

# The Rise of Women's Education and the Modernity of East Asia: Focusing on the Education of “Virtuous Wives and Worthy Mothers” in China and Japan<sup>\*</sup>

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This year marks the 50th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan. Looking back on the past and forward to the future, we realize modernity has become a critical issue that not only China and Japan, but the whole East Asian region should pay attention to. China and Japan are both within the “Circle of Confucius Culture” and are both modern latecomer countries. As they were coerced by western countries to enter the modern age, they shared multiple common features. An exploration of the two countries' respective rising of modern women's education is an important path to discuss the reconstruction of gender and an important method of the course of the embodiment of east-Asian women into modernization drives. With regards to conclusion, entering the modern age, Chinese and Japanese intellectuals reshaped the female gender in terms of interpersonal relationship, value system, and knowledge structure by advocating the idea of “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” education. In the concept of virtuous wives and worthy mothers in East Asia, the Confucian ethics of “docility and virtue” is the soul, and modern scientific knowledge serves this core value. On the other hand, in the course of localization in China and Japan, this imported concept from the West has encountered a completely different historical fate.

*Keywords:* women's education, modernity, China, Japan, virtuous wives and worthy mothers

## Introduction

In contemporary China, especially after the Reform and Opening-up, women joined the grand tide of market economy and many of them were rejoiced by their freedom of choice. Meanwhile, women face the dilemma of balancing their careers and families, prompting them to re-examine their social gender roles. In 2016, the Chinese government introduced the two-child policy to all households, which means that earlier restrictions that prevented couples from having a second child were lifted. On 31 May 2021, the Chinese government introduced three-child policy to alleviate problem of ageing population. As women are the main caretakers of their families, the introduction of these policies means that they have to shoulder extra responsibilities. Against this background, a significant number of women are choosing to give up their careers for their families, the concept of “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” has regained public focuses.

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In the neighboring country, Japan, “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” performed a significant function until the end of World War II as a guiding philosophy of education for women led by the government. As Japan developed into the contemporary society, women’s value systems diversified, celibacy and DINK (double income no kid) have become the choices of many women. Nonetheless, becoming “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” continues to be an ideal destination for many Japanese women. In other words, the value orientation of contemporary Japanese women carries heavy historical traces.

Nowadays, in both China and Japan, the philosophy of education for women centering on “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” is tagged “outdated” or “remnants of feudalism” and widely criticized. However, the same educational concept, as the mainstream ideology in cultivation of women in modern east-Asian societies, exerted profound influences on women and the forming of modern families. Moreover, it is intertwined with the women, social customs, and thinking patterns of today’s Chinese and Japanese women. Therefore, discussing the modern histories of Chinese and Japanese education for women and conducting comparative studies would not only help understand the process of reshaping east-Asian women since the beginning of the modern age and its connotations, but would also provide food for thoughts for understanding contemporary Chinese and Japanese women, as well as the social realities they face.

A large amount of researches have been completed focusing on Chinese and Japanese modern education for women. The researches such as Liao (1988), Lu (1993), Du (1995), Luo (1996), Sugimoto (2000), Zhou (2000), Zhu (2002), Jin (2006), Bailey (2007), Xu (2008), Yu (2012), Han (2014), He (2017), and Huang (2020) have conducted detailed discussions around the emergence and development of modern Chinese education for women. Researches of Fukaya (1998), Tachi (1984), Katayama (1984), Koyama (1991), Sechiyama (1996), Omori (2019), and Wu and He (2020) are representative works on the discussion around modern Japanese education for women. The past research works of both countries centered on the following three aspects: (1) from the angle of history of systems: discussion of the initiation, development, and transitions of the systems of modern education for women, (2) from the angle of history of thoughts: analyzing the connotations and features embodied in education for women at different times, mainly focusing on thoughts of modern educators on education for women and their practices, (3) from the angle of case studies, examining the institutions, curriculum design, students’ family background, and conditions of studies of modern women. In a word, previous studies focused on individual countries, with confined focus on education for women itself.

China and Japan are both within the “Circle of Confucius Culture” and are both modern latecomer countries. As they were coerced by western countries to enter the modern age, they shared multiple common features. From the perspective of gender studies, the inclusion of women into modern education system is the redefinition of the female gender, giving it a “modern” connotation. Exploring the forming and practices of Chinese and Japanese modern Women’s education is an important method of the course of the embodiment of east-Asian women into modernization drives and an important path to discuss the modernity of latecomer countries of East Asia. To be specific, discussing the educational thoughts of “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” in East Asian Society, contemplating the process of female gender being reshaped, sorting out the value system it constructs, and reflecting on the experiences and lessons learned in the modernization drives of China and Japan using it as clue would not only enhance understanding of history but also enhance understanding of women of China and Japan, as well as the social realities they face.

From a perspective of cross-national comparison, a discussion of the historical instant in which women’s education was introduced to China and Japan, or reflecting on how education for women was regulated,

defined, and transformed from a value system to actual practices and experience, and a discussion of the modernity of East Asia through comparing and analyzing the localization of women's education is a topic rarely elaborated on by previous researches. For that reason, this research will be based on previous efforts, give focus to discussing the historical processes in which the thought of "virtuous wives and worthy mothers" of education for women took root and thrived in China and Japan, and analyze the historical connotations given to it. While focusing on historical commonalities, this research will also analyze the differences of development paths of the thought in the two societies. Furthermore, discussing how women are redefined, positioned, and shaped, and reflecting on the modernity of China and Japan are the key issues discussed by this research.

### **Emergence of Modern Women's Education and Evolution of Women's Value System**

After the signing of a series of unequal treaties after the Opium Wars, the Qing Dynasty was forced to open its border and enter a new historical period. On the dimension of culture, a large amount of westerners including missionaries and merchants flooded in the country, carrying with them western cultures and challenging continuously the inherent value systems of China and orders governing the relationship between the Chinese and foreigners. An increasing amount of people with visions started to pay attention to "foot-binding", a massive campaign to stop foot-binding and promote education for women started (Liao, 1988; Lin, 1993; Lu, 1993; Du, 1995; Yang, 2004; Xia, 1995; Takashima, 2003; 2004; Tohda, 2004; Ko, 2001; 2005), the traditional value systems of women also embarked on a period of transition.

Firstly, attacks from western missionaries ushered in this transition. On the *Globe Magazine* ran by the American missionary Young John Allen, many missionaries called the custom "impossible" and criticized foot-binding on the basis of Christian doctrines or modern medicine. Meanwhile, missionaries advocated the importance of education for women on the grounds of gender equality and building of modern states. These missionaries established various organizations against foot-binding and mission schools. They put their advocates into practices through various means and tried to save Chinese women who were suffering in extreme misery in their eyes. Spreading the gospel of Christianity and trying to reshape Chinese women or even China as a whole were the main impetus behind missionaries' efforts to end foot-binding and build education for women. Their efforts yielded some results. However, the influence only extended to a handful of converted Christians and the poor who wished to get access to relief through this channel. In other words, such efforts did not bring material changes to Chinese women's traditional ways of lives and pattern of thinking.

Following the advocacies of the missionaries were the echoing responses of Chinese Reformists and Revolutionists, among which Liang Qichao and Jin Tianhe provided arguments that reflected the characteristics of their time and captured much attention. In Liang Qichao's *The General Considerations of System Reform: On Education for Women* (变法通议·论女学), he stressed the importance and urgency of developing education for women on the ground of national prosperity. In this view, he regarded it a priority to abandon the tradition of foot-binding in order to develop education for women. He claimed that if men were willing to damage women's body and put them through torture and pain just to cater to their aesthetic tastes, men would never pay real attention to education for women. So if foot-binding were not abandoned, education for women would never be established (Liang, 1989 [1936], p. 44). In other words, Liang Qichao argued that transformation of aesthetics and value systems of the public was of paramount importance, the first step on which the development of education for women depended.

While Reformists argued mildly in step-by-step approaches, Revolutionists, represented by Jin Tianhe (金天翮, 1874-1947) were both radical and passionate. In the *Feminine World's Bell* (女界钟), the first modern literary work of China advocating feminist thoughts, written by Jin Tianhe and published in 1903 by Datong Publishing House of Shanghai, he dismissed traditional views on female fundamentally, leaving no room for reconciliation (Jin, 1903 [2003]). Of course, the extreme criticism and claims were for the purpose of building a brand new value orientation that was going to be distinct from the previously prevailing "feminine beauty". In the *Feminine World's Bell*, the social functions of education for women were stressed and amplified. It was emphasized that only education could free women from the shackles of feudalism and provide an effective path for women to escape from the benighted traditional rules set for them (Jin, 1903 [2003], p. 37). Of course, since China and the Chinese nation were facing pressing difficulties and unprecedented crises, pronounced advocacy for education for women was for the transformation of women's value systems and directly aimed at the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and state.

The Reformists and Revolutionists actively launched the campaign against foot-binding and for the introduction of education for women with the purpose of saving the nation from subjugation and building a modern state. With the help of newspapers, a modern media, their social influences extended continuously and were echoed by an increasing number of open-minded gentries. As a result, ending foot-binding and introducing education for women became a significant trend in China. In 1902, Wu Xin established the Wuben Girl's School, one of the first girls' schools established by Chinese people. After that, girls' schools grew like mushrooms in Beijing, Tianjin, Nanjing, Hankou, Changsha, etc. Peking Female Normal School (京师女子师范学堂) in Beijing, Yanshi Girls' School (严氏女塾) in Tianjin, Lyuning Girls' School (旅宁女学) in Nanjing, Shushen Girls' School (淑慎女学) in Hankou, Hunan First Girls' School (湖南第一女学堂) in Changsha, and other renowned girls' schools were all established during this period. With the support of local open-minded gentries, building of girls' schools thrived (Du, 1995, pp. 326-327). However, due to lack of unified regulations for management, girls' schools established during that period were varied in features and levels (Liao, 1988).

### **The Establishment of Education for Women Centering on "Virtuous Wives and Worthy Mothers" in Modern Chinese Society**

The emergence of girls' schools demonstrated vitality, vigor, and the irreversible trend of history. Under such pressure, the Qing Dynasty had to abandon outdated traditions. It started to publicize the importance and necessity of education for women to the whole country and tried to institutionalize related practices. At the same time, modern media including newspapers fanned the fire. Education for women took root in people's minds and became a new standard embodied in the value systems of women.

In 1904, the introduction of the Kuimao Educational System (癸卯学制) marked the establishment of modern educational system in China. In the Kuimao Educational System, the Qing Dynasty recognized education for women from the angle of "educating mothers". However, the Qing Dynasty opposed to establishing girls' schools. To the Qing Dynasty, if education in girls' schools was legalized, women would not only appear freely in public venues, but also expand their visions through this channel, and develop independent judgments and opinions. To them, such a development would be offensive to the traditional beliefs including "it's improper for men and women to touch each others' hands in passing objects" (男女授受不亲) or "lack of talent in a woman is a virtue" (女子无才便是德) and should thus be prevented by all means. On one hand, the Qing dynasty advocated the significance of education for women to the cultivation of "high-quality" citizens. On the other hand,

the Qing Dynasty worried that copying the western or Japanese models of education for women would undermine traditional ethics, rule, and conventions. Bearing such potential risks in mind, the Qing Dynasty adopted a half-measure, letting the mother or wet nurse of girls teach them at home. As the first educational system formally carried out by the Qing Dynasty, the Kuimao Educational System covered a full range from primary schools to universities. However, it excluded women from the system, claiming that “home-schooling” would be the most proper and reliable form. As to how “home-schooling” should be carried out, the system failed to provide clear and exact solutions to important issues, such as the contents, forms, or levels of teaching. It thus appears that even though the introduction of Kuimao Educational System demonstrated the commitment of the Qing Dynasty to develop modern schooling systems, it also reflected the reluctance of the Qing Dynasty to abandon the traditional rules governing genders it adhered to (He, 2017, pp. 61-62).

In 1907, the then Ministry of Education submitted the “Memorial of Charters for the Establishment of Girls’ Schools” (奏定女学堂章程折) to the imperial court, emphasizing the importance of establishing girls’ schools. By then, the attitude of the Qing Dynasty had undergone major changes. One of the reasons behind such changes is the already overwhelming trend of establishment of girls’ schools in different provinces. In other words, to control this irreversible change of situations, the Qing Dynasty changed its attitude so as to control and manage continuously emerging private girls’ schools with formulation of rules and regulations. This should serve as the first step in recognizing education for women at school. In the *Charter for Women’s Normal School* (女子师范学堂章程), it was stressed that learned and reasonable women were the prerequisites of establishing harmonious and happy households. To achieve this goal, women must be well-educated. Moreover, only “virtuous mothers” can live up to the tasks of cultivating future-oriented citizens and carrying out high-quality family education. The key to cultivating “virtuous mothers” is education for women (Qu & Tang, 1991, pp. 576-577). This time, the Qing Dynasty fully recognized the establishment of girls’ schools and connected “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” to both households and the nation by claiming that “orderly and honest household management” and “national strength and prosperity” are closely related to education for women. It even deemed education for women one of the “foundations of national education”. Meanwhile, the Qing Dynasty also stressed that observing traditional rituals and dogmas are priorities. It is of paramount importance that women should adhere to “loyalty and chastity, peace, obedience, kindness, dignity, thrift, and other virtues” (Qu & Tang, 1991, p. 576).

The original intention of the Qing Dynasty was not to promote the thriving of these newborn institutions in Chinese society but to check and control the prevailing trends of establishing girls’ schools in various provinces by introducing regulations and building systems. Nevertheless, the gaining of legitimacy and voices of girls’ schools through official channels were of great and profound significance. The recognition from the Qing Dynasty and introduction of related policies undoubtedly exerted strong positive impacts on the development of girls’ schools. According to statistics, with the introduction of policies relate to girls’ schools in 1907, the number of girls’ schools and female students displayed drastic growth. In 1906, 1907, and 1908, the amounts of girls’ schools were 245, 402, and 512 respectively. The amounts of female students attending girls’ schools in 1906, 1907, and 1908 were 6,791, 14,658, and 20,557 respectively (Liao, 1988, pp. 224-228). Compared with the number in 1906, the growth in number of girls’ schools by 1907 was more than 60%, and the growth by 1908 was more than 100%. These statistics indicate that modern education for women was developing and growing in China, and the idea of modern education in girls’ schools was taking root in people’s minds.

The modern era had arrived, with the development of modern publishing industry in China, the media of newspapers played an increasingly important role in guiding public opinions. The *Ladies' Journal*<sup>1</sup> (妇女杂志) published by the Commercial Press (商务印书馆) was one of the most outstanding representatives and became an important platform for the advocacy of education for women and discussion of female-related topics. In the early times since its founding, the *Ladies' Journal* served the main purpose of publicizing education for women towards “virtuous wives and worthy mothers”, and stressed that being “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” was the inherent responsibilities of women. Authors spoke with one voice and shared opinions. Specifically, they started from the building of modern states, sexual distinction psychology, and other angles, and positioned women in “families”. Through analyzing the influence of women on their “husbands” and “children”, the significance of “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” was established. In the way, the journal made clear the responsibilities and values of women as “citizens”. Whether a woman could properly handle the daily affairs of her household, whether she could provide quality education to her children, whether she could deftly and flexibly utilize knowledge of modern science, whether she was devoted, selfless and demonstrate skill and ease were the main indicators of her “virtuousness” and “worthiness”.

In its hopes to teach women to become “virtuous wives and worthy mothers”, the *Ladies' Journal* did not stop at publicizing an ideology. Through various channels, the magazine presented a multi-dimensional and accessible image of “virtuous wives and worthy mothers”. “Handcrafts” (学艺) and “Homemaking” (家政) were two important columns, in which a large amount of knowledge related to daily family lives was introduced. These knowledge covered a wide range including how to nurture babies, how to feed infants and young children, how to correctly provide education at home, how to effectively prevent diseases, provide treatments, and take care of the sick. The columns also taught about nutrition compositions of food, cooking methods, sewing, washing and preservation of clothes, knitting sweaters, and other commonsense knowledge related to families<sup>2</sup>.

The explanations provided in the *Ladies' Journal* included accurate data and specialized terms. It placed trust in modern scientific instruments such as the microscope, and reasoned according to scientific ways of thinking. These features demonstrated that the *Ladies' Journal* was not only publicizing knowledge of modern sciences including hygiene, physiology, medicine, physics, chemistry, and mathematics, but were also trying to implicitly plant the spirits and value orientations of modern science in readers' minds. The advocated features of

<sup>1</sup> The *Lady's Journal* (妇女杂志) was published by the Commercial Press (商务印书馆) in 1915, setting female as the topic of discussions. The magazine stopped publishing in January, 1932, because the building of the Commercial Press was destroyed in Japanese bombing. The guiding principles in the editing of the *Lady's Journal*, which kept publishing for 17 years, can be basically divided into two phases. At the beginning of its founding, the magazine advocated the education for women towards “virtuous wives and worthy mothers”. Therefore, the magazine included columns such as “editorials”, “handcrafts”, “household affairs”, “narratives”, “literary world”, “fictions”, and “model articles in modern Chinese”. Leading authors during this phase were male intellectuals including the editor-in-chief Wang Yunzhang (王蕴章), Hu Yuzhi (胡愈之), Zhang Jiluan (张寄鸾), Se Lu (瑟庐), Jiang Weiqiao (蒋维乔), and Qu Xuanying (瞿宣颖). After the “May Fourth Movement”, Zhang Xichen (章锡琛) became the new editor-in-chief, and the theme of articles in the magazine shifted to the discussion of “liberation of women”. Main authors during this phase included Shen Yanbing (沈雁冰), Zhou Jianren (周建人), Wu Juenong (吴觉农), and Jiang Fengzi (蒋凤子). Owing to the advanced distribution network of the Commercial Press consisting of sales agencies around the country, the *Lady's Journal* became an influential magazine for women of the modern history of China in terms of years of publishing, geographical coverage of sales, and volumes sold.

<sup>2</sup> In this regard, typical examples can be found in the titles of articles included in these two columns. For example, Volume 1, No. 3: “食物之腐烂及防除法” (Methods to Prevent and Treat Food Decaying), “家庭教育简谈” (Brief Discussion about Family Education). No. 3, No. 4, and No. 5 of the *Lady's Journal*, Volume 1 serialized articles: “衣类污点拔除法” (Ways to Remove Taints on Clothes), “简易家庭看护法” (Simple Nursing Methods at Home), “家庭医病法” (On How to Cure Diseases at Home), etc. There were numerous articles of this kind.

modern science, such as objectivity, rigor, and precision, were fully reflected in the *Ladies' Journal*. Also, cultivation of awareness of "hygiene" is another urgent and important philosophy guiding the authors. In the agonizing time of the *Ladies' Journal*, when "incalculable people die every year because of diseases" (Shen, 1915, p. 2), authors placed high hopes on hygiene and medicine, so that it would save more people. In other words, numerous authors advocated the importance of hygiene from the angle of building of the state and attempted to realize the health of the nation through "virtuous wives and worthy mothers". They tried to reshape traditional Chinese households from families until the ragged Chinese society would take on a new look.

In addition to publishing a large amount of instructive and demonstrative articles, the *Lady's Journal* also invited "virtuous wives and worthy mothers" in real lives to share their stories. They used their first-hand experiences to tell the readers how to become good "wives" and "mothers". Articles of participants were themed around sharing of experiences in assisting their husbands, teaching their children, and handling household affairs. Diligence, thrift, and dedication were embodied in expressions of contentment besides flat narrations. The images of "virtuous wives and worthy mothers" were depicted vividly on pages. Those "virtuous wives and worthy mothers" were no longer timidly or obedient. On the contrary, they used what they learned to perform their duties as wives and mothers. They made the most of their abilities and always reached the exactly right extent of everything they tended to. Their images were far from their traditional counterparts.

To sum up, education for women centering on "virtuous wives and worthy mothers" positioned women in "families", demanding them to stay loyal, be virtuous, and ladylike. Meanwhile, such education advocated that women should put all their energy into managing household affairs and educating their children. It is worth noting that the education required them to master knowledge of science and develop hygiene awareness as ways to demonstrate their "virtuousness" and "worthiness". The "new notions and knowledge" advocated in this development referred to establishing modern scientific and hygiene awareness, mastering knowledge of science related to household affairs and bringing up of children, and modern hygiene common senses closely related to the health of family members. It is obvious that the knowledge that "virtuous wives and worthy mothers" were required to master was highly targeted and limited. The knowledge referred to in this development was "gender labeled". And such "virtuousness" and "worthiness" combined the adherence to and upholding of traditional rules governing women, as well as new connotations given by the era.

As is mentioned before, the rise of modern women's education in China basically went through three stages. Specifically, western missionaries challenged the traditional Chinese custom of foot-binding and hoped to reshape Chinese women through Christianity. They established girls' schools and were the first to bring modern education for women to the Chinese society. Even though the results of girls' schools run by the Church were limited, they established the first modern educational institutions available to Chinese women, set the model forms for future development of Chinese education for women, and provided food for thoughts as well as practical experiences for the rethinking of the female gender by Chinese male intellectuals. Therefore, the significance of the emergence of such schools must not be neglected. Meanwhile, the building of girls' schools by the Church is closely related to the campaign against foot-binding and served as a prelude to the enlightenment that would transform the value system of Chinese women. After that, Reformists and Revolutionists advocated vigorously, and local open-minded gentries from around the country echoed, creating a prevailing trend of ending foot-binding and promoting education for women. Even though such development met setbacks because of the failure of the Reform Movement of 1898, the course of history was irreversible. The greater environment pressured the Qing Dynasty to abandon the traditional rules of "it's improper for men and women to touch each

others' hands in passing objects" and preached to the whole nation the indispensable significance of education for women at schools. In a word, foreign missionaries provided the original impetus behind the entrance of education for women into China. Then, under the guidance of Reformists and Revolutionists, local open-minded gentries from around the country actively participated in the campaign against foot-binding and promotion of education for women. The Qing Dynasty changed its strategies under pressures and adopted an approving attitude towards education for women, hoping to confine education for women within the system through institutionalization.

In the early 20th Century, the Chinese nation suffered continuously from dangers and threats of annihilation. Intellectuals were worried about the future of the nation. They were filled with longing and ambition, hoping to find the nation a way out of the plight. The campaign against foot-binding and promoting education for women reflected the essence of this historical mood. In this course of history, "promoting education for women" became a kind of effective medicine to cure both women and the Chinese nation in the eyes of many intellectuals. Moreover, with the "digging in" and "discovery" of the value of modern education for women, people started to regard it as the new standard for "feminine beauty" to replace foot-binding. The transformation of people's value system gave women the right to enter social public venues, and an increasing amount of women began to appear in schools and socializing venues previously forbidden to them. By this token, significant cultural implications and profound meanings to social practices were embodied in modern education for women. All in all, during this historic period of social transition, modern women's education was first and foremost a political signal carrying the weight of the salvation and survival of the nation. In addition, it performed important cultural and social functions.

Even though "lack of talent in a woman is a virtue" was one the essences of previous rules set for Chinese women, as China was coerced by the west to enter the "Modern Era", the significance of women to modern states was gradually unveiled. Women were finally included in modern educational systems. This time, women were still positioned in families. However, the knowledge structure of women was redefined. Previous indicators of whether a woman is "talented", such as the ability to write poems and lyrics and to excel at musical instruments, chess games, calligraphy, and painting were marginalized and were replaced by knowledge of modern science. It is obvious that such a transformation of evaluation criteria is directed at the building of modern state.

Looking back at traditions, the traditional virtues of women centering on Confucianism focused on self-cultivation. Traditional knowledge put emphasis on one's belief and ethics. The essence of such education is to integrate the educated into social orders and ethical relationships and to cultivate people's inner abilities to coordinate and control themselves (Wu, 2002, p. 138). Therefore, such education kept a distance from practical lives. In other words, traditional virtues of women were not direct means or methods applicable to handling household affairs. They focused on providing a philosophical code of conduct and an ideal level of spiritual development. From the perspective of traditional value systems, knowledge of natural science, knowledge that explains the mechanism of matters or professional knowledge was but trivial crafts and skills not worth mentioning in refined contexts. As is claimed in "the studying of knowledge beyond forms is the quest of truth, the study of knowledge beneath forms is the forging of tools" (形而上者谓之道，形而下者谓之器), and it was obvious which one was more noble, "the quest of truth" or "the forging of tools". On the contrary, western modern knowledge of science starts from pragmatic perspectives and focuses on practicality. The introduction of western knowledge of modern science was accompanied by the introduction of underlying modern scientific spirits, such as logical reasoning and causation (Wu gang, 2002, pp. 36-196) to the education of women, dividing China between the "past" and the "present". The teaching of knowledge of modern science in the *Lady's Journal*,



using “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” as media to change Chinese households and the society as a whole, was like silently flowing streams yet fundamentally offsetting the classical aesthetic and value systems of China.

Meanwhile, through the localization of “virtuous wives and worthy mothers”, it was clearly demonstrated that on one hand, science as a “new knowledge” had already gained authority among intellectuals of the early 1900s, on the other hand, multiple articles of the *Ladies' Journal* made attempts to blend western medicine with Traditional Chinese Medicine. This means that while intellectuals publicized knowledge of modern medical science, they were not trying to reject Traditional Chinese Medicine. This is an important characteristic of the localization of modern science in China. In other words, the relationship between modern science and traditional culture was not defined as binary opposition. Such a characteristic is sharply distinct from the May Fourth Movement, or the later patterns of opposing tradition with scientism. Also, the acceptance of modern science laid an indispensable foundation for scientism of the later May Fourth Movement, in which science was elevated to the level of value, belief, and ideology. Also, knowledge of science related to family lives actively participated in the drafting of new regulations for women, and with that came the highlighting of its practical social significances. The image of Chinese women, who used to be humble and timid, faded away and was replaced by women who shouldered not only the routines of their households but also the future of their nation. These women pursued actively rather than passively and were bold enough to take on responsibilities.

### **The Rise of Education Towards “Virtuous Wives and Worthy Mothers” in the Japanese Society**

After the Meiji Reform, the Japanese government set an overall development goal of national prosperity, military strength, breeding industries and boosting businesses, and introducing civilized culture and ways of lives. From the noble class to people at the grass-root level, people were enthusiastic about learning the western ways. Such imitation extended all the way from ideas and concepts to systematic design. As Japan embarked on a modernization drive, the Meiji Government attached much importance to the introduction of modern western educational system. Modern education for women embraced an opportunity of development. The transformation of women's “role” started.

In August 1872, based on the French education system and drawing from the education systems of other European and American countries, the Meiji government introduced the first national educational order—the (Meiji) Education System (学制), announcing the establishment of modern school system in Japan. The Education System stressed that women should receive education like men, and tried to introduce the “virtuous mother” educational thoughts into the Japanese society. The European concept of “virtuous mother” meant the cultivation of mothers who are healthy and strong, who can master and flexibly apply knowledge of modern science in the education of children, and who would commit themselves to the cultivation of talents for the nation. In the early years of the Meiji Period, enlightening intellectuals also played an important role in the introduction and promotion of education of women. The first enlightenment academic body: Meirokusha (明六社), played a vital role that must not be underestimated. Members of Meirokusha traveled to Europe and America many times. Witnessing the sharp differences between European/American women and their Japanese counterparts, they felt strongly that it was necessary to learn from the west. Members of Meirokusha criticized the traditional beliefs that “the female gender is inferior to the male gender” from the angle of people's natural rights and advocated the gender equality thoughts brought in from Europe and America. Also, they advocated the importance of developing education for women on the grounds of cultivating “virtuous mothers”. The “Discourse on Wives and

Mistresses” (妻妾論) written by Mori Arinori (森有礼) and “How to make a good mother” (造就善母説) by Nakamura Masanao (中村正直) were typical arguments put forth at the time. To summarize, after the Meiji Reform, under the advocacy of the government and enlightening thinkers, Japan initiated a wave of movements to learn from the west at both noble and grass-root levels and development of education for women. The thoughts of “virtuous mothers” were the guiding concepts of education for women in the early years of the Meiji Period. However, unlike the enthusiastic Meiji government and enlightening intellectuals, the general public's ways of thinking were dominated by traditional beliefs. Development level of education for women remained low, the increase of number of girls of appropriate age attending schools remained slow, and the development of secondary education for women was very limited (Tachi, 1984; Koyama, 1991; He, 2009).

However, with the rise of Movement of Freedom and Civil Rights (自由民権運動), especially after the Political Upheaval of 1881—the high tide of the Movement of Freedom and Civil Rights, the arguments of enlightening thinkers were marginalized. Conservatives like Motoda Nagazane (元田永孚) and Nishimura Shigeki (西村茂樹) showed up on the stage of history. They were harshly critical towards educational principles that rejected Confucianism philosophies, and were committed to the restoration of traditional value systems, hoping to reconstruct ideological education with the help of such efforts. It is worth noting that the conservatives did not stand for a complete return to the past. They were not arguing to abandon modern education at schools, yet they were more firmly against total abandoning of Confucianism ethics and moral codes. The core of conservatives' initiatives was to better carry out ideological education through education at schools, better passing on of “traditions”, and cultivation of subjects loyal to the Mikado and the state.

In October, 1890, Emperor Meiji personally issued the “The Imperial Rescript on Education” (教育勅語) written by Motoda Nagazane and others, in which it was preached that the subjects' loyalty to Mikado was “the essence of the state system” and “the origin of education” (我力國體ノ精華ニシテ教育ノ淵源) (Webpage of MEXT, 2021a). Also, the document stressed the importance of filial piety and harmonious matrimonial relationships. The core purpose was to return to the track of building a Mikado-centered state through bringing back Confucianism ethics. Naturally, demanding women to adhere to teachings of Confucianism classics became the top priority in education for women. Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 was followed by unprecedented high tides of domestic nationalism in Japan. Reflecting on the reasons behind the victory became a heated topic. As people attributed the victory to education, the importance of education for women attracted much attention. The functions of “virtuous mothers” performed by women were reaffirmed. Moreover, “virtuous wives” was also becoming a focused function of women.

During the same period, the active guidance provided by the Japanese government including administrative measures yielded satisfying results. The number of girls of appropriate age who attended schools surged, and primary education for women gradually became universal. On the other hand, with the signing of unequal treaties, allowing foreigners to enter and exit Japan freely, a large amount of foreigners flooded into the country. This caused the further growth of number of Christian girls' schools. In fact, before the issuing of “The Girl's High School Order” (高等女学校令), because of the lack of an official order, there was no clear standard for secondary schools for women, and the amount of such schools was scarce, over 50% of which were Christian girls' schools (Fukaya, 1964, p. 51). The education in Christian girls' schools was mainly the doctrines of Christianity. Most of female students who graduated from such schools would become Christians. The Meiji government was determined to change the situation and put education for women under its control. The Meiji government aimed to use education for women as a channel to arouse populism, patriotism, loyalty to the throne,

and national awareness in women. Therefore, drafting of clear laws and regulations became an important measure by the Meiji government (Fukaya, 1964, p. 51). In a word, factors including the issuing of "Imperial Rescript on Education", the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, the guidance of the government's policies on education, and the signing of unequal treaties exerted important influences on the development of education for women in Japan. Swiftly, plan education for women so as to regulate, control, and guide its development direction was the priority of the works of the Meiji Government then.

In February, 1899, the Japanese government promulgated "The Girl's High School Order", ordering that at least one public high school for women must be established in every prefecture, thereby establishing the secondary education system for women. The promulgation of "The Girl's High School Order" was the first time in which the Meiji government introduced order on secondary education for women. This is a landmark in the formation of the modern Japanese educational philosophy of "virtuous wives and worthy mothers". This order reflects that the Meiji government was consciously cultivating the awareness of loyalty to the throne, patriotism, and senses of responsibilities to families and the society in female students (Wu & He, 2020). The issuing of "Girl's High School Order" greatly promoted the development of secondary education for women. According to statistics, there were 52 high schools for girls with 658 teachers and 11,984 students in 1899. In 1900, there were 70 high schools for girls with 958 teachers and 17,540 students. In 1901, the numbers continued to rise: there were 80 high schools for girls with 1,173 teachers and 21,523 students (Webpage of MEXT, 2021b). Within two years, the number of schools for women, teachers, and students all increased by nearly 100%, demonstrating the high speed of development.

The promulgation of "The Girl's High School Order" marked the official recognition of the educational philosophy of "virtuous wives and worthy mothers" and made it the mainstream value system in the shaping of women. "Virtuous wives and worthy mothers" stressed the equality of character between men and women from the angle of building a modern state. Meanwhile, the philosophy advocated the division of work, namely "men shall be in charge of external affairs while women shall be in charge of internal affairs", based on biology and sexual distinction psychology brought in from Europe and America. The philosophy required women to abide by "loyalty and chastity", "tenderness and obedience", and other moral codes advocated by Confucianism and to flexibly use knowledge of modern science to handle household affairs and bring up children, so as to live up to their roles of "wives" and "mothers" (Koyama, 1991; Tachi, 1984; Sechiyama, 1996; Ueno, 1994; Ochiai, 1989; Katayama, 1984; Fukaya, 1998; Yamaguchi, 1989). Up to then and until the end of World War II, such educational philosophy remained the mainstream ideology in Japanese education for women. Even though there was the emergence of "New Women" represented by Hiratsuka Raichō, who led the way in the Bluestocking Era, criticizing the educational philosophy of "virtuous wives and worthy mothers" within the national education system on behalf of women. However, with the accelerated development of Japan into a military state, such educational philosophy was regarded as a powerful booster in the building of state. It remained a mainstream with ever increasing authority and exclusiveness.

### **Women's Education and the Modernity of East Asia**

China and Japan are both within the "Circle of Confucius Culture" and shared similar traditions of thoughts and culture. At the turning point of history, how to face the old value systems, and how to confront the modern west was a shared issue in front of both countries. In this sense, China and Japan, both latecomer countries, shared many common features as they entered the "modern age".

First, modern women's education was an imported concept, yet it was embedded in the Chinese and Japanese societies, experiencing similar historical backgrounds. The defeats in the Opium War and the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 posed grave life-and-death challenges to China, giving people with vision an urgent sense of crisis. The Meiji government was a newly ascended young regime. For the Meiji government, the most important and urgent task was to get rid of the unequal treaties signed during the Shogun Era and to speed up the paces of building a modernized country. In a word, crisis awareness is a critical factor that included education for women in the agenda. For both China and Japan, to draw from the modern systems of western countries, to lift themselves out of national crises, and to achieve national prosperity were the shared preconditions. Against such backgrounds, whether in China or Japan, women's education first carried the function of "salvation" and "enlightenment".

Secondly, the women's education of the two countries carried similar implications. Looking back at the East-Asian society, Confucianism value system stood on a supreme and exclusive moral position. Under the ethical ideas of Confucianism advocating loyalty and filial piety, the roles of wives were described as concentrating a "tending to parents-in-law", "caring for the husband", and "teaching children". Living spaces of women were confined within their families, and only through their relationships with parents-in-law, husbands, and children would they gain social positioning and realization of their value. In these relationships, filial piety to the parents-in-law was of utmost importance, and then came the relationships with husbands and children. Overall speaking, in the patriarchic clan society depending on Confucianism standards, the foremost criterion used in the evaluation of "wives" is their performances as "daughters-in-law" while their performances as "wives" came second.

As they entered the modern age, intellectuals redefined the kind of inter-personal relationships established for women. The so-called "virtuous wives and worthy mothers" meant that women were evaluated for their "virtuousness" and "worthiness" through their relationships with their husbands and children, while their performances as daughters and daughters-in-law became secondary. This new standard is distinct from the patriarchic clan society's idea that placed "filial piety" in the first place. In other words, the modern education towards "virtuous wives and worthy mothers" conveyed a new standard that guided women to focus more on their husbands and children. Also, such development painted a new picture that featured modern nuclear families. It is worth noting that advocating the necessity of women to adhere to Confucianism ethics, stressing the required awareness and due responsibilities of women as citizens, and promoting the importance of knowledge of modern science on the shaping of "wives" and "mothers" were the core values of education towards "virtuous wives and worthy mothers". However, the part of "adhere to Confucianism ethics" did not mean complete copying of previous ways. Rather it was revised according to the needs of modern families. This is a significant feature of the educational philosophy of "virtuous wives and worthy mothers" shared by both China and Japan.

On the other hand, in face of western "modernization", China and Japan display distinct levels of enthusiasm. As is mentioned before, modern education for women at the end of the Qing Dynasty thrived due to the driving forces of western missionaries, Reformists, Revolutionists, and open-minded gentries. In face of such a condition, the Qing government turned from "neglecting" to opposing, and finally to approving. While attitude changed, the Qing Dynasty was not actively providing guidance, but rather forced to acceptance in the form of delayed recognition. In a word, the localization of modern education for women in China was a development process moving upward. Japan, after the Meiji Reform, was committed to modernization following the paths of the west, including developing education for women. From the European theories of "virtuous mothers" to the

establishment of education for women towards “virtuous wives and worthy mothers”, Japan went through a path from active imitation to balancing of the past and the present, the domestic and the foreign. Education for women in Japan transformed from full imitation of western ways to a combination of the east and the west. The localization of modern education for women basically moved downward in Japan. However, at the crucial moment of institutionalizing of secondary education for women, the “Girl’s High School Order” was issued and served as an important legal base even though the government was trying to control the growth of secondary education for women in the private domain by establishing a educational principle and development direction led by the government. Obviously, private efforts played a vital role in this aspect. So the common understanding that the modernization of Japan was a movement downwards was not a completely uncontested truth of Japan’s modernization. From the perspective of institutionalization of education for women towards “virtuous wives and worthy mothers”, the force that moved upwards played a determining role.

Looking back at history, even though the backgrounds of entering into the “modern age” between China and Japan were similar, the two countries’ choices about reality and future paths differed vastly. Trying to move women from previous extended families to modern nuclear families, equipping women with both Confucianism moral codes/ethics and knowledge of modern science, and highlighting the significance of women to a modern state through nationalism were the common features of east-Asian countries entering the “modern age”, and the condensed historical complexes behind “virtuous wives and worthy mothers”. However, the imported concept, education for women towards “virtuous wives and worthy mothers”, met distinct destinies in China and Japan in the course of localization. From an ideological perspective, education for women towards “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” took root swiftly in Japan and remained the core value in the education for women until the end of World War II.

Cultivation of “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” was also the theme of modern Chinese education for women. As an imported good, it received profound influences from Europe, America, and Japan. However, in the course of localization in China, the educational philosophy encountered multiple obstacles and difficulties. After the “May Fourth Movement,” this new educational concept was transformed into an “outdated tradition” that had to be abandoned by works of scholars then and was subject to harsh criticism. Because of the drastic shift of evaluation criteria, people abandoned it without fully understanding it. Then, turbulent times, the outbreak of Japanese invasion, the civil war that followed, and change of regime in 1949 deprived education for women of a stable environment for development. School attendance and proportion of women proceeding to higher levels among women remained low. Only a scarcely few women were able to receive education above secondary level. As a result, the influence of education for women towards “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” was very limited.

### **Conclusion**

When East-Asian countries were coerced to enter the “Modern Age”, they were facing similar historical environments and carrying similar cultural backgrounds. These factors also resulted in many commonalities in their reshaping and redefinition of the female gender. This research used the entrance of modern women’s education into the Chinese and Japanese societies as examples, carried out discussions around the dialogue between the east and the west around the topic of women, and analyzed the processes of reshaping East-Asian women.

At the time discussed, European and American countries were ambitious and aggressive. Against the background of the prevalence of Social Darwinism, to achieve modernization by learning from the west seemed

to be the only hope and way out for East-Asian countries. In this course, education for women primarily performed the functions of “salvation” and “enlightenment”. On one hand, women were included in the framework of building modern states, and shouldering the responsibilities of taking care of their families and educating their children, winning them recognition for their value and significance as members of their nations. Because education for women was highly influenced by the national system, its purpose was defined as serving the building of modern states. Education for women was not carried out to serve individual women and did not have absolute connection to the realization of women's self-worth. Such a function was even deliberately evaded due to traditional reasons. In this sense, when education for women was introduced into the East-Asian societies, it entered a brand new context and was given a distinctive meaning. In other words, the so-called functions of “salvation” and “enlightenment” were not directed at women themselves, but rather paving the way for “national prosperity”. Of course, it cannot be denied that the development of education for women factually sowed the seeds of hope for the awakening of East-Asian women. However, it was only an unexpected benefit brought by education for women, far away from an original intention.

As is mentioned before, in the Chinese society, because of the rejection towards progresses by the ruling class, and the dominating position of traditional notions such as “lack of talent in a woman is a virtue”, the budding and development of modern education for women basically went through a journey from the private domain to the public, moving upward. While in Japan, the Meiji government, as a young regime, felt a keen sense of crisis, it longed for an escape from the “backward” Asia and became equals to European and American countries. Such anxiety and excitement spread among decision-makers. In that historical context, the rise of education for women could be attributed to the enlightenment campaign carried out by the Meiji government in a downward manner. On the other hand, the promulgation of “The Girl's High School Order”, the establishment of the notion of “virtuous wives and worthy mothers”, and key factors that resulted in the realization of the two originated from the development of primate high schools for women. After that, such educational philosophy served as an important ring that protected the modern nationalism that put the Mikado on the supreme position, stayed a mainstream ideology, and was continuously strengthened as Japan developed into a military state.

Knowledge of modern science ended the absolute advantageous position of Confucianism in the education of women. Scientific spirit became an emerging force and participated in the reshaping of women. It is worth noting that the educational theory of “virtuous wives and worthy mothers” was a convergence and balance between the two. While “tenderness, obedience, and virtuousness” were the core of Confucianism ethics, modern science became a means to serve that core value. “Tenderness, obedience, and virtuousness” were guarantee for happiness, satisfaction, and harmony of families and the society. They were the required qualities of individuals' serving of the building of modern states. Meanwhile, spirits of modern science participated in the reshaping of women's pattern of thoughts. Attending schools changed the living spaces for women and expanded their channels of socializing and obtaining of information. Such changes paved the way for the independent awakening of women.

In this sense, analyzing the modernization processes of women's education in East-Asian countries and discussing how women were redefined, re-positioned, and reshaped, exploring the processes and features of how “modernization” was localized in East-Asian countries, as well as questing for the social backgrounds, structural features of discourses, and historical circumstances would become valuable resources and clues for our understanding of the modernity of East-Asian countries. Therefore, this topic is worth further discussing.

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