

A Sociological Exploration of How Chinese Highly Educated Women Respond to the Gender Stereotype in China

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Abstract : In this study, Chinese highly educated women referred to those women who are currently doing their Ph.D. studies, and those who have already had Ph.D. degrees. In ancient Chinese society, women were subordinated to men. The only gender role of women was to be a wife and a mother. With the rapid development of China, women are encouraged to pursue higher education. As a result of this, the number of highly educated women is growing very quickly. However, people, especially men, believe that highly educated women are challenging the traditional image of Chinese women. It is thus believed that highly educated women are very different with the traditional women. They are demonstrating an image of independent and confident women with promising careers. Plus, with the reinforcement of mass media, highly educated women are regarded as non-traditional women. People stigmatize them as the 'third gender' on the basis of male and female. Now, the 'third gender' has become a gender stereotype of highly educated women. In this study, 20 participants were interviewed to explore their perceptions of self and how these highly educated women respond to the stereotype. The study finds that Chinese highly educated women are facing a variety of problems and difficulties in their daily life, and they believe that one of the leading causes is the contradiction between patriarchal values and the views of gender equality in contemporary China. This study gives rich qualitative data in the research of Chinese women and will help to extend the current Chinese gender studies.

Keywords : Chinese highly educated women, gender stereotype, self, the 'third gender'

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