

Another Side of Silence: A New Understanding of Peking Female Higher Normal College*

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Peking Female High Normal College (PKFHNC) is the first national institution of female higher education established by Chinese in modern China. In the first half of the 20th century, it was an important place and center of female higher education in China. With the shift of gender conception, the college has become an important sign of interaction among society, culture, and education, as well as its transition and transformation. However, affected by both research orientation of neutralization and traditional historical approach after the establishment of People's Republic of China (PRC), it has been marginalized in historiography of education. Therefore, it has been forgotten by people gradually and even with some misunderstandings. To restore its historical truth and true features, the position and historical significance of PKFHNC should be revealed and explicated.

Keywords: Peking Female High Normal College (PKFHNC), neutralization, educational historiography

Introduction

Peking Female Higher Normal College (PKFHNC) is the first higher educational institution for female college students owned by Chinese people since modern times in China. In fact, it was the first national female institute of higher learning in China, too.

Its predecessor could be traced back to the Imperial Female Normal School founded in the late Qing Dynasty (1908) and in 1912, the school changed its name into Peking Female Normal School. Then, in 1917, it applied to the Ministry of Education for reorganizing the normal school into a higher one. In order to prepare for such reorganization, it added a special training program in teaching Chinese and set up its high school in the same year (Peking Female Normal School, 1918, pp. 1-7). After the approval of the Ministry of

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Education, in April 1919, it was renamed as PKFHNC (Literature and Art Research Association of PKFHNC, 1919, pp. 4-6). In May 1924, it changed its name again into the National Peking Female Normal College (NPKFNC).

However, in June 1928 the National Government carried out a system reform of University District, so in September, 1928, nine national higher universities and colleges in Peking were consolidated into National Peking University (NPKU). As a result, Peking Female Normal College became the Second Normal College of National Peking University, planning specially for female students only. And yet, the implementation of University District was stopped in June, 1929. Once again, in December, 1929, the Second Normal College of National Peking University changed its name into the Female Normal School of National Peking University, officially merged with Peking Normal University in July, 1931 (Peking Normal University, 1984, pp. 52, 75-87; Wu & Li, 1992, pp. 410-411, 416, 420-421, & 435-436). In this article, PKFHNC refers to the NPKFNC in the period of those seven years, from the preparation of reorganization in 1917 to the combination and upgrade to the NPKFNC in 1924.

As early as the first half of the 20th century, PKFHNC was a center for Chinese female to receive higher education, playing a key and positive role in promoting the development of the early-education for female in China. Moreover, in the development of PKFHNC, gender perceptions were also changed greatly, making it an important symbol for the transition and interaction with Chinese modern society, culture, and education. However, for various reasons, today, Peking Female Normal College has withdrawn to the marginal position of the main stream of educational historiography and has evidently been forgotten. With that in mind, aiming at returning its historical feature and calling for more awareness of relevant researches on PKFHNC, this article deals with a new interpretation of its significance and historical position by analyzing its current research status and the causes with a view from historical marginalization to historical center.

Marginalizing of Educational Historiography

Some commentators pointed out that it was relatively weak to study female education in the field of educational historiography (Xiong, 2006, Preface, p. 2). And this is true to the PKFHNC, which it is also a research subject of educational history for female. Indeed, research shows that there is few studies specialized in PKFHNC. Occasionally, such studies are sometimes involved in the related general history of female education or dynastic history and history of higher education or school history. But only mentioned a few words and did not make systemic elaboration of relative research on education situations in detail and real education scene, even if in the collection and collation of historical materials, there has not been a major breakthrough.

In terms of academic research nature, researches on PKFHNC should be first classified into research category of educational historiography and further to the branch of women's studies and gender studies. Therefore, its development in academia is inevitably influenced by both the development of educational historiography and the present situation of women's studies or gender studies in China.

Before 1949

Basically, women's studies in China started in the period from before-and-after the May Fourth Movement to the time before the Anti-Japanese War. During this period, with the surge of women's liberation thought and

the early development of female education, more and more works came to be written on female's education and living conditions, such as Chen Dongyuan's (1928) *Chinese Women's Life History*, *The History of Contemporary Chinese Female's Education* compiled by Cheng Zhefan (1936), *Modern Chinese Female's Education* written by Liang Oudi (1936), etc.. In addition, many research papers about women's education were published in the same period, such as Yu Qingtang's (1931) "Chinese female's education in the last 35 years" (pp. 343-377), involving a little situation about PKFHNC—the first national institution of female higher education at that time. However, as early researches in the beginning stage, they mostly focused on combining general history and dynastic history, instead of having specialized discussions about issues of women's education. Among these studies, there were a few words of factual descriptions towards PKFHNC, which were hard to be considered as researches in the strict sense, even though they were valuable historical records.

After the break-out of the Anti-Japanese War, China suffered from the chaos of war and deepening national crisis. Hence, to salvage China from subjugation, it was so urgent that overwhelming the enlightened education. As a result, the attention towards researches about female liberation and development became less and less, so did the studies about women's education.

After 1949

After the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), a series of policy and law of equality of men and women were promulgated one after another. In addition, it was widely believed that the task of women's liberation had been completed and the central goal of women for generations had been achieved. That is, women finally were considered as the same with men and achieved transition from "woman" to "human." In this kind of social and cultural context, it was impossible to carry out independent researches by stripping women away from the unified concept of "people" (Du & Wang, 2003), "neutralization," or "de-sexualization" became the common orientation of the society and academic circles (Du, 2001). Developed in such environment, researches on educational historiography inevitably got wrapped into "neutralization," which partly led it to being "blind" to the particular person of gender identity in real life for quite a long time after the founding of the PRC. Hence, there was almost no development to women's education. In addition, on the research orientation, educational historiography in China reflected the characteristic of Chinese traditional historiography: paying greatest attention to military and political history. Therefore, it focused on researches like discussions on educational thoughts of elites, major educational events, and education reforms, employing double perspectives in thoughts and system. However, researches on educational system tended to focus on events not on individual, even if discussions on elites' thoughts were about individuals, but those elites were mostly male, making women's education, especially the education for women as an individual, could not legally exist in the past educational history. In a word, by examining such a few researches on Chinese educational historiography and women's study during this period, it is easy to find that women's education has withdrawn from the mainstream of Chinese academia and has been excluded to the margins of research.

Since 1980's, along with the deepening of Chinese social reform, studies on women, who already were "liberated," were no longer an issue, and now causes much controversy. The controversy arouses more research attention and requires more theoretical studies, such as the son preference in family planning, girls' education in the complementation of compulsory education, the employment issues of female college students, equal pay for equal work between men and women etc.. They lift women's study in China out of silence, which had been lasting for more than 40 years. When people were concerned about the current problems of women in reality,

they carried out two main ways to solve these problems. That is, it gradually introduces the western feminist theories as well as tracing to its source by looking back to the Chinese tradition. Thus, the resurgent researches on the study of Chinese women's history was becoming increasingly important, forming the characteristics of research developments. The developments take modern women's movement as a starting point, through looking back to ancient times and gradually entering the dating history study and specific history research to fill gaps in the traditional history (Li, 2005, p. 86). Meanwhile, studies on female education in modern times had also become one of the research focuses of historical researches on China modern women because of its huge influence (Zheng, 2000, p. 395).

In addition, since the new era, Chinese educational historiography began to enter the recovery phase and ushered in the height of its development after the 1980's. During this period, numerous books have been written about general history of education and dating history and new fields of research have been constantly explored, too. The research on specialized educational historiography has gained many achievements (Du, 1998, pp. 151-252). Therefore, women's education, as a branch of educational historiography as well as an important symbol that China modern education was distinguished from traditional education began to enter the vision of academic field (Wang, 1996, p. 9). In this case, researches on Chinese female education in modern times have exercised strong attractions on many scholars from various fields and massive outstanding achievements correlating with this have emerged up.

More specifically, findings on PKFHNC are described in most of researches on general history or dynastic history for female education, especially in *The History of Peking Normal University: 1902-1982*, edited by Peking Normal University (1984). The book achieved a great breakthrough in the collection of historical records of PKFHNC, particularly in clarifying its basic outline and development.

More examples, such as Qiao Suling's (2005) *Education and Women—Modern Chinese Women's Education and Intellectual Women Awakening (1840-1921)*, which analyzed the complicated association between recent developments of Chinese female education, including PKFHNC, the liberation of intellectual women, the formation of female groups, and the attainment of their social roles. Then, Gu Zhongyu's (2000) *The Evolution of Modern Chinese Feminism and Women's School Education*, which examined the interaction between the evolution of the female consciousness of Chinese people in modern times and the development of female education. While Zhang Suling's (2007) *Culture, Gender, and Education: Female College Students in China 1900s-1930s*, which focused on campus life of Chinese female college students from 1900's to 1930's. It uses cases of those institutions where female had the same opportunities to receive education, like PKFHNC, the Christian colleges, and Peking University, to discuss factors affecting female college students in gaining gender identity by campus environment of different colleges.

Generally speaking, these studies had gained the "pioneer" position as they were considered as studies in the beginning stage for the second time. Nevertheless, most of these studies paid more attention on the general history and the dynastic history of female education, focusing on the development and the characteristics of modern Chinese female education at macro level, or sorting out the history of developing the female education for particular groups, such as Christian education, overseas education. Only a small number of these studies covered the school history of female colleges. Moreover, studies involved in this field were mostly confined to the discussion of the Christian colleges for women or a brief reference to a historical stage of the school history of Peking Normal University. Up till now, there is no special written work on PKFHNC by further exploring and sorting historical materials.

Above all, regardless of the special academic atmosphere after the founding of PRC, the influence of both the neutralized research orientation and the traditional theory path of history led to the decline of female study or gender study in Chinese academia for a long period in terms of academic research direction. It makes out of the concern of the scholars in the mainstream of educational circle. Although problems talked above have been improved since 1980's, educational history of female, on the whole, is still on the fringe of the mainstream educational history. As a result, in such context, PKFHNC, the first public female university that was set up and managed absolutely by Chinese people, still has not drawn as much academic attention as it deserved. Intentionally or unintentionally, scholars tend to believe that study on the female students of PKFHNC is a marginalized and "small" topic about ordinary people, who are insignificant in history. While the study focusing on the traditional education ideas and the major educational reforms, which is built on the standpoint of male elites, is a valuable and "big" topic with its mainstream in academic research.

The Center of Female Higher Education in Early 20th Century China

PKFHNC has now been gradually forgotten. However, a century ago, as the first higher educational institution for female college students owned by Chinese people since modern times, and also as the first national female institute of higher learning in China, it played a very important role in the early development of female education in China. Increasingly, it became a center for women to receive higher education, cultivating a group of early female intellectuals. Most of them become the vanguard of intellectuals in the period of Post May Fourth Movement, having a positive effect on social development and advancement.

Main Ways for Chinese Women to Receive Higher Education

Before the reorganization of PKFHNC, institutions of higher education in China, such as Peking University and Nanjing Higher Normal College, did not accept and admit women. During this period, there were two main ways for Chinese women to receive higher education: one is to go off to various tertiary institutions for oversea education and the other is to go to those Christian colleges for women (Xiong, 2006, pp. 367-368). It should be admitted that both the development of oversea education and the establishment of Christian colleges for women in late Chinese Qing Dynasty trained a group of early female intellectuals for the society, playing an active role in guiding and promoting the female liberation and the development of female education. Especially, the establishment of Christian colleges for women provided guidance and blueprint directly for the development of higher education for women in China. However, to some extent, these two kinds of education were still be limited, particularly in their development scale and influence, because of high tuition for oversea education and limited opportunities of government scholarship to study abroad, religious requirement of most of the Christian colleges for women and tight outlay for running school. For oversea education, at the beginning of the Republic, there were three main ways for women to study abroad: one is Tsinghua University, next is official dispatch by Ministry of Education, provinces, and cities, the last one is study at their own expense. It could be divided into further two ways: self-supported by students their own or sponsored by civic organizations. For example, in 1914, Tsinghua University sent the first group of nine female students abroad, totaled 38 in 1923 after nine years of development (Li & Zhang, 1981, pp. 367-368).

While for official sponsorship, although the Qing government started to send oversea students at the end of Qing Dynasty, the government only sent female students abroad in large-scale once at the beginning of the

Republic. In 1916, they send 43 female students to Japan. As for self-funded oversea education, according to the statistic all over the country, by 1916, there were 86 female students going abroad to study at their own expense (Xiong, 2006, pp. 257-258). In addition, from the perspective of the Christian colleges for women, there were only three Christian colleges admitting female students, namely, the North China Union College for Women (also known as Yenching University for Women), Ginling College for Women in Nanjing, and Hwa Nan College in Fuzhou before the May Fourth Movement (Li & Zhang, 1981, p. 363). Specifically, North China Union College for Women was founded in 1905 and the number of its graduates was 49 till to 1919, when it merged with Yenching University, including 22 university students and 27 college students. While Hwa Nan College only offered advanced-placement classes at the time, when it was first established in 1907, it started to offer four-year undergraduate curriculum until 1917. So, the first batch of graduates in 1921 were the only three students with a bachelor's degree (Du, 1992, pp. 150-153). Among these three colleges, Ginling College for Women was the largest Christian college with greatest social impacts. However, it had only nine teaching staff and 13 students, when it was established in 1915. After four years' development, there were only 52 students in 1919 (Sun, 1990, p. 21).

PKFHNC: The Most Important Institution for Female Higher Education in Early 20th Century China

Despite its late start, PKFHNC went one-step further in its large number of students and rapid development, when compared with the above-mentioned two ways. For example, at the beginning of its preparation of reorganization in August 1917, the number of enrolled students reached to 24, setting up a high school as its internship base (Peking Female Normal School, 1918, pp. 6-7). At the time, when it officially evolved into PKFHNC in 1919, there were altogether 71 staff and 260 students (including preparatory courses students) (Literature and Art Research Association of PKFHNC, 1920, Appendix, p. 3). And from 1919 to 1924, the total number of its graduates was up to 303 (Peking Normal University, 1984, pp. 215-216). From this, even though PKFHNC was established later when compared with those oversea education and Christian colleges for women. At the same time, no matter in the way of the number of enrollment, the scale of education, or the speed of development, it still could be considered as the first and the most important institution for female higher education in China because of such strong growth. Eventually, it became the center for Chinese female to receive higher education.

Moreover, in 1920 (soon after PKFHNC had officially changed its name in 1919), Peking University and Nanjing Higher Normal School began to enroll female students. Then, many other institutions followed suit to admit female students, offering co-education. Hence, co-education became the dominant trend of the development of higher education in China, and thus, had greatly facilitated female students to receive higher education. However, according to China Education Improving Institute, survey data showed that colleges owned by Chinese had enrolled for a total of 665 female students all over the country in 1922, and the enrollment of Peking Female Higher Normal School reached to 236, about 35% of the total (Chen, 1990, pp. 390-393). Even though Peking University, Peking Normal University, and Southeast University in Nanjing were starting to offer training and degree programs for female students, the scale of students enrolling in these universities was still very limited.

Influenced by the traditional idea that males and females should be treated differently, independently-organized institutions of female higher education not only survive, but also become a primary choice of various women and their families.

The Symbol of Early Modern Transformation in Chinese Society

Early Modern Transformation in China

In fact, the historical position and significance of PKFHNC are not limited to education. It is an important place of female higher education in early stage and the cradle cultivating a batch of outstanding female scholars. Moreover, to some extent, PKFHNC is a sign in modern neutral transformation of Chinese society in early stage.

As we all know, since modern times, ancient China started its difficult journey to modernization under the impact from western culture. In more than half a century from the Second Opium War to the New Culture Movement, China staggered and experienced the exploration from instrument reform to system innovation and enlightenment. Finally, the direction turned to a modern core character—individual liberation. Since then, China started to transit from modern times to contemporary times. In fact, from the Sino-Japanese War to 1930's, individuals were liberated from the constraint of traditional Chinese culture in the transition from family ethics to individualism. Therefore, early modern transition is realized to gradually form the mainstream orientation among elite intellectual. It can be said that the awakening and liberation of individuals are gradually placed in the key link of early modernization in Chinese society.

Modern Chinese female education was generated in this background. Women's schools came into the sight of elite intellectuals as an important way of women's enlightenment and rapidly developed into national mainstream discourse. However, aiming at strengthening the nation and race, female emancipation thoughts and female education practices guided by these thoughts focus on functions of women as a physical gender (a mother) or a social gender (a wife, revolutionist, or citizen), rather than on development and rights of women. In early imagination about modern China, woman is not a subject, but a carrier, a method or a tool through which a specific purpose can be realized. These thoughts, which once promoted the starting and development of Chinese female school education in the early stage and prevent women from gaining independent personality and rights as men for internal limitations. Therefore, women cannot get the equal rights of education to men, causing gender tracking of modern Chinese education system in early stage. Compared with male education in the same level, female education is much poorer in objectives, content, methods, and management rules. Moreover, female education is always defined as basic education levels of primary education and middle education, but never higher education.

After the establishment of the Republic of China, political emancipation had been initially completed and the New Culture Movement granted a deep understanding on roles of enlightenment and individual emancipation in Chinese modern transformation. Since then, the connotation of women emancipation and female image started to change from "a good wife and devoted mother" at the end of Qing Dynasty and "female citizen" in early Republic of China after Xinhai Revolution to new women with independent personality and equal rights of being educated and pursuing equity and freedom as men (Shu, 1928, pp. 389-429). In such background, the ideological trend, which advocated the elimination of gender tracking in education and proposed equal education right between men and women, emerged at this moment to encourage that women should receive the completely same education as men. Since then, institutions of higher education, which did not involve too much with women and took teaching advanced knowledge and developing great talents for Chinese development (Pan & Liu, 2007, p. 375) as principles, were directly pushed to relieve the prohibitions for women and recruit female students. It can be said that the breakthrough of female concepts

pushed Peking University and Nanjing High Normal School to relieve the prohibitions for women. Moreover, the transformations of female views imply the manifestation of individual emancipation in female problem. Therefore, one of the nodes in modern transformation in early Chinese society is that universities relieve the prohibitions for women.

PKFHNC's Role in Early Modern Transformation in China

It should be noted that early in 1917 before Peking University and Nanjing High Normal College relieved the prohibitions for women, PKFHNC had been approved to set special courses of education and Chinese language to reorganize higher normal college. Approved by Ministry of Education in April, 1919, the college was formally renamed as "PKFHNC." In early stage of establishing modern system of school education, there were different views on the problem if higher normal college belongs to higher education. However, the education policy in early Republic of China determined that higher normal college belonged to higher education according to its characters and orientation (Ju, Tong, & Zhang, 2007, pp. 638, 818). In early establishment, PKFHNC had not gotten rid of the gender tracking in the independent organization of female higher education institution. However, the set-up and reorganization of national institution of female higher education still meant the elimination of "female prohibition" and openness to women in education. Therefore, in a certain sense, the establishment of PKFHNC could be treated as a positive response to the transition of gender conception and new female image in May 4th period. In other words, the set-up, reorganization and renaming of PKFHNC in 1917 implied the mainstream gender conception and the loosening and change of brand new social views constructed by gender roles and relations. In fact, the foundation of PKFHNC also becomes a node in early modernization in Chinese society.

Throughout seven years from set-up and reorganization of PKFHNS in 1917 to final upgrade to university in 1924, the New Culture Movement surged with a series of enlightenment ideas, including individual emancipation and female emancipation being encouraged. Therefore, school education and campus life in PKFHNC changed dramatically. PKFHNC simply inherited and copied the tradition of female education at the end of Qing Dynasty in the beginning of reorganization, and then, gradually broke the gender limit in professional education with focus shift to the orientation of academic research. After May Fourth Movement, PKFHNC responded to individualized education in education idea of civil government by creating academic scenery approximate to that in Peking University (Jiang, 2012, pp. 37-66, 113-182; Jiang, 2009a, 2009b, pp. 18-25, 80-86). With this landscape, the education purpose in PKFHNC became academic orientation, so the college set a course system containing Chinese and western academic essence, gathered masters as teachers with the academic atmosphere of "thought freedom and inclusiveness." Moreover, female students in PKFHNC also changed in this atmosphere. In early stage, Li Chao whose life could be treated as the portraiture of numerous Chinese women became an important victim in Chinese history of woman's rights (Hu, 1998, p. 503). After May Fourth Movement, many modern women bravely broke the restraints of feudal ethics and rites to voluntarily bear the responsibility of ethical as well as national rise and fall with self-reliance. It can be said that without specific historical situation and ideological atmosphere in the New Culture Movement, PKFHNC would not change and grow up as modern women and female scholars. In turn, witnessing and explaining the change and transition of society, the development and revolution of PKFHNC and the growth of female students became a miniature of social evolution in a specific age. In this sense, PKFHNC is an important sign of social modernization of China in the early 20th century.

Conclusion and Discussion

Due to the research orientation of neutralization and traditional historical approach since 1949, PKFHNC has been marginalized in Chinese historiography of education and almost been forgotten by people today. However, as the first national institution of female higher education established by Chinese in modern China, PKFHNC was an important center of female higher education and a crucial symbol of interaction among society, culture, and education, as well as its transition and transformation, in the first half of the 20th century China. In hence, to reveal its historical features and roles has important and profound social significance.

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