

The Emergence and Development of Modern Female Schools in China

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Abstract—The modernization of Chinese society was compelled to be completed in the influences of western culture and civilization. The modernization of education is an indispensable part of social modernization, and the education equality of men and women is a necessary and big step in China's education modernization. In ancient China, the society defined female education as the education on "female virtues" and prohibited women from school education. As China was forced to open the door, missionaries began to set up female schools in China, thus starting the new journey of China's female education. The emergence of China's female schools was a remarkable sign of China's education modernization. As women are playing more and more important roles in the society, re-viewing the emergence and development of China's modern female schools is an important approach to consider how women were included into the modernization path.

Keywords—component; Modern female schools; missionary female schools; educational system; equality in education

I. FEMALE EDUCATION VIEW IN ANCIENT CHINA

The first school in China appeared in the Western Zhou Dynasty when only men had the right to receive school education. What was the female education in Western Zhou Dynasty? Some people called the education at that time the "indoor education". This kind of education included a series of trivial matters, such as silkworm breeding, weaving, sewing, cooking gruel of millet flour and sugar, serving maternal uncles and paternal aunts, attending upon the husband, and so on, which was about, in short, "sewing and cooking". Due to the social division of labor, women were tied to the family role gradually with the social status inferior to men, and the society has become a patriarchal society. The view that men were superior to women was developed gradually. In ancient China, women's social status was low. "The women of upper class were the toys of men; the women of middle class were the servants of men; the women of lower class were tortured, maltreated and imprisoned recklessly, with a fate even worse than death and the status even inferior to dogs or horses". [1] Women have descended to the vassal of men and fell to the bottom of society. In ancient China, the evaluation standard to define women was "a woman without talent is virtuous". Women reading books or

understanding knowledge was considered as a provocation to the patriarchal society, so at that time women couldn't access to schools; instead, women were educated and trained by their parents, as well as nurses, maybe in noble families, indoors.

China experienced a long feudal period when women were always in a subordinate position and oppressed by the religious authority, the clan authority, the political power and the husband's authority. In The Analects of Mencius, Mencius said, "The wife and concubine should act in compliance with the orders of the husband, which is the guiding principle of women". In the influence of feudal moral principles and traditional female virtues, female education was limited to the obedience education. However, in Chinese history, there is no lack of excellent women, such as Wenji Cai, Zhao Ban, Empress Wu Zetian, Qingzhao Li, and so on, but they never received school education; instead, they were more affected by their families and received family education, and most of them were in the upper noble class.

Since the Song Dynasty, affected by the Cheng Zhu Neo-Confucianism, the society put more constraints to women, and there was even a fallacy of "women's views are shortsighted and worthless, so women shouldn't learn in school". In late Ming and early Qing Dynasties some scholars struggled against the view, of which the representative figure Zhi Li said, "It is wrong to say women's views are shortsighted and worthless. People can be divided into the male and the female, but how can views be divided into the male view and the female view? Isn't it wrong to say men's views are circumspect and farsighted while women's views are shortsighted and worthless? If women are treated as equally as men and allowed to see and hear what men can see and hear, women will show as much talent as men, and, in this case, men will feel ashamed for themselves and even lose their tongue". [2] In addition, he gave many examples of women with brilliant literary or artistic talent to prove women could also be outstanding and there was no lack of women with extraordinary talent and abilities.

In late Qing Dynasty, Ruzhen Li proposed that men and women should enjoy the equal right in education and the imperial examination for participation in politics. He described the ideal educational system and elective system equal for men and women in his magnum opus

The Marriage of Flowers in the Mirror, "The virgins with unusual literary talent are allowed to take examination and ranked by literary performance to get the horizontal inscribed board or honorable crown and robe, or win titles for their parents or honor for parents-in-law, which is a great event in our hometown". "Any family with daughter/daughters, whether rich or poor, will send the daughter/daughters to private schools when she/they reaches/reach the age of four or five to prepare for the examination".

In ancient China, the view of female education was basically about female virtues, which required a woman to be "an understanding wife and loving mother", and even by Ming and Qing Dynasties, only few people proposed to pay attention to female education and give women the equal right to receive education and participate in politics, which couldn't form an ideological trend in the society. Therefore, the idea of making women receive school education, get free from the family role assigned by feudal idea and get the political power has never been put into practice, but the importance of women has aroused the attention of the public.

II. FROM MISSIONARY FEMALE SCHOOL TO CHINESE FEMALE SCHOOL

In China, the first modern female school was the missionary female school introduced from the west by western missionaries when doing missionary work. In the 24th year in the reign of Emperor Daoguang (AD 1844), Miss Aldersay, a member of UK Eastern Women's Education Association, established a missionary private school in Ningbo, which is the first missionary female school set up by a foreigner in China and also the first female school in China. [3] After that, the missionary private school spread all over China. According to the Minutes of the Conference of Christian Missionaries in China in 1877, in 1876, in the missionary schools of Christianity in China, there are 82 female day schools with 1307 students and 39 female boarding schools with 794 students. [4]

The emergence of missionary female schools allowed Chinese women to access to the advanced educational idea of the west objectively and understand the importance and possibility of female education, and hence the Chinese began to change the educational view. Especially, with the development of capitalism in China, the new idea of equality of education emerged. Shu Song, one of early reformers, was a representative figure against old educational idea in modern Chinese history. From the perspective of improving national cultural quality, he proposed that women must receive school education, and suggested that the state should "issue an education decree stipulating that boys or girls at the age of six must start school". If any women succeeded in a special field of study, she should be granted the title of student doctor like a man. After that, Guanying Zheng and Zhi Chen also proposed similar views. As the trend of the eastward transmission of western culture and sciences spread to most area of China, reformers, such as Youwei Kang, Qichao Liang and Fu Yan, developed the embryonic female educational view. Qichao Liang pointed out in *On Female School*, "The accumulated

weakness of the state started from the time when women were not allowed to receive school education". [5] He raised female education to an important position affecting the foundation of state. With the development of and in the influence of missionary female schools, on May 31st, 1898, Yuanshan Jing, the director general of Shanghai Telegraph Administration, established the first private female school Jingzheng Girl School in Shanghai. The school issued the diploma when students graduated, and women graduated could work as doctors, lawyers and teachers. Women began to change the situation of being restricted into the family. Jingzheng Girl School was forced to close as Hundred Days' Reform failed, but it started the new trend of Chinese female education.

Although Jingzheng Girl School was forced to close, its influence about equal education on men and women spread widely, and in this influence, many places had private female schools. In this case, female schools were accepted by the society gradually. In the 29th year of the reign of Emperor Guangxu (1903), Qing Government published the Approved School Rules which put female education into the Charter of Family Education, paying official attention to female education.

III. CHANGE OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF CHINESE FEMALE SCHOOLS

The issuance and implementation of Guimao Education System in 1904 marked the establishment of Chinese modern educational system. In Guimao Education System, Qing Government affirmed the importance of female education from the perspective of mothers' educational function, but clearly opposed the establishment of female schools. "In the present situation of China, female schools will bring many adverse impacts and thus are not suitable". The so-called "adverse impacts" refer to "learn wrong foreign customs, in which case more and more women will choose husband by themselves and gradually develop the contempt for parents and the husband". Qing Government worried that if there were female schools, women could enter into public places and form their own views and idea, which was considered as a provocation to the Confucian political ethics. The Guimao Education System was the first educational system officially issued and implemented by Qing Government, which included a complete set of system from primary school to university but still excluded women from schools and included women into the family education. The system ran counter to social development.

On March 8th, the 33rd year in the reign of Emperor Guangxu (1907), the Ministry of Education submitted the Female School Regulations for Approval including 26 articles about primary girl school and 36 articles about female normal school. [6] Although the establishment of female school was recognized officially by government, female education at that time was discriminated against greatly. According to the educational system, men could receive as long as 30 years of school education from primary school to expert Confucian school and choose from vocational education and normal education, but women could only enter into primary school and receive normal education for 12

years in total which were very different from male education, and women couldn't get into the industrial education.

The admission requirements of female schools were very strict. According to the regulations of female school in the Chapter of Admission, besides the required educational level, women admitted must "come of a decent family, have good conduct and a healthy body, and have the guarantee from fair gentlemen and the clan". The regulation shows that female schools at that time offered the aristocratic education which was hierarchical.

Besides the admission conditions with strict class requirements, the teaching content also served the feudal regime. The primary girl school offered two moral education classes mainly teaching virtues, such as filial piety, fraternal duty, decorousness, gracefulness, integrity, diligence, thriftiness and so on. In the normal education, teaching content involved female books, such as *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, *Commandments for Women*, *Education for Women*, and so on. The depth of teaching content could only meet daily living requirements, which still served for the maintenance of feudal system.

Moreover, the management in female schools was very strict. Teaching and management staffs were all old and virtuous women. For the posts have to be taken by men, schools chose men more than 50 years old with good character and sincere conduct and focusing on school affairs. In addition, female schools adopted the full-closed-off management. All students must live in school and should not go out or ask for leave without a good reason. The schools prohibits visitors except otherwise approved. With strict management and teaching, female schools were separated from the society, which infringed the educational right of women greatly from the modern perspective. However, in the society in those days, the reform of educational system in 1907 had great progressive significance, because for the first time China officially admitted that women also had the right to receive school education. Although the education system implemented at that time was a double-track system with the brand of feudal autocracy, it laid a foundation for the later educational equality of men and women and the development of modern education in China.

After the Revolution of 1911 broke out, the revolutionaries led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen spread propaganda of human rights, civil rights and woman's rights of Western learning, and believed that the failure of female education development was the root-cause for national subjugation and genocide, thus calling on women to fight for natural rights. The establishment of the Republic of China created favorable conditions objectively for the new struggle advocating educational equality in men and women. Sun Yat-sen was a pioneer of not only revolution but also China's modern education development. In the speech made in Guangdong No. 2 Female Normal School in 1912, he said, "The Republic of China has been established today, and citizens hope to behave faire and upright, for which the most important is the character". "To resume the character, we must start from education". [7] He not

only emphasized education but also affirmed female education and female normal education. "China has about 20 million women, but never paid any attention to female education, so only a few of them are learned and literary. Nowadays, we should give priority to female education". "To make 40 million citizens get education, we must rely on normal schools". To make 20 million women receive education, the state must advocate female normal schools, so the Republic of China proposed the slogan of "vitalize education with equality of men and women". As the Republic of China paid increasing attention to female education, the double-track school system maintaining feudal ritual system crumbled. In 1912, the Republic of China enacted laws of Interim Method for General Education, Interim Curriculum Standards for General Education and so on, and proposed general education's aim of developing citizens' civic virtues and promoting physical and mental development for overall-developed citizens. Moreover, the government stipulated that boys and girls could be admitted to the same primary school and the courses offered by female schools should be the same as those in male schools. From September, 1912 to August, 1913, the government published the new educational system - Renzi-Kuichou Educational System, which divided the whole school into seven grades, and stipulated that the grade, age requirement and course content for women admitted were basically the same as those of men. The educational system broke the feudal thought advocated by feudal ritual system that women were inferior to men and should be treated differently. The education for men and women tended to be more equal.

The Renzi-Kuichou Educational System was not the single-track educational system in an absolute sense. The absolute single-track system in modern educational history of China could not do without the May 4th Movement in 1919. The Movement started a new chapter of Chinese new democracy, since when the fully gender-neutral single-track educational system emerged.

In the May 4th Movement, the feudal ethical code was cast aside thoroughly, and the remnants of feudal thinking about men were superior to women were discarded in the mighty torrent of history. The idea of equality of men and women has been admitted by the times. A symbolic revolution was lifting the university prohibitions for women. In the eve of May 4th Movement, Chunlan Deng submitted a written statement to the President of Peking University, Yuanpei Cai, required the university to remove the prohibitions for women. For this, Yuanpei Cai expressed his opinion, "For the issue of lifting university prohibitions for women, I don't think it's necessary to take a stand, because according to the regulations issued by the Ministry of Education, no regulation says that university students are limited to men, just like there is no election law limiting the right to vote to men...therefore, in my opinion, there is no such a problem of whether opening the university to women. When Peking University recruits students next year, any qualified female student can apply for the entrance examination, and those passing the exam will be admitted".¹ In 1920, nine

students, including Chunlan Deng, Lan Wang, etc., were admitted by Peking University successfully, and since then Chinese women began to receive higher education equally.

The removal of university prohibitions for women shocked the whole education circle in China, and the coeducational style began to prevail in schools on various levels. Impelled by the development of times, The Renzi-Kuichou Educational System failed to meet social requirements then, so in 1922, Chinese educational circle investigated domestic situation of education prudently and used the education system of developed countries for reference, and then developed a gender-neutral single-track educational system – Renxu Educational System, which adopted the six-three-three system of the USA. The development of the system weighed the role of education completely from the perspective of equality of men and women and showed great respect to the individuality of women.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In the new times of socialist construction, the status of women is getting more and more attention in all professions and trades. The importance of Chinese

women has drawn global attention since Ms. Youyou Tu won a Nobel Prize in medicine which relies on the development of modern female education. The democracy is an important criterion to measure the civilization level of a country, and the equality in education is a significant dimension of democracy. With the continuous deepening of China's political civilization degree, re-reviewing the emergence and development of China's modern female education can help to eliminate occupational discrimination and accelerate the modernization process in China.

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