

## Understanding the 'Third Gender': A Qualitative Study of the Perception of Being a Leftover Woman among Chinese Female Ph.D. Students

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**Abstract :** In recent years, a growing number of Chinese women choose to pursue Ph.D. education. Except for the male and female, women with PhD degrees are stigmatized as the 'third gender' in Chinese society. People, especially most men, believe that female PhD students challenge the traditional image and gender role of Chinese women. This gender stereotype causes a range of difficulties in finding partners in marriage market for Chinese female PhD students. In this study, the author conducted in-depth interviews with 15 participants who are currently doing their PhD studies in Chinese universities to explore their perceptions of being leftover women on the basis of their experience. All the participants are single. Based on the analysis of qualitative data, this study found that the 'leftover women' phenomenon among Chinese female PhD students is the result of the contradictions generated between Chinese patriarchal society and them. Although Chinese female PhD students is an attention-attracting group, the studies about them are very limited in China. This study could not only contribute to the understanding of the 'third gender' phenomenon and the 'leftover women' studies in China, but also, in practical level, could give some guidance for governments to resolve the social problems of female PhD students.

**Keywords :** Chinese female Ph.D. students, the 'leftover women', the Chinese patriarchal society, gender role, Chinese culture

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