

## On the Discussion of “Virtuous Mother” in *New Youth*\*

ZHANG Pei, ZHANG Yao

Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, Beijing, China

When Chen Duxiu founded *New Youth*, he attached great importance to the “women’s issue” and established the “women’s issue” section, publishing articles on women’s issues and discussing women’s identity, status, and rights deeply. *New Youth* provided a forum for women to express their ideas, and its existence was a reflection of its advancement. However, from the discussion and promotion of “virtuous mother”, it’s easy to see that the intellectuals at that time had a biased perception of women’s identity and emphasized the intersection of women’s consciousness with the state’s thinking.

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### Preface

When it comes to equality between men and women, the great experience through three stages: move towards the opposite side of the male spectrum to prove that they are not weak; begin to demand rights and want to participate in the wider social sphere; revert to themselves and identify as independent, unique women. One of the characteristics of Chinese culture is the variety of “ideas”, “fashions”, and “doctrines”...that were later given explicit titles by western philosophy, all of which contain more or less, just like the ginseng tree, which takes a few years to sprout, flowers and fruit are relatively late. For example, the basic system of dissolving marriage in ancient times was “seven out and three out”. “The regulation of ‘three out’ and the interpretation of ‘seven out’ basically prohibited divorced wives for men” (Su, 2007, p. 9). It was a deliberate attempt to protect vulnerable women in the system, which was humane, reasonable, and justified under the productive conditions of the time. The praise and criticism of “special women” in biographical literature all convey a message to posterity: there are always some women striving for something. The more restrictions on women in Neo-Confucianism, the more fantastic women and men with advanced thoughts in the world. It can be seen that the simple desire to protect women, the hazy “feminist thought”, and the consciousness of pursuing fairness always exist.

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ZHANG Pei, Ph.D., Post-doctoral of Law, Associate Professor, Master Instructor, Department of Editing and Publishing, School of Journalism and Publication, Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, Beijing, China.

ZHANG Yao, Undergraduate, Department of Editing and Publishing, School of Journalism and Publication, Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, Beijing, China.

### Gender Equality

However, from the existence of consciousness to real practice, there is a relationship between one step and 99 steps. Each accounts for half of the success, and the former is particularly important. The problem in our country is that for thousands of years, we have some ideas of taking steps, but we have not taken steps yet. In western parlance, Pandora’s box has not been opened. The truth is the same between the East and the West. Taking the first step means the overthrow of Yin and Yang, the beginning of the collapse of Mount Tai. When the lid of the box is lifted, disaster wakes up and scourge flies out, but hope is left at the bottom of the box. These ideas not only make people feel how deeply human beings fear “change”, but also clearly feel that what should happen will happen. Even the faltering of Chinese women’s rights began with the help of Western missionaries.

They firmly believed that “our body is the temple of God” (CCC, 2005, p. 1129), which is the residence of the Holy Spirit. Naturally, it is not allowed to destroy the dwelling of God. Similarly, Confucianism also emphasizes that “the hair and skin of the body are the parents of the body”. The reason why “dare not damage” is that protecting the body is the “beginning of filial piety” (Hu, 1996, p. 1). It is absurd that women shoulder most of the duty of filial piety, but allow the crazy aesthetic evil interest to destroy the hair skin, which is called the method of binding feet. It stems from the southern Tang Dynasty emperor Li Yu’s appreciation of three inch golden lotus. Later generations took this as elegance and followed it from generation to generation. Who could have expected that the gap for westerners to open the magic box of women’s rights by “repairing the temple”, dissuading foot binding and organizing the “Tianzu society” to carry out large-scale practice of foot liberation, so that both disaster and hope could walk freely on this closed land.

Later, the Reformists also participated in the “no foot binding” movement, which spread from Guangzhou to Shanghai, Hunan, Hubei, and Fujian. By 1900, it had radiated to Hangzhou, Tianjin, Weihaiwei, and other places. Women have benefited a lot. Due to the convenience of walking, freedom of movement, and independent study tour, the overall dress and mental outlook of some women have changed. Zhang Zhujun, a female scholar in the Qing Dynasty, “She followed her father to graduate from Hackett Medical College for Women attached to Rouji Hospital, Duobao Street, Guangzhou...She graduated with honors in Gengzi year and became a doctor.... She walked daily between Rouji Hospital and the south and west of the city, always wearing a suit and leather shoes” (Fen, 2011, p. 219). She always embraced celibacy and liked to think of herself as a man. All her adopted sons and daughters called her “adopted father”. Qiu Jin, the heroine of Jianhu, “She arrived in Tokyo in March, 1904. She firstly studied Japanese at the Japanese Language Workshop of Surugadai International Students’ Association, and then transferred to Aoyama Practical Girls’ School. She always wore kimono in her spare time and didn’t like to be decorated. She was generous and her demeanor was unrestrained” (Fen, 2011, p. 301).

Of course, Zhang Zhujun and Qiu Jin were independent among women and continued to grow in their active participation in revolutionary activities. Most of the women who had attended church schools, official and private women’s schools, or studied abroad and accepted feminist ideas had some relatively favorable family backgrounds, teachers and students, and friends who were easy to contact the revolutionary atmosphere. Among them, there were also some people who originally held the view of “harmony between husband and wife”, and then gradually affected by the revolution baptism and lives were surging and changing. For example, Liu Yi, an official in charge of printing in the early days of the founding of the Republic of China, was

regarded as a rare commodity by her mother because of her beauty and sociability. She often used them to attract young people to her home for tea parties in order to generate wealth. When her husband died, she was suspected. During the process of escaping with others, she ran across her old friend in a distant land after several turns. So she crossed the river with her friend to Wuchang and was placed at Mount Rouge, having the access go to school. She was very secret with the party members because there was a branch of the Allied Party organ at the foot of the mountain. Later party members used her beauty to woo Liu Zhongwen who was wealthy with much fortune, and Liu Yi showed her talent of Red Whisk. Afterwards, she and Liu both participated in the attack of the Hubei revolutionary party and were arrested unyielding. Then the governor's office of Hubei was established, Liu was promoted as the general supervisor and Liu Yi became the seal supervisor (Fen, 2011, pp. 376-378).

From these examples, we can also see some problems exposed when the atmosphere was gradually opening up, such as non-marriage doctrine, easy interaction, and breaking through major defenses in relationships between men and women. The discussion of these problems directly affected people's reflection on the essence of “gender equality” and the concept of “women's education”.

### “Virtuous Mother”

Chen Duxiu's translation of *Women's Views* (《妇人观》) written by French Max O'Rell (1848~1903) contained in the first volume of *New Youth* (September 15, 1915), in which he said: “Although women are not born to issue orders, However, her innate power is enough to control the man who issues orders. In the most harmonious couples, the wife tends to have the highest authority, and the husband is subservient to her.” At first glance, it seems that this is the foundation of women's power, but actually women are arranged to take care of the family, handle the “internal affairs”. Chen also said: “No matter how perfect one's desires may be, if they are not polished by a woman's tender hands, they are nothing more than a coarse diamond.” Nothing more than women's value, or to “assist” men, polish each other into diamonds, and it is enough for women to do the responsibility as a piece of sandpaper.

In response to this uninspired view, several articles calling for “virtuous mother” were published in the second and third volumes of *New Youth*. So what is “virtuous mother”? According to Chen Qian Aichen, “A woman who has morality, knowledge and economic ability meets the criteria of a ‘virtuous mother’, and one of the three conditions is indispensable. The morality I am talking about is not the traditional female morality in our country's old customs, in other words, it is true morality, true knowledge and real economy. Therefore, when entering school, women of our generation should have the purest purpose of training themselves to be “virtuous mother”, so that they can live up to their responsibilities and the hope of the nation. As for those free women in our country who have no morals, they are really not worth mentioning, and I deeply hope that the woman I love most will not be like those free women” (Chen, 2011, p. 457). The “three virtues” mentioned at the beginning seem reasonable, and are really a combination of virtue, talent, and wealth. Unfortunately, the “true morality” advocated by the author is virtually tantamount to the fact that slaves set themselves up for shackles, advocating that the goal of a woman's education is “training themselves to be ‘virtuous mother’”, and one can succumb to a high-class reproductive machine without “old customs”. Finally, the “free women without morality” referred to at the end those who practice non-marriage or have promiscuous affairs with men. Surely the author's original intention is not bad. The article begins by saying that he is eager to cultivate “excellent citizens” as a backing in addition to “current strategies for dealing with superficial problems” such as

mining, industry, craftsmanship, and strict national defense.

When talking about women’s education, Liang Hualan made it clear that worthy wife and mother should be implemented as a “comprehensive planning policy”. Its positioning for women is “the mother of mankind”, and the way to contribute to the country is nothing more than “caring for the husband, teaching the children and running the family”. From this point of view, the practice of French women who prefer leisure to labor and avoid giving birth is not desirable. The women of our country just have the good “obedience” that has been suppressed and cultivated for thousands of years, and can make use of its convenience to “give them good education and eventually become the first-class women in the world”. Therefore, it could be said that the good mother and good wife are the key points of education. Women’s “superb ideas and precise opinions due to advanced education” are of great significance to mankind. Not only that, Liang also added to the “scope of advanced education” for women, believing that “mostly women are suitable for literature, and men are suitable for quality”, and she was not optimistic about European and American women who “do not recognize the weakness of physiology” and forcefully engaged in science and engineering, which would not flourish. Accordingly the equality of education between men and women is “not the equality of educational types, but the equality of educational personality” (Liang, 2011, p. 70).

In No. 3 of 1917, Gao Susu sharply refuted the argument of worthy wife and mother: “A woman is one of the citizens, owned by the state, not privately owned by a family, not privately owned by a man, and has a complete personality. Therefore, the policy of education should be for women themselves, for the future of the country, not for men’s private service. The saying of worthy wife and mother has been prevailed in Japan, and there is a slight trend in our country recently. Japan despises women more seriously than China, so this perspective is not surprising at all. Their approach to education, even at its peak, was to create a class of knowledgeable and obedient servants to be driven by men. They have the name of worthy wife and mother, but not the reality of it. The result is that women are cordoned off in the home and become virtuous role models at the command of men. Older women in our villages can reach this level as well. So why all the extra work of setting up schools?” (Gao, 2011, p. 231). The most valuable aspect of her view is that women are fully human beings, educated for the benefit of themselves and country, and should not stand behind men in a humble manner, becoming erudite servants and following “old habit of Taoyao” of being good for the family. At the same time, she denied the value of this theory from the source, and believed that Japan belittled women, so the theory of good mother, which was handed down from Japan, was so superficial and untrue. Stripping off this high-end coat, the muscles and bones are all old and rotten as well known to the village women. Consequently dumping educational resources here was of little benefit and great waste.

After this strange tune, the ideal type of womanhood remained the same. At the end of the chapter *the Great Solution to Women’s Problems* (《女子问题之大解决》), Chen Huazhen quoted her brother Deming’s words, saying that women’s mental strength and physique were not as good as men’s, and the responsibility of childbirth and childcare was essential. At the end of the article she attached a prescription, that is, “I would like to give a piece of advice to women to study morality and learning in order to be an understanding wife and loving mother for the nation in future” (Chen, 2011, p. 236). It can be said that bitter taste is not necessarily a good recipe, and prejudice is deposited in the common brain. In Sun Mingqi’s article *Close Relationship between Reforming the Family and State* (《改良家庭与国家有密切之关系》), it was said that

Parents should teach their sons the way of patriotism and family unity, and more importantly, teach their daughters

the important task of running a family. A harmony family makes a powerful country. As the saying goes, those who want to govern their country should first integrate their family. Those who want to integrate their family should first cultivate their body, which is also called. That’s the point. (Sun, 2011, p. 310)

Sure enough, the scholars returned to the old Confucian way after going around.

This voice calling for “virtuous mother” had hovered over *New Youth* for two years and refused to land. It was just the shadow of the huge wings of the old orthodoxy in reality. From the founding of the women’s school in China by the missionary Eliza Bridgman in the third year of Tongzhi (1864) (Jessie, 1971, p. 132), to the sixth year of the Republic of China (1917), the fifty-three years of feminist practice during this period did not go all the way in the transformation of deeply ingrained things, and there was still the negativity and backward forces of not making progress. Because the “women’s problem” was included in the transformation plan of the whole country, it was difficult to become an independent part and exist because of its existence. Even if people paid attention to it, it was also based on the state. Thus, the original intention of calling for a “worthy wife and mother” was to make women improve their own quality and continue to play the great “maternal” and gentle soothing power, to cultivate and help “sound nationals”. In the meantime, the tendency of “excessive freedom” in the process of women’s liberation should be corrected.

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