that is always in process and socially constructed within power relations and by powerful discourses (Britzman, 1994; Lather,

1991; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1987). Subjectivity has been defined in different ways. According to Weedon, subjectivity refers to “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relations to the world” (1987, p. 32). Moreover, subjectivity is the battle site of the self and subject positions are the social identities that can be taken up or inhabited by individuals. For these reasons subjectivity is “precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (p. 32).

Also, discourse plays a key role in the subjectivity construction process. Weedon argues that discourse is the place “where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed” (1987, p. 21). Subjectivity is produced in “a whole range of discursive practices-economic, social, and political-the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power” (Weedon, 1987, p. 21). Throughout such a process various discourses either reinforce or compete with each other, in the same process “subject positions are produced and subjectivity is continually revised and reconstituted as discourses are contested, disrupted, and/or coalesce” (Allan, 2010, p.15). As a result of the conflicting discourses, we constantly construct multiple subjectivities which are even contradictory and fragmented.

The concept of subjectivity is significant for educational researchers because it emphasizes the social, cultural and historical construction of human subjects, thus offering new productive tools to understand gendered issues in educational practices in their specific historical and cultural contexts. Moreover, the site of the self is subjected to many authoritative discourses and it is because of this that this same site of self-struggle is a space of resistance and agency (Larson & Phillips, 2005; Lather, 1991; McNay,

1992; Munro, 1998), so “understandings of subjectivity are inextricably linked to conceptualizations of agency and strategies for social change” (Allan, 2010, p. 19), and creating ways of achieving equality and equity in education.

Resistance and agency

Poststructuralist feminists understand human subjects as non-unitary and fragmented, constructing itself by taking up available discourses and cultural practices and, at the same time, subjected and forced into subjectivity by those same discourses and practices (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 502), and this provides us new space to imagine such concepts like agency and resistance. Agency, according to St. Pierre (2000), refers to an ability that a subject has to “decode and recode its identity within discursive formation and practice” (p. 504). Munro offers similar understanding, holding that agency primarily lies in “the ongoing and continual process of constructing a self” (1998, p. 15). Agency does not lie outside discourse, but in disrupting dominant discourse, and taking up new unfamiliar ones (Butler, 1993). Poststructuralist feminism conceives resistance as “always possible” and “inevitable in power relations” (St. Pierre, p. 492). According to St. Pierre, resistance is not a single, unifying concept, rather, “there is a multiplicity of resistances” (p. 492), which explicitly connects to the feminist mission of gaining gender equity. Britzman (1995) argues that “resistance is not outside of the subject of knowledge or the knowledge of subjects, but rather as constitutive of knowledge and its subject” (p. 154). Moreover, resistance is “generally local, unpredictable, and constant” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 492), so in this framework, theorists argue that “the struggle of women are local and specific rather than totalizing” and “resistance and freedom are daily, ongoing practices” (ibid, p. 493), thus are more identifiable and less abstract.

Educational Research Using Poststructuralist Feminism

Since the 1990s educational research from a poststructuralist feminist lens has proliferated. This includes overviews of poststructuralist feminism in education (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1987), methodological texts written under its aegis (for example, Lather, 1991, 2007; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000), and empirical studies guided by this theoretical framework and its key notions: subjectivity, discourse, power, resistance, agency and femininities/masculinities. A major focus of these empirical studies is on women educators and students, including studies of preservice teachers (Britzman, 1992), in-service teachers (Munro, 1998), girl students (Adams & Bettis, 2003; Walkerdine, 1990), and academic women (Talbert, 2000). Informed by the poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity as fluid, multiple, and constructed in discursive practices, these studies focus on how their identities and subjectivities have been constrained and essentialized by the dominant discourses and how they construct, negotiate and reconstruct their identities and subjectivities and create resistance and power through taking up different subject positions that become available within specific discourses and contexts. These studies are significant because they shed new light on how to expand space for women to re-invent themselves and create new meanings of being female teachers and students, and produce powerful insights about gendered discourses that may potentially transform educational practices.

For example, Weiler (1997) uses a poststructural framework to reflect on the historiography of her recent study of women teachers in rural California, and summarizes some of the most salient issues currently under debate among feminist scholars, such as the nature of knowledge, the influence of language in the social construction of gender,

and the importance of an awareness of subjectivity and context in the production of historical evidence. She reminds us of the importance of considering the conditions under which testimony is given, both in terms of the dominant issues of the day, and the relationship between speaker and audience. Therefore she pinpoints the importance of addressing the issues of the nature of evidence and representation of social reality for educational researchers.

Patti Lather has long been concerned with poststructuralist feminist theorizing and methodological work in education. She has explored a series of notions in her work such as praxis, validity, reflexivity and self-reflexivity and representation (for example, Lather, 1991, 1993, 2007). In her recent book *Getting Lost: Feminist Efforts Towards a Double(d) Science* (2007), she plays with the title of her earlier work in feminist pedagogy, *Getting Smart* (1991) and proposes instead “getting lost” as both a methodology and a mode of representation” (p. 11). She explores a philosophy of inquiry grounded in not knowing through analyzing the loss and being lost in her practice of research. She discusses the “double(d) practices that would allow us to neither assume transparent narrative nor override participant meaning frame” (p. 39). This work proceeds from the assumption there is always an unavoidable failure of trying to tell other people’s stories. Because of this “getting lost” as a methodology requires self-critique and self-reflexivity from the researchers. Lather’s statements are illuminating for us in terms of what it means to do poststructuralist feminist and empirical research, the inevitable limits of what we can know and represent, and how researchers hold ethically accountable to the complexities of conducting research for social justice.

Middleton's *Educating feminists: Life histories and pedagogy* (1993) is another example of conducting feminist research on educational issues, in this case women teachers' life history. In the book Sue Middleton attempts to integrate "biography, history and social structure" in an exploration of the relationship between feminist teachers' life histories, the historical context in which they move, and the broader patterns of power relations in which they are situated. Moreover, Middleton is concerned with discourse in exploring the lives of women teachers and students and to develop a feminist pedagogy, and challenge and decenter our taken-for-granted assumptions about women teachers. Her book is thus powerful in providing spaces for particular articulations of women's voice and subjectivity and documenting the rich possibilities of feminist teaching.

To sum up, educational research informed by poststructuralist feminism is oriented towards disrupting and deconstructing what appears as normal and legitimate, such as standard classroom practices and conventional gendered subjectivity, and creating new space and possibilities of reinscribing school practices and gendered identities in educational settings. The present study will take on a similar task, exploring what new meanings my participants can add to being an academic woman in China.

Life History Research

Life history is "one of the earliest and most popular narrative genres to be developed by ethnographers" (Tedlock, 2000, p. 459). It is a term that means different things to many people and is defined in a variety of ways (Tierney, 2000). Sparkes (1994a) defines life history as "an umbrella term that includes as sources of data, autobiographies, personal documents, human documents, life records, case histories, interviews, life stories, etc" (p. 110).

Early uses of life history methodology appeared in Thomas and Znaniecki's publication of *the Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918-1920) and Paul Radin's *Crashing Thunder* (1920) (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Goodson & Sikes (2001) argue that life histories in anthropology and sociology were numerous during the 1920s and 1930s, influenced by the "Chicago School", and then its influence as a social science tool waned after the World War II. But since the early 1980s with the growing awareness of the value of qualitative research methodology, life history has enjoyed a renaissance in sociology (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), and is particularly popular with educational researchers, feminists and queer theorists amongst others (Tierney, 2000). One important reason is that life history research is designed to "locate the teacher's own life, story alongside a broader contextual analysis" (Goodson, 1992, p. 6). It is the interaction between personal life and wider social cultural context that makes life history a useful tool for educational research.

In its early stages life history was undertaken in the interpretivist paradigm and is widely used in qualitative and feminist research to research on marginalized population in terms of race, class and gender (Sykes, 2001). In the late 1980s life history began to be used in educational research, mainly dealing with the issue of preservice teachers (Sikes & Everington, 2001; Sikes & Tronya, 1991), gay, lesbian and bisexual teachers (Sparkes, 1994a, 1994b; Squires & Sparkes, 1996; Sykes, 2001), and women teachers (Casey, 1993; Middleton, 1993; Munro, 1998; Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985). While adopting different theoretical perspectives, these studies explore how these particular groups of teachers who were marginalized in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality actively construct their identity and empower themselves. For this reason Munro argues that

‘women’s narratives become a generative space for understanding not only the complexity of women’s lives but how women construct a gendered self through narrative’ (1998, p. 5). Narratives, then, are a vehicle through which women develop subjectivities.

Assuming a poststructuralist feminist stance, Munro (1998) argues that the epistemological assumption of life history is that knowledge is situated and socially and intersubjectively constructed. She further points out its transformative and critical potential, arguing that “by highlighting the storied nature of knowledge, narrative has been critical in problematizing modern forms of knowledge that seem natural but, in fact, are contingent on sociohistorical constructs of power” (p. 5). Therefore life history methodology can serve the poststructuralist feminist work of disruption and deconstruction. It is crucial to distinguish life history from life story, to the effect that “an analysis of the social, historical, political and economic contexts of a life history by the researcher is what turns a life story into a life history” (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 125). So qualitative researchers have long recognized and approached life histories as socially constructed (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Moreover, Citeroni (2006) points out the significance of the researcher in the data-gathering and meaning-making process, contending that “life histories are co-constructed stories.” In this view, the researcher and the narrator “together create a narrative account centered on particular themes” (p. 197). In this sense contextualization and collaboration are the key elements of doing life history research.

However, debates continue concerning the methodological and ethical issues of life history. The crisis of representation and legitimization (Denzin, 1994) have been

persistent in contemporary qualitative research paradigms and life history research is no exception. Life history languished under modernism because it “persistently failed the ‘objective tests’ (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 14). And the condition of ‘postmodernity’ provides new dilemmas and new directions for life history. Under postmodern conditions, “assumptions of linearity of chronological timelines and storylines are challenged in favor of more multiple, disrupted notion of subjectivity”, and the focus of discourse has been on “the role of language in constructing identities in producing textual representations” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 15), and life history can fulfill these missions. Also, Citeroni (2006) contends that “Life histories are not objective in the sense of neutral, uninterested, purely factual accounts of a person’s life. Rather, they are rich and complicated tapestries of experience, woven with meaning and emotion” (p. 198). Therefore, the features that some identify as past “weaknesses” of life history some now perceive as its strength (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Munro, 1998).

Life history methodology also brings the need to reconsider the meaning of truth and how to reach “truth” to the fore. Munro admits that “narrative does not provide a better way to locate truth”, but instead argues that “neat, chronological accounts of women’s lives” is “an act of betrayal, a distortion, a continued form of ‘fitting’ women’s lives into the fictions, categories and cultural norms of patriarchy” (1998, p. 12). Fine (1994) also warns that “the search for the complete and coherent is delusion; we produce a snapshot of transgressions in process when we write up life history work” (p. 72). And there are difficult moments in the research process when an informant narrates his or her life in search for coherence or romanticization while the researcher, positioned in a different paradigm, desires for “rejection of the unitary subject for a more complex,

multiple and contradictory notion of subjectivity” (Munro, 1998, p. 35), and when the researcher makes “a dangerous move” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001) from life stories to life histories which involves accounting for historical social contexts.

There are no easy solutions to these issues and questions raised in the messy work of studying lives. Munro (1998) holds that the questions of representation, self-reflexivity, and subjectivity in the collaborative process are ongoing questions. She also argues that it is dubious if degree of reflexivity or subjectivity, or mode of representation can provide “better” criteria for establishing “truth” since such acts still trap us within an essentialist notion of truth. Then, through a poststructuralist feminist lens, I would argue that the significance of life history research doesn’t lie in its endeavor of establishing truth. Rather, it lies in the possibility of deepening our understanding of the multiple ways we create, negotiate, and make sense of the power relations in our lives. And this can well serve the poststructuralist feminists’ mission of envisioning new spaces—particularly in the process of knowledge construction--to strive for women’s equality.

Conclusion

A poststructuralist feminist approach to life history research allows me to explore the process in which my participants construct their subjectivities and how they make meanings of being an academic woman out of their daily lives. It foregrounds the role of discourse in subjectivity and meaning making and rejects the notion that life stories are transparent vehicles for representing the real. My questions are: What are the discourses to which academic women in China are subjected? How do women respond and react to various historical, cultural and social discourses? How do they create resistance and

agency in their process of subjectivity construction? For what reasons do they take up certain subject positions and reject others that are available to them? I hope this study can help me better understand these questions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study is designed for the purpose of conducting basic research within the qualitative paradigm (Patton, 2002). Munro (1998) chose life history methodology as an appropriate design for her study given that life history can illuminate gender relations and addresses feminist concerns that research should be “situated contextually”, “intersubjective”, “collaborative and reciprocal” (p. 9). Convinced of these strengths, I will utilize a life history methodology similar to Munro’s to understand and critique the three Chinese women academics’ subjectivity and agency.

Data Collection

I collected the data for the research during summer 2010, between May and August. I conducted purposeful sampling for the study and relied on word of mouth to form a sample of convenience (Patton, 2002). This sampling method fits my research purpose because “purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 230) and is common within a life history research (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

Because of my intention to collect intensive and in-depth data from each participant, I chose three women academics to be my participants. My original criteria for

choosing my participants are that they have taught for at least five years, have taught for varies time spans in different subject areas, and have various experiences of being an academic woman. Through my friends' references, I finally chose Mei, Jie and Linda (pseudonyms) as my participants. Born in 1958, Mei has been an educator for over three decades, beginning her teaching career as a substitute elementary teacher in a rural school. She received her Ph.D. degree in 1992 and then began to teach biology in a university in South China. Since then she have accomplished a lot in her career as a woman academic. I was intrigued by Mei's experiences, especially how she switched from a substitute teacher in a rural school to a prestigious professor in her field in China. I was especially intrigued by the decision that she chose to take a Ph.D. degree in 1989, a decision that few Chinese, especially women, would take at that time since it would not yield financial gains. Especially, I was curious about how she negotiated various conflicting discourses in her life and shaped her life through narratives.

Jie was born in 1971 and has taught English in higher education for 16 years. She regards herself as "an experienced university teacher". Jie was not content with being "a sheer teaching worker", and is pursuing a Ph.D. program in education at the present time. Jie's experiences echoes my own experiences, and this enticed me to choose her as my participant. By listening to her life stories, I believed that I could better understand mine. Linda is of similar age as Jie, however, she first entered higher education as an administrator in 1992. Then she switched to become a faculty member of music science in 2001. Linda's special life experience enticed me to choose her as one of my participants. I was curious how she would make out the meaning of being a woman

administrator and a woman academic in China, what caused her to make such a switch, and how such a switch would affect her construction of her subjectivity.

Denzin (1970, as cited in Munro, 1998) suggests that the chief feature of the life history is the prolonged interview, so I conducted three interviews with each participant. During the interviews I asked participants both open-ended questions and more focused life history questions (see Appendix B). I retained the nondirected nature of life history interview while at the same time used the questions in my interview protocol as a guideline to solicit more data from my interviewees. Seidman (2006) argues that “the open-ended, in-depth inquiry is best carried out in a structure that allows both the participant and the interviewer to maintain a sense of the focus of each interview in the series” (Seidman, 2006, p. 19). Therefore, during the first interview I planned to focus my questions on my participants’ childhood memories, including their family life and educational experiences. The second interview questions were designed to revolve around their work experiences. Since all three women academics have never changed their careers, my second interview with each of them was planned to focus exclusively on their work experiences at their universities. In the last round of interviews, I planned to ask my participants to reflect on their life stories and on the influence of gender on their life histories. After I entered the field and began data collection process, I interviewed Mei and Linda according to the plan and changed my original plan when I interviewed Jie. Since Jie answered my questions in a concise and conclusive way, I adjusted the plan. In the first interview I asked all the questions of her. For the following interviews I used questions generated from the previous interviews.

These interviews were audio-recorded. Each interview lasted for a length of one hour and took place at a location of my participants' choice. Mei invited me to come to her office at 9 in the morning to interview her, so all my interviews with her occurred in her office, a simple and tidy room with a glass door. Both Jie and Linda invited me to come to their homes for interviews. The interviews were conducted in Chinese. At the end of the interviews, I asked each participant to select a pseudonym so as to protect their identity.

The purpose of the study is to understand and critique how these women academics' subjectivities are constructed within and against various social, historical and cultural discourses. To better fulfill my research purpose, I also had informal talks with them before and after the interview. I observed their classroom teaching so as to better understand their teaching life and to consider how their description of their experiences compared with an outsider's observation of those experiences. Moreover, I attended Jie's social gathering with her colleagues twice, which provided me more opportunities to observe her interactions with her colleagues. I also collected different forms of documentary data, including award certificate, photos, news reports, and other relevant artifacts. In order to understand how my own subjectivity is involved throughout the research process, I kept a reflection journal and constantly reflected on my research process. Furthermore, I also interviewed my participants' colleagues, friends and students so that I could get additional information to help me deepen my understanding of my participants' narratives, think about discourses evident in my participants' stories, and bring up new questions for interviewing.

Data Analysis

Though this study is informed by a poststructuralist paradigm, I primarily followed the conventional qualitative data analysis procedures, which include coding, identifying themes, and analysis. However, I am aware that how I conceptualize my study and what claims I believe I can make from these methods are very different from conducting research through an interpretivist lens intended to understand a given life history. My understanding of truth and knowledge prompts me to collect and analyze my data with a purpose of raising doubt rather than locating truth, and my focus is to seek contradiction rather than seek coherence, so I followed Munro's (1998) practice that we need to attend to the silences as well as what is said, that we need to attend to how the story is told as well as what is told or not told, and to attend to the tensions and contradictions rather than succumb to the temptations to gloss over these in our desire for 'the' story. (p. 13)

I began data analysis with transcribing each participant's interviews. After transcribing the interviews I gave the transcription to them either by email or in hard copy to allow them to conduct a member check both to elicit further questions and honor participants' right to reflect on their narratives. I listened to the interviews and read the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the data and deepen my understanding. I coded my data and identified themes, but I was aware that coding can become a limiting act of categorization, which poststructuralism aims to disrupt. So I came back to my data multiple times, not to confirm my coding and seek coherence, but to challenge my previous coding and make it tentative, open and contested. Such acts allowed me to spot contradictions and discrepancies for my further critiques. At the same time, I bore in mind the particularities of doing poststructuralist feminist research, and recognized that

the life histories of my participants are never static but fragmented and full of tensions and contradictions. I incorporated my own reflection as an important part of my data analysis process. Only when I honestly revealed my own subjectivities and how my own subjectivities interacted with those of my participants could I understand and critique my participants' subjectivities as honestly as possible. As Munro (1998) believes, life history researcher's self-reflection of their relationships and collaboration can be the "epistemological base" for interpretation of data (p. 11).

My analysis of the data included three steps: narrating my participants' life histories, seeking some understanding of their subjectivity construction process, and critiquing and deconstructing their subjectivity construction process. Deconstruction as an analytical tool aims at how language creates some meanings and suppresses other meanings. Derrida (1974, 1967) points out that language works not because there is an *identity* between a sign and a thing, not because of presence, but because there is a *difference*, an absence (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000). Therefore Derrida uses deconstruction to analyze how discursive practices create some meaning while at the same time suppress other meaning, with a focus on what is not said, silences, gaps, contradictions, ambiguity, disruptions. To be specific for the process of qualitative inquiry, Mazzei regards silence in interviews and data as a "meaningful" data source for deconstruction and proposes that we consider silence "not as a lack, an absence, or negation, but rather as an important and even vital aspect of the fabric of discourse" (p. xii). Therefore, I focused on the dominant discourses that are visible in the women academics' narratives, paying special attention to silences and contradictions in their narratives.

Role of Researcher

The notions of collaboration and voice have been central to life history research and to most contemporary qualitative research (Cary, 1999). I am fully aware of the problematic nature of voice and issues of representation within life history work (Sparkes, 1994a). I have been troubled with the legitimization of voices in narrative research ever since I was introduced to this methodology. How I as a researcher deal with voices of researcher and the researched and power relations between them becomes not only an issue of validity and reliability, but more an ethical consideration and an unshakable responsibility of researchers. It is imperative for me to consider the connections and discrepancies between the participants' life story as told, the life that it concerns as lived 'reality', and written accounts of life history research. I recognize and accept that a life history is nothing more than a "re-presentation" (Britzman, 1991) of the life it concerns and it is never possible to capture through language and faithfully recreate experience totally. I equally recognize and accept that there are multiple realities, and various ways of telling the 'same' story. And this lies at the heart of the events termed the 'crises of representation and legitimatization' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 9; Denzin, 1997, p. 4, as cited in Sikes & Everington, 2001). These considerations continue to reflect foundational epistemological and methodological debates in the academy that have weighty implications for how and what knowledge is created.

To address this crisis, first and foremost, I need to clarify my positionality as a researcher. Luke (1996, as cited in Cary, 1999) states that positionality is the most important thing to highlight since "the importance of 'positionality' of voice and experience is paramount" in feminist pedagogy and research (p. 290). This is important

because feminist scholars have sought to develop alternative epistemologies that emphasizing “situated knowledges,” arguing that knowledge is produced positionally (Haraway, 1988), therefore researchers’ positionality plays a central role in the research process and in the final products. For this reason, I need to clearly define my positionality as researcher, and is vigilant not to allow my positionality to oppress my participants. I must be well aware of how my own experiences and my own subjectivity will be involved and how they affect my endeavors of telling my participants’ stories and experiences.

I am a Chinese woman and used to be an academic and work in a university for a decade. It is contended that the process of understanding women’s life is one of “empathy, identification, and ultimately separation” (Munro, 1998, p. 129), therefore I am convinced that as a researcher whose experiences are similar to the researched, I can find connection and identification with my participants. I believe my own experiences would definitely help me better understand my participants’ stories and the meanings they give to their lives as women academics. Moreover, I quenched the desire for totalization and romantization, resisted searching for “authentic voice” and disrupted the notion of “fully knowable subject”. Instead of focusing on “non-contradictory truth that is beneficial to society” (Serres, 1995, as cited in Cary, 1999, p. 421), I would embrace “the difficult story” (Lather, 1998, as cited in Cary, 1999) and the unexpected story (Cary, 1999).

However, as Gorelick (1992, as cited in Sparkes, 1994a) notes,

just 'giving voice' is not enough because although the telling of life histories may describe the world as perceived by the person involved, it may also confine them within these perception and so provide them with little that they do not already know. (p. 108)

Therefore, while honoring my participants' voices, I cannot forget my important mission of academically theorizing their narratives, thus inserting my own voice into the analysis process. This gave rise to the dilemma of representation and authorship in which I was inevitably caught. I need to search for a right balance between "the responsibilities of authorship and my authority to write about" (Sparkes, 1994a). Richardson (1990) advises us that there is no one 'right' answer to this dilemma. Despite this, Richardson reminds us that writing is a site of moral responsibility and that "we can choose to write so that the voice of those we write about is respected, strong and true" (1990, p. 38). Moreover, Sparkes (2002) understands Richardson's arguments that "while all knowledge is partial, embodied and historically and culturally situated, this does not mean that there is no knowledge, or that situated knowledge is bad" (p. 23). Goodson (1975, as cited in Munro, 1998) argues that there is nothing inherently liberatory about life history research. Munro (1998) further argues that "all research is implicated in power relations, and life history research is no exception" (p.12).

In recognition of these dilemmas, my tentative solution was that, on one hand, I accepted and made clear to my readers the situatedness and partiality of life history that I recounted here and my re-presentation was only one of many other ways of representing their lives. On the other hand, I am keen aware that life history research is an intersubjective process of meaning making (Munro, 1998), which involves both my

participants' subjective selection of particular stories, the discourses that give birth to these stories and particular ways of telling the stories, and also my own subjective process of re-presenting, interpreting and critiquing the life histories based on my own personal experiences and knowledge. Therefore I was obligated to inform my readers why I chose to re-present the life history in this way and make my stance and position explicit to my readers (Clandinin & Connelly; Sikes, 2000, as cited in Sikes & Everington, 2001).

Also, I recognize the limitations of the practice of applying the Western theoretical framework to studying non-Western women (Teng, 1996), especially when the fact is that the concepts of identity and subjectivity are relatively new in China. I am aware of my own experiences of being a former Chinese woman academic. I was brought up in Chinese culture, then studied and in the United States. Therefore my analysis of my participants' life history narratives are both informed by my cultural upbringing in China and academic training in the United States, which underscores that my analysis is contradictory and limited. Though there is no easy solution to negotiating these multiple subject positions, my explicit presentation of my positionality to my readers can help them to better understand and critique my analysis.

Validity of the Study

Validity has long been considered an important factor to consider for conducting qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed four criteria for validity including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and further recommend a series of strategies to meet these criteria. These strategies include

prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, referential adequacy, peer debriefing, and member checks. These criteria and strategies have been widely used in qualitative research to test the validity of the research. Though I am doing a poststructuralist study, I remember Kvale's (1996) caveat that "content and purpose precedes methods" (p. 280). Therefore, informed by poststructuralist feminism, I employed some of the strategies I mentioned above, but I used them differently and in a way that suits my research purpose, that is, to critique truth rather than to locate truth, to provide tentative and open findings rather than final conclusion.

I had prolonged engagement with my participants, involving about four months of interaction with my participants in summer and the ensuing communication with them through telephone calls and emails. It is important for me to establish rapport with my participants in order to "learn the context, to minimize distortions and to build trust" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 307). The rich data yielded from my prolonged engagement with my participants also enabled me to spot the nuances and contradictions in the data.

I adopted the strategy of triangulation and collected different kinds of data including individual interviews, classroom observations, and documents and artifacts such as photos, research proposals, conference information, and news report; however, my purpose in using triangulation is not to verify truth, but to "establish as broad a context as possible for understanding the life histories" (Munro, 1998), and more importantly, to disrupt traditional notions of validity and how we establish rigor and credibility.

I adopted the strategy of conducting a member check. Before or after the second and third round of interviews I asked my participants to clarify some points that seemed ambiguous or ambivalent in our previous interviews. Also I gave a copy of the interview transcription to my participants for review, clarifications, and suggestions. My purpose of conducting member checks with my participants was not to establish or verify truth, but to verify I had recorded their stories as they had delivered them, to offer a gesture of respect to my participants, offer opportunities to explore contradictions with them, and to inspire additional self-reflective questions for me.

Patti Lather's (1993) methodological work has contributed to disrupting and expanding traditional understanding and uses of validity in qualitative inquiry. Lather argues that discussion of epistemological criteria of validity should be moved from taking them "as a relation of correspondence between thought and its object to the generation of counter-practices of authority grounded in the crisis of representation" (1993, p. 676), and imagines a checklist to use for ensuring transgressive validity that can help "in such an effort toward generative methodology" (p. 685). Lather reconceptualizes validity as "a dispersion, circulation, and proliferation of counter-practices of authority" (1993, p. 40) in which reflexivity, ethics and politics are integral, and concretizes transgressive validity into four framings of validity: simulacra /ironic validity, Lyotardian paralogy/neo-pragmatic validity, Derridean rigor/rhizomatic validity, and voluptuous validity/situated validity. These categories are not exhaustive, as inherent to transgressive validity is both the pursuit of new forms of rigor and fundamental critique of authorizing concepts.

This set of transgressive validity is often used by many contemporary qualitative researchers to address validity issues (for example, Fox, 2003; Lenzo, 1995, Newton,

2009). I applied Lather's (1993) transgressive validity checklist (see Appendix C) to the present research project. The checklist of transgressive validity enabled me to question/interrogate/challenge the authority of those relying on traditional view of validity (Lather, 1993) and created new space for "partiality, self-reflexivity, tension and difference" (Richardson, 1993).

Lather advocates to "construct(s) authority via practices of engagement and self-reflexivity" (1993, p. 686), which incites me to conduct self-reflexivity during my research process. I recognize that there are severe limits to my ability to "self-critique" (Lenzo, 1995), especially when there are so many of my selves involved and when I am so enthusiastic about my political and theoretical ideals (Newton, 2009). I kept a reflexive journal as a source of reflection and analysis of the inter-subjective research process. I recorded down my reflexive thoughts about my own subjectivity construction process and the methodological decisions I made. More importantly, I reflected on my dynamics with my participants and examine how my role as a researcher facilitated our collaboration.

To ensure transgressive validity, I also adhere to Lather's (1993) call to embody "a situated, partial, positioned, explicit tentativeness" (p. 686). Therefore, rather than establish authority through claiming the truth of my study, I conceive my findings as tentative, situated and partial, and open to new possibilities. I invited my readers to join me in my efforts of critiquing and deconstructing my participants' narratives.

One more important criteria of transgressive validity is to "bring(s) ethics and epistemology together" (Lather, 1993, p. 686). Therefore, in the last chapter I discuss my

consideration of ethics as a researcher and how it is integrated in my research process, since I am convinced that “my relationship in the field not only provides my primary source of data, but these relationships became the epistemological base from which any interpretations and knowledge claims originated” (Munro, 1998, p. 11). I also incorporated my own life history and how my understanding of my life history evolved throughout the research process “as a means of acknowledging the intersubjective nature of knowledge” (ibid.).

Conclusion

This research is about how three women academics in South China construct subjectivities and create agency. In this study I investigated three questions: 1) what discourses are visible in the three Chinese women academics’ life history narratives? 2) How do they construct their subjectivity against and within these various discourses? 3) What are the implications of the study on the poststructuralist understanding of agency and resistance? Data for this research are from four main sources: interview transcripts, fieldnotes, documents and my own reflexive journals. I conducted three in-depth interviews with each of the three women academics in China and additional interviews with their friends, colleagues and students. I then transcribed and translated them from Chinese to English. I conducted three observations of the three women’s class activities and three social gatherings. I also collected relevant documents about the three women academics, both from them and from the internet, including their award certificates, resumes, research project proposals, conference information, academic papers that they have published, and news reports about them. These different sources of data enable me to better understand and critique my participants’ life histories.

My reflexive journal involves my constant contemplation about my present research endeavor, thus an indispensable source of data for tracking and understanding the intersubjective nature of the study. The data were read multiple times and then analyzed, mainly using the tool of deconstruction, so as to contemplate “the danger of what is powerful and useful” (Lather, 1992, p. 120) and “keep things in process, to disrupt, to keep the system in play, to set up procedures to continually demystify the realities we create, and to fight the tendency for our categories to congeal” (Caputo, 1987, as cited in Lather, 1992, p. 120).

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN ACADEMICS' LIFE HISTORIES

In this chapter I present the life histories of Mei, Jie, and Linda. The purpose for my recounting their life histories is to invite my readers to join me in my endeavors of first understanding their experiences as they describe them, then, to critique, contextualize and deconstruct their life history narratives from a poststructuralist feminist lens. Although from this perspective my participants' stories are nothing more than "frozen moments" (Britzman, 1991), a kind of truth situated in those moments, these moments are also powerful and "unrepeatable public moments" (ibid.) that reveal how discourses play or are played at the site of my participants' subjectivity.

In this chapter I mainly retell my participants' life histories, and my analysis and deconstruction of their life histories will be the focus of the next chapter. I'm aware that my voice is inevitably intertwined with those of my participants, so my retelling can only be counted as an act of "re-presentation" and thus is always "partial telling" (Britzman, 1991), and is strongly influenced by my own epistemological stance and political agenda. Therefore, I embrace the fragmented and contradictory nature of their narratives, and bear in mind that subjectivity is always complex, ambiguous, contradictory, fragmented, and

fluid. I am cognizant of the fact that “all stories are partial, the teller always ‘in flux’, and that the tales we tell are never mere descriptions” (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Lather, 1991; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Moreover, I resisted telling their stories in a linear, neat and chronological order since in so doing I am imposing another form of normalization, which poststructuralist researchers endeavor to disrupt and deconstruct (St. Pierre, 2000). Rather, I chose to organize their narratives to reflect their narrative priorities. Also, I chose to present both the original data pieces and my translation here, with a purpose of enabling my readers, especially readers who understand Chinese, to detect the meaning that might be lost or changed and the nuances that might be neglected through my act of translation and deconstruct the delicacy of their language. This choice in format also helps capture my own subject position as a Chinese woman educated in the United States.

In this chapter, each narrative will be presented individually, following each participant’s priorities and emphasis, yet the reader will note some similarities across narratives. For example, each of them used simple and ordinary language; each narrated their excellent performance at school and describes themselves as working hard in their work; each academic described at some point the importance of teaching and research to their careers; and each described aspects of academic work in terms of mothering. For each participant, I combined data from multiple interviews conducted in May through August in 2010 to narrate their life histories and to emphasize the issues they conveyed that are significant to them. The majority of the data I used to construct these narratives emerges from interviews, but some are also garnered from, or triangulated from teaching documents, informal conversations with their friends or students, artifacts, etc. Among the three participants Mei, Jie and Linda, Mei gave me the most detailed and exhaustive

data. This is partly due to her personality of being helpful and verbally articulate, and it has something to do with her unique and rich life experiences as well. Among my three participants she has been an academic for the longest time. Therefore my representation of her narrative is the most extensive as well.

Life History Narrative 1: Mei

“Being a university teacher is quite sacred”

I feel my personal life experience is generally quite smooth, for example, my profession is my interest, and it is a good fit of my personality. My job has been quite challenging, but I still have room for growth. And I enjoy many benefits from the interactions with many people during my career. In the mean time I am an educator to the students. Therefore, I have thought that I am very fortunate to have a job not only fits my personality but also benefits the society. I believe that this is quite fortunate for any individual person. At the same time I have a happy family. My daughter has grown up to be quite successful in her own life. I am enjoying what I have been doing. Biology is my favorite subject in teaching. The working environment in the university has been very pleasant. I am completely devoted to my career in education. This is my general idea.

我这个人人生经历，应该总的来讲还是比较顺利的。我觉得比较顺利的，比如说，嗯，从事的工作，从事的职业，应该说，也是我自己比较喜，喜好的。而且也又符合我的个性，嗯，有一定的挑战，但是相对应的又有一定的自己的自由空间，而且也可以发挥这种人际间的互动，同时又培养了这个人才。所以这一点我就觉得很幸运。就是我个人的个性和国家的教育事业所需要的经验应该是刚好相吻合

的。这对一个人来讲是很万幸的。同时也家庭呀，女儿的成长呀，总的来讲应该还是比较顺利的。如果就我的人生经历来讲，我觉得还是很喜爱这个专业吧。很喜爱我这个生物学专业，也喜爱这个教师职业，也很喜爱在高等院校从事教育事业。

When asked to describe her life experiences, Mei summarized her life with these words. Some key themes surface in her narrative, including profession, interactions, educating students, family, specialization, and being an academic. Actually, the recurrent nature of these themes in our interviews suggests their value and importance to Mei. The above vignette sets the tone that Mei depicted a positive picture of her life, and this tone pervades her narratives of her life history, especially in her narratives of her achievements in her life despite various hardships she has sustained. In her narratives Mei separates her career life from her personal life. Central to Mei's story is her commitment to teaching and research. She recalled fondly her persistent efforts to improve her teaching and research abilities. Specifically, she endorsed women academics' pursuit of career advancement even through sacrificing their domestic roles, and articulated her disapproval of some of her women colleagues' prioritization of family over career. How Mei narrated the conflicting gender norms is what I now turn to.

“No one knew this Ph.D. is so valuable today”

Mei described her personality as someone who likes “accepting new things, thinking and learning”. Multiple times in our interviews Mei reiterated such personality traits and narrated her efforts to learn new things, to think and reflect on her life and keep learning and moving forward. Though her narratives appear spontaneous in response to

my questions, I believe that she had some practice narrating her life based on her continuous contemplations on her past life experiences, which she admitted as well. Mei further attributed her professional accomplishments to these personality traits.

Mei went to university in 1977 when China restored National College Entrance Exams after ten years' suspension of college enrollment because of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During the Cultural Revolution she was sent to work in the rural areas in order to answer Chairman Mao's call for intellectual youths to be re-educated in the rural areas. She had a strong desire to attend the university not only because she wanted to leave the countryside but no one in her extended family had graduated from college. So she "worked hard" and was admitted to a normal university in Hunan Province, and had excellent academic records. After graduation, she began to work as a teaching assistant in a normal college in a city in Hunan Province.

Later Mei went to a normal university to take a master degree program in biology. Before graduation, her advisor, who was late in his career then, climbed up to her dormitory on the sixth floor and asked her to be his Ph.D. student. Mei was "greatly touched" and "gladly accepted the offer". But since she had promised the university where she had worked that she would return after graduation, she attended the Ph.D. admission exams secretly. Finally she entered the Ph.D. program in 1989 after significant negotiations with the university in Hunan. Looking back at this experience, Mei recalled,

It was really not easy for me to accomplish my doctoral program. But I did very well during my doctoral studies. After I completed my doctoral degree, my advisor asked

me to work at the university. I accepted the offer without a second thought. Looking back at my life as a student, I felt that I was very hard-working and diligent. I knew that I was not young anymore and I got a kid; especially I was living alone without my family around me, I had to work hard for all the support and encouragement from my husband.

所以这个读书也是很不容易的。当初还读得可以吧，一读完导师就把我留下来。留下来我二话也没讲，留下就留下了。大概就是这个情况。所以我读书，整个来讲我觉得我还是很认真的，很勤奋的。反正我也想过我年纪也大了，又生了孩子……所以，你又愿意学习，自己又勤奋，你想我小孩都不在身边了，老公又那么鼓励我，要好好读，对不对？

It was not common for a married woman to leave home for graduate studies at that time in China. It seemed that this motivated Mei to be “hard-working” and “diligent”. Mei recounted that she took her Ph.D. at a time when learning was regarded as valueless in China, in her word, “no one studies” in higher education at all, much less studying for a Ph.D. According to Mei, among the 180 master graduates in her university in that academic year, only two chose to move on to a Ph.D. program, and she was one of the two. Mei cited a popular saying at that time, “as foolish as a teacher and as stupid as a Ph.D.” By using this language, Mei suggested that intellectual work and pursuit for knowledge were seriously devalued and even ridiculed at that time. It is true that in China in the 1980s because of the newly implemented reform policy and the transition from a planned economy to a market economy, some businessmen made a fortune though they received little education. “Money worship” became a trend. A popular saying at that time is that “the scientists don’t earn as much as the peddlers, and the surgeons don’t earn as

much as the butchers”. For this reason knowledge was devalued and people chose to go into business world rather than pursuing academic degrees and research (Wang & Xu, 2009). Without a doubt it took Mei great courage and audacity to choose to do her Ph.D. against such a social backdrop.

This trend went out then after Deng Xiaoping put forward the theory that “science and technology is the first productive force” and “we should respect knowledge and respect intellectual talents” in 1988. The ensuing higher education reform converted the mode of China’s higher education from elite to mass education, and set much tighter requirements for university professors. A Ph.D. became a prerequisite to be recruited to become an academic person. As a result, Mei’s colleagues often joked with her about her foresight, and Mei responded, “no one knew this Ph.D. is so valuable today.”

“I like to have new goals and new pursuits in my work”

Mei explained in detail why she chose to become an academic. First, she recounted that several of her teachers had profound influence on her understanding of teachers’ role and teachers’ responsibility. From these teachers she learned to be tough, to plan and work systematically, and to develop her leadership and communicative skills with her classmates. She regarded herself a great helper for her teacher and paid visits to her classmates’ home with her teacher and helped observe her classmates for her teacher. I understand that this experience undoubtedly developed her leadership ability. She recalled that,

I had two female teachers in the elementary school. Both female teachers had the admirable quality of resilience, elasticity, and pursuit. I also admired these two

teachers very much as the others. They both possessed their personal style and special charisma. They were good-looking and had pleasant disposition. They were my role models. And there were male teachers then. Then male teachers were open-minded for handling daily work. That's also very pleasing, isn't it?

小学碰到的是两个女老师。女老师有女老师的那种坚韧，那种韧性，那种追求。加上这两个女老师我又很羡慕她们。有个人风格和独特的魅力，长得也很漂亮，有自己的气质，我很追求这种气质。完了这个男老师，他是男的。那男的有男的那种宽容，大度，那种处理事情的眼界。又不一样。对吧？

Because Mei admired the disposition and talent of both her male and female teachers, it seems that she “followed their teaching styles and personality” in her own teaching career. For example, Mei made persistent efforts to improve her capability of being a woman academic, such as keeping learning so as to catch up with the latest development in her field, which is influenced by her female teacher's ‘resilience’ and ‘elasticity’. Moreover, her decision of stepping away from her previous position as associate dean in order to provide opportunities for those with more capability and more vitality, which is influenced by her male teachers’ open-mindedness “for handling daily work”.

Another example of their influence is in Mei's treatment of students. Mei reiterated how her master and Ph.D. advisor revised her thesis word by word. She said that this had very profound impact on her,

So, now I treat my student in the same way. Though many colleagues say that we don't need to revise our students' thesis or dissertation, and that is their own responsibility. If he\she makes silly mistakes, that is his\her own business. I don't

think so. I say that 'if so, what is the point for us being their teachers?' I just feel there are two points. First, my own generation has grown up in the way of teachers' tender caring. If our teachers had not taught us in this way, how could we have had today's achievements? Second, since we are teachers, we should teach them, shouldn't we? If you don't teach them what's the point of us being their teachers?

所以我现在对学生也是这样子的，呃，尽管有很多老师说，学生论文不要给他们改，是他自己的东西，他出丑是他的事，我不这么认为。我说那让我们当老师干什么，我就觉得两点，第一，我，我们自己是这样成长过来的，我们当初老师不是这样教我们，我们哪有今天？第二，既然我们是一个老师，我们就应该要教他们，对不对？不要你教还要你做什么？

From this narrative we can find that Mei's understanding of teacher's role and teacher's responsibility is shaped by her own experiences of being taught by her own teachers. It seems that such positive experiences cultivated her desire to become a teacher.

Mei also attributed her desire to become a university teacher to the environment in which she was raised. Mei recalled her childhood life fondly, especially the neighborhood where she grew up. According to Mei, when she was young her family lived in the neighborhood affiliated with the research institute where her parents worked. Though Mei's parents were not intellectuals, the majority of their neighbors were experts and scientists who had studied abroad.

Growing up in such an environment and playing with children of those experts and scientists, Mei was greatly influenced by her playmates whose home was crowded with books, and developed "a profound love for books, an unquenchable thirst for

knowledge and pursuit of scientific research.” Mei remembers poignantly that she often went to her playmates’ home and just sat there and read their books for hours. Such memories came to her mind twice during our interviews. Mei concluded that these unique experiences in her upbringing cultivated her desire for pursuing knowledge, which was never quenched even when the social milieu devalued education and “no one studied”. Because of this, Mei chose to become a university teacher so that she could conduct scientific research.

Mei further explained her decision to become an academic woman through an analysis of the different roles that elementary teachers, secondary teachers and university teachers hold in the Chinese education system. Mei expounded on clear differences she saw among these roles,

Sometimes when I was alone I also tried to figure out why I was so sure that I was not fit[to be an elementary or secondary teacher], and I just liked to be a university teacher. There are many reasons. One important reason is my personality. I like challenges, especially my attitude towards knowledge is that I like to have new goals and new pursuits in my work. That is, I want to have a kind of new motivation, so I felt that if I were an elementary school teacher, of course, actually even now I don't know much about being an elementary school teacher. But at that time I thought I knew it very well, that is, it seemed that they taught very limited knowledge, and only needed to change their ways of teaching. But in terms of knowledge itself, the frequency for this kind of change is quite small...So that might bore me. Then it is the same with secondary school teachers. Also, the secondary school students are not easy to teach, but I also felt that they just taught the same syllabus for multiple

times. I feel that doesn't fit my personality quite much, so during my college study I already had the idea that I must be a university teacher. Only then can I teach and interact with students and share with them the rapidly updated knowledge and also research. And I especially like teaching a syllabus that is always different from last time. It must be revised or improved somewhere. Also I know that it has something to do with my internal impulse of exploring and researching.

我自己有时候静下来想过，我为什么就这么明确认为自己不合适，觉得我就喜欢当大学老师。有很多原因，中间有一个很大的原因就是我本身的性格，就喜欢挑战。特别是对这个知识，就是，就是喜欢工作中有新的目标，新的追求，嗯，就是有一种新的动力。所以我自己觉得如果让我去当小学老师，当时，其实我现在也不是很了解，我当时就认为自己很了解，就是说好像就那么一点知识，就只是在变化教学方法来教这些学生。但是对知识的本身来讲，这种变化的频率是蛮小的……可能是会令我很厌烦。那么中学老师也有这些情况。中学老师学生也不太好教，但是觉得也是属于那个一个教案要讲多次。我觉得那个不太合适我的性格。所以我在大学期间我就有这个想法，就是说要去当大学老师，才有一个这样的，一个知识更新快，而且是带有研究的这种角度去教学，去和学生打交道。而且我特喜欢的就是今年的教案和去年的教案不一样。它总会有一些不同的地方。还有一个我知道也跟我自己内心的一种冲动有关，去探讨去研究我觉得还是有关。

Therefore it seems that one significant reason Mei became a university teacher is that this profession could satisfy her “inner impulse to explore and to research”. To Mei, it seems that being both elementary and secondary teachers would restrain her desire for pursuing

new knowledge, so she decided to become a university teacher based on what she described as “careful deliberation.” She continued to recall that,

So at that time I have made up my mind that I should strive to become a university teacher. It didn't occur to me that I should be a scientist, but I felt to be a university teacher is quite sacred. I can both teach and do scientific research at the same time, and also I felt I am quite cooperative and I am glad at being cooperative. There is one more reason, that is, I thought that to be a university teacher is very glorious and respectful. My thoughts could be considered quite simple.

所以当时就下决心就是说争取还是要去当高校老师。因为当科学家可能就因为没想那么多，但是当高校老师，当时想的就是觉得它还是很神圣的。既可以教学，又可以搞科研，而且我自己又觉得好像还比较合作，我也乐意做这个。还有一个想法，就是当时的想法也是觉得大学老师也是很光荣的，就感觉受人尊重的一个工作。这样想的。其实也是很朴素的。

Mei regarded being a university teacher as “sacred”, “glorious” and “respectful”; however, she also admitted that such understanding was “simple”, implying that her decision was not popular in a time when the majority of people chose to enter profitable professions. This further indicates her active reflection about her choice of profession. Her strong desire to become a university teacher so that she can both teach and research is apparent throughout our interviews. When I inquired of Mei, “have you ever considered taking a different profession other than being a university teacher?” Mei replied,

I can't say I have never thought about other paths. That is, especially after I completed my Ph.D. studies, I also had other choices at that time. Perhaps it was because though I wanted to have challenges or something, but in essence I am also a simple person. That is to say, I don't like making things complicated. Then at that time my advisor asked me to stay and work in this university, and I felt it was quite good, and didn't think about exploring the outside world. During this period of time it was quite popular that people went into business, and this also had some impact on me. And I also thought about it, what kind of work were I really capable of? For example, I could do some business, to run an enterprise, or manage a project, or something. But later when I saw what happened around me and also listened to the radio broadcasting, and found that not many people succeeded and many of them were still wandering. So sometimes I felt I was very lucky that I didn't take these jobs. ...Moreover, and especially during this one or two decades, from my own experiences I begin to realize that it is not an easy job to be a teacher, who also is faced with a lot of pressure. That is to say that if you can really play the role of a teacher well, then that is really not an easy job. So probably I still feel that I need to do my present job well and forget about changing my job.

也不能说没想过。就是，嗯，特别是研究生毕业，那时候也可以有选择嘛。可能就是 我虽然自己想有一种挑战什么的，但是真正说起来我还是一个简单的人。就是说不喜欢很麻烦。那么当时博士毕业导师一说留，那我觉得留就留，也没想到要到外面去闯。中间也有一段也是，就是社会上大家什么下海，也有一些冲击，以前也想过，我自己到底能干什么。比如说也去做个什么，从事企业呀，或从事自己去搞什么项目管理呀，什么。后来看过身边发生的事情和听一些广播，就看还是成功的少，就是彷徨的多。

所以这样一想呢，有时候又觉得自己很庆幸，没去做这一块……而且呢，而且特别是这十来二十年，中间的经历我感觉是做一个教师也很不容易，压力也很大。就是说你真正要把你手上的现在的角色能做好，我觉得这已经很不容易了。所以可能我自己还是觉得把眼前的做好，其他的事就，就不去想。

Despite the temptation of greater financial gains and more excitement from pursuing other professions, Mei had her own independent thought and chose to stay firm in her teaching profession, and focused on acting her role of university teachers well.

“It is not easy to be a university teacher”

Mei has been in the teaching profession on and off for over three decades. Teaching is her lifetime career. Despite her previous position of Associate Dean of her college and her current position as Associate Chief Editor of a journal of her university, she still refers to herself primarily as a “teacher”. She talked fondly about her past experiences, which she describes as her lifetime commitment to striving for excellence both in her teaching and in her academic research, and her continuous efforts to explore the meaning of being an academic woman.

Mei’s earliest teaching experience occurred when she was sent to work in the countryside communal in Hunan Province as an intellectual youth after she completed her secondary education. Mei taught multiple subjects to students in Grade 1, 2, 4, and 5. According to her, she became a substitute teacher for the sole purpose of survival and she didn’t have much understanding about teaching at that time. As for Mei, “teaching seems to come out from my natural instinct”, and “I had never been a teacher before, but somehow I survived through that period of time”. Though Mei recalled this teaching

experience with dissatisfaction, she recounted how she continuously endeavored to improve her teaching after she got her Ph.D. degree and began to work in that university.

When I inquired about her teaching philosophy, Mei replied that “my teaching philosophy is that my curriculum should reflect new knowledge, new technology and the qualities that are required by this new era”. Her teaching philosophy resonates with her personality of liking “accepting new things” and “keeping learning”. Mei described various efforts to put her teaching philosophy into practice, including incorporating the newest materials in her teaching and informing her students of the newest developments in her field, never repeating her teaching syllabus, and updating ways of evaluating her students. Mei dwelled on how to cultivate her graduate students’ research abilities, such as sending her graduate students to work in the top biological laboratories in China so that they could bring back advanced technology in this field, getting her students involved in her research projects and taking them to various conferences, and teaching them how to write research project proposals.

Mei concluded that to be a university teacher is no easy job. She reflected,

So I feel it is really not easy to be a university teacher. That is to say, you need to have new stuff in your teaching, and you have pressure from academic research, don't you? You must be a good teacher, you must teach your course well, you must excel in your research. Since the government entrusts students of so many different levels to you to teach, you cannot waste their time, can you? Now I have postdoctoral student, doctoral student, master student, and also undergrads in their first year, second year, third year and fourth year. I have students of all levels. Also,

how would you educate them? Once they become my students, I must be responsible for them.

所以我就真的觉得做个高校教师就很不容易，就是说，你教学要有新的，有学科的压力，这个对吧？你要做好一个教师，你要上好课，带好科研，而且国家给这么多层次的学生给你培养，你不能耽误人家。是吧，我现在有博士后，有博士，有硕士，还有大一的学生，大二的学生，大三的学生，大四的学生，我都有。再一个，不同层次的学生，你怎么办，你怎么培养，就是一般只要成为我的学生，我就要对他负责。

Mei thus understood her professional life in terms of her teaching, research and educating her students, which are equally important for them. She reiterated her responsibility for her students, and talked extensively about her interactions with her students. Mei narrated her responsibility for her students in this way,

I just follow my own guidance in my work. But I know the general rule, and I know the change of the current status quo of education and myself, and the new requirements for our teachers. And when you interact with your students, you must teach each class well and educate each student well, so this is my very simple idea. That is, I will not have my students end up learning nothing from me during their four years of study here.

反正我是瞎折腾吧，就是凭着感觉走。但是应该是大线条不变，知道这个教育形势的变化和自己，对我们教师有新的要求以外，那你在你教学生涯中具体跟学生打交道，具体上好每一节课，带好每一个学生，反正我很朴素的想法，就是不让跟着你这几年没收获。

In order to fulfill her responsibilities, Mei urged herself and her colleagues to teach students as if they were their own children. Apart from helping her students in their academic life, Mei also recounted her effort to establish relationships outside of her classes. She described her image in her students' eyes not only as a respectful teacher, but also as a close friend. For Mei, taking care of her students' needs and having effective communications with them are an indispensable part of her responsibility as a teacher. She recalled,

Throughout the years when I interact with my students, I would try my best to understand their feelings and try my best to communicate with them, and to pay close attention to them. In this way I know what is their biggest puzzle and give them some advice.

我就这么多年我跟学生打交道，就尽可能去体验学生的想法，能够尽最大努力跟他们沟通，去关注他们，也知道他们现在最大的困惑是什么，能够给他一个提示。

Mei recounted two cases that illuminate the importance of such a responsibility. The first case concerned a student in her undergraduate program who excelled when entering college but finally couldn't graduate because of some academic failures. Another case was about a formerly outstanding university student in China, because of his great financial difficulties and academic failure, finally chose to rob a bank before his attempted suicide. By relating to these two cases, Mei pointed out the important role for a university teacher to play, "as a teacher, maybe a few words of yours would lead him to success, or maybe a few words of yours would also bring him to failure." In order to fulfill this responsibility, Mei recounted that she had always paid special attention to her

students who are in various difficulties. She continuously lent money to some poor students to pay their tuition fees. One of them was still not financially able to return the money to her.

“I don’t have talent for doing academic research”

Mei divided her academic research experiences into two stages: before 1995 she assisted her advisor with research projects. But after she finished her one-year postdoctoral fellowship outside of the country and returned in 1997, she experienced fundamental changes in her research, “I gradually became independent. I began to have my own research project regularly, and I had my own graduate students”. Mei recounted that gradually she began to form her own “research style”. Though she admitted that “I don’t have talent for doing academic research”, she also recounted that “but I work hard and move forward, and lead my students forward, and this is very important to me.”

Mei narrated various factors and experiences that facilitate her moving forward in her research. She attributed her research achievements to her personality of asking advice from and respecting others. She suggested that “you should never feel ashamed of asking questions of the person who is less learned than you”, therefore she both asked the prestigious professors in her field for advice, and “often listen to them [her graduate students] very modestly”. Mei also attributed her research achievements to her constant pursuit of newest knowledge, constant contemplation and actively seeking new possibilities of solving difficult problems in her research. Mei used the terms “happy research,” which indicates that she experienced her research as enjoyment rather than burden or pressure.

To Mei, attending conferences is an indispensable part of her academic life. Mei said that,

I have been very active in recent years and like attending academic conferences. I often attend academic conferences, home and abroad, because I like thinking. Even you just listen to a short report. It seems that you feel nothing about it and it has nothing to do with you, but once you get there, and you read the abstracts, and talk to them, you can always get something.

而且我这几年也很活跃，喜欢参加学术会议。我经常参加学术会议，不管是国际国内。因为我自己就喜欢去琢磨，就是哪怕你去听报告，短短时间，那可能报告听完你觉得没什么，跟我没关系，但是你到了那个会场，你通过那个会议摘要，通过同同行，新老朋友交谈，你总可以好像可以悟出一点什么东西。

Believing that she can benefit from the experiences of attending conferences, Mei has attended a multitude of conferences home and abroad in recent years. When I first interviewed her she was just back from an international conference in Japan and shortly after our third interview she went to a conference in Europe.

Mei strongly suggested that university teachers cannot detach their teaching from research. According to her,

Also I always feel that, as a university teacher, especially a teacher teaching major courses, you must conduct academic research. I am always against the practice that a teacher puts all his energy into teaching and does not do research. You definitely cannot do that in the field of life sciences, because if you teach it, then the knowledge in this field is undergoing rapid development. Also you should teach your students

mainly with real cases because you need to give him some ways of thinking and research notions. If you don't experience the scientific development process by yourself, it is very hard for you to teach your course well.

我也始终认为，做为一个高校教师，特别是上专业课教师，你一定要开展科研。我一直很反对什么一个老师把全部精力去教学不去科研。在生命学科这一块是肯定做不到的。因为你要教学，你肯定这个学科的知识就是在发展过程中。还有就是说你面对的学生你也应该主要是用案例来教学。因为你要给他一个科研思路，一个科研理念，你没有，你没有你亲身体验的这个科学发展过程，你也很难讲出好课来。

Therefore, Mei regards both teaching and research as integral elements of being an academic woman, and is strongly opposed to the separation of teaching from research. Mei is also strongly opposed to some teachers' lack of commitment to their research. She repeated her regret for those young women teachers in her college who didn't engage themselves in research work. Mei recounted various honors and achievements she had achieved in her career, such as the Role Model of Teacher's Morality in her university, and Provincial Prestigious Professor. She has received funding for her research projects from her university, the higher education authority in Guangdong Province, the Department of Education, and the national institutions.

"I had no more excuse to refuse to serve them"

Mei described her experiences as an administrator spontaneously when narrating her academic experiences. Mei attributed her leadership abilities to her parents. According to her, she inherited organizing ability, eloquence, and writing ability from her father and kind-heartedness and tolerance from her mother, which helped her immensely

in her administrative work and communication with fellow colleagues. Also, she owed her development of leadership abilities to the fact that she had held leadership positions throughout her school years. Mei recalled how she took up an administrative position,

In 2000 my college held election since some office terms were going to expire.

Because before that, some teachers also felt that I had great competence and

leadership potential, so they told me that I should stand out and serve them, and lead

them to do some research projects. Then before 2000 I felt that I didn't have enough

credentials and I should further improve my academic research ability, so it hadn't

occur to me that I should be a leader of the college. But in 2000.....the college held

election, so at that time the situation was that the time was ripe for me to stand out.

At that time I also thought about it carefully. Since the teachers around me

recommended me, I had no excuse to decline to serve them anymore. At that time my

work was steady, I had acquired my advanced professional title, and my daughter

also performed well in school, so I was willing to stand out. After I was elected I was

chosen to be the associate dean in charge of teaching.

00年学院刚好换届选举。因为以前吧，也有一些老师都觉得我的工作能力还比较好，有一定的组织能力，也说过你应该出来为大家服务，做点课题，做点管理。那么以前自己也觉得自己资历比较浅，还是要把自己的业务做扎实点，也就没想过要去当干部，当领导，但是到00年，应该是00年，00年学院选举，那么当时的情况就是，应该是自己能够出来的时候。我那时候也想过，就是周围老师就推荐了我，我也没有什么理由要推辞不为大家服务了。我那时自己的工作也稳定了，职称也上了，小孩也比较稳定了，所以我就愿意出来了。

Mei entered administration when she felt that she had achieved considerably in her academic field and when she was free of the worry from her family. She explained that she decided to take an administrative position to serve her colleagues. By narrating this

way Mei seemed to put her academic identity and domestic identities as more important than her administrative identity. Mei proudly recollected an array of achievements when she was associate dean of her college. She reformed the curriculum of lab courses, designing them as separate courses from theoretical courses and focusing on developing students' experimental ability. She set up two brand-new undergraduate programs and explored new ways of developing these two programs. Mei developed an internship system for the fourth-year students that greatly developed their ability to apply their knowledge to practice, and this system became a model for other colleges to follow. During her time in office, the course she developed was awarded multiple times. Mei emphasized that she couldn't achieve these without the immense support from her colleagues.

Mei served as an associate dean for her college for six years; she resigned with the assertion that she must leave the position to more capable persons. But recently she became an administrator again. She recounted her reappointment in this way,

I didn't hold any administrative position in the past couple of years. Then I came to work in the editing board of the journal. They recommend me to come, so I accepted the appointment. My thought was that if I didn't take any administrative position, I could do something else to enrich my life. I could educate my graduate students well, and I take pleasure from doing it. I didn't value my administration position much. I don't think associate general editor is an important position either. They congratulated me on getting promoted again. I said this was not an important position since I had only two or three people under me. And I still don't know what

official rank it is.....And these are really not important to me. I just feel that it is a good thing that I can do something for the university.

完了这几年没做，又去了编辑部，他们推荐我来，说来就来吧。我的心态就是说，我不做，我就可以做别的事情来充实，我可以去带我的研究生，我也乐在其中，我没有说以官位为本，你现在让我来做我也没觉得这个官有多大。他们就说恭喜你，又升官了。我说这官有多大，才管两三个人.....这些对我真的是不重要。我就觉得我能在这事上能帮学校做点事，就行了。

Again, Mei referred to her reason to become an associate editor as “do[ing] something for the university”, and didn’t value her administrative position high. Instead, she took it as merely one of the ways of “enrich[ing] my life”.

“My family is a harmonious and happy big family”

Mei’s narratives about her family are scattered throughout our interviews. It seems that she endeavored to depict herself as successful in handling both her public role as an academic woman and her private role as a wife, a mother, a daughter and daughter-in-law. Mei was born in 1958 to an ordinary urban family in a city in South China. She grew up amid the turbulence of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and experienced the dramatic social changes in China, including economic transitions from a planned economy to a market economy, implementation of the policy of opening up to the outside world, and higher education reform. Though these social movements have greatly transformed Chinese society and affected every individual Chinese person’s life, Mei mentioned them only occasionally and did not dwell on them. I speculate that it is

because Mei has a strong faith that personal effort is the major contributor to a person's success.

Mei recollected that her father was strict with her. She related a vignette that her father asked her to quit from a school performance simply because they couldn't afford the performance costume. Mei remembered vividly that her father told her that "we should compete with others in terms of academic performance and capability rather than beautiful clothes". In retrospect, Mei believed her father imposed this pressure on her to push her forward. Like the majority parents in China, Mei's parents held to traditional Confucian values in terms of the importance of education and courtesy. In retrospect, Mei thinks that her mother had great influence on her life,

My mother who was very beautiful during her ages, had influence on me for her tolerance and kind-heartedness. So that is to say, even including me, I am 52 years old now, and everyone thinks that I am very helpful, kindhearted, and considerate.

那么我母亲这种宽容，善良。我母亲长得非常漂亮，这种贤淑达理，也应该也影响了我。所以就是说，就包括我，我今年也52岁了，大家都觉得我很热情，很善良，很为对方考虑。

Mei is especially impressed by her mother's generosity and hospitality to her father's relatives. Mei recounted that she treated everyone in her life in the same way, and educates her only daughter to do the same. For Mei these are the good virtues that women in China should possess. She took her mother as a role model to guide her interactions with her extended family and taught the same behavior code to her daughter. While relating about her immediate family, Mei focused on how to educate her daughter and

how her husband supported her at the important junctions in her life. Mei explained that, when she failed her graduate entrance exams for the first time, her husband, then her boy friend, comforted her repeatedly, saying that “ok, let’s forget about it, don’t be afraid, since you want to study so much, I will send you to study in the future.”

When the university finally allowed Mei to take the graduate admission exams for the second time, she chose not to take them because she had a newborn daughter. At this juncture her husband persuaded her to take the exams, saying, “Don’t you always want to pursue study? Now the chance comes, why don’t you do it? In the past couple of years you wanted but your university wouldn’t allow you to go. Now they grant you this chance why don’t you want to go? With her husband’s support and encouragement, she sent her four-month-old daughter to her parents-in-law and began to prepare for the exams. Finally she passed the exams and was admitted to a normal university in South China that is about 400 miles away from her home. Looking back on her past experiences, Mei concluded that spousal support was very important for women academics. When she narrated about her ‘small family,’ Mei’s face shone with pride of her husband’s career success and her daughter’s promising career future and recent marriage with her classmate.

“ I must make use of my advantage”

Mei expounded in detail her understanding of being an academic woman over multiple interviews. For her, being a female can bring her more advantages than disadvantages. According to her, “women don’t have the pressure to win the bread and support the family, so as long as she can get support from her husband, she can just go

ahead to pursue her own interests and her career”. In a similar vein, Mei held that “women are more amicable and thus more approachable than men, thus making it easier to communicate effectively with others and can achieve great results”. She commented that, “women have their advantages in terms of education, educating students, even including taking care of family, coordinating, and switching among multiple roles, or taking on multiple social responsibilities”. For Mei, she regards women as more capable of handling multiple roles and responsibilities. Moreover, women are more verbally articulate, more expressive of their ideas, and more capable of communicating with students and knowing their needs. Because women are usually more meticulous than men, their instructions are more detailed than academic men.

Another advantage of being an academic woman is that “you don’t need to be so outstanding as long as you have tried your best. It doesn’t matter if you can’t reach a certain level. So I just feel that we must have our goals that are set according to our own situation.” Since the society usually sets lower requirements for women than men, Mei perceives this as an advantage for women because they can set lower goals for themselves that are easier to reach. Because of these advantages, Mei concluded that “So I feel that I am an academic woman in university, and I have my own advantages, and I must make use of my advantage.”

However, Mei also mentioned disadvantages of being a female. The biggest challenge for academic women is “how you can persevere and endure hardships” since some academic women prioritize family responsibilities above their career development and regard being a caregiver as their major role. And many academic women failed to see their potential ability for research and thus didn’t grasp the chance to further develop

themselves. Mei felt very regretful about it. Mei concluded that, “But despite all this, regardless of gender, what really count are still his or her own efforts. You can find one thousand reasons and ten thousand reasons and take gender as an excuse, right?” Therefore, Mei did not think gender is the decisive factor to determine an academic woman’s success, but rather, she emphasized personal efforts and perseverance as the most important elements.

Life History Narrative 2: Jie

“It is a very lucky thing for me to become a university teacher”

...my life experiences are quite simple. I used to be a student. After graduation from college I taught at the same university, so basically my experiences are all connected to schools, so there was little fluctuation in my life experiences. Except that I changed several schools and, em, moved to several different cities, I feel my experiences are quite simple and peaceful.

人生的经历比较简单。我最初从当学生，然后留校，基本上都是和学校有关系的。所以人生的经历是比较没有波动的。除了就是说转换了几间学校啊，嗯，走过了几座不同的城市之外，我觉得经历是比较简单吧。很平静。

Jie is my former colleague before I came to the United States for my Ph.D. studies, but we didn’t have much contact then. When I recruited participants for the present study Jie volunteered. My contact with Jie includes three one-hour interviews, multiple informal talks both before and after the interviews, a 90-minute classroom observation, and observations during three social gatherings. As shown above, Jie used the words

“simple”, “flat”, “peaceful”, and “with little significant changes or surprises” multiple times to describe various stages of her life. She expressed her desire to live a stable life several times during our interviews. However, she also admitted that she liked having and meeting challenges in her life. Unlike Mei who constantly touched upon her domestic life, Jie seldom talked about her family life except her childhood memories. She seemed willing to discuss teaching but seemed to evade discussion of her administrative work.

“Not the top student in my class”

Jie grew up in a time when China began to restore stability and economic steadiness after ten years of turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). When I asked Jie about the unforgettable events in her school years, I was intrigued greatly by Jie’s response that what impressed her most about her formative experiences was not academics but her performance at the sports meets. She recounted that,

I remember that when I entered the elementary school, I was very active. Then I entered for the competition at the sports meets very actively... But the results were quite frustrating.... I was ranked the last place in race. Then after that, as I told you, I went to do physical training with those students from the sports school since I didn't have a strong body. Em, then I found that, after receiving the physical training for one semester, em, at the same sports meets, I got very good results, so my self-esteem was suddenly enhanced. So I feel that this probably has positive influence on my growing up process.

我记得我刚刚入学的时候呢，很积极的。然后呢，积极报名参加运动会.....但是呢，结果就非常令人沮丧.....跑了倒数第一名。然后后面呢，就是我刚才跟您说的，就是

跟体校的那些人去锻炼身体，因为自己体质也不是非常好。呃，发现啊，锻炼完身体后一个学期，呃，还是在同样的运动会上，取得了很好的成果，所以我的这个自尊心啊，忽然就增加了。所以我觉得可能是对我的这种整个后面的成长也有很好的好处的事情。

To improve her sports performance, Jie got up at five every morning to train in a sports school. She persisted and finally got good results in the sports meets. Looking back on this experience, Jie reflected that,

Because once I found that I was probably not weaker than others in sports, and I also had fun from doing physical training, such as success. You can get some sense of satisfaction and sense of pride after you achieved some success through hard efforts. Then you will feel that, you will get a faith that you can reach your goal as long as you work hard for it. And this might be the most important thing for me. But at that time since I was young I didn't realize it.

因为发现自己可能在体育运动方面可能不会比别人差，然后也会从中得到一些乐趣。呃，比如说成功啊，一些经过艰苦的一些努力获得一些成就啊，那种满足感和自豪感这方面，就会，你会觉得说，你会得到一种信念，通过你的努力可以达到你的目标。这可能是最重要的。但是当时小的时候是不会意识到这一点的。

After hearing Jie's narratives, I began to understand this special experience not only brought her prize and confidence, but more importantly, Jie received a message from this experience that as long as she tried her best and persevered she would succeed. In contrast to specific descriptions of sports activities, Jie didn't relate much about her particular school experiences:

Because as for me, I was not one of the top students in my class, especially since my elementary school, probably because I was often careless in personality, I had a strong desire to be liked by my teachers and become one of the top students, but probably I was never such a student. But if the classmates around me, their enterprising spirit, and after class they often discussed with each other, so that kind of atmosphere I feel is rather unforgettable.

因为像我的话，也不属于一直都是尖子生啊，尤其从小学开始，因为个性的马虎所致，就会觉得自己很渴望成为老师喜欢的，然后学习成绩好的，但是可能自己一直都不是这样的学生。但是如果说，周围的这个同伴啊，他们的那种上进呀，然后下课之后的一些，比如说大家互相讨论问题呀，那种气氛啊，我觉得是比较难忘的。

From this narrative we can see that Jie resisted shaping herself into the image of a “good student” or “teacher’s pet” (Luttell, 2009), and denied that she was a top student in her class. However, in later narratives she also admitted that she excelled in her math in her class. This reveals a contradictory moment in Jie’s narrative, which I will come back to in the next chapter.

“Walking through a forest”

Jie went to a normal university after completing her secondary education. She recalled that her parents made this decision for her,

When I chose the university for my undergraduate studies, basically my parents made the decision for me. They liked the idea that their daughter would be a

teacher since it is a secure job, and also they felt English majors had rather good job prospects, so I chose this university.

报志愿的时候是父母的原因会比较多一点。他们喜欢女儿去做老师会比较保险，还有就是这英语专业，他们也觉得前景比较好吧。就做了这个。

So she went to a normal university in central China. Jie's parents believed that teaching is a good profession for girls since it is secure. Second, English is a good major for girls. In contrast to Mei's experience, then, Jie's choice was influenced by her parents. After graduation from college she began to teach English at the same university. Several years later she took a master program, and her memory of that experience is that she "didn't have so much pressure from publishing papers" so she "had a very happy time doing it". After she got her master degree, Jie felt that "I could do with my master's degree and didn't think about doing a Ph.D." However, in 2008 Jie decided to take a Ph.D. program. She recounted that she made the decision after "some struggle". Jie recounted the reasons behind her decision,

I feel it might also be that the society has set higher and higher requirements for university teachers. But actually as I told you, I don't care too much about the requirements from the outside world. I feel that if I am asked to give an external reason, that is certainly one reason. Then I feel the second reason has something to do with the micro-environment that you are in. Because you are in such a kind of, em, university, institute and your department, if it has a rather good, active and learning atmosphere I feel that it can motivate you to do so. Because around me, em, there are many teachers, they are very enterprising, so they really motivated me a

lot. Especially those teachers who are older than me. I am already not young, but those who are even older than me, they don't just stay at university very comfortably because of their age. Still, they want to pursue something. And I feel this touched me greatly.

我觉得可能是首先是社会上对大学老师的要求是越来越高了。但其实我刚才都说过了，我对外界的一些要求可能并不是非常在意的。我觉得如果说强调外界的原因的话，那这肯定是一个原因。然后第二个我觉得可能是还是和你所处的这种小环境的原因多一些。因为你所处的这种，嗯，学校、学院、或者你的教学部，如果它有这么一个比较好的，积极求学向上的气氛的话，我觉得还是有促使的。因为我周围，嗯，有很多老师，他都是这样子一种比较上进的一种情况的，所以对我的一种激励还是很大的。尤其是比我年纪大的那些老师。我的年纪都已经不小了啊，然后比我年纪大的一些老师，他们不是说因为，嗯，差不多年纪了就可以就舒舒服服地在学校里面，他们还是好像有一种追求的感觉啊。我觉得这个对我来说触动还是很大的。

Recognizing the increasingly high requirements for university teachers, Jie decided to pursue Ph.D. studies in order to enhance her research ability. As she recounted, "I feel that through doing a Ph.D., through such a process, I learned how to do academic research, and I also practiced thinking profoundly when I wrote academic paper." Jie compared her life before and after taking the Ph.D. program,

I feel that my life in the first semester was a huge contrast to my life before, so at that time I felt that I sometimes lost myself, because after all there was a big contrast before and after I was in the Ph.D. Program. Before I was in the Ph.D. program I was only an ordinary teacher, and didn't have much pressure, but after entering the

program, because I had one more role to take, and I do it while I still work, so I need to teach and study at the same time, so that kind of busy student life, and that kind of, pressure from writing papers, and I would, I would feel that actually I didn't have to do a Ph.D., and then I would have doubts about myself, and asked myself if I really wanted to keep myself so busy. Right, so this is the first year, and I had the feeling that I was very exhausted. Ever since the second year, because I was gradually used to this kind of life, and I also felt that I began to see some light since I walked into a very dark forest, so I felt much less pressure then, but still I had a lot of pressure, and I felt painful but happy. If you hadn't had so much pressure to push you to do something, to move on, you couldn't read so many materials now and open your eyes, and I also feel that I am more professional at writing academic articles and began to have my own ideas, etc. I feel that such kind of experiences should gradually move toward the bright future, but there is still a long way to go (laughter).

这个经历的话我觉得最初的一个学期应该是经历反差非常大的一个时期，所以那个时候呢，可能就会觉得自己有的时候会有点迷失自己。因为毕竟读博之前和之后的生活反差非常大，之前就是一个普通的老师，没有，没有说太大的一些压力，而读博之后的话，因为多了一个身份，并且是在职读的话，因为她同时还要再教学，再读书，所以这种紧张的学习生活，那种，嗯，写文章的一些压力，就会，就会让自己觉得，唉，其实也不是很必须要读博，然后就会怀疑自己，你自己是不是一定要给自己找这么多事情来做，对。这是第一个学年吧，有这样的一种感觉，就是很累了。从第二个学年开始的话，因为慢慢适应了这种环境，而且也觉得可能是从这种一头扎进去一个很黑的森林慢慢看到一点点光亮出来，那种感觉心里边就会压力减轻了，但是还是有很大

的一些压力在这里。但是会觉得应该是痛并快乐着。你要是没有这样一种压力让你去做，让你去，那你也可以也没有现在读这么多的一些材料啊，一些，眼界也开阔了一些啊，然后觉得自己在科研上写文章上也稍微多了一些启发呀，起步呀，等等。我觉得慢慢来说这种经历应该是越来越，嗯，越来越向着光明的方向去走吧，但还有很长的路吧（微笑）。

Jie described her experience of pursuing a Ph.D. as “walking through a dark forest”. Because of the striking contrast before and after she pursued the program, she even doubted the necessity of giving herself so much pressure. After a period of painful struggle she began to “see some light” and found the progress she made in her research ability, so she felt her experience of doing Ph.D. was “painful but happy.” Despite her doubt, Jie was also pleased about the progress the Ph.D. program facilitated in her academic growth. She further hoped that she could finally completely enjoy her academia life when she became a veteran researcher. Jie’s narratives suggest that she feels increasingly confident with her academic research capability. It seems that Jie overcame difficulties in her pursuit of Ph.D. studies and in her work. However, interestingly, this understanding contradicts her earlier statement that “I don’t want to strive for something actively.... and just want to take the world as it is”.

“I was chosen to be a teacher”

Jie asserted that she liked meeting challenges and her original career aspiration was to become a policewoman or a military officer, but I speculate this has also something to do with her family influence since her father used to serve in the military. According to her,

It[To be a police woman] is a very challenging career, yes. I felt that if a girl became a police officer she needed to be quick-witted, and good at analysis and making judgments, and then all kinds of opportunities of cracking cases, so I felt being a policewoman was both mysterious and challenging.

挺有挑战性啦。对。我觉得女生要做警察她需要有那种机智的头脑啊，一些分析判断啦，然后各种不同的那些，有机会破案啦，就比如说觉得很神秘又很有挑战性。

Despite her aspiration to become a policewoman, Jie finally followed her parents' urging to enter a normal university. By saying so Jie constructed herself as an obedient daughter that follows parents' arrangement. Afterwards though she had a chance to reconsider her profession upon graduation in 1993, she chose to work in the same university as an English teacher. She recounted her decision-making process,

at the very beginning my reason was very simple, because the university where I took my undergraduate program was a university that trains teachers, a normal university. So at that time our job was assigned by the government and you couldn't choose your workplace after graduation. So I was chosen to be a university teacher, and that is the earliest state.

最初的原因是比较简单的，因为我读的这个大学就是专门培养教师的大学，就是师范大学。所以我们当时的一个，嗯，状态就是国家还包分配的，就是你自己不能选择工作。所以也就是说被选择了去当高校教师。这是最初的一个状态。

Jie further attributed her decision of entering the teaching profession after graduating from normal university to the current governmental policy about normal university

graduate students. By saying so Jie once again presents herself as a passive and obedient normal university graduate, who was “chosen to be a teacher”. She remained in this profession since then. Jie began teaching in 1994, a time when China was experiencing a transition from a planned economy to a market economy, so great professional opportunities with substantial financial gains abounded, which tempted university teachers to quit their teaching job and ‘jump into the commercial sea’ (*xiahai*). Like Mei, Jie also considered whether she should follow the trend. She recounted,

Because like my colleagues, some male colleagues around me, they usually had such experiences, that is, after teaching for a couple of years they might quit their jobs and go to work in management, hotels, restaurants ,and travelling, foreign trade, and even selling medical appliances At that time I also had that kind of, also thought about quitting my teaching job. Since teaching is such routine work, why not go outside to do those more challenging jobs. In that way I can travel a lot, and I can meet all kinds of people, and I can have more financial gains. So I also had such idea, at the very beginning.

因为像我周围有这样的同事，一般男同事哈，他都有这样的经历，就是做了几年之后，他可能跳槽出去了，去做一些比如说管理啊，酒店啊，饮食呀，还有旅游呀这样一些东西，外贸啊，甚至还有一些医疗方面的器械一些推广这样的都有.....当时我们就是有一种，也有一种想法就是想去跳槽。做老师这按部就班啊，还不如到外面去做那些，嗯，能够到处出差呀，一些接触各式各样的人啦，还有经济上更好的这样一种工作，挑战性的工作。也有过这种念头，最初的。

Obviously Jie did think about leaving teaching profession to do something that could better fit her personality of meeting challenges. She finally gave up this idea. She told me why she chose not to quit her job,

I feel that, first of all, there are objective restrictions, because we were assigned by the government to be teacher. If you don't want to be a teacher, you might need to go through some procedures, and this is an objective condition. Secondly, I feel this must have something to do with my own experiences, because, em, after you became a teacher, you will find some advantages of being a teacher, and your aspiration for working in the outside world and that impulse would also fade gradually, and gradually you will feel the advantages of being a teacher, and then you will not long for changing your job any more.

我觉得可能是，首先客观条件也是有限制的。因为我们当时做老师的话呢，就是属于国家分配的。如果说你不要做老师的话，可能要走一些手续，这是一点客观条件。第二点的话呢，我觉得，可能跟自己的这种经历吧，慢慢的也是有关系的，因为，做老师之后，你就会发现做老师的一些优势，然后对外面的那些工作的话呢，性质可能也随着时间的推移，那种向往啊，年轻时的那种冲动就会减低的。所以从个人的这种感觉啊，慢慢就体会到做老师的一些优势吧，可能就会不是非常向往的说再去跳槽啊。

Jie explained that she dismissed the idea of leaving her academic profession because she doubted whether entering business world could bring her a stronger sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, apart from the restrictions from the governmental policy. One more important factor that caused Jie to abandon the idea of changing her profession is that she gradually began to find the advantages of being a university teacher and thus 'your

aspiration for working in the outside world and that impulse would also fade gradually'. When asked to summarize her feelings of being a university teacher, Jie responded that she could use only one word "enjoy," for the reason that being a teacher doesn't mean "routine work" any more but "freedom of time and professional development" and "standing at the frontier of new knowledge and technology", and "growing up together with students". She reiterated that "I enjoyed this process very much". Jie commented that "it is a very lucky thing for me to become a university teacher" because she "can work with outstanding colleagues and keep improving myself when I interact with them."

"I just want to be a good teacher"

Indeed, Jie encountered various challenges that she had to overcome. How to define the meaning of teacher and how to create new meaning with the established definition of teacher are then a focus of Jie's narratives. Jie talked about her own teachers. According to her,

actually I have held the idea that, besides parents, teachers are actually key persons that have impact on students. If you are lucky enough to meet with some very great teachers, then it would be great. But not everyone has such a chance to be taught by such a great teacher. I feel that in terms of formal school education, from elementary school to senior high, I don't think my teachers have had great influence on me, because they, that is to say, that you just felt that they were just doing their routine teaching. In his class you could seldom have a kind of passion and a strong desire to study. But they are all good teachers, very responsible, taught their lessons step by step, and cared about their students.

其实我一直都在想，老师其实是学生，呃，影响学生最关键的一个人物了，除了家长之外。呃，那，如果说你一生当中有幸遇到一个特别好的老师，那是非常棒的。但并不是每个人都有这样的一个机会去得到这样一个老师。我觉得如果是从正规的学校训练的话，从小学一直到高中，我觉得老师对我的影响都不是非常大。因为他们，呃，就是说你会觉得只是一种按部就班的一些吧。你很少能够产生说一种在他的课上一种很渴望的，一种很，很，很想学习的一种激情。但是他们都是很好的老师，就是负责任，上课按部就班，关心同学。

Here we can see some other contradictions in Jie's narratives. She admitted that teachers' roles are important in terms of their influence on their students, but she didn't think that her teachers impacted her greatly. The reason is not because they are poor teachers, but because they just did their routine work and fulfilled their regular obligations as teachers. Jie's comments reflect her understanding that "teacher" is not defined by fulfilling their routine and regular responsibilities, but by impacting on students' future life and arousing students' passion and desire to learn.

Though Jie recounted that her teachers didn't impact her much, she recalled two teachers that had great influence on her; one was her physical training teacher and the other was her elementary math teacher. According to her, her physical training teacher influenced her "not on my studies, but probably on my personality development", and "was especially good at encouraging and motivating students". Because of his encouragement Jie felt that she was "the best student and worked hard toward this goal". She also believed this influenced her performance at sports meets. Similarly, Jie described her math teacher in this way,

he was not that kind of teachers who attracted their students with their appearance, but he attracted students with his own sparkling thoughts, his systematic teaching, and his enjoyment of and immersion in the process of problem solving, so I feel that he is one of the teachers that impressed me deeply.

他不是属于那种外表上吸引学生。他是属于那些用自己的一些思维的火花，或者是上课的一些清晰条理的一种状态，自己也特别享受那种解题的过程的那种状态去吸引学生。所以我觉得这应该是对我印象比较深刻的一个老师。

Therefore, Jie held that good teachers are not those who perform well in their routine responsibilities but those who know how to encourage and motivate their students and have passion for their teaching. Undoubtedly these two teachers influenced her philosophy of teaching.

“Light House”

Looking back on her teaching career, Jie listed responsibility, patience, and passion as the three most important qualities a teacher should possess. In particular, she held that “... for a teacher, the third point might be the most important, that is your passion, and your input in education.” Jie disavowed regarding teaching as routine work, and emphasized teachers’ crucial role in formulating students’ outlook on life. According to her,

My ideal teaching philosophy is that I can guide my students, maybe not guide, that is to say, I can have certain impact on my young students during their growing up process. I can give him a hand when he is in confusion and give him some advice so

that he can avoid taking the same roundabouts you took when you were young, and make fewer mistakes that you made when you were young. And this might be, how to put it, should be....should play the role of a lighthouse. But now the teachers' role is also transforming.... But you can give them some help at some crucial moments. And a teacher must be up to it.

我的教学理念就是能够作为一个引领学生，也不叫引领吧，就是说，能够在这个年轻学生的成长过程中能够起到一定的微小的作用的这样一些老师，就是在他迷茫的时候你能够推他一把，能够给他点拨一下，让他能够少走你曾经走过的一些弯路，就少犯一些你曾经犯过的一些错误。这个可能就是，这个怎么说呢，应该就是.....起到一种灯塔的作用吧.....但是你能够在关键的时候能够给他一些扶助。这个应该是老师最需要做到的。

Therefore Jie compared teachers' role as a "light house" that can guide students in their future life trip. To further exemplify her teaching philosophy, Jie recounted a vignette about how she helped motivate one of her students to study through casual talks with him. She regarded taking care of her students' need as her greatest teaching priority, and, like Mei, paid special attention to those students who have difficulties in studies or who have special needs or difficulties.

Jie began to teach English to non-English majors in 1993, using the traditional teacher-centered teaching mode in which teachers explained English grammar and texts to students "word by word" and "sentence by sentence". Jie "didn't like such a way of teaching" and "felt very vexed about it" because it was not only "boring" but didn't challenge students. Yet, she "didn't have any chance to observe any other better teaching methods and to improve myself". After she moved to work in a university in Guangzhou,

English teaching was reformed at that university and a student-centered teaching mode was adopted to develop students' English communicative skills. Jie was "happy about such an experience", and reflected,

I felt that at the very beginning I was still not quite confident about it, because if it was student-centered, I didn't know if I could control the whole class as before, if I could bring them back because you were not sure what students would say and how you could bring them back to the major theme of the class. Such a concern lasted for quite a period of time, about, about one semester. Later I felt that I had less and less such concern because if the class is generative, there must be a constant interaction and alterations between the feedbacks from my students and my previous expectations of the class, and so on. And such alterations are improvised, so you don't need to worry about it. That is to say, I think I should jump out of the stereotypical thinking that you must let your students follow your thoughts, or follow your prearrangements of the class and reach your predesigned objective of this class. So you should keep adjusting your class according to the differences between your own objectives and the feedbacks from your students, then after you finish your class you begin to see, oh, I have achieved so much in class. I feel that such a constant adjustment is very important.

我觉得刚刚开始的话自己还是有一点点不自信的，因为如果是以学生为主的话呢，自己不知道是否能够像以前的思路说控制一下课堂哈，能够收回来，因为您不知道学生说了一些东西之后你能不能够引导回主线回来。然后这种担心的话是大概会有一段时间，大概有，也有一个学期的时间吧。后面的话我觉得可能这种担心慢慢会越来越弱，因为，因为如果现在的课堂是一种有生成性的课堂的话，那它必然就会伴随着一种说，

学生他的反馈和我自己之前的一种备课的这样一种不断的一种互动啊，变化啊，等等等等。然后这种变化是一种即兴式的，而且不用很担心。就是说现在我觉得应该是跳出一种这种框架，一定要让学生按照你的一种思路，或你的一种之前的一些备课安排去，一定要达到您的这个目的。可能应该是在你的目的和学生的这种知识反馈之间的不断的这种调整，调整，然后你一节课下来之后你才知道，哦，走到一个什么样的地方，我觉得可能是这种不停的这种调和吧，这种调整才是，才是比较重要的。

Jie narrated how she transitioned smoothly to the new teaching mode. She found that this reflexive teaching could better help her students, and she took great pleasure in switching her mechanic routine grammar teaching to a more interactive and more reflexive communicative teaching style. According to her,

I feel very happy about such an experience. At least I felt very happy about it, because I feel that as a university teacher, I need a certain kind of progress, a kind of moving forward. If I just teach in a routine way, and teach in the same way every day for decades, such a teaching style, I feel, is a waste of time both for the teachers and for the students. So for me, I am very glad to accept such an experience, that is, a very big transitory experience.

我觉得这种经历对我来说是令人高兴的。至少我是觉得很高兴的，因为我觉得老师他之所以成为，嗯，大学教师可能还是需要一定的这种，嗯，前进吧，一种进步吧。如果要是说都是按部就班地去做，几十年如一日的，这种教学方式无论对老师也好，对学生也好，也是一种，我觉得是一种浪费时间。所以这种经历很，就是比较大的转折的经历对我来说还是非常欣然去接受。

Moreover, she recounted that she extended her teaching to after class and actively reflected about her classes and how to improve her teaching in her future classes. In this way she worked to create new meanings to teaching at university level.

“Dancing with shackles”

Like Mei, Jie described academic research as important for teaching. She expressed, “I feel that if I want to be a good teacher, I really need to have some research of my own, to have some academic research to sustain me, so I have a lot of pressure from it.” Recognizing the increasingly high requirements for university teachers to conduct academic research, Jie embraces such a trend and actively make efforts to improve her research ability. But the circumstances create pressure.

Jie is currently assisting her dissertation advisor in a project on English education in elementary and secondary schools in multiple cities in Guangdong Province. She made multiple visits to different schools and interacted with teachers there. Jie described her feelings of doing research projects as “a process of baptizing my mind” since she renewed her understanding of research. For her, the purpose of doing research projects is not solely for publication, but also to bring about practical benefits. From such experiences she realized that “people’s ideas are the most difficult thing to change”.

Jie is writing an English textbook for elementary students. Though she and her team had great ideas, they had to “conform to the style and structure of the current English textbooks in China”, therefore she described such a process as “dancing with shackles”, explaining that “we don’t want to follow such a traditional stereotype, and want to have some breakthroughs but we still must do it within such a framework, so I

feel it is quite contradictory, like dancing with shackles.” Despite all the difficulties, Jie believed that “we will have some gains”, and such gains “should be some challenges to some of my previous deep rooted ideas”. Therefore for Jie, the shackles mean the convention, the stereotype, and the deep-rooted ideas in people’s mind. Once again, Jie approached the difficulties she met as “some challenges” that she must conquer. Though she described it as a painful process, “like bearing a baby”, she believed that finally she would produce a great textbook that could bring some new ideas to China’s English education.

Jie recounted her experiences of presenting at conferences, which she greatly enjoyed. When I asked her to elaborate on such experiences, she responded,

Attending conferences is one way of getting contact with this profession, because there is a circle, like academic circle for each field, and you can get to know the famous guys, famous scholars in your research field through such a conference. Moreover, I feel that attending conferences is also a conclusion to the paper I wrote. So at the beginning I listened to their presentation, and then gradually I began to know how to present my own papers and then began to get my voice heard too. So this is a major purpose of attending conferences. A second purpose is that you can get your paper published if you attend some conferences, and this is also a requirement of Ph.D. program.

参加研讨会应该也是自己接触这个行业的一个方式。因为每个都有一个圈子，像学术圈，还有你这个研究这领域的一个圈子的人，通过这样一个会议可以认识这样的大家啦，学者啦，等等。另外我觉得开研讨会的话可能也是对自己的一个写的文章的一个

总结吧。就是也是说从倾听别人的这些发言开始呢，能够慢慢地了解到自己怎么样去开始发表自己的声音，能够慢慢有自己的话语权。这是会议的一个比较主要的一个用途了。参加研讨会的话，第二也是可以发文章了。这个也是学业上的一个要求。

Jie endeavored to “get her voice” heard in the conferences and improve her research ability. She further commented that “I began to think how I could do my research and express my ideas with less nonsense, and how I can examine issues from a trenchant and unique angle. And I feel this is my greatest gain from attending conferences.” It is obvious that Jie made active efforts to improve her research abilities.

“Such work is not the goal that I pursue”

Jie works in a university in South China. She was once department head and held the position of Party branch secretary. She resigned from these positions when she decided to focus on her Ph.D. studies. Jie seemed to be reluctant to talk about her administrative experience, and her limited descriptions of these roles further reveal that she didn't endorse such experiences,

It seemed that such work is not the goal that I pursue, first. But if I have such a chance to do it, and then by doing such work, em, I can help others, then I am very glad to do it. So for me, this is not a burden. But it really took away some of my time that was originally for my teaching and other work, so it actually increased some burden to me. So I feel such administrative work, to tell you the truth, doesn't help you much in terms of your academic development.... But in terms of personal development, I feel it plays a very limited role, and even holds back your

development, because after all it takes up a lot of your time, the time you could have spent on your academic research, and on your family life.

这种工作的话好像不是我追求的目标，首先。但是说如果我有这样的一个机会去做的话，然后如果要是能够通过这个工作去，嗯，帮助到其他别人的话，我也是很乐意去做的。所以对我来说，这个应该也不是一个负担。但是的确给我的教学还有工作，还有其他生活方面造成一些就是时间的占用啦，也是实际上也是增加了一些负担。所以我觉得如果说这种行政上的工作的话，说实话可能对你的这种学术上的帮助，我觉得并不是很大.....但是真正的你说个人的发展，我觉得可能作用是很小的，甚至还有一点阻碍的作用，因为它毕竟占用了你很多的时间嘛，你自己花在学术上的时间啊，还有家庭一些生活上的时间就会少一些。

Jie reiterated that her purpose of taking administrative work was to serve others and help others, rather than taking it as a symbol of her career success. Though Jie felt it was a “burden” to her professional development. She also admitted that “it is a very good chance for me to develop my ability”. Jie explained why she stepped down from her administrative position,

First I was affected by my family because they always think that professional development is better than administrative development. And then secondly I also feel that I can have a better hold of myself in terms of my own specialization, of my academic degrees, my research, and some other specialties. And then there are so many uncertain factors involved in administrative work, and I am relatively not very interested in it, so I feel that, em, it should do good for my own professional

development if I give up my administrative responsibilities. So I would prefer to develop myself in terms of academic degrees and my specialization.

因为首先是家里的影响，因为家里面还是一直认为专业方面的这种发展更加好过行政方面的发展呢。然后第二自己也觉得可能在这个工作的过程当中，可能从个人的这种专业呀，一些学历上呀，一些科研上呀，一些其他的一些专业呀，能够更加把握自己吧。然后行政方面，因为它不确定因素太多，然后自己可能在这个方面，嗯，相对来说兴趣不是非常大，所以我觉得，嗯，放弃对我来说应该是，是，是对个人的专业发展应该是有好处的。所以，对，还是比较喜欢在学历上呀，专业上呀，发展。

Therefore Jie suggests that her academic endeavors can better facilitate her self-actualization than administrative work. However, she also admitted that “but if I am asked to do it, I feel that I still have the courage to accept it or manage it.” Jie’s attitude towards administration is ambivalent and contradictory. On one hand, she regarded it a good thing to develop her ability and serve and help others, on the other hand, she didn’t value it and regarded it as an impediment to her academic and family life. Also, though she doesn’t endorse administrative work, she is still embracing the possibility of reentering administration.

Life History Narrative 3: Linda

“The greatest happiness is that you can give something to your students”

My personal experiences, I feel they are very ordinary and simple (laughter), very ordinary. Like most people I have also experienced the happiness and unhappiness of life, and have tasted the sweetness and bitterness of life (laughter), and have

worked hard to fulfill my dreams and goals....there are many setbacks in a person's life, or some setbacks. I feel if you want to overcome these setbacks, I feel the love from family is really very important, and also care from friends, generally speaking (laughter). And then I myself, in my life experiences, for example, family love, friendship, and I must be competent for my work. This is also very important. And this is also an important indicator of my personal sense of happiness (laughter)

我的个人经历，我觉得是比较平凡简单，非常平凡。和大多数人一样都经历生活的如意不如意，都品尝生活的酸甜苦辣（微笑），都为自己的这个理想和目标去努力去奋斗.....其实人生经历总是，人的一生总是遇到很多的这种小挫折，或者是一些挫折。我觉得，要去顺利渡过这些挫折，我觉得家人的这个温暖我觉得真的是很重要。还有一些朋友的关怀呀，总的来说吧（笑）。嗯，然后自己，人生经历中，比如说亲情，友情，工作上要自己能胜任工作吧。这个也很重要。这也是个人幸福感的一个（笑）重要的指标。

When I asked Linda to describe her life, she responded with these words. From her summary we can identify the most important things in her life: family, friends and work. She described her life as ordinary and common, intertwined with setbacks, and she regarded competence at work as an important indicator of her sense of happiness. Indeed, her narratives revolve around the topics of family and work. Therefore, my representation of Linda's life history revolves around her family and her work experiences.

“My family has very great influence on me”

In our interviews Linda talked a lot about her family, such as her vivid memory of her grandparents, how her father and mother's parenting styles differed, and her

husband's support of her career pursuit. In retrospect, Linda recognized their substantial influence on her at various moments of her life.

Linda was born into an artistic family since her father used to be an oil painter and her grandfather was a musical teacher in a secondary school. Being the eldest child in her family with a brother and a sister, she admitted that she had a sense of responsibility from an early age. Linda's father worked in the local Bureau of Culture, an institution that regulates and promote the local people's cultural life. One of their routine activities was to bring the local opera troupe to the rural areas to perform from village to village. Linda recounted that when she was very young, her father often led the opera troupe to perform in the rural areas and always took her along. This offered Linda great opportunities to watch those performances and later imitated them with her playmates. Linda had fond memory of such experiences:

The children of similar age in our neighborhood played together... We played house a lot. We especially like putting on opera. At that time we took the bed as a stage (laughter), and used mosquito net as the stage curtain. We drew the curtain, then we often dressed us up. We put scarves on our hair in the shape of real flowers, and then we put on two skirts, so they looked like the opera costumes. We also worn a cloak and imitated the figures in the opera. Then we performed the opera and sang. Well, I think this impressed me most deeply. At that time because I was older than my playmates, and had a good memory of the lines of the opera, I was always the leader and we had a lot of fun together.

几乎前后三四栋的大小孩年龄相仿的小孩都玩在一起就经常玩过家家。特别是演大戏。我们那时候那个床是大床，把床当舞台（微笑）。那个蚊帐开就当那个帘，拉帘，然后我们经常化妆，把丝巾扎在头上带花，然后穿裙子裙子半截，再把另外一条裙子穿在这里，就一条长裙，再披着一个什么东西就模仿那个剧中的人物啊，然后再演，再唱，哎哟我觉得这个印象很深刻。那时候因为我比同龄人大，就是在这方面我有更多的记忆，往往就是以我为首，带着他们一起玩，这样子。

Linda described herself as a leader of her playmates because of her familiarity with the content and lines of the opera. Though she did not mention it, I speculate such special experiences developed her leadership interests and love for music, so they had profound influence on her later career as an administrator and as an academic women specializing in music education.

Linda thought that her family had exerted great influence on her. While talking about her family members, she recalled some anecdotes about her grandmother's hard work, selflessness and sacrifices for the good of her family, such as leaving the best food for the family. Linda commented that "I feel I should possess these virtues during my growing up process. And then, I also ask myself to pass on these very good virtues." Linda also related to her grandfather's showing her the door to music, and especially her parents' different ways of parenting. She recounted,

I feel that I also enjoy the deep love from my father, I feel his love for me is very deep, very great. Then because my mother is rather rational and was very strict with us, but I feel she was always industrious and thrifty in running our home. I feel that if she weren't so strict with us, because my dad, he was too easy-going, if not for my

mum's rational element, we would have never had such a great environment for us to grow up.

我觉得我受到的这种父爱也是，我觉得也是很享受，我觉得很重，挺好。那我妈因为比较理性，管我们管得比较严，但是呢我觉得她勤俭持家。我觉得如果不是她这么，这么严谨，对我们这么严厉，因为我爸，他太，他太随和了，那如果没有我妈的，就是那种理性的因素，我们也不会说有很幸运的成长环境。

Linda recalled that “in my memory my parents are very strict with us,” requiring the children to work hard and check their homework regularly. Under the wider social milieu that value education and regard education as an important means of ensuring a decent life, Linda’s parents expected her to work hard to achieve excellent academic performance and be a good student. However, she also recounted that she read some novels secretly, which her parents did not allow. She recollected that,

At that time I read them very stealthily. I put the novel in my desk drawer and read it. Also I put a textbook on my desk so it looked like I was reading my textbook. Then when they came to check on me I just closed my drawer and read my textbook.

那时候就偷偷的，放在抽屉里面偷偷地看。上面放着这个功课课本，好像在看书，结果他们来看的时候就把抽屉合上去看书去了。

Linda recounts this vignette as a form of mild resistance to her parents’ authority and discipline. Linda further described her parents’ parenting style as “keeping a [necessary] balance” for a family. She recalled her father’s support for her pursuit of music, such as taking her to practice piano in his friend’s home since Linda’s family couldn’t afford a

piano, which was a luxury in the 1980s in China. She also recalled she preferred to confide to her father because of her mother's strictness and rationality. Linda described her mother as "rational", a word seldom used to describe mother because of the stereotype that men are described as rational while women are usually irrational.

Despite this, Linda suggested that she must attribute her mother's rationality to her later achievements. Linda clarified that her mother made important decisions for her and supported her decision at many important junctures in her life, including supporting her to move on to attend university instead of finding a job after she graduated from a normal school. This made her feel that her mother's rationality served her development well. Because of Linda's expression of her admiration of her mother's rationality, I speculate that Linda takes her mother as a role model in her future life, since Linda's narratives portrayed her as an active thinker rather than blindly following the general trend when she must make some major decisions, a point to which I will return in the later section.

Linda expressed her appreciation of her husband's great support for her to pursue her academic career. Linda recounted that her husband took up the major household chore responsibilities so that Linda could have more time to study and conduct research. When I observed Linda's class, surprisingly I found that her husband went to the class too to help her to get the multimedia system ready and deliver the handouts to her students before he left. Linda recounted,

My husband supported me greatly when I was in master's degree program. Some of my friends felt that why you bother to take this program, right? At such an age, you

should lose no time to have a child. But my husband supports me very much and understands me very much. He knows that I must take this career path, so I had nothing to worry about when I took the graduate college entrance examinations, and nothing to worry about when I was in the graduate program.

先生对我的支持很大。有些人觉得，哎呀，读什么读，是吧？这么大年纪，赶紧生孩子吧。他很支持我，就是都理解我，应该要走这样的一个，所以我考研也是没有后顾之忧，读书也没有后顾之忧。

Like Mei, Linda also had the support from her husband for her pursuit of academic achievements. Though Linda didn't clarify what "worry" she might have had in these circumstances, I speculate that she referred to her husband's support. This echoes Mei's explanation that women don't need to worry about winning the bread for the family, so "as a woman if you can communicate well with your husband and with your family, if they can support you, then you will feel you have strong support" and "pursue the things you are interested in". Also, owing to her full engagement in her work and in her studies in the past years, Linda didn't have time to have a child, but she didn't feel such pressure from her husband. From the interviews I can feel Linda's great appreciation for her husband's support for her pursuit of professional excellence.

"I always worked hard"

When Linda narrated her school years, she focused on her academic performance, which is generally regarded as the most important goal for a student in China. Linda recalled that she was an outstanding student in her elementary school, however, after she entered the secondary school her academic performance was ranked as B plus, which she

explained that was due to her “being not attentive enough in class”. Linda went to a normal school to study preschool education after she completed the junior secondary education. According to her,

After I entered that school, I felt that I studied very very hard, so my academic records were ranked as the top in our grade, in terms of comprehensive evaluation or something, because we also need to choose the winners of some prizes, so I was always ranked the first or the second in that preschool education class.

我到了那边以后呢，觉得自己还是比较，比较刻苦，所以这个学习成绩应该在我们年级都是，都是算是前列了，综合测评什么的，因为还要评什么的嘛，都是排第一、第二，就在我们那个幼师。

Linda emphasized her outstanding academic records in the normal school. As a result she won an array of prizes and awards: “I was also awarded a lot of prizes, such as Outstanding Student Leader of the school. When I studied at the Normal School I was also awarded Municipal Merit Student, and I still keep these certificate, I still keep them.” Linda seemed to be proud of the prizes she won and showed the award certificates to me after we finished the interview. Linda perceived these awards and ranking as important indicators of her academic success in the normal school. She owed her academic achievements during this time to her hard work and full involvement, which is culturally required for a Chinese student, but I considered another reason might be her passion for music and music education.

Linda narrated her active participation in extra-curriculum activities, another important aspect of Linda’s school life that attributed to her academic achievements.

Linda's leadership ability was greatly developed through participating in her extra-curriculum activities. She recalled an experience that occurred in her elementary school,

When I was in the elementary school I was in the dancing team of our school so I often put on performances. Then what impressed me most deeply was that, in one chorus competition, we did quite well in our rehearsals, but once we were in the competition, probably I felt myself, I myself had some influence, my team all looked at me very attentively when I conducted the chorus, so I adjusted a little bit and aroused their emotion. Since I adjusted my strength and tempo it had very good effects, and we finally won the prize.

比如说我小学的时候也在学舞蹈队，经常表演。然后我印象深刻的一件事情就是，我们这个，这个合唱比赛，就是大家排练的时候还可以，但是一到比赛，可能我自己，自己也有一方面的作用，指挥的时候好像都看着我很认真，那我就处理了一下，结果后面就把大家的情绪调动起来了。力度的处理，那快慢的处理，处理好了以后效果就很好，就拿了这个，这个名次。

This occurred when Linda was in elementary school. Like her previous experience of putting on opera performance, she led her students to perform and won the prize. Linda recounted many similar experiences during her school years. After she entered secondary school, despite her weak performance in her subject studies, she recalled that "in the aspect of cultural recreation I was quite outstanding". Cultural recreation in China usually refers to students' extra-curriculum activities such as various competitions and contests of dances, singing, chorus, and evening parties. Looking back on her life in the normal school, Linda recounted,

When I was in the normal school, I felt very [I worked very hard]. Because I put in a lot of efforts, I improved my academic records. At that time we already had our student government organization. And at that time I was director of the Cultural Recreation Committee in our normal school, so I often organized some large-scale cultural recreational activities. I was both an organizer and a participant. Then I felt that because of my experiences in the elementary school and in junior high, and also because of the influence from my family, I had some accumulation. So during this this period of time when I studied in the normal school I did quite well. That is to say that I did quite a good job in terms of both my social work and my own academic performance, and I also developed my ability greatly.

就中师这段时间，我觉得也比较，因为自己投入也比较多，那学习成绩也就上去了。

那在我们那边，那时候已经成立了学生会了。那时候是整个师范学校的一个文娱部的一个部长，所以经常组织一些大型的文娱活动。自己是作为组织者，还有参与者，那么也是，我感觉，因为我小学，中学，因为我家庭环境的影响，有一些积累。所以我在这个，这个，这个学习阶段，这个师范期间学习阶段的表现，我觉得还是比较优异。

就是说各方面，社会工作，还有本身的学习我觉得还是不错，我也受到了很大的锻炼。

Linda admitted that she developed her leadership ability through participating in these activities. Because of her performance both in academics and extra-curriculum activities, her teachers recommended that after graduation she attended a normal university for undergraduate study. Linda recalled that only eight students from the normal schools in the entire province could have the chance to attend university while the others would work as kindergarten or elementary school teachers. This admission to university is thus not easily obtained.

Linda recalled that because she put almost all her time in her studies and on organizing and rehearsing performances, she didn't have time to socialize with her classmates at the normal school. She felt alienated from them and like an outsider. In fact, her roommates nicknamed her "a traveler" since she was seldom in her dorm or with them. Linda regarded this experience as her greatest frustration during her school years. Despite this, Linda said that, "But as a matter of fact they respected me very much because I studied hard and did quite well both in exams and in school performance, so I didn't have such problems. Perhaps I am too demanding of myself." As for Linda, even though there were social costs to her academic accomplishments, having strong academic records allowed her to measure up to her parents' expectations and garnered respect from her classmates and teachers.

Linda's college experiences were similar to her life at the normal school, and her narratives revolved around being the top student in her class, organizing and participating in competitions and winning awards. However, her experience of doing a master's degree program was quite a tortuous one because she repeatedly failed English proficiency exams, which meant she was not qualified for obtaining her master degree. Knowing that requirements for university teachers' academic qualifications continued to increase, Linda began to take master's courses in musical education. She completed all the coursework but failed in the English proficiency test three times because she had received little English education during her previous studies and because of the strict passing rate of the test.

After multiple attempts to pass, Linda finally gave up and attended the National Graduate Examinations. She was admitted to a conservatory of music to study musical

psychology. Changing a specialization meant that she needed to “study a lot of things from scratch”. Linda audited a number of general psychological courses in order to bridge the gap in her content knowledge, and completed her master’s degree in 2009.

“A sense of accomplishment”

Like Jie, Linda has worked in higher education for more than 15 years. However, not all her working experiences at university are connected with academic work. For the first seven years after graduation she worked in administration. Among the three participants, she is the only one who worked full-time in administration before switching to become a faculty member in 2001. Although Linda described entering into administration as “serendipity,” undoubtedly her exceptional performance and leadership qualities aided her. She said, “I feel that I developed my ability quite a lot, and I feel that this had great impact on the work I engaged in later.”

Linda’s work responsibilities mainly involved supervising the Student Government Association and college students’ extracurricular activities. Although Linda described her administrative work as arduous, she spoke fondly of such experiences,

at that time we were very busy, and often held various contests and competitions, both academic knowledge contests, and also art contests and sports contests. I feel holding those activities developed my ability greatly. Then apart from planning and organizing these contests and competitions within the university, and organizing students to have rehearsals and to give performance, we often need to attend the contests and give performance outside the university. We must organize students to attend these contests, so we were very busy. Then because our students had very

good quality, they could always win some prizes and was spoken highly of, so that's it.

我们那个时候会特别忙。就经常举办各种各样的竞赛。有学术上的知识竞赛，有文艺、文体这方面的这个比赛。我觉得挺锻炼人的。那除了学校校内的要组织策划这些比赛，以及组织学生排练节目参加演出之外呢，还经常有省里面的一些赛事和表演的任务……一些知识竞赛啦，文娱比赛啦，等等。我们都要组织学生参加，所以特别忙。那我们学校的这个学生素质都比较好，所以往往组织学生参加一些比赛表演都拿到一些奖项，以及获得好评，就这样子。

Linda listed the competitions and contests that she had taken her students to participate in and the awards they had won, her supervision of the Student Government Organization, and her training of the various art groups of the university such as the singing group, the dancing group, and the model group. When summarizing such experiences, she claims that,

I feel that though I was very busy when I worked in the League Committee, I acquired a sense of accomplishment from supervising the art groups. I also feel quite happy about it. Because I mainly interacted with college students, and because we were of the same age, of similar ages at that time, I felt very happy.

那我觉得就是说，嗯，自己在这个团委工作虽然很忙碌，指导艺术团开展工作呢，还是小有成就感。我觉得也挺愉悦的，和大学生一起打交道啊，因为大家都同龄，差不多年龄相当，那时候差不多，所以还是很愉快。

Linda acquired “a sense of accomplishment” through her engagement in administrative work both because she could utilize her specialization and because it facilitated honors and prizes to her students. Her work became a means for her to realize her own value.

This can explain why she felt happy though she was very busy,

I felt quite fulfilled since I was so busy. And then I also felt that I grew up happily. Why did I say so? Because when I interacted with students, they were not sophisticated and pure, and they had a lot of wisdoms too, right? And we were just like friends, and felt very happy when we accomplished something together. And during the process of planning, organizing and arranging work I feel that my ability was also developed greatly. So I feel it was a growing up process for me too. So I summarized this period of working in this way.

所以我觉得充实。然后快乐成长。为什么说快乐成长，因为和学生打交道，学生很单纯，而且他们也充满了智慧，对吧？和他们就是一个朋友的关系。那么在很多合作都有成绩，大家都很高兴。那我在组织，策划，安排工作的过程当中自己也得到了，能力得到了，我觉得到了极大的锻炼，我觉得自己也是一个成长的过程。所以我是这样概括的。

Linda interpreted her relations with students as friends, and regarded her interactions with students as “a growing up process” since she developed her ability both from her work and from her interactions with her students. By so saying Linda offered her special perspective for her work experience as an administrator. Linda had a heavy workload because many of the competitions, contests and performances occurred in the evening. Linda commented on her busy work that “I feel things went on quite well during those

seven years, except for the fact that I was too busy. I was so busy that I had little personal space. And I feel regretful about it”. I wonder if she regretted for “taking a master degree at a late time” and marrying late because she spent the majority of her time on work and had “too little personal space.”

“Wanted to become a teacher”

Despite Linda’s previous administrative experience, she commonly referred to herself as a teacher rather than an administrator. Indeed, she reiterated that she was “half teacher” because part of her responsibility in her administrative work involved teaching students singing and dancing skills.

Linda traced her decision to becoming a teacher back to when she graduated from junior secondary school. At that time she faced two choices, either moving up to senior secondary school or entering a normal school, a school to train its students to become elementary school teachers. Finally Linda chose to enter the normal school to study preschool education, and she lists multiple factors that influenced her decision,

...it was a very good choice to go to secondary technical school at that time...Also because my parents, also because my academic records in the junior high was not quite good, and my parents also felt that I did well in cultural recreational work, right? So I entered for that exam.

.....在那个时候，上中专还是一件很好的事情.....加上父母，也加上自己在这个中学的成绩可能也不是特别特别的好。父母也觉得可能我自己平时在文娱方面的表现也可以，是吧？那这样就报考了那边了。

At that time the great demand for preschool teachers meant that studying preschool education offered great job prospects. More importantly, Linda's parents were concerned that if she attended a senior secondary school she might fail in the national college entrance exams since her academic records were not good enough then, which meant that she might not be able to find a good job. Furthermore, her parents thought applying her musical talents to becoming a preschool teacher would suit her interest. So in actuality Linda's parents made the decision for her, as she herself narrated, "because I was still young then, my parents arranged that for me. I didn't have my own idea then, because I didn't know what I wanted to do in the future." In this sense Linda's choice of attending normal school was in actuality prompted by her parents, which is similar to Jie's case.

Linda spent three years in the normal school. She recalled that the majority of her classmates chose to work after graduating from the normal school because "their parents felt that it was not necessary for girls to go to university and it would be better for them to go to work early so that they could form a family and have children". However, Linda didn't follow this trend, and her parents supported her decision. Linda moved on to a normal university. After four years of undergraduate study, she again faced two choices: either entering the teaching profession or pursuing other professions. She recalled her dilemma,

Because at the beginning of the 1990s Chinese normal university graduates were assigned to work by the government immediately upon graduation, so it was not as difficult as today for us to find a job. Em, some classmates even didn't want to work in the university as a teacher, and they were more willing to work in customs offices,

governmental departments, and those sorts of places. And then, I myself wanted to be a teacher, and the university where I studied is a normal university, and its major purpose is to train us to be teachers, so I had such an opportunity, em, that the League Committee of my present university wanted to recruit someone, a music major, because one of their staff who was specialized in music had just quit the job and went abroad. They wanted to recruit a music major graduate, so one of my classmates came to this university for a job interview, but finally he decided not to come. After he changed his mind my department recommended me to come, so I was recruited and came to work here.

因为我们90年代初期这个工作分配，不会像现在这么难，嗯，就是到高校当老师可能有一些同学还不愿意来，可能更愿意去一些海关啦，去一些政府部门啦，这样子的。那当时呢，我自己也想做，做老师，而且我们那个，我所在的，所毕业的院校是一所师范学校，就也是培养我们去做，主要是培养我们去当老师的，所以就是也有这样一个机会，嗯，就是说大学团委这边要招人，要招一个音乐方面，因为他们刚走了一位学音乐的，出国去了，就想招一位，招一位学音乐的男生。结果我们班有个同学，他来面试，结果他又不来了。不来了之后我们系里就推荐我过来了，那后来我就来了。

Though Linda had chances to pursue other professions, she preferred to work at university because she liked teaching and “wanted to be a teacher”. Linda further attributed her aspiration for becoming a teacher to her family influence,

...probably it has something to do with my family background. My family can be regarded as a scholarly family, because many of us are or used to be teachers. My aunt was a teacher, my grandfather was a teacher, my grandfather's brother was a

teacher, and my grandfather's brother's daughter was also a teacher, among many others.

可能跟我们家庭这个背景有点关系吧。我们，我们家算是一个，不知道算不算是书香世家，所谓的，就是好多人当老师。我大姑当老师，我爷爷是老师，我爷爷的弟弟是老师。我爷爷的弟弟的女儿也是老师，等等。

So Linda perceived her decision to become a music teacher as both related to inclination to teaching and to her family influence, especially from her grandfather, who taught her to sing and play the harmonica when she was young and therefore led her into the world of music.

In 2001 the university launched a reform that streamlined and re-staffed all the administrative positions. Linda took this opportunity to leave administration and became a faculty member. It would be unusual if she hadn't had any struggle about this dramatic switch. She explained that she had a desire to "uplift herself" through taking a master program; however, her work didn't allow her to invest time in her advanced study. So there was a conflict, and her solution to this conflict was to become 'a full-time teacher'. Linda reflected about her decision-making process,

I must not let this opportunity go. At that time I thought about it for quite a while. I just felt that I didn't want to leave the position. I had been on the League Committee for seven years. I felt that this job required you to put in a lot of time and energy, and also this job needs young and committed staff and therefore the senior staff who had been working there for a certain period of time must move to other positions sooner or later. So I must think about where I should go after I left the League Committee. If

I continued to do some administrative work which was not relevant to my specialization of music I wouldn't like that work position and that would not be the life I wanted. And this might be a deeper reason. Finally after thinking about it for a long time I decided that I should be a faculty member, so I left the League Committee and became a teacher in the Art Teaching and Research Center of the university.

自己必须要去把握这样一个机会。后来我也想了，想了很久。就是在团委工作的这七年对这个岗位也是，就是说也是恋恋不舍的，但是我觉得，我觉得团委啊，毕竟是一个铁碗金盘，而团委工作者是一个流水的兵，他必须要流动。那以后要流向哪里，那如果说到了别的一些工作，就是说从事行政工作的岗位并不和我自己所从事的专业并不是很相关的话，那么可能不是我自己喜欢的或者是我想要的生活，那可能是深层次的原因吧。那么最后我考虑了很久还是觉得还是想做一名老师，最后就，就离开团委了，转到那个艺术教研室去当老师去了。

Therefore, Linda attributed leaving administration and becoming a full-time university teacher to her interest in pursuing the life she liked and doing the job that would utilize her specialization knowledge, not because she couldn't handle administrative work. It seems true that Linda valued her specialization highly and regarded gaining expertise in her specialization, rather than getting promoted in her administrative position, as an important means of uplifting herself.

“Women shouldn't be so busy”

Though Linda explained that she left administration and became a teacher because of her inner desire to gain expertise in her specialization and uplift herself, in our later revisit to this topic, Linda offered a different perspective. When I asked her whether

being a female had any influence on her life, she responded that it might have some influence,

After I went to work I first did administrative work, right? Then if I were a man, probably I feel I might not [switch to being a teacher]. After all I've been in this position for so many years, right? That is to say, I had laid some foundations both in terms of the networking I had accumulated and in terms of developmental space I had expanded. And after seven years I began to switch to a teaching position, and started my career from the very scratch, that really needs a lot of courage. At that time I also felt that as a woman, as a female, I felt that women should not be so busy, because I saw my superiors were very busy, very very busy. And it seemed that that was not the life that I wanted, so I felt that women should both have their busy life but also should have time for relaxations. They should both have their own career but also not be too busy so that they can have time to take care of their families. So I made up my mind and transferred to be a faculty member. But if I were a male probably I might not have considered these issues.

我在，在出来工作以后先是在行政工作上面对吧，那如果我是男性，可能，可能我觉得我不一定会，毕竟工作了这么多年，是吧，就是说，自己积累的一些人脉也好，积累的这些空间也好，都是有基础的。就是说七年以后再转向这个教师岗位的话，就是从那边又要重新开始，还是需要勇气的。那我当时也是觉得女，女性，我觉得女性不应该这么忙碌，因为我看到我的领导很忙碌，非常的忙碌，好像不是我想要的这种理想的生活状态，所以我觉得，我觉得女性应该有张有弛，既要有事业，但是也不要太

忙，也能照顾，照顾家庭。这样子，所以我就，我就转过去了。但如果我是男性的话可能不一定会可能考虑这些问题。

While reflecting on her decision to switch to teaching from the perspective of gender, Linda's understanding is different. She switched to becoming a teacher because being an administrator was too busy and that was not a life that a woman aspired for. By thinking in this way Linda regards taking care of her family, the traditional role for women to take, as an important factor in her career decisions. Linda asserted on several occasions that she might not switch to a faculty position if she were a man. She seemed to imply that administration is not suited for women though she had endeavored for seven years and had established foundations for her future development. Linda further expanded on this issue,

Besides, the traditional Chinese culture thinks that a good scholar should become an official, so we feel that men should enter politics, and they should enter politics if they feel they are competent, so that is the general idea. So I feel the same way. As I said just now, if I were a man, that gender might have had some influence on my profession, and on my life. Probably it has something to do with the value system of the society.

另外中国的这种传统文化都是觉得学而优则仕，就是觉得男人从政，觉得有能力应该从政，大概是这样。所以我觉得也是，就是说为什么我刚才谈到，如果我是男性，可能会对我的职业，人生会有一些影响。可能也跟这个社会的价值观有一定的关系吧。

Linda suggested that she was influenced by the traditional value system in Chinese society that a good scholar should become an official. Undoubtedly the scholar is

a man. Therefore Linda seems to imply that women shouldn't go into administration. If Linda had contradictory understanding of her experience of being an administrator, then her experience of re-entering administration is equally, if not more, ambivalent and contradictory. Linda became the chair of the trade union in her college after she became a faculty member. Linda explained that "I feel that it is a very happy thing for me to serve my colleagues in my spare time and to be recognized by them". This poses another contradiction for Linda. Though she regards administration as man's job, it seemed that she still wanted recognition of her leadership abilities. Despite her earlier narrative of her juggling both work and graduate study, she was willing to spend extra time on this administrative role. This seemed to suggest that she values administrative work as well.

"To be a teacher that is beloved by my students"

After Linda became a faculty member, she focused on both "teach[ing] my classes well" and "uplifting myself and obtaining a master's degree." Linda discussed her teaching frequently. According to her,

I feel that my teaching philosophy is teaching through having fun. I don't know whether my teaching can measure up to that standard. I just do my best to let my students learn in a pleasant environment. I seldom give lectures to them throughout the class time, and I seldom spoon feed them. I like interactive teaching, interactions between my students and me, so I do my best to enrich my teaching forms and teaching methods.

我觉得我的教学理念就是寓教于乐吧，我不知道算不算啊？就是尽量让学生在愉快的环境中学习，就不是满堂灌的，不是灌输式的那种教学，而是一种互动式的，师生互动式的这么一种教学，就尽量在形式上啊，手段上啊，都丰富一些。

Linda emphasized the importance of good teaching and worked hard to make her classes lively and effective. She has a collection of several hundred CD and DVD disks in her home, which she bought and used in class when she discussed the music with her students. She asked her students to perform the music pieces in her class with musical instruments, and gave her students chances to discuss and exchange ideas in class. It appeared that Linda felt quite confident in her teaching, asserting that “during the first years of teaching I was awarded the third prize for teaching by the university for couple of times. Though I only got the third prize, it could prove that I was quite good at teaching”. For Linda winning teaching awards is a means of gaining recognition of her teaching capability. However, she also suggested that,

I am still working hard to improve myself in this aspect. I really mean it, I didn't do it well. I feel that there is still a lot of space for me to improve myself, but it is impossible for me to accomplish it in a single day, and I need to improve my teaching gradually.

我自己仍然在努力当中。真的，不好，我觉得自己还有很大的提升空间，但是这些都不是一蹴而就，需要慢慢地。

Linda regards her teaching as an important aspect of her academic life, therefore she works continuously to improve it. Linda expressed her aspiration to become a teacher that students love:

I think that my ideal is to be a teacher that is beloved by my students. If you want your students to like you, you must teach your classes well. Besides, you must have some positive impact on them in other aspects than class teaching. Han Yu said that teachers are responsible for transmitting Tao (chuandao), imparting knowledge (shouye) and resolving doubts (jiehuo). So I think to be a teacher, to be a well-qualified teacher, you need to do your best in every aspect.

我觉得我的理想就是做一个学生，嗯，喜欢的老师。要学生喜欢老师，你课要教得好，除了课教得好以外其他方面你都要给他们一些积极的影响。师者，韩愈不是说嘛，师者，传道授业解惑。我觉得做一个老师，合格的老师方方面面都应该做到。

By citing Han Yu's famous words, it is likely that Linda valued teachers' role of 'cultivating' as important as imparting knowledge. Therefore though Linda takes teaching as an important part of her academic life, Linda finds it equally important for her to exert positive influence on her students' future life. She recounted that she spent extra time to assist her students and provide what they need.

Research is another important element of Linda's life as a university teacher. Linda proposed that "we need to put equal efforts in teaching and research". Because Linda switched to become a faculty member in 2001, she described that she was still "at the starting point in her path of academic research", but she is working hard at "building up my research capacity" and it is "an arduous process". However, Linda described her research goals that included getting "one academic article published each year". Linda listed to me the papers she had published concerning students' music psychology and the research projects she had conducted about music education. Linda was satisfied with her

research progress thus far, but also expressed her concern that many papers published in academic journals are repetitive work with few creative and original ideas. She wanted her research to be original.

Summary of Narratives

As Munro (1991) argues, “The transition from the interview process to writing the lives of these women was a difficult one” (p. 96). This rings equally true for me. To echo the words of my research participants, this is an “arduous” process, in part because of the impossibility of capturing the richness and complexity of these women’s lives on paper. Though my act of putting their lives into different subtitles seems “too simplistic” (ibid, p. 97) and in some ways an act of betrayal, I hope such an act can help me and my reader to better highlight important moments, the “frozen moments” and “unrepeatable public moments” in these women’s lives.

Through her narratives, Mei presented herself as an academic woman, an active thinker, who continuously pursued academic achievements. She found success in both her public and domestic lives. It seemed that Mei constructed herself as a woman who successfully negotiated her identity conflicts between her public role as an academic woman and her private role as mother/wife/daughter/daughter-in-law. As for Jie, controversies, surprising turns, and ambivalence pervade her life history and thus are the focus of my re-presentation. Linda emphasized the achievements she had made both in her school life and in her career life, and constructed herself as a woman striving for excellence in whatever she was engaged in. I am intrigued by their specific ways of constructing their life histories. This is significant because I can find commonalities in

their ways of self-representation. For example, they all emphasized that they worked hard, and had consistent pursuit in their professional life. They all focused on improving teaching and emphasized their relations with students. They all expressed that they enjoyed teaching and regarded teaching as nurturing, etc. Therefore, to analyze, critique, deconstruct and reconceptualize these women's ways of constructing their sense of self is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF WOMEN ACADEMICS' LIFE HISTORIES

In this chapter I first discuss the ways in which my participants construct their subjectivities both within and against the main social and institutional discourses that I identify within their narratives. I pay special attention to the contradictions, disruptions and silence in their narratives to consider how these moments might reveal resistance and agency at the site of their subjectivity through the lens of feminist poststructuralism. Finally I proceed to discussing my reconceptualization of the notions of subjectivity and agency in Chinese context and how we can begin to consider new space to “re-invent” (Phillips, 2002) different ways of being and knowing for Chinese women, especially for Chinese women academics.

My purpose of conducting this research project is to reveal the ways in which discourses work to put Chinese women academics into complex and contradictory subject positions, and how they create agency and resistance within such a process. I am cognizant that my participants' narratives are always already reconstruction of their lives, and the meanings they make through such narrative acts are always “historically and culturally contingent” and are “created by and in social life” (Munro, 1998, p. 2). I

believe that it is within these discursive sites that various political, cultural, socioeconomic and ideological forces are vying for power and legitimacy and offer my participants their versions of truth and meaning (Weedon, 1987). More importantly, my participants negotiate and add meanings to their experiences. Munro (1998) clarifies that women are not determined solely by discourses but are active agents in negotiating them and their subjectivity is always in production. Therefore these discursive sites of the ongoing production and negotiation of the self are the focus of my narrative analysis in this chapter.

A close reading of the three women's life histories enables me to identify multiple discourses at play in their narratives. However, in order to conduct an in-depth analysis of the key discourses, and place these women's lives within the social historical context, I focus specifically on the dominant social and institutional discourses, or official discourses, that emerge from their narratives and the three women academics' own discourses which are salient in their narratives. The language they use demonstrates the play of both the official discourses and their own discourses that work to create their subjectivities. They have each lived their experiences within a period of dramatic changes and reforms in China, including economic reform and opening up (*gaige kaifang*) which began in 1978, restoration of National College Entrance Examinations (*hui fu gaokao*) in 1977, and higher education reform (*gaoxiao gaige*). In the past three decades before 2010, China's higher education experienced dramatic changes, from its restoration in 1977 to the sharp increase of college enrollment, expansion of campuses and recruitment of university teachers that began in 1999, accompanied by the redefining of professionalism for university teachers and restructuring of university administrative

bodies. Within these social changes various discourses are “vying for status and power” (Weedon, 1987, p. 41). Some are sanctioned as dominant and legitimate to organize social institutions and give meanings to people’s lives. They are visible in my participants’ narratives, including discourses of university women teachers, discourses of professionalism, discourses of higher education administration, and discourses of gender equality. While constructing their subjectivities within and against these official discourses, they simultaneously created their own specific discourses.

Weedon (1987) argues that “neither the body and the thoughts and feelings have meaning outside their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourse constitutes the minds and bodies of individuals is always part of a wider network of power relations, often with institutional base” (p. 107). In this view, authoritative discourses provide the language we can use to construct our knowledge and meanings in the world, and legitimize and delimit our understanding of our existence and the world. However, we are not solely passive objects defined by discourses. From the narratives of the three women academics, we can see that they are actively negotiating and performing their identities within and against these discourses, and create their agency by accepting and/or rejecting them. In the following section, we will examine how the authoritative discourses function in the three women academics’ narratives of their life history and how they negotiate their self identities within and against these discourses.

Negotiating the Discourses of Women Academics

There are multiple contradictory discourses concerning university women teachers in China, and trying to account for the position of women faculty in China

involves understanding changing university structures and changing gender ideologies (Gaskell, Eichler, Pan, Xu & Zhang, 2004). In China, the traditional Confucian beliefs hold that academic work could only be undertaken by men while women are kept from academic pursuits. But with China's process of modernization in the late 19th century, and later with the New Cultural Movement in the 1920s, opportunities for women to enter higher education gradually opened up (Peterson, Hayhoe, & Lu, 2001). After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, the Chinese government has endeavored to promote gender equality, especially equal right to marriage and employment (Hershatter, 2004). Since then, Chinese women have participated in higher education in significant numbers. When Chinese universities reopened in 1977 after the Cultural Revolution, women teachers accounted for 25% of the teaching staff. In 2004 this proportion rose to 42.5% (Zhao, 2007). The steady increase of women's participation in higher education and the existing literature (for example, Wang & Li, 2009; Zhang, 2000; Zhang, 2007) show that social mores generally embrace university teaching as a good career choice for women.

Behind such a social phenomenon are multiple discourses. First, teaching is currently regarded as women's true profession. Teaching has been regarded as women's true profession in the West, especially in the United States since the 19th century. This discourse is grounded in the supposed fact that teaching complies with women's nurturing and self-sacrificing nature and womanhood. This weighty Western maternal discourse has travelled to China when China adopted the western model of modern public school system (Peterson, Hayhoe, & Lu, 2001). Though teachers in China had been

exclusively men historically, since then women began to enter teaching profession and were gradually accepted (ibid.).

Teachers have been regarded as a respectable profession in China (Chi, 2007; Yin, 2009), and had been exclusively male until the beginning of the 20th century. University teachers are regarded as one of the most prestigious professions in China. However, the dominant discourses about women academics depict them as still family-oriented rather than a career pursuer (Zhang, 1997). One reason is that the university teaching position provides women stability as well as flexibility in scheduling which enables them to fulfill their traditional obligations of “supporting husband and educating sons” (Zhang, 2000). To be a university teacher is thus regarded as a good profession for women since it is both respectful, responding to their nurturing nature and enabling them to fulfill their domestic responsibilities.

Within and against these dominant discourses concerning women’s entering into higher education, each of my participants narrated their stories about becoming an academic woman and about their life-long commitment to this profession. Despite their asserted commitment to education, their stories of becoming an academic woman and remaining in the teaching profession are fraught with tensions and conflicts. From my perspective their negotiation of such tensions and conflicts are a process of negotiating their gendered identities as teachers, therefore are a site of resistance and agency.

Becoming Academic Women

An important theme that emerges from these three women’s life history narratives is their stories of “*becoming academic women*”. Though the stories they told reveal

different motives and reasons for becoming academic women, to some extent all my participants recounted that they responded to others or government policy when making decisions about future career. Though Mei wanted to become an academic woman because of her internal desire for pursuing science and knowledge, she also narrated that she responded to her advisor's invitation to work at university after she got her Ph.D. Jie and Linda deferred to their parents who suggested they attend a secondary normal school or a normal university. Linda narrated, "I was very young then, so my parents arranged my life for me, and I didn't have my own thoughts then". Jie articulated similar words. By saying so, one interpretation is that they both construct themselves as obedient and docile daughters, and thus conform themselves to the traditional gender norms of "three obediences" for Chinese women. Still, given the emphasis on parental authority over children and obedience in traditional Chinese culture and both sons and daughters need to obey their parents, it is likely that obedience is not merely a gendered notion, but also a cultural one. The gender discourse of Chinese women's obedience is also a cultural discourse of China.

One additional reason both Jie and Linda narrated is that they chose to teach at a university because the current governmental policy dictated that the government assigned normal university graduates to teach since they received monthly stipends from the government at college. If they wanted to change their profession, they must compensate the government financially. In this way they all constructed themselves as obedient and docile, thus conforming to the traditional gendered identity of Chinese women that are passive and submissive. Though they have choices, but those choices are constrained within dominant narratives about what good women should be.

By attributing their decision of entering into teaching profession to their parents, advisor or the governmental policy, it seems that their agency is obscured. However, while narrating that they entered into higher education because they responded to others' suggestions, they resist the dominant reasons for women to enter academia as mentioned above. As Munro (1998) argues, in positioning themselves outside dominant gender ideologies, agency is possible. While participants appropriate the dominant discourse that women should be obedient and submissive, they reject the dominant discourses that teaching is women's true profession or university teaching can better facilitate the fulfillment of their domestic responsibilities. Such acts of rejecting one dominant discourse while accepting another discourse can be read as a form of agency. Therefore, engaging the dominant discourse provides an alternative to the critical and neo-Marxist conception of resistance that is always oppositional and open (St. Pierre, 2000).

Linda's experiences of entering into university teaching are even more tortuous than Mei's and Jie's. Linda attended a secondary normal school based on her parents' decision, but she also admitted that she chose to work in the higher education because she likes teaching. She emphasized that she was a woman with passion for teaching. Despite her avowed passion for teaching and despite the fact that the majority of her classmates became teachers, she took an administrative position in a university after graduation. In this sense her story of becoming an academic woman is ambiguous and contradictory. She both appropriates the dominant gendered discourse about teaching as women's true profession and an interest for her personally to account for her entering into teaching profession, but at the same time she embraces the dominant discourse that regards taking up administrative position as a symbol of career success, which will be discussed in the

later section. In this sense her avowed passion for teaching and her actual choice of administration poses a contradiction.

Linda's story of switching from administration to teaching is an equally contradictory one. On one hand, she explained that she decided to become an academic so that she could "fulfill my aspiration of uplifting herself" and "utilize my specialization knowledge"; on the other hand, she later admitted that she made this decision because she believed being an academic could provide her a stable life since she felt that "women should both have their busy life but also should have time for relaxations" and "they should both have their own career but also not be too busy so that they can have time to take care of their families". At this point though Linda creates new meaning to being an academic woman that it can better fulfill herself, she also reports her choice in terms that conform to the traditional gendered norms that women should be family-oriented. Therefore, though Linda endeavors to construct herself as an academic woman who actively pursues academic excellence, her subjectivity is still enmeshed within the traditional gendered discourse for women that she should be family-oriented and not too engaged in career. In this sense Linda takes up multiple subject positions that are at the same time contradictory and fragmented.

Life-Long Commitment to Higher Education

The three women academics' explanations of their becoming university teachers can be understood as an act of agency. Agency also lies in their narration of their persistence in remaining in this profession despite the temptations of substantial financial gains from the other professions. By narrating their choice in this way, they construct

themselves as being committed to their academic career. In the 1990s with China's embrace of a market economy, private enterprises, joint ventures and foreign ventures mushroomed in China. Not satisfied with their low salary and heavy teaching loads and attracted by the much higher economic payoffs of the business world for their knowledge and skills, many university teachers quitted their teaching positions and entered the business world. This is referred to as "jumping into the commercial sea" (*xiahai*), which became a buzzword and social trend in the 1990s. Such a social trend was widely discussed in the academic world (for example, Liu, 2001; Ma, 2008; Yang, 1993; Zhang, 1994; Zhang, 1995). Though the majority of those university teachers are male (Cao, 2008), thus is a gendered phenomenon, it is not uncommon for women university teachers to follow this trend as well.

Despite this prevalent social trend, my participants didn't follow the trend blindly. Looking back, both Mei and Jie commented that they made wise choices because they found out that teaching at university enabled them to fulfill their career aspirations. Mei had several chances to change her profession but she described her experiences as a "choice" to remain in the teaching profession. Mei recounted that she had thought about changing her career, especially when the university where she worked prevented her from taking a Ph.D. program; however, she resisted the temptation, and chose to stay in her profession. In retrospect, Mei recalled that she made a wise choice and felt "I was very lucky that I didn't take those jobs [other than being a teacher]." Through this narrative Mei constructs herself as an active thinker that can think independently despite social influences, thus putting herself in a subject position that rejects the dominant gendered discourse that describe women as passive and submissive.

Mei depicted herself as an academic woman who has persistently pursued academic excellence and remained unaffected by various prevalent social mores. When she finished elementary school, she recounted that “no one wanted to go to school” at that time since the Cultural Revolution was at its peak and the whole nation was engaged with class struggles. Despite this, Mei was very firm on her decision to pursue science and learn knowledge. When she completed her master’s study in 1988, because of the great impact of market economy, people rushed to jump into the business world (*xiahai*) and devalued the pursuit of education. Despite the negative social impact of *xiahai*, Mei didn’t follow it blindly and held fast to her aspiration of becoming an academic woman. Mei positioned herself in a subject position that resists the dominant social discourse that teaching is valueless and that women are usually not committed to their career.

Both Jie and Linda narrated that they were also tempted by the social discourse of *xiahai*, but dismissed the idea of changing her career because they narrated that they preferred a stable life, thus conforming themselves to the conventional gendered norms for women. While this is not unusual for Linda since she explained earlier that she chose to be an academic woman because she wanted to live a stable life, this especially poses a contradiction for Jie, who reiterated that she liked challenges. Jie regarded being a policewoman as her ideal profession for its challenging nature, though few women would choose to be a policewoman. But when the chance came for her to move into more challenging profession, Jie resisted the temptation of *xiahai* for her. Jie attributed her decision to remain in the profession to her conformity to the dominant gender norm that women prefer stability, and explained that “if I were a man, I would be influenced by my male colleagues and tried different jobs.” Though Jie constructs herself as an active

thinker who can make independent decision free from the influence of the social discourse, she did so in this case by conforming to another dominant discourse concerning women's gendered role. Therefore her story of remaining in the teaching profession put herself into contradictory and fragmented subject positions.

Another important factor that caused Jie to abandon the idea of changing her profession is that "I gradually began to find advantages in being a university teacher", such as "freedom of time", "freedom of professional development", and "growing with students". In so saying she resisted the discourse of *xiahai* that devalued university teachers' work, and gave new meaning to her identity as a university teacher, that is, growing together with students. Growing has been an important theme in Jie's narratives. By perceiving her teaching as a process of growing with students and by regarding pursuing a Ph.D. program as a form of "academic growth", Jie constructed her professional identities as dynamic and in formation. In this way Jie creates agency by posing herself as an active thinker and struggling to "forge a path that acknowledges women as subjects, not objects, in the landscape of life" (Munro, 1998, p. 89). Jie's resistance to the influence of general social trend on her life experience becomes a powerful way of constructing her subjectivity.

Furthermore, rather than taking up the dominant discourse that regards career as an encumbrance and a conflict to women's domestic roles, Jie saw her career as advantageous for fulfilling her domestic roles since her teaching profession "can do you good in terms of educating your kid, because as a teacher, you are more concerned with education and think more than others about how to educate your kid". Chinese academic women are commonly depicted as caught in the conflicts between their public and private

roles, so oftentimes they have to sacrifice their public roles for their private roles (Fan, 2006; Huang, 1996; Qu, 1995; Wei, 1995, 2002). Such public/private binaries are troubled by poststructuralist theorists for the reason that they operate “to produce very real, material, and damaging structures of the world” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 481), just as the categories “researcher”, “teacher” and “administrator” might do. Jie seems to endeavor to eliminate the private/public binary and boundaries, and perceive both as important part of her gendered identities. Jie’s stories provide a glimpse of her effort to disrupt dominant discourses concerning women’s identity conflicts and forge new meanings in being an academic woman.

Negotiating the Discourse of Professionalism

The professionalization of university teachers has been an authoritative discourse since China launched the higher education reform in the 1990s, so it has played an important role to define Chinese academics’ professional identity. Professionalism for Chinese university teachers refers to their competence in professional ethics, academic research and teaching (Fu, 2009). In China, apart from various pre-service training and in-service training for university teachers, the most effective means to attaining professionalism is through a scientific evaluation system (Fu, 2009). University teachers’ level of professionalism is evaluated through a set of quantified criteria and instruments. Their teaching is evaluated via student evaluation and teaching competition, and their research is calculated with their academic publications, and their professional titles are awarded based on their academic degrees, research projects and publications (Fu, 2009). Because of the hierarchal nature of professionalism, the dominant discourses of professionalism in China’s higher education are generally understood that “academic

research is valued more highly than teaching” and “teaching is valued more highly than cultivating students’ good qualities” (Wang & Fu, 1998).

Within the discourses of professionalism, women university teachers are usually depicted as more committed to teaching than research, and are in a weaker position in scientific research (for example, Gaskell et al., 2004, Zhang, 1997, Zhang, 2000). They usually occupy the lower rungs of the professional hierarchy system than their male counterparts in terms of the academic degrees and professional titles that they acquire (Wan, 2008; Zhang, 1997). As a result, some women teachers cannot but “withdraw before the new challenge and give up or lower their achievement goals” and be “satisfied with their low rank and position” (Zhang, 1997; Zhang, 2000). When faced with the conflicts between their professional role and domestic role, women university teachers are very often depicted as “sacrificing their career for the good of her family” (Fan, 2006; Huang, 1996; Qu, 1995; Wei, 1995, 2002, Zhang, 1997). Despite the dominant discourse of “women holding up half the sky” that position women as equal to men in terms of employment, career and in many other aspects of social life (Hershatter, 2004), the discourses of professionalism described above show that appropriate womanhood remains domestic competence and commitment to family, thus is gendered.

As Burton Clark (1983) emphasizes, research and advanced degrees are the distinctive features of academic organizations, and the professional knowledge of specialized scholars is a very important and distinctive form of power, and it gives some people authority to dominate others (as cited in Gaskell et al., 2004). The dominant discourses of professionalism seems to construct the identity of university teachers as gender neutral and objective, but in essence it is defined in male language since the

decision-makers are usually male, and in a scientific precise way since it is evaluated through a set of quantified criteria. Moreover, women academics' domestic responsibilities often divert their attention and energy from their career pursuit. For these reasons women academics are put in a disadvantageous subject position as passive, lack of commitment to career and incapable of research.

These dominant discourses of professionalism can be identified in my participants' narratives. Within these discourses, while degree of professionalism can be measured by one's advancement of their professional titles and concrete quantified criteria, my participants construct their professional identity by both conforming to the discourses of professionalism and in the meanwhile defining their professional identity in their own way. Their understanding of their professional identity adds new meaning to the discourses of professionalism.

Passion for Teaching

All the three women academics reveal that they have passion for teaching and work hard to improve their teaching quality. Mei emphasized that "I always trace the latest development in the field of life sciences" and "bring the newest knowledge in my field to my students" since "in this way your students begin to like your classes since you can teach them new things, and this is the very pressure that university teachers are faced with". Moreover, she narrated that she had kept updating her syllabus and updating the evaluative means of her courses, which means a lot of extra work for her. Mei's extra efforts in teaching are not usual practice in China higher education, particularly when teaching is not as rewarded as research according to the present professional title evaluation criteria. Mei's narrative constructed herself as a woman academic committed

to career excellence, thus disrupting the dominant discourse that depicts women as having a lack of commitment to career.

Jie recounted that “if I must be a teacher, I just want to be a good teacher.” Jie described her role as “a light house” for her students, and recounted how she actively adopted new teaching modes in her classes and kept reflecting after each class on how to improve her teaching. The adoption of new teaching mode posed great challenges for Jie since she needed to switch from “teacher-centered” teaching mode to “student-centered” teaching mode. Even though Jie believed that student-centered teaching model was a promising change, it is inevitably that she experienced some “apprehension” and “struggles”. After this period of adjustment, she finally felt that “I was very glad to experience such transitions”. Change is one major theme in Jie’s narrative. Though she summarizes her life as one “with few changes and very simple and peaceful,” and describes herself as a person who prefers “a stable life”, she also recounted the major changes in her life, including the change of her workplace from one city to another, the change of her teaching modes, and the change of her specialization area from English teaching to education administration. She recounted that she fared these transitive moments in her life “very smoothly,” thus constructing her subjectivities as multiple and fluid.

Linda narrated that “my ideal is to be a teacher that is beloved by my students,” and she further explained that “if you want your students to like you, you must teach your classes well.” She related to her efforts to make her class lively and fun and her use of both audio and video means to enrich her class activities. She proudly showed me the large collection of CDs and DVDs that she had collected, which she used in class. These

improvements of their teaching are consistent with discourses of professionalism in which teaching is academic people's primal obligation (Fu, 2009). By positioning them as teachers dedicated to teaching and teaching excellence, they construct their professional identities within the dominant discourses of professionalism.

Despite this, they are equally aware of the predominance of research over teaching. Since the key criteria for university teachers to be promoted to a higher professional title is their publications according to the current professional title evaluation system, it is a plain fact that the dominant discourses of professionalism stress university teachers' research output and publications as more important than their classroom teaching performance. For this reason classroom teaching is devalued as routine work in comparison to academic research. Despite this, my participants narrated at length about how they valued and worked to improve their classroom teaching. Classroom teaching seemed to be the most important factor for them to define their academic identities. While the dominant discourses of professionalism emphasized research over teaching, these three women regarded teaching as foundational to their academic identities, and advanced their stories about their teaching experiences first.

Furthermore, despite their administrative experiences, and despite the dominant discourse that values administration over teaching, they seemed to value their teacher's identity more highly, and this is especially true with Linda, who claimed herself "a half teacher" even when she was doing administrative work. They all defined the role of "teacher" in their own specific ways.

Teaching as Nurturing

These three women academics all shared their stories of caring for their students and their interactions with students. Responsibility for students seems to be an important layer for them to define their teaching identity. Mei regards “to teach students into useful persons” as the “historical mission” of university teachers. Jie listed “responsibility for students”, “patience” and “passion for teaching” as the most important qualities for university teachers. Linda regards “competence” and “responsibility” as the most important qualities for university teachers.

Their understanding of teacher’s responsibility extends from facilitating students’ academic progress to caring about their students’ personal lives, which manifest their exertion of their nurturing nature in their fulfillment of their teaching role. Mei recounted how she cared about her students and helped those with financial difficulties. She regarded her students as her own children and thus taught them like teaching her own children. She even urged her colleagues to do the same. As Mei narrated,

I told the teachers that if your kids sat in your class instead of your students, and you spent several thousand Yuan to send him or her to university, and you asked him whether he had learned something three or four years later, and he said nothing, what would you think?

Jie wanted to establish a caring relation with her students. She emphasized the important role teachers can play in helping students to grow up healthily and form correct outlook on life. Jie also recounted how she helped those students with various difficulties. For Linda, teaching didn’t simply mean imparting knowledge and important theories to students, but more importantly, “having positive influence on and shaping students to

become appropriate members of the society”. Though her time is limited, she still spends a lot of time helping her students rehearse their performance, though it is not within her work obligations.

All my participants stressed the importance of establishing caring relations with students. Though the dominant discourses of professionalism ranked teachers’ professional ethics, teaching and research as the three most important elements of being an academic person, the evaluative system and the hierarchical nature of career advancement cause academic people to focus more on research and teaching (Fu, 2009). Also, in Chinese universities teachers are responsible for students’ academic life while political instructors take care of the other aspects of university students’ life. Despite this, these women narrated that they communicated with their students after class, and described caring about their student as one important part of their teaching obligations.

This caring approach seems necessary when the expansion of college enrollment in China has brought more intense competition and substantial psychological stress to college students (Dong & Chen, 2004; Li, Nan, & Gen, 2003; You, Chen & Ou, 2004). As Mei said, “as a teacher, maybe a few words of yours would lead him to success, or maybe a few words of yours would also bring him to failure. So that is the importance of being teachers”. Therefore teachers play a crucial role in helping students with difficult situations. Mei related to the students with whom she had interacted that excelled when they entered the university but ultimately were unable to obtain their degrees, and expressed regret for them. She regarded their teachers had unshakeable responsibility to educate their students into useful persons.

My purpose of proposing that my participants' teaching is more relation-oriented than knowledge-based here is to contend that, by disrupting the dominant discourses of professionalism that focus more on teachers' knowledge through scientific measurement than interactions with students, these women appropriate the gendered caring discourse, thus creating new meaning to their work and a form of resistance to the dominant discourses of professionalism. Carol Gilligan's classic research (1982) contends that women's relationships with others play a decisive role in the way they handle situations, whereas men, by contrast, handle situations more according to rules and principles. Similarly, the academics in my study seem to apply a feministic nurturing model to their teaching, rather than the masculinist model of mere knowledge imparting process, and defining their teaching as deeply embedded in their relations with students. In this sense my participants create new meaning to their subjectivity that is not only complex, fluid, but also relational, and are always intimately correlated with their multiple roles in their families, social networks and in their work.

From their narratives, it appears that their identity as university teachers would be incomplete without defining themselves in relations with their students. By so saying they capitulate to the dominant discourses about women's responsibility to nurture students and the discourse that they are indeed more nurturing than men. So these women academics bring a new dimension to the discourses of professionalism. And I began to realize that their appropriation of the dominant gendered discourse concerning women's nurturing nature can be counted as a form of agency.

Dedication to Research

While my participants elaborated on their continuous efforts to improve teaching, they also narrated their perseverance in improving their research ability. Mei acquired her Ph.D. degree in 1992 and has been accomplished in her research field. She repeatedly recounted that she pursued an academic career because of her “internal desire for pursuing knowledge and research”, therefore she regarded her commitment to research as an important means to satisfy her internal thirst for knowledge and personal interest. Mei recounted that she “liked experiencing the fun of getting some research results and that can bring me some sense of accomplishment”. Despite her achievements in research, she admitted that, “I don’t have a talent for doing research, but I keep working hard at it and leading my students to move forward, and this is very important for me”. On one hand, her persistence in research showed her feminine resilience. On the other hand, she resisted the dominant discourses that women are biased, non-analytical, and not capable of doing academic research (Katila & Merilainen, 1999), believing that perseverance could bring success to a woman’s academic pursuit. In this way Mei rejected the dominant discourses concerning women academics and constructed herself as an academic woman that persistently pursues research achievements.

Jie stated that she decided to take a Ph.D. program in order to “enhance my research ability” and “satisfy my inner desire for self actualization”. Actually when she obtained her master degree she thought that “I can just do with a master degree”. In this sense Jie’s definition of self actualization and her professional identity is deeply enmeshed within the evolving discourses of professionalism, and her subjectivity is in formation with the changing social discourses. After the higher education reform was launched in China in the middle of the 1990s, Jie was keenly aware of the social

development and thought that university teachers could no longer be content with being ‘simply skillful workers’, or ‘teaching worker’. Rather, Jie holds that they should gradually switch to academic roles and develop their academic research ability. This urged Jie to take a Ph.D. program and to transit from a “teaching worker” to “an academic woman”.

For Jie, these ideologies worked to shape understanding of her emerging professional identities in complex ways. Her belief that she needed to acquire an advanced academic degree reflects her desire to meet the requirements of professionalism. She also narrated her hesitation about pursuing a Ph.D. because of its consequences for taking care of her family. Her hesitation reflected the dominant discourse that regards women as firstly caregivers of the family and secondly career achievers. A female achiever usually shoulders double obligations from family and work and must assume dual roles for them. Such dual roles often forced women to recess to their domestic roles. At this junction, Jie’s subjectivities are contradictory. By finally deciding to take the Ph.D. program, Jie created her resistance and agency to the dominant discourse that depicted women as primarily a caregiver and then a career achiever. And her understanding that her career can facilitate her education of her son further obscures the binary of career/family.

Like Jie, Linda took doing research as an important means to uplifting herself and accomplishing self-actualization. Linda narrated that she “made it a rule to get at least one paper published each year”. She listed multiple academic papers she had published and the research projects she conducted that were funded by the university. She also expressed her aspiration for taking a Ph.D. in her specialization in the near future.

Though Linda related to the pressure she felt from research requirements, she attributed it to the fact that she started her research very late and was still in the stage of “primitive accumulation”. Because of this, she was working hard to make progress in her academic research. Linda’s narrative can be understood, on one level, as compliance with the dominant discourses of professionalism, on the other hand, as resistance to the discourse that women are not capable of academic research. Furthermore, while working hard to conform to the requirement of professionalism, both Jie and Linda alleged that she pursued research in order to uplift them instead of merely meeting the requirements of professionalism, thus adding new meaning to being an academic woman.

Despite the general perception that women academics are more committed to and involved with teaching (for example, Gaskell et. al., 2004)—which my participants’ narratives also illustrate—each has also made active efforts to improve their research ability. Their efforts in their research fields complied with those requirements of professionalism and met the demands for contemporary academics. In this sense their desire to improve and increase their research might imply they are working along with dominant demands and discourses.

Breaking the Teaching/Research Binary

Though the dominant discourses of professionalism stress the importance of both teaching and research and conducting academic research can help better improve teaching (Fu, 2009), the actual prevalent practice in China’s higher education is that research is emphasized and valued more than teaching (Wang, 2010). The reason behind such a phenomenon is that the various evaluation systems in China’s higher education put

research output and publications as an important index, therefore there exists a teaching/research binary and academic people usually value the latter while devaluing the former.

As discussed earlier, the three women academics in my studies value teaching highly. Moreover, they understand research as inseparable from their teaching, and believe strongly in the relationship between research/teaching. For example, Mei held that “as a university teacher, especially a teacher who teaches major courses, you must conduct scientific research, and I’ve been always opposed to some teachers’ practice of focusing on teaching while neglecting research”. She further explained that it would be difficult for university teachers who didn’t conduct research to “inform your students’ newest development in this field” and “teach them your research notions and ideas”. Therefore Mei regards research as an effective means to better teaching. In a similar vein, Jie held that “if I want to be a good teacher, I really need to have some research of my own, to have some academic research to sustain me.” For Jie, research seems to promote her teaching and better fulfill her teaching obligations. By treating research as inseparable from their teaching and better facilitate their teaching, Mei and Jie disrupt the dominant discourses of professionalism that separate research from teaching and value research over teaching.

Moreover, they treat their pursuit of research excellence as not only for their career advancement and professional satisfaction, but also as a way of self-actualization. Linda regards it “as an indicator of happiness” and “a way of uplifting self”, Jie regards it as a method of “self-actualization”. Mei thinks that her career can “fulfill” herself, and feels regretful for those women who are not committed to their research obligations.

Through these narratives, I can see their endeavors of breaking down the binaries of teaching/research and career life/domestic life, which are artificially separated and ranked in value in the scientific language of professionalism.

Self-Perception of Their Profession

These three women appropriated the discourses of professionalism to construct their identities. They each seem to take their professional roles seriously and regarded their achievements in their professional field as an important means of self-actualization. Mei proudly related to the various honors and awards she had gained, including “model of professional ethics”, “prestigious professor of the Province”, etc. Linda recounted that she had won the third place of the Teaching Award for several times, which “could prove that I was quite good at teaching”. Both Mei and Linda employed the so-called scientific and precise measures of professionalism to evaluate their self value, and endeavored to meet those requirements.

Jie is evasive about the awards and honors she has received, however, from talking with her colleagues and from the artifacts that I have collected I can find she has been given teaching awards and other awards as well. It seemed to me that Jie’s silence about her awards and work achievements and her emphasis on her consistent efforts of being a good teacher might be understood as one form of resistance to the dominant discourses of professionalism that emphasize scientific evaluation. Her narratives reveal that she seems to focus more on her concrete teaching experiences in the classroom and on how to improve her teaching and research performance, but resist or does not value the rigid evaluation of her professional performance with awards. It is likely that Jie

understands that her classroom teaching can better identify her as a professional woman, rather than meeting the concrete requirements for a professional academic. Jie's narratives construct herself as an academic woman who resists authority and actively creates her own meaning of being a professional woman.

It also seems that there is another contradiction for Jie. On one hand, she embraces the discourses of professionalism to define her professional identity and makes great efforts to meet the requirements of professionalism, regarding meeting those requirements as a prerequisite for her academic attainment and personal happiness. For example, she takes great efforts to do a Ph.D. program and attend academic conferences and get more publications. On the other hand, she seems to resist being evaluated by the criteria of professionalism and devalues the evaluative nature of professionalism by keeping silent about the awards she has won.

All my participants seem to take their academic career as a lifelong commitment and claim an academic life that is enjoyable and fun. Despite the prevalent research and articles describe women academics in China as overburdened by heavy workload of teaching and research (for example, Liu & Liu, 2002; Zhao, 2007; Zheng, 2004), these women related their work to fun and enjoyment. Mei proposed the idea of "happy research" and led her colleagues and graduate students "to work in a happy atmosphere in her laboratory". Jie described her present life as "enjoyable" and believed that "I can fully enjoy my academic life when I further improve my research ability". Though Linda felt pressure from research, she advocated teaching through having fun, since she believes that learning can occur most effectively when students are having fun. Their narratives indicate that they take having fun as an indispensable part of their pursuit of

career, which disrupts the dominant discourse concerning Chinese women academics' present status as being in stress and pressure. They take their profession as a means for self-actualization, rather than nothing but a means of making a living or a means of better taking care of their family. By juxtaposing their academic life with enjoyment, these women construct themselves as an active subject defining their own identities.

Resisting Categories

Poststructuralist feminists hold that categories are used to slot people into “a hierarchy or grid and then manipulated, dismissed, and oppressed” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 480), and work to disrupt and deconstruct categories. From Jie’s narrative I find that Jie has a tendency to resist being categorized. For example, she asserts: “I’m not good at planning”, “I don’t care much about some external requirements or influence”, and “I am not that kind of person that can feel difficulties”.

To be specific, Jie asserted that she doesn’t like planning, since “I might feel disappointed if my plan can’t be fulfilled”. And she offered evidence of this position: her idea to take a Ph.D. program didn’t occur to her until in her late thirties. However, her narrative suggests otherwise. I can see that she is a well-organized person with good plans for her life. For example, to manage both her Ph.D. study and work at the same time, she described her first year in Ph.D. program as “my time is calculated in minutes”. Though she claimed that she didn’t like planning her future life, she revealed that her short-term goals were “to get my Ph. D. degree”, to “have more research output” and “to continue to serve my colleagues if there is such a chance,” indicating that aspects of her life are well planned.

These two examples suggest contradictions between her claim that she doesn't like planning and her actual behavior of good planning, her description of herself as a person who lacks planning and motivation and her actual persistent pursuit for academic excellence. On one hand, Jie appropriated the dominant discourse of women's nature as uncommitted to work or planning. In this way she represented herself as lacking agency. However, her good planning of her time and her future life reveals that she is quite organized in her behavior. In this sense Jie's active pursuit of advanced degree and career success can be understood not only as an act of resistance to the traditional gender norms but also as a form of creating and enacting her own identity which is not fixed, but always in formation.

Mei also resists categories. She repeatedly expressed her opposition to some women academics' lack of motivation for conducting academic research because they must "take up family responsibilities". It is obvious that Mei resists the dominant discourses that depict women academics as "lack of career ambitions", "not interested in research", and "family-oriented". From Mei's narrative we can see that she herself worked for decades to disrupt such discourses and construct herself as an academic woman who is committed to career and research, and when her pursuit for career collided with her family obligations, she even gave up her family obligations in order to fulfill her career aspirations.

Though Linda finally decided to leave her administrative position, her work performance in that positions can also be regarded as her specific way of resisting categories, or to be specific, of resisting the categories that "women are not good at administration" since Linda narrated that she was engaged in her administrative work and

had great performance in her position. Linda described her mother as “rational,” a word seldom used to describe women. St. Pierre (2000) argues that women are usually on the wrong side of binaries such as rational/irrational, so “feminist have troubled these structures that often brutalize women” (p. 481). Linda’s employment of the word “rational” to describe her mother indicates her desire to break the binaries and thus constructing herself as a woman confronting the dominant gendered norms.

Poststructuralist feminists work to deconstruct acts of naming and categorizing that reinforce patriarchal knowledge of the world (St. Pierre, 2000). In this sense, the participants’ resistance to categorization reflects their confrontation of the tension between their own sense of self and cultural expectations of appropriate gender behaviors and norms. For them, it seems that once they are categorized, they can find little space to create new forms of subjectivity. By refusing to construct a fixed stable identity, they create possibilities of constructing multiple subjectivities for them.

Negotiating the Discourses of Administration

In China it is a truism that being officials and hosting an administrative position has always been valued highly in Chinese history and contemporary society, influenced by the Confucian teaching that “an excellent scholar should be a government official” and being a governmental official has been ranked the first on the list of professions in China. Moreover, in China the higher education administrators’ official ranking system is equivalent to the government official ranking system. Therefore university administrators enjoy higher social status than university teachers (Li, Zhao, & Huang, 2010).

Despite Chinese women's active involvement in higher education, the dominant discourses of university administration is that men do the administrative work and women take on teaching loads and routine administration at the lowest level, not able to compete on an equal basis with male colleagues for promotion (Hayhoe, 1996). Other research reinforces such gendered discourse of administration. For example, Gaskell et al. (2004) find that women in their study describe themselves as doing less administration than men, and preferring to do less administration than men, believing that men and women's differences make women more suitable for domestic work and teaching. Though more women enter into administration and some women have served as presidents of universities, Zhang (2001) and Fan (1998) report that the academic women in China experience gender stereotypes, difficulties in getting into male networks and discrimination.

Entering Administration

Interesting enough, all my participants once took or are still taking administrative positions. Such a coincidence is out of my expectation since when I recruited participants, I didn't regard it as a factor to determine their eligibility. Moreover, my original perception of their taking up administrative position was that it signified career success and brave transgression of gendered boundaries, so I expected that my participants would tell me such stories about themselves. It turned out that they told me different stories.

For example, I had expected to hear stories of competitive triumph in gaining the administrative positions, but all my participants attributed their decision to enter

administration to others and played down their personal efforts and credentials for taking the positions. Mei narrated that she took the administrative position of associate dean because “the teachers around me recommended me, so I had no excuse to refuse to serve them. At that time my work was steady, I had acquired my professional title, and my daughter was also growing up steadily, so I was willing to stand out”. Jie avoided talking about it, and when I further inquired about it, she said she was appointed to the position. Linda recounted that her college classmate turned down the offer so her teacher recommended her to take the administrative position. Linda attributed her taking up administrative position to serendipity rather than skill and expertise. These constructions took me by surprise. None claimed the desire to be administrators or actively sought administrative positions. And this seems not uncommon since Cleo in Munro’s (1998) also claims that “I had no desire to be the top Joe” and “I didn’t apply for it [the position] I was asked” (p. 78). By so saying they resisted the patriarchal discourse that values administration and takes it as a symbol of career success. However, by saying so they also construct themselves as conforming to the dominant gendered discourse that women do not go in for administration. And this reveals the contradictory nature of their subjectivities.

What is also intriguing to me about some of their experiences is that they moved in and out of administration rather than continuing to climb up the career ladder, thus creating new space for them to negotiate the meaning of being a woman administrator. Mei stepped from her previous office as the associate dean, but was reappointed as associate general editor of the university academic journal. And she gladly took the office. Though Jie quit her previous position as department head and Party branch

secretary because she needed to fully engage herself in her Ph.D. studies, she expressed her hope that “if there was a chance, I would be glad to serve my colleagues again”. She thus constructed her administrative work as a kind of service. Linda left her previous administrative work and became a faculty member, but she is currently chair of the trade union of her college. Their stepping away from and then reentering administration signals a form of resistance against hierarchical, patriarchal notion of career success that is embedded in the practice of keeping moving up the career ladder (Munro, 1998).

Not A Point of Pride

Neither do my participants perceive their administrative experience as a point of pride. They take administration as an auxiliary achievement when compared with their academic achievements. Mei’s assertion that she didn’t value administrative positions highly indicates her resistance to the male-defined meaning of a successful career, which is usually defined by upward promotion in their administrative position. Moreover, Mei recounted that after stepping from her administrative position, “I have more time to conduct research, I can have more interactions with my students, and more time to take care of my family, and I really enjoy myself. Sometimes I can also have time to learn to play the piano.” Mei claimed that she could gain a sense of accomplishment by doing so and attributed her lack of motivation for administration to the gendered norm that women usually don’t have high career aspirations. Though at face value Mei is conforming to, and thus reproducing, the gender norm, deeper examination lends the insight that Mei is actively negotiated her gendered identity and disrupted the dominant discourse concerning what counts as successful career. So, this act of appropriation can be read as an act of agency.

Jie doesn't see administration as a vehicle for achieving career success; on the contrary, she regards it as "an impediment" to her personal development since it consumes time she can have spent on her academic research or with her family. She seems to suggest that academic excellence was more valued than administrative achievements. In this way she is seeking recognition and alliance with the general teaching force to which the majority women belong. She expressed that before taking a Ph.D. "I was an ordinary teacher then". By saying so she hid another identity: an administrator. This reveals her ambivalent and contradictory perception of administration. In this way she disrupted the traditional patriarchal norms that devalue teaching and prize administration.

After working as an administrator for seven years, Linda gradually found the role at odds with the kind of life she wanted to live, so she switched to an academic position in order to better fulfill herself. Linda's decision reveals her resistance to the dominant social discourse that devalues teaching, thus constructing herself as an active thinker that can have her own authority.

Therefore my participants value academic development more than their administrative achievements. Seemingly, the predefined gender roles and institutional practices have constrained women's behavior and prevented them from seeking administrative achievements. However, if they value their intellectual growth as more important for their self-actualization, then their juggling among being an administrator or being a teacher can be understood as another form of their agency and resistance. Their subjectivities become shifting and fluid within such a negotiation process.

These examples seem to me to be a way that these female academics represented themselves as women who didn't go for administration very much, and avoided presenting themselves as ambitious career achievers, thus assuming a conventional subject position for women. However, their narration of their reasons for entering administration can, in essence, also be understood as an act of resistance to the dominant discourse that values administration more highly than teaching at institutions of higher learning in China.

Despite my endeavors to understand their narratives as various forms of resistances to existing discourses of administration, I also find contradiction. Though they explained that they didn't want to become administrators, both Mei and Linda recalled fondly the achievements they had made in their administrative work. Such a contradiction reveals that they work to construct themselves as women academics who didn't want to become administrators, but could achieve as well as, if not better, than men if they were administrators. Their narratives reflect various complexities and invite various interpretations.

“Glass Ceiling”

Originally I had expected to hear my participants' stories about how they touched the “glass ceiling” and overcame various difficulties in her administrative work, however, all my participants kept silent about this topic or evaded such a topic. In fact from their narratives I can spot the existence of such “glass ceilings” in their administrative experiences. For example, though Linda explained that her reason for leaving administration is that she wanted to “utilize my specialization knowledge” and “uplift”

herself, her later narratives reveals another layer of her understanding that administration was for men. Because of it she switched to a teaching position, believing that she could achieve more by becoming an academic woman. One possible reason might be that she had hit the “glass ceiling” in her administrative experiences, therefore though she had worked hard in her administrative position and though she had outstanding performance in her position, she still converted to a faculty position. Linda’s contradiction reveals her ambivalent, contradictory understanding of administration, thus revealing her multiple and shifting subjectivities.

Jie recounted that the reason for her to quit her administrative position is that “because many times, you just find that though you have good intentions, the result of your work, or some actual effects, might not be as good as you expected”. I speculate that “the result” might be that she couldn’t get promoted despite her “good intentions” and despite her hard work because of the existence of the “glass ceiling”. This might also be the reason for Jie to step from her administrative position, since she comments that “I can have a better hold of myself in terms of my own specialization, my academic degrees, my research, and some other specialties. And then there are so many uncertain factors involved in administrative work”.

The contradiction between my participants’ denial about or evasion of the topic of “glass ceiling” but the possible existence of it in their administrative experiences can be explained that they want to represent themselves as competent and successful administrators, thus refusing to conform to the dominant discourse that women are not good at administration. Also, their silence can be interpreted that even such a “glass ceiling” exists, they didn’t regard it as a difficulty. In both cases I can speculate that they

are confident that they can always find new ways of coping with difficulties. Thus their silence can be seen as a form of agency in trusting in their abilities to negotiate challenges in their administrative work as they encounter them.

Negotiating the Discourses of Gender Equality

My endeavors of critiquing and deconstructing my participants' subjectivity construction process enable me to unveil the invisible working of the dominant discourses of gender equality, and to analyze both its "disciplinary power" and its "insidious nature" (Phillips, 2002) on the subjectivities of Chinese academic women, and possible ways they create their agency and resistance.

In contemporary China the discourses of gender equality are powerful, dominant and pervasive in their own rights. China is traditionally a patriarchal society. Under the influence of western feminist movement, Chinese feminism began in the 1880s, and became vigorous during the New Culture Movement in the 1920s. They struggled for basic human rights for women. Later, "Chinese Marxist feminism", termed by Barlow (2001, p.1287), adopted a Marxist tenet that "the degree of women's emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation" (Engels, [1880] 1978, as cited in Welland, 2006), and this exerted great influence on Maoist gender discourse of gender equality. After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the Chinese government put forth a series of laws and regulations to ensure women's equal rights in various fields, especially their equal right to employment since the government believed that "women's participation in social labor was a prerequisite for their emancipation" (Li & Zhang, 1994, p. 139).

It is undeniable that the discourses of gender equality have brought tremendous improvement to Chinese women's social status and given Chinese women vast space to gain equality and social justice (Hershatter, 2004). Because of these discourses, gender equality was readily accepted and encountered much less resistance than it deemed. One instance is that all my participants have the support from their husbands in their pursuit of career excellence. This also exemplifies the disciplinary power of social discourses that legitimate what is right and regulate people's ways of thinking and acting.

From the three women's narratives we can see that they construct and shape their lives both within and against the discourses of gender equality and also created new meanings to the dominant discourses. Firstly, the three women academics construct their self identities within the dominant discourses of gender equality, believing the emancipatory nature of the discourses of gender equality. They seem to believe that gender equality in contemporary society is a truism, and believe that they could achieve as high as their male counterparts. This can account for the fact that they all strive to construct themselves as capable academic women that are capable of accommodating themselves to various social changes and transformations. These women actively disrupt the dominant discourses about women academics that depict women academics as incapable of academic research and family-oriented, and believe that they can achieve as well as men as long as they try hard. They readily embrace the discourses of professionalism, and endeavor to meet the requirements of their profession in teaching and research, and take becoming a professional woman defined by the discourses of professionalism as the means and goal for their self-actualization. In this sense, they add new meaning to their pursuit of career excellence.

Originally I expected to hear stories about my participants' grievances over the oppressive nature of the rigid requirements of professionalism in contemporary academia, especially to women academics, but my participants told different stories. These women deny that being female brought them negative effects. Mei admits that gender has some impact on her career; however, instead of listing the various disadvantages of being a woman in the academia, Mei expounds in great detail about the advantages of being a female that can facilitate her career development. She listed the feminine qualities that she possess, such as "not feeling ashamed of asking others for advice", "be patient", "be verbally articulate", etc, and perceived these feminine qualities as "advantages" that she could utilize to better fulfill her work obligations. Because of these advantages, Mei concluded that "So I feel that I am an academic woman in university, and I have my own advantages, so I must make use of my advantage". Therefore, Mei actively constructed her subjectivity through rejecting the dominant discourses that always depict women as disadvantaged and oppressed.

Jie recalled that "when I was very young I was told such a notion that men and women were equal." Because of this Jie has been holding the belief that "girls can do the things that boys can do." Therefore, she confessed that "basically gender might have little impact on my life. Then after I entered the teaching profession, from a certain perspective, women have more advantages." Like Mei, Jie listed some feminine qualities that can facilitate her career, such as patience, eloquence, etc. Therefore their narratives disrupted the dominant gender norms and demonstrate the multiple and contradictory nature of their subjectivities.

By understanding traditionally feminine qualities as advantageous for women academics, and by emphasizing personal efforts and perseverance, rather than gender, as the most important elements to determine an academic woman's success, Mei and Jie actively negotiate their gendered identities and positioned themselves as active thinkers and active agents. They deftly negotiate among various gendered discourses and struggle to construct a gendered identity in which she could both measure up to the male standards of being a professional, and "be feminine" since she still conforms herself to various gender norms and expectations for women. However, despite their statement that gender is advantageous for their professional development, this act can also be understood as a strategy that they employ to cope with the invisible gender inequality that persists in both Chinese universities and in Chinese society. One example is that though it is promulgated by law that men and women have equal right to employment, female postgraduate students find it harder to be employed than their male counterparts (Liu, 2006).

While recognizing the advantages of being a woman academic, Mei also acknowledges the detrimental effects of the dominant discourses on academic women, such as the discourse that define women's role in their domestic sphere, and the discourse that depicts academic women as incapable of research or uninterested in research, thus affecting their motivation for achieving career success. Despite this, Mei narrated, "you can't take gender as an excuse." By saying so she implies that gender is not a decisive factor to determine academic women's career achievements, which reflects that her understanding of academic women is deeply influenced by the discourses of gender equality prominent in contemporary China. When they were confronted with the conflicts of their multiple identities as a mother, a wife and a graduate student, they chose to

sacrifice their domestic roles in order to fulfill their career aspirations. Therefore, the contradiction between women's multiple identities became a rich discursive site for them to negotiate their self identity in complex and contradictory ways.

However, participants also admitted that their lives would be different if there were males. Mei and Jie both suggested that if they were male, they would leave their teaching profession and "plunge into the business sea". Linda admitted that if she were a male, "I might not consider it (switching from an administrative position to a faculty position)". So they appropriated the dominant discourse of gender equality to account for their "working hard" both in their studies and in their career, to suggest that they can achieve as well as men. In the meanwhile, they reveal their compliance to gender norms. For example, Mei holds that "if you have a family and have a husband, as a woman, if you can communicate well with your husband and with your family, if they can support you, then you will feel you have strong support." Mei reiterated that spousal support is crucial to a woman academic's career success, which indicates that she still constructs herself within the dominant gender discourses that women should shoulder domestic responsibilities. In a similar vein, Jie holds that "women should live a stable life" and Linda holds that "women should not be too busy." Through these words they conform themselves to the dominant gendered discourses that define gender norms for women.

These are the contradictory moments in their narration of their life histories and in their construction of their gendered subjectivity, which suggests the complex and contradictory nature of their subjectivities, and their resistance to the unitary reading of their gendered identities. They create new meaning to the dominant discourses of gender equality in China, which has been defined as the sameness between men and women.

Their endeavors of adding new meanings to the discourses of gender equality reveal their emerging female subjectivities. As Munro (1998) argues, “in rejecting an either/or concept of gender”, they resist “the duality and finality of unitary concepts of gender identity” (p. 121).

Creating Their Own Discourses

While actively negotiating their sense of self within and against the various dominant social cultural discourses, these women academics’ own specific discourses emerge from their narratives. For example, while the mainstream scholarship on Chinese women academics in China still depicts them as being vexed by multiple role conflicts and consumed by pressure from work, my study has shown that the three Chinese women academics have constructed their subjectivities in different ways as before and their sense of themselves is never the same as before. One indication is that all the three participants state that they have immense support from their husband, which contradicts the dominant dichotomy of career/family for professional women in China.

Also, the discourse of age emerges from their narratives. For Mei, since she is in her fifties, her narratives focus on her recollections of her life experiences in the past years and her reflection of her life trajectory. Mei reiterated that she always reflected on her life during the interviews. Though she proudly recounted the various achievements in her career, she also admits that “In a couple of years, this frequency (of my research productivity) will probably slow down gradually. I am approaching 60 years old then, and I can’t always move upward in some aspects. And I am prepared for this” By saying

this, Mei imagines herself as becoming less motivated and less productive in her research in the near future, and this is a moment that the discourse of age emerges.

In contrast, both Jie and Linda are still in their thirties; therefore in their narratives they expressed their hopes for the future. For example, Jie describes her experience of doing Ph.D. as “both painful and happy”, and such a process enables her to know how to enjoy her life gradually. Jie further envisions that “I also hope that I can finally remove the word ‘gradually’ and then I can fully enjoy my life” after she enhances her research capability. By saying so, Jie envisions her future endeavors in her professional development. Though I asked Linda to tell her life experiences in the past, Linda expresses multiple aspirations for her future professional development. She expressed her hope of becoming a teacher that is loved by her students, saying that “I am also working at it (improving my teaching skills) because I hope I can become a good teacher that students like”. By saying so Linda looks ahead in her career path and envisions a blueprint for her professional development. Both Jie and Linda narrate their future plan, and envision their professional development as “going upward”. Therefore these three women construct their sense of self within the discourse of age in different ways. Mei mainly reflects on her past life trajectory and in the meantime realizes the restraint of age on her professional development, while Jie and Linda both envision their professional development as going upward.

Another discourse that emerges from their narratives is the discourse of specialization. Because my participants are from different academic disciplines, their understanding of their research is also different. For example, Mei specializes in life science, so she understands research in this field as indispensable for her teaching. As

Mei narrated, “I am always against the practice that a teacher puts all his energy into teaching and doesn’t do research. You definitely cannot do that in the field of life sciences”. Mei further explained that “If you don’t experience the scientific development process by yourself, it is very hard for you to teach your course well”. Therefore Mei’s construction of her subjectivity and her understanding of academic research is closed linked to her special area of expertise. For Jie, since her specialization is English education, she recounted that her research capability is relatively weak because “university English teachers are usually quite weak at doing research”. Therefore Jie refers to the role of university English teachers as “teaching workers” and this motivates her to do a Ph.D. in education to strengthen her research capability. In this sense Jie’s construction of her subjectivity is closely related to her specialization as well.

Reconceptualizing Subjectivity and Resistance in Chinese Context

It has been argued that there still exist structural and material inequalities between men and women in Chinese institutions of higher education (Zhang, 1997). My original purpose for conducting Chinese women academics’ life history research was that, by listening to their life stories in their own voices, I could identify how they resisted and combated patriarchal discourses and gender discrimination in their daily lives. My assumption is still framed within the humanist notion of a unitary subjectivity and resistance as opposition. However, through my interactions with them, I find that though they did actively construct their subjectivities and identities through rejecting or accepting various discourses, their narratives both confirm and contradict the dominant official discourses of university women teachers, discourses of professionalism, discourses of administration, and discourses of gender equality, and they create their own

discourses as well, such as the discourse of age and discourse of specialization. They told positive stories about their continuous struggles for career achievements and harmonious domestic life despite various social changes and difficulties, and bravely met various challenges and fulfilled their personal values. In the meanwhile, they also constructed themselves as great jugglers among the multiple identities of a good mother, a good wife, a good daughter and daughter-in-law, an entrepreneurial academic woman and a capable administrator, and gained flexibility for them to shift between these identities.

These three women academics' life histories suggest that their construction of subjectivities as women academics are multiple, situated, fragmented and contradictory. As Munro (1998) argues, this does not preclude agency or resistance. On the contrary, it is in such daily working on their subjectivities, through naming and renaming their daily experiences that complex and contradictory forms of resistance exist. To be more specific, their resistance and agency lie not only in their brave transgression of gendered ideologies and norms, their resistance to dominant discourses, but in their appropriation of the dominant gendered ideologies and discourses, and breaking the existing binaries and resisting stable identities, in their continuous construction of their gendered identities. The multiple subject positions that they take indicate that "agency is not bound to 'a' subject position but in the ongoing resistance to any stable and unitary identity." (Munro, 1998, p. 125)

As a poststructuralist feminist researcher, I honor my participants' naming of their life experiences, and their ways of constructing their subjectivities. By understanding their life histories, I have a better understanding of my own. As I learned from Mei, Jie and Linda, resistance doesn't mean head-to-head confrontation against oppression of

women, but can be subversive and happens in our daily life and in challenging our normalized thinking about what we take as natural and granted, about the various binaries, categorizations and naming that actually oppress us.

Then how can we envision resistance for Chinese women academics? Since subjectivities are sites of the dominant discourses vying for power. It is these multiple, contradictory subjectivities at play that allows for resistance and possibility (Lather, 1991). Munro argues that “it was the ongoing and continual process of constructing a self that was a primary form of agency” (1998, p. 15). More specifically, Deborah Britzman (2003) contends that there is much possibility within teacher education as the “image of teachers as negotiators, mediators, authors of who they are becoming—is the place where identity becomes infused with possibility” (p. 29). Though she speaks for the preservice teachers, I think this equally holds true for university women teachers in China. These three women’s experiences of gendered selves shed new light on our understanding of women’s subjectivity, agency and resistance.

Therefore I hope this study can offer insights and possibilities for looking for resistance in Chinese women academic’s lives and narratives. Also, I hope it will offer insights into reconceptualizing women teachers’ subjectivity and resistance in China’s higher education. In a practical sense, I hope it will offer insights and possibilities on how to enable them to construct the meaning of their life in their own language, to help them become negotiators, mediators and authors of their subjectivity, and to envision new possibilities of constructing their subjectivity.

I also hope this study will render new thinking for the policymakers for China's higher education, especially for those who are concerned with women teachers in China's higher education, since, without touching upon the gender issues in higher education, it would be hard to envision a true development for China's higher education (Gaskell et al., 2004). Most importantly, though the prevalent narratives of Chinese women academics are entangled inseparably with dominant sociocultural discourses of gender in order to enforce and reinforce cultural norms and expectations, a poststructuralist feminist analysis of their life narratives enables us to deconstruct the dominant oppressive identity discourses. It also provides us with options that envision agency and resistance to gendered cultural norms, and envision alternatives to patriarchy and increasing sociocultural equity.

CHAPTER VI

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the previous chapter I examined the three women academics' life histories from a poststructuralist feminist lens, and analyzed how they negotiated their gendered selves through their narratives of their life experiences, then critiqued and deconstructed their subjectivity construction process. Such critiques and deconstructions provide me new possibilities to reconceptualize the notion of subjectivity and resistance in Chinese context. In this chapter I discuss my reflections on the research process, my ethical responsibility as a researcher and the intersubjective nature of the study. Following that is the limitations of the study and suggested directions for future research.

Reflections on My Research Process

Ensuring Validity of the Study

Because of my poststructuralist feminist stance in this study, I recognize that my ethical responsibility is closely related to my epistemology. I understand that the goal of my study is not to locate or reach "truth," but to critique and deconstruct the established "truth" (St. Pierre, 2000), thus challenging our ways of knowing and envisioning new

ways of knowing. My challenge as an ethical poststructuralist feminist researcher shifts from how to accurately represent my participants' life experiences to how to trouble and critique our normalized thinking and habitual practices. I resist retelling their stories in a linear chronological order since that "would be an act of betrayal, a distortion, a continued form of 'fitting' women's lives into the fictions, categories and cultural norms of patriarchy" (Munro, 1998, p. 12). I also resist glossing over the moments of silence, disruption, and contradiction, since I am convinced that these moments are powerful and revealing sites for them to negotiate their self identities and for me to deconstruct their identity formation process. I must admit that my telling is always situated and partial, contingent and temporal, and I am cognizant that my critiques and analysis are both illuminated by my own experience as woman academics in China and in the meanwhile strongly constrained by my own subjectivities. Being aware of the subjective nature of this study, I would leave this project open-ended since it "should be a text sends out multiple messages of possibilities" (Lather, 1996), and I hope this research project can "entice, evade and seduce" my readers (Lather, 1996) to interpret and critique as they read it, and bring their own perspectives to the present study.

I also recognize the importance of considering validity in the present study. Qualitative researchers have revisited and reconceptualized what constitutes a valid piece of qualitative work. Lather (1993) proposes "theorizing our practice" (p. 674) as an important step of doing poststructuralist research, and argues that poststructuralist forms for validities "bring ethics and epistemology together" (p. 686). Such theorizing has at its core a commitment to self-reflexivity in terms of "what is and is not done at a practical level" (p. 674). This valorizes my self-reflexivity as valid data. In order to accomplish the

task of self-reflexivity I keep a reflexive journal and constantly reflected on the research process. In this way my subjectivities are involved in the research process. More importantly, I must trouble my reflexivity, being aware that my perspective is always partial and incomplete. However, self-reflexivity is undeniably an “emotionally troublesome endeavor” (Alcoff, 1991, p. 22) for me. I realize that there are severe limits to my ability to “self-critique” (Lather, 1993, p. 674) and thus casting doubt on my reflection, especially when I recognize that, like my participants, I have multiple selves and these selves are situated, shifting and fragmented too. Then which of my “selves” am I reflexive about? Since I have predetermined theoretical framework to analyze my data, I am also running the risk to fit the data to my research purpose so as to satisfy my own “political and theoretical zeal” (Newton, 2009, p. 108).

In order to ensure the validity of my study I bear in mind the checklist of Lather’s (1993) transgressive validity, which regards reflexivity, ethics and politics as integral. Therefore, the researcher is not detached from the research but an integral part of the research process. In actuality throughout my research process I’ve been clearly aware of my presence in my data collection and analysis process. What I have collected as data and how I interpret them is inseparable from my own epistemological, ontological and ethical stance. And this makes me realize the importance of researchers’ ethical responsibility. I must always bear in mind the moral and ethical responsibilities as a poststructuralist feminist researcher and make my research endeavor open-ended rather than being closed to other possibilities.

Richardson (1993) encourages us to practice “writing from ourselves” so as to be “more fully present in our work; more honest; more engaged” (p. 516). For me, this

serves as a form of “counter-practices of authority” that “interrogate representation” (Lather, 1993, p. 677). Therefore one way of ensuring the validity of the study is to honestly present my research process so that my readers can critique my representation of my participants’ life histories.

Like Munro (1998), though I endeavor to establish an equal relationship with my participants, it turned out that such a relationship is almost impossible. On one hand, I greatly appreciate their brave acts of storytelling since it is not as usual and common in Chinese cultural context as it is in some other cultures, especially when their stories will be the objects of analysis. I equally appreciate their understanding and cooperation throughout the research process. Still, their deep-rooted understanding about research and about the researcher-researched relationships might influence them to assist me and put themselves into a subordinate position to me. Even Mei, an experienced and veteran researcher, also regards me as the authoritative role in the research process. She told me that she will coordinate with me to do some research and will follow my instruction. After I transcribed the interviews and asked my participants to offer their comments, they responded that I knew better than them about how to present the data.

I am equally intrigued by my participants’ understanding of data. In Jie’s understanding, only serious talks can be taken as data, so she tends to summarize her life experiences in concise words rather than telling stories that happened in her life. But after I turned off my digital recorders, she began to chat with me about the little stories in her life. Though she regards this kind of chitchats not as valid data, I see this as the exact kind of data I want. I was puzzled by the discrepancy of our understanding concerning what counts as valid data for my study, but gradually I realize that as a researcher, I

should recognize and respect Jie's ways of presenting her life history and I further regard it as researchers' ethical responsibility to accommodate their participants' individual needs and desires in order to establish a collaborative process as much as possible. After I transcribed my interviews with Mei, I asked her to read it and offer her comments. After she returned the transcripts to me, I found that she changed all the colloquial language into formal written language and crossed out all the hesitations, repetitions and overlapping. Then I realized that she understood that casual talks cannot be taken as research data. This made me realize that more discrepancies between me and my participants might exist in the research process because we had been trained in different cultural contexts, worked in different fields, and were interested in different kinds of research endeavors. Moreover, it might be possible that my participant speculate on my research purpose, thus aiming to produce "the expected data". This implies an unequal power relation between them and me, which inevitably shapes the data gathering process and the certainty of my claims about the validity of the present study.

Reflections on My Own Life History

Throughout my research process I keep reflecting on my own life experiences, and find numerous convergences of my participants' life stories with my own life trajectory. As I hear their stories, I begin to understand mine. I recalled the various times when I resisted becoming a teacher. After finishing junior secondary school my parents wanted me to attend a normal school and study preschool education, since it ensured a good job after graduation. However, unlike Linda who accepted her parents' arrangement, I resisted it and chose to attend senior secondary school, taking the risk that I might not be able to go to college and might not find a good job. Looking back, I realize

that I was both resisting the dominant discourse that being a teacher is women's true profession, in the meantime I was also resisting the discourse of "docile and obedient daughter". After graduating from senior secondary school, though Jie followed her parents' arrangement and attended a normal university, I once again resisted doing so because I thought teachers' work was not valued. After graduation from university I chose to work in the same university as an English teacher, not because I valued teaching then, but because I wanted to stay in Guangzhou, one of the major cities in China. So I was deeply influenced by the prevalent social discourses that devalued knowledge and teaching. Mei and Jie's stories enabled me to find out why I chose to stay in the profession. As they pointed out, teaching is actually not as simple as they had expected and was full of challenges. For me, I began to like teaching because it is both challenging and rewarding. I can grow up together with my students and learn from my students. It is by no means simple work.

Like my participants, I realized the tightening requirements for university teachers, so I came to the United States to take a Ph.D. program in order to improve my capability of research. However, I have never realized the patriarchal nature of the higher education discourses. As I explicated in Chapter 1, I was brought up in a socialist country that advocates the equality between men and women, and firmly believed such a truism. For this reason I failed to detect the actual inequalities in my daily work. Therefore my critique and deconstruction of my participants' life histories helps me to further understand my life as an academic woman, and help me to detect the patriarchal discourses in China's higher education and women academics in China create their resistance and agency in both accepting and rejecting these discourses.

Luttell (2009) contends that she does not believe that “researchers can eliminate tensions, contradictions, or power imbalances”, but she believes that they “can (and should) name them” (p. 259). This resonates with me with the progression of my research process. Like Luttell, though my puzzles continue, I learn to worry less about whether my participants were “telling the truth” than whether I am able to critique gaps, inconsistencies and associations (p. 274). And my puzzles can be conceived of as new starting point to continue my contemplation on such issues as validity and reflexivity in poststructuralist feminist research. As Newton contends, “if I ever came to a place of unquestioning acceptance of particular and seemingly transparent definitions of what validity and reflexivity represent, then this conversation stops” (2009, p. 110). Though I haven’t found satisfactory solutions to the dilemma of validity, my research process definitely increased my understanding of the poststructuralist problems of power, language, representation, politics and ethics.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to my study resulting from my sampling. As noted, my sampling strategy is purposive and convenient sampling through friends’ references. Patton (2002) holds that convenience sampling has the lowest credibility, so this can be considered as a limitation to my research study. And also the sample size is small. But since I didn’t attempt to draw a sample that would yield findings that are broadly generalizable, I find each participant in my study yield rich, complicated data for me, and different types of data have been collected as well for the purpose of triangulation. So the data I collected can meet my research purpose. As Goodson & Sikes (2001) argues, life history samples are usually quite small and that “adequacy is dependent not upon

quantity, but upon the richness of the data” (p. 23), and Kvale (1996) also put forward similar viewpoints. In this sense, my sampling in this study was not a significant limitation.

Time frame is another limitation to this study. I collected the data in China during the summer that lasted about three and half months. If I could have more time to spend with my participants, in multiple settings, I would have yielded more in-depth data for my study.

Also, when conducting this research study, I found that all my participants have similar experiences with similar family background and educational background though they do differentiate from each other in terms of their academic specialization, and different life experiences and working experiences. Being aware of the intersectionality between gender and other factors that shape women’s lives, such as geography, class, ethnicity, I recognize this limitation. However, considering the nature of convenience sample and also the length of time involved in participating in this study, I hold that these cases provide productive insights into Chinese academic women’s lives.

Future research

A future direction of this study would be how these women’s construction of their self identity impacts their classroom teaching, since university teachers play an important role in their students’ formation of their outlook on life, and this would have even more profound significance considering the changing dynamics in Chinese universities and Chinese society.

Another recommendation for future research is to expand the study to include women from more diverse backgrounds, in recognition of the limitations of the present study. Because all my participants are from an urban background, it would be illuminating to study the life experiences of the women academic from rural background. Since gender discrimination is more serious in the rural areas where girls have more difficulties in getting a good education, a future study of women academics that are from rural families will enrich the present study substantially.

Also, since I focus on the analysis of official discourses that emerge from my participants' life history narratives, I pay less attention to their own discourses that they create during narrating. And this can be another future direction for my research, that will demand greater incubation, immersion, discussion with my participants, and self-reflexivity for me as a researcher.

With China's further opening up and the trend of globalization, Chinese universities are gaining momentum to enhance their science and technology research abilities. This has posed greater challenges for academic women in China (Gaskell et al., 2004). How Chinese academic women construct their subjectivities and identities in face with these changes and trends will also be a direction for future researchers to take.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Thursday, April 29, 2010
IRB Application No ED1066
Proposal Title: A Study of Selected Chinese Women Academics' Identities and Subjectivities

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 4/28/2011

Principal Investigator(s):

Xiaoling Ke	Lucy Bailey	Guoping Zhao
83 S. Univ. Pl. apt. 2	215 Willard Hall	211 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74075	Stillwater, OK 74078	Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol

1. Tell me briefly about yourself and your family members.
2. Tell me about growing up in your family.
3. Describe for me some of your most vivid childhood memories.
4. What impressed you the most about your family activities?
5. Tell me about your school life, including some unforgettable events in your school life.
6. Tell me about the jobs you have had, including: place, length of time, position, job responsibility, and reason you left or change jobs and any other important information regarding this job.
7. When and why did you decide to become an academic?
8. Briefly articulate your philosophy of teaching. How has it changed ever since your teaching career began?
9. Briefly summarize your career as a teacher.
10. What do you consider to be the most important about being a university teacher?
11. How would you describe your life?
12. What has been important about your life?
13. Tell me about the major events that have impacted your life.
14. Do you think your life would be different if you were a male? If so, how?
15. Do you think your career experience would be different if you were a male? If so, how?
16. Is there any significant effect that your gender has on your school experience?
17. Is there any significant effect that your gender has on your life as an academic?

APPENDIX C

Transgressive Validity Check-List: A Simulacrum (Lather, 1993)

Ironic validity

--foregrounds the insufficiencies of language and the production of meaning-effects, produces truth as a problem

--resists the hold of the real; gestures toward the problematics of representation; foregrounds a suggestive tension regarding the referent and its creation as an object of inquiry

--disperses, circulates and proliferates forms, including the generation of research practices that take the crisis of representation into account

--creates analytic practices which are doubled without being paralyzed

Paralogical validity

--fosters differences and heterogeneity via the search for "fruitful interruptions"

--implodes controlling codes, but still coherent within present forms of intelligibility

--anticipatory of a politics that desires both justice and the unknown, but refuses any grand transformation

--concerned with undecidables, limits, paradoxes, discontinuities, complexities

--searches for the oppositional in our daily practices, the territory we already occupy

Rhizomatic validity

--unsettles from within, taps underground

--generates new locally determined norms of understanding; proliferates open-ended and context-sensitive criteria; works against reinscription of some new regime, some new systematicity

- supplements and exceeds the stable and the permanent, Derridean play
- works against constraints of authority via relay, multiple openings, networks, complexities of problematics
- puts conventional discursive procedures under erasure, breaches congealed discourses, critical as well as dominant

Voluptuous validity

- goes too far toward disruptive excess, leaky, runaway, risky practice
- embodies a situated, partial, positioned, explicit tentativeness
- constructs authority via practices of engagement and self-reflexivity
- creates a questioning text that is bounded and unbounded, closed and opened
- brings ethics and epistemology together

VITA

Xiaoling Ke

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: A STUDY OF THREE CHINESE WOMEN ACADEMICS' SUBJECTIVITY
AND AGENCY

Major Field: Curriculum and Social Foundations

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Social Foundations at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2011.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China in 2003.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in English at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China in 1996.

Experience:

I taught English at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China for ten years, then I came to the United States for Ph.D. Studies in Curriculum and Social Foundations.

Professional Memberships:

Comparative and International Education Society, Oklahoma Educational Studies Association, American Educational Studies Association, International Society for Educational Biography

Name: Xiaoling Ke

Date of Degree: May 2011

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: A STUDY OF THREE CHINESE WOMEN ACADEMICS'
SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY

Pages in Study: 216

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Curriculum and Social Foundations

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which three Chinese women academics construct their subjectivities through both embracing and resisting the dominant official discourses in Chinese universities and in Chinese society, and how they create agency and resistance in their various daily discursive practices. This study used life history methodology with a poststructuralist feminist theoretical framework to critique and deconstruct the dominant official discourses of being women academics, the discourses of professionalism, the discourses of administration, the discourses of gender equality, and the three Chinese women academics' own discourses. Data were collected through multiple interviews, observations, personal artifacts and documents.

Findings and Conclusions: These three women academics' narratives seem both to confirm and contradict the dominant discourses of being Chinese women academics, the discourses of professionalism, the discourses of higher education administration and discourses of gender equality. Besides constructing their subjectivities within and against these official discourses, these three women academics also create their own discourses during their narratives of their life history. Among their own discourses there are discourse of age and discourse of specialization. Their life histories suggest that their construction of subjectivities as women academics are multiple, situated, fragmented and contradictory. Their resistance resides not only in their brave transgression of gendered ideologies and norms, but also in the appropriation of the dominant gendered discourses. Moreover, their resistance resides in their acts of breaking the existing binaries and their continuous construction of their gendered identities. It is hoped that this study can shed light on examining Chinese women's subjectivity and agency.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Lucy Bailey, Dr. Guoping Zhao
