

Impact and response: Debate on the necessity of female education in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic period

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Abstract:

The late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China were the periods of rapid changes in Chinese society. People's thoughts were wandering between persistence and innovation. Influenced by the introduction of Western ideas, missionaries and advanced Chinese intellectuals advocated women's education and the establishment of girls' schools. Influenced by the traditional social division of labor, feudal ethical thoughts and heavy historical accumulation, it has not received unanimous support, and this resistance mainly comes from conservatives. Under the pressure of public opinion from all walks of life, women's right to education was initially established. The debate on the necessity of women's education presents the characteristics of impact and response, reflecting the rise of feminism and the awakening of women's self-consciousness.

Keywords: Late Qing Dynasty and Early Republic of China, Female education, Impact and response, feminism

1. Introduction

Education has existed since the slave society, and its types can be divided into family education, school education and social education. The scope of this paper is school education. In ancient China, there were some sympathizers with women, Yuan CAI(The first person to advocate the theory of female sympathy in Chinese history) in Song Dynasty(From 960 to 1279) was one of them, but it was not until the late Qing Dynasty(From 1840 to 1911)and the early Republic of China(From 1912 to 1949) that women's education entered a historical turning point with the deepening of the national crisis. In the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic period, Chinese and Western thought and culture were stirring, which provided opportunities for the development of women's education, and feminism presented the characteristics of diversification and complexity.

The study of female education has always been an important part of the study of educational history and history. The academic circles have achieved fruitful results in macro and micro research, which are pioneering to a certain extent, but from the overall situation of the research, because the research of women's education in modern China started relatively late, the research scope and region are still insufficient. Scholars have discussed the issue of girls' education from different perspectives such as male and female students, school and family liaison [1], focusing on typical areas such as Shanghai,

Yunnan and Qingdao [2]. The academic circles pay attention to the research of women's education thought and church girls' school. However, there are few studies from the perspective of social polemics. In view of this, this paper, from the perspective of the argument of necessity and guided by Marxist feminist theory, sorts out the new and old voices through historical materials, examines the difficult course of the development of Chinese feminism, and shows the characteristics of "impact and response" of women's education in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China. By exposing the controversy of necessity, we can deepen people's understanding, provide a diversified perspective of research, and show the connection of world history, so as to serve the development of Chinese women's education.

2. The wind of prosperity prevails

"People's ideas, opinions and concepts, in a word, people's consciousness, change with the change of people's living conditions, people's social relations, people's social existence." [3] In the late Qing Dynasty, the foreign powers invaded and the Qing government signed a series of unequal treaties, which made the traditional Confucian thought doubted and promoted the educational reform. The failure of the Sino-Japanese War became a new opportunity for the development of women's education. Faced with the foreign war of the Qing government, the Chinese people began to re-examine the reality and reflect on

themselves.

Since the 1840s, Western missionaries poured into China in large numbers, playing the role of liberation and rescue, and feminism came to China with the footsteps of missionaries. "Many of the Protestants clearly believe in the principle of equality between men and women, and are determined to engage in a crusade for equal rights for women in China." [4] With the help of missionaries, many articles promoting the education of foreign women and prominent Western women were published in newspapers such as *The Bulletin of All Nations*. Among the western missionaries in China, there are a considerable number of female missionaries. "In 1903, the Western missionaries of Jesus in the East numbered 2,950 men and women, 1,233 men, 868 wives and 849 unmarried women." [5] As the beneficiaries of women's education, they themselves feel the low status of Chinese women, rationally examine the historical and realistic status of women from the standpoint of women, and actively advocate the establishment of women's schools. The missionaries' penetration of the concept of women's education impacted the inherent values and social order of China, and the Chinese ideological circle played a certain role in enlightenment. Influenced by new ideas, advanced intellectuals recognized the importance of girls' education, believed that patriarchal society and the patriarchal culture bred under the patriarchal society was an important source of inequality between men and women, and advocated breaking the century-old restrictions on girls' education. In 1896, Chen Chi(Officials in the late Qing Dynasty) mentioned in "Gynecology" : "The custom of Taixi, where women embroider, work, art, there are women's school..... Therefore, after a woman is married, she can always be a husband and a son, and it is the basic plan of a rich country and a strong army." [6] "But when I put the root cause of weakness in the world, it begins with women not learning." [7] Liang Qichao(Chinese modern thinker, statesman and educator) continued to develop this idea. Kang Youwei(The representative figure of bourgeois reformism) mentioned in the *Book of Datong*, "People are born of heaven, there is a body, that is, they have their rights, infringers call the right to invade heaven, and those who let the right call the loss of heaven." Man and woman, though alien, are the people of heaven and share the same rights." [8] He pointed out the deep-seated reasons for women's loss of rights and advocated the establishment of girls' schools so that women could receive education. Dong Shou(Published "Xing Female Study Discussion")also said: "All specialized learning, men have no time to think deeply, women can not out of mind, research new principles and new laws, prosperity, great cause, the root of this prosperity." [9] *The Women's Clock*, written by Jin Tianhe(Chinese modern poets), was published in 1903 and had a huge social impact. In the book, the feudal education system was ruthlessly criticized, and girls' school education was opposed to all the old ideas and customs.

In the fusion and collision of Chinese and Western cultures,

women are no longer silent, they actively advocate the revival of women's learning, advocating that women are independent individuals, but also have the need to realize self-value. Fang Naixiu(Published "Developing the Education of Hui Women in the Voice of Northwest China") discussed the importance of women's education to the family, the nation and the country, thus extending the importance of promoting women's education, and believed that the key to create a happy society and the nation is to promote women's education. Qiu Jin(advocate of women's rights and women's education in China) believed that if women did not learn knowledge and culture, they would be ignorant, so that "men can be proud and arrogant, and actually see women as men's slaves like cattle and horses." [10] Kang Tongwei(Journalist and translator) clearly put forward the view of equality between men and women in the article "The advantages and Disadvantages of Female Education", arguing that "the strangers of heaven and earth are equal, Yin and Yang are equal, and there is no bias." [11]

3. Conservatism remains

Although Western thought did challenge the traditional concept of male superiority and female inferiority, but in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic period, the concept of male superiority and female inferiority and the three principles and five permanent moral requirements were deeply rooted, and there were many obstacles to promoting female learning. The ancient Chinese society was centered on men, and women were dependent on men. The right to education was the privilege of men, and women could only receive family education. Both privately established academies and official schools did not admit female students. Influenced by the traditional social division of labor, feudal ethical thoughts and heavy historical accumulation, the movement against women scholars and the destruction of women's education was also common in this period.

Some gentry sent a message to the court to oppose the rise of women's education. Conservatives adhere to the traditional idea that "a woman without talent is a virtue", resist western learning, insist on maintaining traditional female education, and think that the revival of female education will bring harm to the country and the people, and the order is in chaos. Liu xian(Works department chief) and Zhang Ruiyin(imperial historian) had on the fold, asked the department to guard against female learning abuses. Girls' school, as a new bud in the modern school garden, has been oppressed and destroyed. Some girls' schools, such as Hunan First Girls' School, Hunan Shu Shen Girls' School, Guangdong Minli Tiezheng Girls' School, Hubei Girls' School, etc., have frequently suffered from the bad luck of being closed. In September

1904, the Qing government ordered the closure of Hunan First Girls' School and Shushen Girls' School, which was also recorded in the Record of Emperor Dezongjing in the Qing Dynasty. Even Mei Yiqi (The first batch of students to enter the United States), a big scholar who has been influenced by the European wind and rain, agrees in principle with the recruitment of female students, but also "thinks that it needs to be done." Because the gender of men and women is different, there are many aspects that must have special preparations, so it must go through considerable preparation before it can be held." [12]

4. Outcome and interpretation of the debate

Despite the conflict of two debates and the strong reaction of conservatives, the public's call for girls' school education has become increasingly fierce, and under the background of the spread of the idea of "Xing women's school" and the rise of private women's schools, the department has included women's school in the education system. In March 1907, the Department promulgated the "Regulations for Girls' Primary School" and the "Regulations for Girls' Normal School", marking that women's education was formally incorporated into the official system and recognized by the court. Since then, women have enjoyed some learning opportunities, and education conditions have gradually moved closer to men. This reflects the affirmation of the value of women, men no longer occupy the supreme position, women gradually begin to get rid of bondage and repression, and the status of men and women is gradually equal. The improvement of women's national status has opened a gap for women's education in the future.

However, the women's right to education established at this time is very limited, and the equality between men and women has not been realized in the true sense, and the theory of good wife and good mother under the male discourse can still be seen. The stipulation of female education in the constitution of the Qing government is not complete, which shows that the establishment of female education right is more of a expedient measure. The idea that women should play the role of housewives to realize women's social value through receiving new education is still the mainstream public opinion on women's education. The independent personality of women has been ignored, and there is still a certain gap between men and women in the real equality of the right to education.

Under the influence of western liberalism and feminist movement, social thoughts against patriarchy emerged. Under the pressure of internal and external troubles and for the purpose of self-improvement, advanced

intellectuals linked women's education with national salvation and social and political development, which made women's education more important than ever, thus establishing the legitimacy of promoting women's education and reflecting distinct characteristics of The Times. There are obvious political overtones.

The impact of the two different cultures in China and the West has brought the shock of ideas to China, but it is more manifested as the passive strain under the impact. Chinese modern feminism was formed under the unique "blending culture" background of China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, so it has both continuation of tradition and breakthrough of tradition, which is the unity of continuation and breakthrough. Chinese modern girls' school education presents the characteristics of traditional girls' education combined with the particularity of western girls' education.

5. Summary

The rise of the debate on the necessity of women's education in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China is the inevitable result of the national salvation and social change, which reflects the trend of social change and the awareness of women's subjectivity. Faced with the declining Manchu Dynasty, they began to reflect on the reality, and various thoughts of social reform kept emerging. This reflection became more and more profound with the deepening of the aggression of Western powers, and the reform of feminism and women's education was the product of this reflection background. In the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic period, the debate on the necessity of female education was the epitome of the debate between western feminism and Confucian female thought, reflecting the decline of Confucian female thought and showing the characteristics of impact and response. The development of girls' school education in modern China has moved to a new level step by step in practice, which is related to feminism. In the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic period, the debate on the necessity of women's education and the characteristics of feminist development were not only related to the impact of western views on women and the education of ecclesiastical girls' schools, but also deeply rooted in China and closely related to the political and economic changes of modern Chinese society.

"The development of a certain historical era can always be determined by the degree of women's freedom", "the degree of women's liberation is the natural standard for measuring general liberation" [13] Therefore, the prominence of women's role is not only conducive to their own development, but also conducive to the progress of society, and is an inherent meaning of women's own development and social progress. The current

education should pay attention to the independence of women, the awakening of women's self-consciousness and the cultivation of personality, which has a reference for deepening the reform of higher education.

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