

# *Local Practice of Women Law Education*

## —The History of Women's Law and Politics Seminar of Sichuan Public School of Law and Politics

Kaiyue Liu \*

Law School  
Sichuan University  
Chengdu, China

**Abstract**—After the Revolution of 1911, women's desire to participate in the administration and discussion of state affairs became increasingly stronger. In order to adapt to the tide of women's liberation in the new era, many women's School of Law and Politics or seminars sprung up. Sichuan Provincial School of Law and Politics, the predecessor of Law School of Sichuan University, also trained women legal talents through the establishment of women's law and politics seminars. The Women's Law and Politics Seminar of Sichuan Provincial School of Law and Politics which was established in 1923 enrolled women students from Sichuan. It encountered many obstacles such as lack of funds, awkward position and changes of educational system, which showed the difficulties in women's law education in the early years of the Republic of China.

**Keywords**—women's law and politics seminar; women's law education; Sichuan Public School of Law and Politics

### I. CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION AND ESTABLISHMENT

With the fierce development of the democratic revolution in the early 20th century, the civil rights consciousness was also enlightened. A group of women with new ideas began to form their awareness of participate in the administration and discussion of state affairs in hope of breaking the pattern of male domination of politics for thousands of years. In November 1911, when the Republic of China is built, Lin Zongsu, a member of Chinese Alliance, initiated the "Women's Political Participation Comrades' Association" and carried out the following activities: proposing to improve educational methods for women, setting up a political participation research institute, hiring lecturers to teach political and legal knowledge, joining various political assemblies and associations, petitioning the interim government to grant women political participation and seeking help from comrades from other countries. After the provisional government of the Republic of China was established in 1912, Lin Zongsu paid a visit on Sun Yat-sen, the interim president, on January 5. He expressed the women's desire to participate in politics and asked for Sun Yat-sen's support to establish the women's School of Law and Politics. Sun Yat-sen agreed clearly. At the same time, Zhang Zhaohan, the founder of the "Women's Republic Association of the Republic of China", contacted more than 100 people including Wu Tingfang and Zhang Jingjiang to write to Sun Yat-sen, proposing to "set up a women's law and political school to boost the foundation of women's political scholarship". [1]Sun Yat-sen replied immediately after

receiving the petition: "God has given human rights, which should be fair for men and women with no difference. I agree with this truth", "Women all over the world want to receive education, study law and politics, and advocate industry in order to facilitate the country progress. This is an ambitious goal, which is worthy of commendation and admiration. The women's School of Law and Politics that is petitioned to be initiated should be applied to the Ministry of education by the members and others, and I will allocate 5,000 yuan for the expansion of the community's public welfare." [2]

In 1912, China's first women's School of Law and Politics was built in Shanghai, and Sun Yat-sen specially approved 5,000 yuan as its start-up fund. In addition, in Nanjing, the Jinling Women's School of Law and Politics initiated and founded by Pan Suqing and others has also received great support from the interim president Sun Yat-sen and the interim government. In the early years of the Republic of China, the Ministry of Law and Politics established the Women's Complete School of Law and Politics to train the backbone for women's political participation. Since then, women's School of Law and Politics have sprung up like mushrooms after rain, setting off a craze for building women's School of Law and Politics. At that time, there were Women's School of Law and Politics of the Republic of China, the Women's Law and Politics Special School, the Women's Law School, the Women's Prison School of Law and Politics, etc. in Nanjing.

However, the craze did not last long. In 1914, the Education Minister of Empire of China officially banned private women's law schools everywhere. Under formidable pressure, the women's School of Law and Politics in Shanghai were closed down in a hurry, and the Jinling Women's School of Law and Politics soon followed.

After the fall of Empire of China, those who cared about and supported women's law and politics education seem to see hope. At that time, women's law and politics education was at low ebb. According to the survey report of the China Education Improving Institute from 1922 to 1923, the total number of legal and political schools in the country was 10,864 at that time, of which 10,815 were men and 13 were women, accounting for only 0.12 % of the total number, which was worrying. [3]In 1922, Pan Zhenya and Shen Yibin founded the Shanghai Women's Law and Politics Seminar, "with the purpose of training women political activists." [4] creating a public sensation.

The establishment of the Shanghai Women's School of Law and Politics has made law and politics educators everywhere more or less aware of the necessity of training women's law and politics talents. Yang Boqian, a doctor of University of Michigan with open and progressive mind, principal of Sichuan Public School of Law and Politics, also planned to initiate a women's law school in Sichuan. After returning home in 1919, he began to serve as the principal of Sichuan Public Law and Politics Special School and actively accelerated the spread of women's liberation thoughts. With his strong support, on March 20, 1923, Sichuan Law and Politics Special School petitioned the Sichuan provincial governor to initiate a women's law and politics seminar with a draft enrollment brochure:

Article 1 The purpose of the undergraduate stage is to inculcate women's legal and political knowledge;

Article 2 The length of undergraduate study is one year and six months;

Article 3 Any woman over the age of 20 who has graduated from high school or has the same academic ability may apply for an undergraduate course.

...

Article 7 The articles of association shall be submitted to the Provincial Governor's Office when they need to be amended.[5]

In the enrollment brochure presented, a plan has been put forward on the length of study and courses of women's law and politics seminar, which has made full preparations for the exploration of women's law education. However, due to the busy government affairs or conservative attitude of the governor, the governor's office has not replied. Therefore, on June 9, 1923, Sichuan Public Law and Politics Special School wrote again to ask the government affairs office to set up a women's seminar. Finally, on August 3rd, Governor Liu Chengxun gave instructions in the order No. 1817 of the Sichuan Provincial Governor's Office:

You have petitioned for the establishment of a women's law and politics seminar with the intention of training women's law and politics talents, which is reasonable, but the establishment of a separate law and politics seminar has been banned at the early days. The establishment of this seminar for girls can only be attached to the school. The funds for it are 3,000 yuan per year according to the preparatory course standard, and will be paid by the provincial Education Fund Revenue and Expenditure Department after the start of the seminar. However, the length of schooling ordered by the enrollment brochure is too short, and the ethics course should be added to the course of study. Please revise it immediately for and re-examination. In addition, the school's admission of female students is a pioneering undertaking, so the admission must be supervised by the personnel distributed by our office. Only when there are more than 30 qualified students can the class be opened.[5]

It can be seen that the government is conservative about such a "pioneering undertaking", not only making it clear that women's seminars can only be attached to School of Law and Politics, but also strictly restricting the use of funds. The setting

of the conditions for the opening of classes only with 30 people not only demonstrated the government's prudence, but also more or less showed the people's wait-and-see doubts about women's law and politics education at that time. It can be said that the establishment of the seminar was extremely difficult.

After receiving a clear reply from the Provincial Governor's Office, the Sichuan Law and Politics Special School has made certain changes to the enrollment rules. First of all, the "length of schooling" in Article 2 of the Charter was changed from one year and six months to two years. Secondly, the original three semesters were increased to four semesters, and the types of courses and the class hours per week were adjusted accordingly.

Some subjects such as politics, economy and ethics were added, and the class hours of each course were greatly revised. On August 7, President Yang Boqian petitioned the Provincial Governor's Office for the revised enrollment brochure. After the preparatory work was completed, on August 16, Sichuan Public Law and Politics Special School petitioned the Governor's Office to send personnel to supervise and guide the first entrance examination on August 20. After receiving a clear official reply, the first entrance examination of the women's law and politics seminar was held as scheduled, and the names of the 18 admitted students, including Pu Lyduan and Zhen Yin, were posted two days later. On September 3, the list of 21 applicants in the second batch was announced. At this point, the establishment of the Women's Law and Politics Seminar has finally taken a leap forward.

On September 17, the opening ceremony of the women's law and politics seminar i as a branch School of Law and Politics was held. Due to the fact that various infrastructure projects had not yet been completed at that time, they had to temporarily "carry out work in Sichuan Women's Industrial Research Institute".[5] After a six-month preparatory period, the branch was finally set up through ups and downs.

## II. STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

In September 1923, the first batch of women's law and politics seminar students entered the school. As new youth who experienced the New Culture Movement with open mind, under the dilemma of "few women are engaged in law", they actively signed up for legal study with foresight in order to "realize the goal of equality between men and women of Sun Yat-sen". There were 36 people in total, almost all of whom came from Sichuan, showing the locality of law and politics education in the Republic of China. At the same time, they all have a certain educational background, but with the relatively large age difference, the youngest is 19 years old, and the oldest is over 30 years old.

Among these students, there were 26 between the ages of 19 and 24 and 10 between the ages of 25 and 30. When the students entered the school, that is, in 1923, the principal Yang Boqian was only 32 years old, and the faculty members were generally young, which made this new class vigorous. [6]At that time, the self-awakening of new women's independent consciousness in Sichuan has become like that of single spark can start a prairie fire. Therefore, the school was deeply aware of the need to expand enrollment. It later announced that "the

branch continued to recruit new students for the women's law and politics teaching and research class. Please register in the inspection office of the branch and accept regular tests immediately." [5] In order to enable more women to receive new education.

At the same time, the seminar also specially hired a group of teachers to teach legal and political courses. Compared with the list of teachers in the public law and politics special school in Sichuan in 1923, there were no teachers in dual roles, showing that there was a certain difference between the women's law and politics special school and the men's law and politics special school. In the first semester, the school hired Yang Jiqui as dean, with a monthly salary of 60 yuan, while the average salary of other teachers was 40 yuan per month. In the second semester, that is, in 1924, Yang Boqian left office and was replaced by Zhou Diliang as the principal. The new headmaster did not make any large-scale adjustments to the teaching staff except for some changes, he continued to use the teaching staff of various subjects last semester. At the same time, the number of deans was increased to three, namely Yang Ziqiu, Fan Zhian and Yang Yuying. Due to the lack of funds in the school, Yang Zhiqiu also served as a music teacher and dormitory monitor at the branch school with monthly salary of still 60 yuan. Moreover, "Yu Songsheng is hired as a social policy lecturer in male schools and a social policy lecturer in female schools", [5] which was the first time that male and female schools shared teachers.

Due to the new principal's emphasis on women's studies, more than one teacher has been hired in some subjects. With the enrichment of curriculum content, the teaching work has been carried out step by step, and the teaching of women's law and politics subject has gradually stepped into the right track. Women were encouraged to actively study and explore law and politics education, which has achieved good results in Sichuan and has gradually attracted the attention of political and legal circles around the country. After that, the establishment of the capital women's law and politics seminar was more or less influenced by the Sichuan women's law and politics seminar.

### III. FUNDS AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

However, the development of any kind of new-born thing may encounter many obstacles. In the process of exploring education, the shortage of funds and the change of educational system have become stumbling blocks to the development of women's law and political studies.

As early as 1923, when preparing for the women's seminar, the Provincial Governor's Office's reply NO.11817 clearly stated that the seminar's funding should be equal to the standard of 3,000 yuan per year like the preparatory course and should be allocated by the Education Funding Revenue and Expenditure Department. However, according to the budget, the start-up cost for the establishment of the women's law and politics seminar alone was as high as 50,018 yuan and 10 cents, which was mainly spent on the construction of school buildings and the purchase of goods, obviously far exceeding expectations. For this reason, the principal Yang Boqian had to write to the Provincial Governor's Office again to ask for more girls' annual expenses and start-up expenses. It was not until

September 21 that the Provincial Governor's Office agreed by order NO.15078 to "increase 3,000 yuan, which allocated on a monthly basis with the original funds ". [5] The annual fund of 6,000 yuan was nothing but a drop in the bucket for tens of thousands of expenses. Schools can only charge tuition fees in an attempt to get rid of the financial difficulties that they cannot make ends meet. Principal Yang Boqian therefore instructed: "Each semester, students shall pay tuition fees of ten yuan and lecture fees of three yuan. ", [5] almost the same as male students' tuition fees of law and politics special school at the same era. At the beginning of the second semester, the school announced: In addition to tuition fees of ten yuan and lecture fees of three yuan this semester, people other than teaching staff will have to pay another yuan for accommodation. In addition, in June 1924, it again notified of increasing tuition by three yuan. In July, the school issued a document demanding the recovery of girls who have not paid their tuition fees, which showed the serious shortage of funds.

In addition, outstanding students Yang Tangshu and Gao Zhikun from poor families applied for a tuition loan, but the Provincial Governor's Office's order 7399 rejected it on the grounds that it did not conform to Item 3 of Article 4 of the tuition loan regulations, indicating the provincial government's negative attitude. "difficult to get money" has become a major obstacle to the rapid development of women's law and politics seminar.

The Women's seminar was set up in a hurry, so many problems were inevitable. For example, the length of schooling has been changed from one year and six months to two years, with several changes, and it was difficult to determine the name and nature of the seminar. On December 3, 1923, the special public school of law and politics submitted to the provincial department to change the subject of women's seminar to another seminar, which was rejected. Therefore, it has to announce to students that the school name has not been changed.

At the same time, Li Yuande, Luo Wenduan and other 26 students signed a letter sincerely requesting the school to extend the length of schooling. Six months later, that is, in June 1924, the school decided to follow the example of the men's school, with a one-year preparatory course and three-year undergraduate course, taking the results of two semesters for a preparatory graduation test, and those who passed the course were promoted to undergraduate courses. This change has freed women's law and politics seminar from the shortcomings of low requirements and short hours of special schools at the same time, resulting in a decline in the quality of education, and gradually enjoyed the characteristics of standardized academic system and appropriate curriculum in modern universities. Repeated changes in the educational system to some extent illustrate the difficulty of creating a new educational form of women's law and politics seminar. The practice form of women's legal education has gradually boosted in the continuous exploration.

On September 1, 1924, the branch campus announced the recruitment of new students, requiring "girls with high school normal education or equivalent qualifications" [5] to bring their own pens to receiving the examination on September 8th, and

the admission criteria was nearly the same as a year ago. On September 10, the list showed the candidates being taken and the candidates to be taken. In addition, the branch also issued documents to Yu Peiqing, Liu Shuyi, Wang Linre and other students to prove their graduation on schedule.

With the graduation of the first batch of students at the first term in 1925 and the admission of girls at the second term, the women's legal education has achieved a preliminary success in the local practice of Sichuan. It is worth mentioning that among graduating students, Yu Peihou became a famous female lawyer in Chengdu, and entered smoothly the Sichuan Senate to work to achieve the original dream of political participation. Later, she married the famous scholar Zhou Taixuan, and actively supported the feminist movement, promoting the founding idea of the women's law and politics seminar.

#### IV. SUMMARY

Under the strong desire of women's rights to receive education and participate in the administration and discussion of state affairs in modern times, women's law and politics education arose at the historic moment, and the women's legal and politics seminar of Sichuan Public Law and Politics Special School was established in difficulty. Under the dilemma of shortage of funds and change of educational system, women's law and politics seminar has actively faced up to it and taken reasonable measures to improve the quality of teachers and enrich the curriculum to train a group of women with professional legal quality. With the development of

women's law and politics education, women who suffered from feudal ethics began to realize social values. As a local practice of modern higher legal education, the Women's Law and Politics Seminar of Sichuan Public Law and Politics Special School, together with many women's School of Law and politics at that time, made enduring contributions to the popularization of the concept of equality between men and women and women's participation in the administration and discussion of state affairs

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Civil newspaper, March 15, 1912. (In Chinese)
- [2] Sun Yat-sen, Sun Yat-sen's Complete works, 3rd ed., Zhonghua Book Company: Beijing, 1981, pp117. (In Chinese)
- [3] Xueyuan Du, General history of Chinese women's education, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Guizhou Education Publishing Company: Guiyang, 1995, pp467. (In Chinese)
- [4] Xuezi Li, "On the Junior Colleges of Law At the Beginning of the Republic of China", Tianjin Normal University Journal, vol.2, pp24-28, 2001. (In Chinese)
- [5] Sichuan Public School of Law and Politics file in 1923, Sichuan University Archives Collection. (In Chinese)
- [6] Zan Li and Xinjie Liu, "Sichuan Public school of Law and Politics", Journal of the East China University of Political Science and law, vol.1, pp.142-154, 2009. (In Chinese)