

**Sides with Chinese Women: The Christian Magazine**  
***Woman's Work in the Far East* and Education, 1912-1921**

By

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## DECLARATION

This work has not been submitted previously for examination to any tertiary institution.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	1
I. The beginning of the magazine .....	8
II Education of Women Missionaries.....	14
(1) Role of “Teacher Mothers” .....	16
(2) Embracing Chinese Culture and Integrating Chinese Customs with New Concepts. ....	20
III <i>Woman’s Work in the Far East</i> and Chinese Education.....	22
(1) The Background and Purposes of Female Education .....	22
(2) Systematic Missionary Female Education in China .....	26
(3) Controversy in Spiritual Education: Patriotism and Christian Education.....	31
(4) Blind Children’s Schools and Vocational Training .....	36
Conclusion.....	39
References .....	42

## Illustration Content

<b>Figure 1:</b> <i>Woman’s Work in the Far East</i> Content.....	12
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## Abstract

This article interprets the role of female missionaries during the early years of the Republic of China through the lens of the missionary magazine: *Woman's Work in the Far East* published in Shanghai by the American Presbyterian Mission Press. Their publications serve as a source of direct access to their thinking. Using the magazines as primary sources, this article examines what were the ideology practices that the female missionaries in China, and what kind of future they envisioned for Chinese women. Female missionaries were not a single individual exerting its position, but a whole constructed throughout cultural exchange. Although the same profession, they played a different role than male missionaries. Female missionaries could direct access to Chinese, especially women, and serve as intermediaries between upper-class women and male missionaries. They actively challenge gender stereotypes and extend their influence into the social sphere, against foot-binding and concubinage. Taking this culture exchange perspective can we see gender ideology as embodied in female missionary magazines and how female missionaries affected Chinese education. They were significant to the development of women's education in China. As the earliest proponents, female missionaries covered not only the education of school-age students in a systematic education system to train missionaries but also the literacy education of marginalised groups, such as married women and blind children, filled the social welfare. They exerted their initiative and practices for the modernization of China, the shift of Chinese society from a traditional one. Together with their practice, when it came to spiritual education, the Chinese were critical of their missionary goal since it

deviated from Chinese nationalism and patriotism. In vocational education, missionaries were also profitable from the unpaid labour of students.

**Keywords:** Christianity, Periodical Magazine, Female Missionaries, Chinese Education, Gender Education.

*Woman's Work in the Far East* was a seasonal missionary magazine published in Shanghai, from 1890 to 1921 by the American Presbyterian Mission Press<sup>1</sup>. This magazine was born to advocate Chinese belief in Christianity and connect the social status of Chinese women with missionary efforts and religion. The magazine provided female missionaries a venue to share and communicate their experiences, showing their unique roles. Due to gender segregation, female missionaries were naturally granted access to areas inaccessible to male missionaries, they could directly communicate with Chinese women and acted as intermediaries between male missionaries and upper-class Chinese women. In the magazine articles, as promoters of Western culture, with a sense of assurance and supremacy from the level of development in their origin countries, female missionaries transmitted Western concepts and the latest women's movements and ideologies to China, helping to revolutionise traditional Chinese beliefs. Residing in a dynamically changing Chinese society, female missionaries also monitored and engaged with Chinese ideologies and current trends. While embracing some of China's traditions and principles as missionary approaches, female missionaries hoped China would progress towards their envisioned improved future.

Female missionaries, both as contributors and readers, exhibited distinct and diverse perspectives in *Woman's Work in the Far East*. In reaction to the current conditions of Chinese women, they also advocated for women's emancipation in China. To transform Chinese society, female missionaries were influenced by Western women's social movements, they promoted female education, the abandoning of foot

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<sup>1</sup> *Woman's Work in the Far East*, v. 34, no. 1, March, 1913, Cover page, unpaginated.

binding, as well as in the social area stopped smoking, alcohol consumption, and opium use. Recognizing the significance of education for Chinese women, female missionaries supported the improvement of their cultural and educational acquirement, this was evident in the magazine's shared lots of their stories as being "mother teachers". They developed a detailed framework for Chinese women's education, tailored to different regions' specific needs and characteristics. Examples include the establishment of educational institutions in city areas catering to both unmarried and married women, and the provision of vocational training to women, whereas in rural areas, they worked for literacy education and sought to modernize people's mindset.

This paper especially focuses on the educational ideas presented by female missionaries in *Woman's Work in the Far East* and explores the following questions: What kind of content was the magazine about? Using this magazines as primary sources for research on female missionaries, this paper hopes to answer: What was the ideology behind the education practices that the female missionaries in China, and what kind of future do they envision for Chinese women? The research question was addressed through the examination of the only currently available digitised magazine sources from 1912–1921. *Woman's Work in the Far East* served as a contact zone for female missionary experiences, this paper mainly argues that the female missionaries contributed to the modernization of Chinese society. They actively promoted gender equality, demonstrated that abilities are not dependent on gender, and urged women to assume greater responsibilities, regardless of nationality. Education played a key role in the authors' reasoning; female missionaries tried to overcome the lack of educational

opportunities for Chinese women by offering several types of education to promote literacy and people's awareness of Christianity and guided women to become financially independent and forward-thinking. They provided support to marginalized communities and supplied social welfare to promote hygiene and reduce the mortality rate of the population. However, these women were also constrained by the limitations and restrictions imposed by their societal positions and the period. They attributed all their practises and achievements to their faith and avoided directly reviewing China's political behaviour. In general, female missionaries in China's evolving landscape had consistently demonstrated fearlessness in sharing their struggles and hardships. They have continuously sought to expand their social sphere, promote their competence and have unwaveringly always been on the side of women.

Research on the earliest Chinese women's education frequently puts it as a component of church education. Gao Shiliang examines the features of church schooling and focuses on elementary, secondary, and higher education<sup>2</sup>. Wang Lixin analyses many primary sources in different languages to present a dialectical viewpoint on the impact of American missionaries on the modernization of Chinese education. He argued missionaries held an imperialistic ideology towards China while playing a significant role in promoting educational reforms<sup>3</sup>. He Xiaoxia and Shi Jinghuan affirm that missionaries promoted and helped to transform Chinese society by contributing to

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<sup>2</sup> Shiliang Gao. *Zhong Guo Jiao Hui Xue Xiao Shi [History of Chinese Church Schools]*. (Changsha: Hunan Education Publishing House, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Lixin Wang. *Mei Guo Chuan Jiao Shi Yu Wan Qing Zhong Guo Xian Dai Hua: Jin Dai Ji Du Xin Jiao Chuan Jiao Shi Zai Hua She Hui Wen Hua He Jiao Yu Huo Dong Yan Jiu [American Missionaries and Modernization in Late Qing China: A Study of Social, Cultural, and Educational Activities of Protestant Missionaries in China]* (Tianjin: Tianjin People's Publishing House, 1997).

women's education to move from traditional to modern education. They argue the work of missionaries in running schools in China has been more or less independent from the missionary activities and formed a unique system<sup>4</sup>. With a wealth of clear data tables, Lu Yanzhen examines women's education from 1845 to 1945 to the process of the Chineseization of private schools<sup>5</sup>. Lin Meimei researches the reverse influence of Western missionaries, not only on Western influences on Chinese women, but focuses on primary sources from the American Episcopal Church Missions and argues global missionary activity also expanded the influence of the American church and affected the status of American women<sup>6</sup>.

This paper tells narrower stories of *Woman's Work in the Far East* as a lens on the broader questions of what was the guiding ideology behind the practice of female missionaries in China, and with what educational practices. This paper proceeds on the female missionary magazine through three parts: the beginning of the magazine, the education of female missionaries in the magazine, and the educational practises for Chinese women. Part I introduces the meeting where the decision to restart a magazine and rename *Woman's Work in the Far East* was made, examining the magazine's ambition from the perspective of the special roles of female missionaries. It provides an overview of the editorial team and authors of the magazine as well as readership. It

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<sup>4</sup> Xiaoxia He and Jinghuan Shi. *Jiào Huì Xué Xiào Y ŭ Zhōng Guó Jiào Yù Jìn Dài Huà* 教會學校與中國教育近代化 [Church Schools and the Modernisation of Chinese Education] First Edition, (Guangzhou: Guang Dong Education Publishing House=廣東教育出版社, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Yanzhen Lu. *Zhōng Guó Jìn Dài N ǚ Z ĭ Jiào Yù Sh ĭ : 1895-1945* 中國近代女子教育史: 1895-1945 [History of Women's Education in Modern China: 1895-1945]. First Edition, (Taipei: The Liberal Arts Press=文史哲出版社), 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Meimei Lin. *Women in missiology: the study of the Episcopal women missionaries and their endeavours in China (1835-1900)* (1st ed, Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2011).

introduces the fixed three-column structure and the general features of the magazine. Part II investigates education for female missionaries in this magazine through two sections. Based on magazine articles, highlight the expectation that female missionaries should possess a belief in gender equality. Section one introduces unique requirements for female missionaries as the role of a “teacher mother”, combined with the American idea of a virtuous wife and mother. Section two examines how female missionaries embraced and integrated Chinese culture into their missionary activities, showing their adoption of the Chinese tradition.

Part III is divided into four sections, exploring the educational practices of female missionaries in China based on the guiding principles in the magazine. The first section focuses on the envisioned future that female missionaries aimed to accomplish through education. It starts with the Chinese social context where the missionaries introduced education for Chinese women and the advocacy of female education by knowledgeable Chinese. The second part examines the missionary spirituality curriculum, comparing the differences between patriotic education and missionary education, and the critical voices of Chinese society towards missionary education. Part three outlines various school types for systematic missionary education, including the Station Class, the Elementary Bible School, the Intermediate Bible School, and the Bible Teachers Training School. It analyses these schools’ application requirements, courses of study and where to go after graduation. The article concludes with the scattered education for blind children and vocational training by female missionaries. While profiting from the

labour of the students, missionary education connected with the social welfare system and played an important role in educating socially marginalized people.

## I. The beginning of the magazine

Magazines often served as an open intelligence service to gather information from China. Missionary work through evangelistic, educational, and medical work go hand in hand. Many early missionaries believed that Western knowledge and material advancement were worthy of spreading alongside the Christian faith. For this reason, they understood the importance of a secular press<sup>7</sup>. At every level of Chinese social life, the profound influence of newspapers and magazines was obvious to all and has had an enormous impact on how Chinese people think, speak, write, and communicate<sup>8</sup>. In 1890, the Protestant China Mission held its annual meeting in China, analysed the year's achievements and put magazine on the agenda. On the fourth day afternoon, the Conference started to share their opinions about Chinese women's work<sup>9</sup>. After the conference ended, the women's representatives met at the Union Church and proposed reviving the women's magazine *Woman's Work to China*, renaming it to reflect their work in China, Japan, and Siam, and renaming it *Woman's Work in the Far East*<sup>10</sup>, centred around the ministry of female missionaries in the Far East.

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<sup>7</sup> Auhter R. Gaillmore, "Journalism and the Christian Movement in China", *The Chinese Recorder*, October, Vol.69, Issue 10 (1938): 521.

<sup>8</sup> Xiaohong Xia. *Wǎn Qīng Nǚ Xìng Yǔ Jìn Dài Zhōng Guó* [Late Qing Women and Modern China]. 2nd ed. (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>9</sup> General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China (Shanghai, China), *Report of the Missionary conference held in Shanghai, May 1890* (Shanghai: Printed at the "North-China Herald" Office), 13-15.

<sup>10</sup> Protestant Missionaries of China, *Report of the Missionary conference*, 15.

“There is the need of being kept informed as to the local conditions in every portion of this great, changing Empire that the work among women of every class may be accurately reported, thus aiding the work in general, and inviting thought- full discussion of methods and larger plans that may develop as a result.”<sup>11</sup>

The rationale for establishing a magazine was evident based on the discussions held throughout the meeting. As Barbara Welter concluded: the Missionary Boards were good at describing the miserable state of the non-believer women and contrasting it with the supposedly happy life of her American sisters. However, they also have to draw two contradictory conclusions: first, despite the non-believer women’s degrading situations, they still possessed big influences; and second, that male missionaries were not allowed to contact these powerful women<sup>12</sup>. The Protestant China Mission’s meeting also exemplified the argument, as attendants voiced concerns over the subordinate position of Chinese women and the burden cause by rigid gender standards. Male and female missionaries from various regions of China expressed their views on the topic of Chinese women.

The conference analysed the country’s strict gender segregation as the main reason that male missionaries found it challenging to reach women. “As a rule, the women of China can be reached only by and through women”, Rev. A. Williamson as a representative summarized the participants’ speeches<sup>13</sup>. Throughout history, Chinese

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<sup>11</sup> “Temperance and Reform,” *Woman's Work in the Far East*, v. 34, no. 1, March, 1913, 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Welter. “She Hath Done What She Could: Protestant Women’s Missionary Careers in Nineteenth-Century America.” *Women in American Religion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 118.

<sup>13</sup> Protestant Missionaries of China, *Report of the Missionary conference*, 13-15.

women have consistently showed their influence in the family. Whether as daughters or mothers, women's roles had never been associated with leadership positions, but they still had a significant impact on the whole family. "The permanent Christianization of China depends upon the women of China, what can a man do when the women are all against him?" Because women related to household and their families, female missionaries showed abilities-- they could directly influence Chinese women, as well as could also affect women's husbands and children in the family. In addition to bridging the gap between religion and women, female missionaries could also serve as intermediates and provide connections for male missionaries. "There is less fear of women as political agents and the influence of these visits prepares the way for the male missionaries who may follow."<sup>14</sup> Despite the same occupation, the role of female missionaries was different from males, they showed a softness that male missionaries could not. So, there was a need for a work guidance magazine specifically for women. As the Presbyterian Church's main magazine, *The Chinese Recorder*, had a small percentage of female authors. Although the Contributors to this magazine were also mainly missionaries and church school teachers<sup>15</sup>, *Woman's Work in the Far East* could serve as an important addition to the women's issues.

The aim of the magazine was to serve as a platform for facilitating the learning and exchange of experiences among female missionaries, while also promoting

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<sup>14</sup> Protestant Missionaries of China, *Report of the Missionary conference*, 13-15.

<sup>15</sup> Feiya Tao. "The Voice within the Missionary Movement: A Preliminary Discussion of *The Chinese Recorder* (1867-1941)" in *Sh ĭ Liào Y ŭ Sh ĭ Ji è: Zh ō ng W én W én Xi à n Y ŭ Zh ō ng Gu ó J ĭ D ū Ji ào Sh ĭ Y án Ji ū 史料與視界：中文文獻與中國基督教史研究* [Historical Materials and Perspectives: Chinese Literature and the Study of Chinese Christian History] (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2007): 251.

Christian knowledge and faith. It also facilitated the exchange of information regarding contemporary events related to women and shared ideology of the female missionary group. Due to limitations in primary sources, this paper analyses from 1912, end to 1921. *Woman's Work in the Far East* kept developing its publishing formula during this time. As described in the catalogue page header, the editorial board consisted of 3 to 5 women, both married and single, from various Christian organizations, each one was typically responsible for one section of the magazine. The managing editors during this period were G. F. Fitch from 1913 to 1915, A. P. Parker who acted as editor from 1915 and then became the full editor-in-chief until 1917, W.S. Elliott served as Assistant Editor in June 1915, and Evan Morgan held the position from 1918 to March 1921. Since June 1921, the magazine stopped mentioning any members of the editorial board. Through this period magazine, the editorial board appeared to downplay their influence and seldom offered articles, serving as curated and reviewed for publication.

On reader analysis, since this magazine was written in English and the editorial board consisted entirely of non-Chinese, it was more accessible to Western readers. The readers would inevitably be limited to missionaries in China and Chinese Christians who could read English. Undoubtedly, the largest readership for the magazine was comprised of female missionaries or believers of its specific concentration on women's work. While the magazine aspired to broaden its coverage to include the Far East, it mostly concentrated on China, with few mentions of Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia. Due to its seasonal publication, the response to hot topics was relatively slower, so high demands for timeliness people were also not the target of this magazine. This magazine

provides valuable sources for historians to comprehend the progressive evolution of perspectives within the female missionary community throughout that era.

## WOMAN'S WORK IN THE FAR EAST

Published Quarterly by the Presbyterian Mission Press, Shanghai, China.

### Editorial Board:

Mrs. G. F. FITCH, 18 Peking Road, Shanghai.  
 Miss D. C. JOYNT, "Glimpses and Gleanings" 143 N. Szechuen Road, Shanghai.  
 Mrs. W. S. ELLIOTT, {"Temperance and Reform," } Changsha, Hunan.  
 Mrs. C. GOODRICH, {"Chao Kung Fu, } Peking.  
 Mrs. C. B. LACHLAN, for the China Inland Mission, 9 Woosung Road, Shanghai.

VOL. XXXIV.                      MARCH, 1913                      No. 1

### CONTENTS.

EDITORIAL ... ..	1
CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES:	
Faith ... ..	<i>George Müller</i> , 5
Republican First-Fruits in Shantung ...	<i>Mrs. Robert Mateer</i> , 12
Meng Sam School for Blind ... ..	<i>Miss Lucy Durham</i> , 15
Women's Schools and Their Advantages } to Our Evangelistic Work ... .. }	<i>Mrs. Wilson H. Geller</i> , 18
Kiangyin Schools for Women and Girls.	<i>Mrs. Lacy L. Little</i> , 25
Fancheng Bible School ... ..	<i>Miss Therese Peterson</i> , 27
Learning How ... ..	<i>Miss M. C. White</i> , 29
The "Women's Army"—A Sequel ... ..	33
In Memoriam: Mrs. J. V. N. Talmage.	<i>Mrs. Helen C. Kip</i> , 35
TEMPERANCE AND REFORM:	
Introductory... ..	<i>Mrs. W. S. Elliott</i> , 38
Shall We Not Inaugurate a United and Earnest Anti-Cigarette Campaign? ... ..	<i>Mrs. C. Goodrich</i> , 39
GLIMPSES AND GLEANINGS ... ..	43
ILLUSTRATIONS.	
Weih sien Girls' High School ... ..	Frontispiece.
Rescued Blind Girls, Canton ... ..	Page 16
Kiangyin Schools for Women and Girls ... ..	25
Woman's Bible Institute, Fancheng, Hupeh ... ..	28

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**Figure 1:** *Woman's Work in the Far East* Content

**Source:** *Woman's Work in the Far East*, v. 34, no. 1, March 1913, Cover page, unpaginated.

Open a *Woman's Work in the Far East*, readers will find the table of contents.

Generally, one issue was divided into three sections, but there were also issues with four or five sections. In the case of a separate issue, the catalogue contained the issue

number and publishing date, along with information on the editorial board's members, with their locations, and branches of the Church. With the page numbers of the articles, the photos would be labelled individually. Following the contents, the first part titled *Editorial* comprised the editor's compilation of recent significant events and developments in women's work. The editor provided a concise overview of the chosen articles from this issue, along with the reasons why they chose their selection. The section concluded by inviting readers to participate in a prayer.

Following the *Editorial*, the most important section was the *Contribute Articles*. As a magazine, a platform for information dissemination, *Woman's Work in the Far East* argued: "Co-operation lies one secret of successful work." This segment regularly commenced with an article concerning the Bible and Christian doctrine to augment readers' faith. Then, the content was very varied and covered different missionary practices, articles covered topics such as missions, education, social work, healthcare, and daily activities, etc. Different from the type of article, this section included: missionary-written articles and comments, public speeches given at specific locations, and reports on the innovative format and content of various women's conferences to help those who were unable to attend to find practical plans. To expand the variety of content, the editorial board also invited some capable missionaries to contribute articles discussing their experiences and perspectives. Most of the authors were female missionaries, regardless of church affiliation, discussing the ministry progress in their living region and missionary stories.

Sometimes there would be additional chapters in *Woman's Work in the Far East*. The *Temperance and Reform* board was stopped in 1916<sup>16</sup> and its contents were put into *Contribute Articles*. In order to promote the importance of reading, the magazine offered a *Literary Notes* section once in the December 1915 issue. The fixed last part was *Glimpses and Gleanings*, presented short messages by female missionaries from around the Far East, as well as personal experiences. This part was much shorter than the contributed articles, which were mostly focused on the missionaries' everyday experiences and emotions. In this part, missionaries shared their firsthand experiences, including participation in weddings and other casual social gatherings. It was discontinued from the December 1920 issue because the *Contributed Articles* were prolonged to more pages.

## II Education of Women Missionaries

*Woman's Work in the Far East* not only promoted the education of Chinese women but also published different missionary experiences to improve the attitudes and abilities of female missionaries. The magazine also reported on skill-upgrading courses which helped them to learn new skills and integrate into Chinese society. The general principle of the magazine was to emphasise women's abilities and argue female empowerment by advocating for women to take an active role in decision-making, rather than deferring to men. "Lazy habits of the women, who have been content for the men to work out their problems for them, and habits of the men in thinking that

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<sup>16</sup> *Woman's Work in the Far East*, v. 37, no. 1, March, 1916, Cover page, unpaginated.

when the men have spoken all is said. It remains for the women to blame themselves for the past, to arouse, and to determine to make themselves a part, in fact of every organization to which they nominally belong.”<sup>17</sup> In advocating the opening of Ginling College, the magazine reviewed that women’s abilities were not only comparable to those of men but could even be greater. “Remains to be done toward the realizing of the deeper and higher realm of things which women can do, not merely as well as men, but incomparably better.”<sup>18</sup> Regarding the significance of gender equality, there were also more radical and progressive opinions, such as the suggested leadership modification. “In order to provide equal opportunities for Chinese men and women, it was necessary to achieve equality between men and women in education committees.”<sup>19</sup> Facing World War I, female missionaries also asked “Is there nothing that women can do really to help bring and preserve peace? Have they learned nothing in fifty years of the power of organized womanhood? Is there no place for our great women’s missionary societies to fill in this crisis?”<sup>20</sup> These expressions all showed their desire to participate more in the social sphere and increased women’s influence.

The emerging concept of gender equality and the importance placed on female competence will undoubtedly be reflected in education. Education has received the attention of missionaries as a powerful tool for the spread of missionary ideas. The demand for missionary and teacher training was increasing with the expansion of missionary schools catering to female students. This paper will analyse the educational

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<sup>17</sup> “Editorial,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 36, no. 1, March, 1915, 6.

<sup>18</sup> “Ginling College,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 36, no. 1, March, 1915, 19.

<sup>19</sup> “One of China’s Need,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 36, no. 1, March, 1915, 23.

<sup>20</sup> “Women and World Peace,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 36, no. 2, June, 1915, 92.

principles pushed from 1912 to 1921 by women missionaries through their contributions to *Woman's Work in the Far East*, including role of “teacher mothers” and embracing Chinese culture and integrating Chinese customs with new concepts.

### **(1) Role of “Teacher Mothers”**

*Woman's Work in the Far East* suggested that the female missionaries should see themselves as “teacher mothers,” and used love and enthusiasm to lead non-believer women to faith in the religion. It was related to their hometown's culture: American women in this period had a “special mission in public life was to purify, uplift, control, and reform; to improve men, children, and society, to extend the values of the home.”

<sup>21</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, the home economics movement was quite popular in America and had a large following. Motherhood changed in the progressive age, not only being a talent that could be trained but also a respectable profession. The proficient mother was a skilful organizer and followed society rules, capable of acquiring knowledge and instilling good habits in the whole family. She needed to learn each developmental stage of her child, adapt her responses to their different needs, from infancy to adolescence, and evaluate her own value based on her level of success<sup>22</sup>. Being associated with the future of society-- children, while women need to know more about scientific childcare, the standards for evaluating women were unconsciously changed to elevate. Lin Meimei argued that American women had been trying to enlarge their gendered space since the late nineteenth century, while society considered a woman's career was constrained by standards of judgment and governed as obedient

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<sup>21</sup> Nancy Woloch. *Women and the American Experience*. (3rd ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2000), 276.

<sup>22</sup> Woloch. *the American Experience*, 276, 300-301.

spouses and devoted moms. Female missionaries had consciously or subconsciously transferred their conceptions shaped by American society-- women's gendered space, onto their missionary work in China<sup>23</sup>.

As “teacher mothers”, female missionaries needed to be a guiding light in the social family. Typically, female missionaries worked such as teaching, medicine, and evangelism, whereas male missionaries were in comparable occupations. However, the responsibilities of women and motherhood were closely connected, and female missionaries also identified with their role as mothers, so their work involved children more than men and frequently worked in orphanages or some other social welfare organisations. In the missionary process, the relationship between children and mothers was considered highly connected because of the significant impact they can have on each other. One of the motivations behind missionaries preaching to children was the potential influence on their mothers. “A class of this kind held one or two afternoons a week will often prove a help to getting into the hoes of the children, and is an introduction to the heathen mothers.”<sup>24</sup>

Being the “teacher mother” reflected a high demand for patience and care as female missionaries need to actively engage the social welfare work. According to the magazine, female missionaries visited women's prisons regularly: besides women, there were also many homeless children in the prisons. “The children are the saddest part-children who has been stolen by robbers and afterwards abandoned, -unwanted

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<sup>23</sup> Meimei Lin. *Women in missiology: the study of the Episcopal women missionaries and their endeavours in China (1835-1900)* (1st ed, Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2011).

<sup>24</sup> *Woman's Work in the Far East*, v. 33, no. 4, December, 1912, 163.

children purposely lost in the street; these are taken by the police and, because there is no other place, are put into the women's prison." The Prison had this functions that make it more like shelters for the underclass. So, the feedback from these lack-of-attention kids to the missionaries was so positive as "their delight is to get one of the visitors to listen to them and hear them read what they have practised since the previous Saturday, and they utilize every moment in learning new Characters." The missionaries were also worried about the future of these children: "some of them even this prospect of liberty is not open; for owing to their parentage, their previous little bit of life in the streets, they are diseased and crippled and no one wants them."<sup>25</sup> In social contexts, female missionaries tended to be more "mother" oriented, showing inclusiveness towards children as one of their jobs.

The mother's position was naturally confined to the household, so female missionaries guided the non-believer women to think about the impact on the family when they were preaching, for example, "in thinking of health then she will think of it with her family, of her social life with her home, of her Christian life of its practical value not only of herself but of her family and those immediately about her."<sup>26</sup> *Woman's Work in the Far East* was centred on the family and extended beyond the context of missionaries interacting with unbelievers. It also advocated that any Christian woman, especially a married one, could actively participate in the spread of the gospel. The magazine proposed many strategies for the wives of male missionaries

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<sup>25</sup> Starkey, "In Prison," 50.

<sup>26</sup> "Our Interpretation of Christ's Message to the Women of China," *Woman's Work in the Far East*, v. 36, no. 2, June, 1915, 84.

to initiate some missionary education of non-believers around them. “This is something we married women can do any married woman who has a small knowledge of Chinese and Chinese characters, coupled with a loving and earnest heart.” “She needs to be attractive to win people to Christ and Christ draws to himself through the person.” There are other ways in which the married woman may help, she can make it possible for her servants to learn to read: she can arrange their work so they can attend meetings. She can lighten the Sabbath work<sup>27</sup>. In order to promote the mission, female missionaries encouraged non-missionaries to also treat people around them with kindness. This exemplifies what female missionaries demand of women in the home to realise the model of a good missionary home.

In addition to promoting the Western home economics movement, female missionaries hoped to educate women to be excellent mothers and wives. Both Chinese and American societies highlighted the importance of marriage and motherhood. When some progressive Chinese people realised the value of women’s education in connection to their influence on their husbands and children within the home, motivated by the beliefs of missionaries, the Western concept of women’s space collided with the Chinese ideal of the virtuous wife and mother. Such an idea was not strictly feminist but rather placed women in a situation of limited social empowerment in the domestic household sphere<sup>28</sup>. This perspective acknowledged the ability of women to receive education, but it also limited the actions of female missionaries to the household field,

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<sup>27</sup> W.D. Noyes, “The Attitude of the Woman in the Home towards the Province-wide Campaign,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 37, no. 1, March, 1916, 35-36.

<sup>28</sup> Marjorie King, “Exporting Femininity, Not Feminism: Nineteenth-Century U.S. Missionary Women’s Efforts to Emancipate Chinese Women,” In *Women’s Work for Women: Missionaries and Social Change in Asia*, (1st ed, New York: Routledge, 1989), 121.

where their every action must be closely related to the family. The increase of educated women in Chinese culture has raised the standards for evaluating women, resulting in a schism between traditional values, an inadequate education system, and modern ideas.

## **(2) Embracing Chinese Culture and Integrating Chinese Customs with New Concepts**

Female missionaries from various regions of China have consistently encountered the Chinese culture while engaging in their work so *Woman's Work in the Far East* demonstrated a profound understanding of Chinese culture, as well as a thorough analysis of the historical and current condition of women's social standing in China. For instance, one article titled "The Position of Women in China" reviewed the challenges and hardships that Chinese women had long faced from the angle of Chinese linguistics, using characters, proverbs, idioms, and poetry. The author concluded that what Chinese society required was a daughter who was obedient to her parents, a qualified mother, a wife who obeyed her husband, and a daughter-in-law who looked after her husband's family.<sup>29</sup> It reflected the missionary group's deep understanding of Chinese culture. While the missionaries expressed sympathy towards their non-believer sisters and criticised Chinese traditions, they still showed a high level of openness towards Chinese culture that can be used by them. They actively tried to establish closer relationships with the Chinese by using Chinese culture as a missionary tool. In the missionary tips in *Woman's Work in the Far East*, Chinese proverbs were often combined with Christian culture, using them as a mission tool. While managing

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<sup>29</sup> "The Position of Women in China," *Woman's Work in the Far East*, v. 36, no. 1, March, 1915, 25-33.

public lectures, the missionaries linked the Chinese proverb: “No good deed goes unpunished and evil goes unpunished” with Christian doctrine. “There God has prepared two places, one where the good are rewarded and the other where the wicked are punished. The first is called Heaven and the second is called Hell.”<sup>30</sup> While preaching to people who had never been touched by Christian culture, they would “ask if they have seen God, and to the inevitable negative, quote their own proverb, ‘Not three feet above each head is the Spirit of God’ Every head will nod. You have now established the thought of God’s omnipresence.”<sup>31</sup> The strategy of promoting religious beliefs through Chinese cultural means led to positive outcomes, ensuring the acceptance of Christian values among the Chinese in a soft way.

Apart from adopting Chinese culture during the missionary process, missionaries also welcomed Chinese participation in their teaching strategies. In the specific case of educational practices, the magazine featured an article on a 1912 summer school that also demonstrated the missionaries’ acceptance of the Chinese local progressives. The language used for instruction was multilingual, encompassing both Chinese and English. This summer school prioritised teacher engagement with other schools in Shanghai and the surrounding area. The young women displayed great enthusiasm for Chinese teachers’ innovative ideas and novel approaches. This summer course was known as the first summer school only for female educators in central China, with no fees required. The curriculum comprises the subjects of pedagogy, drawing, arithmetic,

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<sup>30</sup> *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 33, no. 4, December, 1912, 164.

<sup>31</sup> J. R. Graham, Kiangpu Tsing, “How to Approach Ignorant Women,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 41, no. 4, December, 1920, 154.

teaching English in the first four grades, teaching Chinese in the first six grades, nature study, and a lecture on schoolroom hygiene. The author extended an invitation to the native Chinese teacher, granting him an honorary member because of his valuable contributions and sharing his teaching expertise<sup>32</sup>. This teacher training showed their acceptance of Chinese teaching methods for Chinese non-believers to join them and help them to improve their teaching skills.

Whether it was the high expectations placed on female missionaries for their roles, the partially accepting attitudes towards Chinese culture, or the acceptance of the Chinese teaching experience, these concepts influenced the practice of female missionaries in China when it came to Chinese women's education. However, considering the huge differences between Western society and traditional Chinese culture, as well as using education as a tool for spreading religious beliefs by missionaries, what was the situation of women's education in China at this time, and what kind of collision would these concepts encounter in China?

### **III *Woman's Work in the Far East and Chinese Education***

#### **(1) The Background and Purposes of Female Education**

In 1912, China had just moved to a republican country with the establishment of the Republic of China (ROC), and the Provisional Covenant Law of the ROC, published on 11 March, declared in chapter II, article 5, that: "The people of the Republic of China are all equal, with no distinction as to race, class, or religion."<sup>33</sup> But, the first

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<sup>32</sup> Helen Lee Richardson, "A Summer Class for Women Teachers," *Woman's Work in the Far East*, v. 33, no. 4, December, 1912, 169-172.

<sup>33</sup> Senate, *Provisional Law of the Republic of China* (Commercial Press, 1916), 4.

requirement for becoming a member of the Consultative Bureau was to be male<sup>34</sup>. It also meant that the right to vote was only available to men, proved by facts that women were not factual equal to men. Chinese progressive women refused to accept this law and reacted strongly. The Shanghai newspaper *Nǚ Quan* 女權 [Women's Rights] published an article about how Chinese women stormed the Nanjing Provisional Senate after the covenant law was passed; the ladies even broke windows in protest, and later elected female representatives to publish petitions<sup>35</sup>. Such political demonstrations had a wide impact and showed the energy of Chinese women in the political arena. Western feminists have praised and encouraged Chinese women's struggle for political participation. The progressive women in England sent the following cable and praised: "British militant suffragists congratulate Chinese women on brave fight; wish them success in preventing establishment political liberty for men only; let Chinese initiate new regime by giving political equality to women, thus setting example whole civil the world. <sup>36</sup>" Brown, a contemporary missionary in China at that time, commented: "It used to be that this kind of thing (women demand suffrage by forces) was only seen from time to time in cities like London." <sup>37</sup> It was a special time when Chinese women began to raise their own sense of gender and equality. In contrast to the old image of Chinese women as outdated and conservative, they have followed the world trend and

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<sup>34</sup> Wang Dao, ed., *Zhōng Guó Xuǎn Jǔ Shǐ Lùè* 中國選舉史略 [A Brief History of Chinese Elections], (Nèi Wù Bù Biān Yì Chù 內務部編譯處[Compilation and Interpretation Division of The Ministry of the Interior], 1917), 3.

<sup>35</sup> "Nǚ Zǐ Yǐ Wǔ Lì Yāo Qiú Cān Zhèng Quán 女子以武力要求參政權 [Women Demand Suffrage by Force]," *Nǚ Quan* 女權 [Women's Rights] (Shanghai 1912). no.1, 1912, 42-44.

<sup>36</sup> "Woman's Suffrage in China," *South China Morning Post* (1903-1941) (Hong Kong), 04/25/1912 Apr 25 1912, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Brown, Arthur Judson. *The Chinese Revolution* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement, 1912), 85.

aligned themselves with their Western contemporaries in their struggle for the right to vote.

However, Female missionaries faced with China's vast geography, urban-rural differences, and diverse education levels, historians must acknowledge the complexity of Chinese society at the time, which led to very different degrees of modernisation of Chinese women's thinking. *Woman's Work in the Far East* which was published in Shanghai, perceived the role of this city's unique role, as a contact zone, it published the work of the women's missionary society in China, Japan, and the surrounding area in these changing times. In 1912, Shanghai, labelled "modern," had a faster embrace of new ideas and emerging things than any other Chinese city, and was still flourishing in the wake of the democratic revolution. As a hub of cultural exchanges between China and the rest of the world, Shanghai has advocacy with a modern sensibility.

*Woman's Work in the Far East* and the female missionaries behind were sensitive observers of the changes in Chinese society, especially among Chinese women: "The changes which are taking place in the thoughts, and ideals and opportunities of the women of China afford the Christian Church one of the most magnificent tasks ever presented to her." "The question facing us now is what is the message of the Church that will meet the ends and satisfy the groupings of this new type of oriental women?"

<sup>38</sup> The magazine gave a flexible answer: "The Gospel is not alone for men; it is for women too and when women are placed on an equality with men in this nation, it will

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<sup>38</sup> "Editorial," *Woman's Work in the Far East*, v. 36, no. 2, June, 1915, 78.

be ‘good.’”<sup>39</sup> Such a view of gender equality was tied tightly to religion, missionaries supported church education because they considered it as a key factor influencing Asia’s path toward modernity. They were directly aware of the impact of female education in these “backward areas.” “In their heathen days, these little girls played all day in the fields or streets, with no toys or games, often carrying a heavy baby on their backs. Now, they come regularly to school and revel in their lessons.”<sup>40</sup> Apart from the religious, at the student movement in 1919, the magazine pointed out the change of progressive education for students: “from a stepping-stone to becoming officials and excludes women, to new education can have a responsibility to fight for and uphold principles of justice, humanity, equality, and democracy in their country.”<sup>41</sup> The missionaries already acknowledged the outcomes of the new education: liberated Chinese, especially women, from their feudal traditions and pushed them towards the societies of modernized countries. It also freed women from their families and marriages so that they could be educated and gain economic independence.

As the first advocates of new education, missionaries attributed the advance in education to the power of faith, though this could be further explained by variations in social development between Western and Chinese civilisations. They argued that “It is the educated girls and women of Eastern lands who must move the womanhood of the East, and they can only do so as they are rooted and grounded in Christ, have the spirit of sacrifice, and are so indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that they become reproducing

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<sup>39</sup> “Our Interpretation of Christ’s Message to the Women of China,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 36, no. 2, June, 1915, 61.

<sup>40</sup> “Woman’s work in Korea,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 33, no. 4, December, 1912, 176.

<sup>41</sup> Yang, “The Student Movement”, *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v.40, no. 3, September, 1919, 109.

Christians, channels of living water.”<sup>42</sup> Because of the profound impact of education and the important role of women, it was not surprising that female missionaries focused their energies on women’s education. “A school for women supplies the surest, quickest, and most satisfactory method for building up the Christian life among the women of our churches, whether baptized believers or enquirers and, further, such a school forms the best introduction to the church for our heathen sisters outside.”<sup>43</sup> Regardless of how much the content of education has changed and how it existed in different types in China, the final target still stayed the same: “Conveying the proclamation of Divine mercy to the human mind, by any means, whether by schools, colleges, the press, or the pulpit, is, virtually ‘proclaiming’ the Gospel, and obeying the Divine Precept.”<sup>44</sup> Eventually, from the perspective of female missionaries, the primary objective of education was to facilitate their mission work.

## **(2) Systematic Missionary Female Education in China**

Based on *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, I argue that women’s educational practices can be broadly classified into two groups: one was following a system of advancement similar to China’s government schools, and another was education with social welfare, helping the marginalised, and lowering the literacy rate. The formal education system reflects the efforts made to prepare women to be missionaries, with graduates going on to become teachers, nurses, and civic missionaries. Besides the formal school system, missionary education with social welfare aimed to be inclusive

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<sup>42</sup> *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 33, no. 4 (December, 1912), 155.

<sup>43</sup> “Women’s Schools and Their Advantages to Our Evangelistic Work,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 34, no. 1, March, 1913, 18-19.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Morrison. *A Parting Memorial* (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1826), 361.

by accommodating students from various grades and marginalized groups, such as blind children and elderly women, regardless of their educational background. Missionaries would tailor the educational model to match the cognitive abilities of students based on their specific needs and capabilities. This initiative can be considered a component of social welfare, as it provided educational opportunities for vulnerable people such as the elderly, crippled individuals, orphans, and criminals who were not part of the school system as marginalized people.

Beginning with an analysis of systemic missionary education, the Station Class was the fundamental kind of Christian education and a class focused on basic literacy skills. Enrolment at such a school required a minimum level of interest in Christianity. “A woman to be eligible for a station class should have attended church for some time and shown signs of being really interested in Christianity.” Classes were structured at the Church’s discretion based on the students’ capacity rather than their age, which varied widely, from 15 to 70 years old. “If any women come who can read a little, two classes are formed, and those who are quite ignorant are put together in one.” The curriculum mostly consisted of teaching Christian doctrines. Maybe included opposition to foot-binding, as the article states that many people abandoned foot-binding at the end of the course. While taking classes, all of the students were in church and could not be visited at will except for special reasons. There was no need to pay money for such a class, students only had to provide their own food and books fees. For ordinary Christian women, this was a more systematic way of learning than the usual spreading of the gospel. “The most earnest and diligent women, however, often go on

to a women's school after a time, and if free from family ties, may in time become Bible-women." "Chinese women workers are trained to do the work of evangelizing their fellow countrywomen."<sup>45</sup> This type of education enabled women to acquire reading skills and break free from illiteracy but only a minority of them would choose missionary work as a professional career. According to *Woman's Work in the Far East*, The Station Class offered short-term classes, and the selected graduates could be educated further.

Apart from the Station Class, the Elementary Bible School offered a three- or four-year course of regular Bible study. Most students entered the schools not because they had a desire to study but simply as an escape from their previous circumstances. Student sources included women who can pay their board or have their local church sponsor them. Students occasionally would be required to sign contracts promising to successfully finish the course or, if fail, refund all funds spent on them. The first lesson was showing women that they had learn ability to learn to speak their own language and let them understand their ignorance and finally discover their own life's mission by sharing what they had learnt. The course content was progressive and included the Bible, primary arithmetic and geography, and the Wen-li of the first series of *National Readers*. Students who achieved higher grades would successfully graduate, and some graduates were carefully chosen by the missionaries being permitted to serve as women Bible teachers. Missionaries reviewed this type of education and pointed out that because of the excellent work of the girls' boarding schools run by the missions which had made

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<sup>45</sup> Margaret E., "Station Classes in Fukien," *Woman's Work in the Far East*, v. 33, no. 4, December, 1912, 172-175.

it possible for the government to recognise the advantages of an educated woman, that government and gentry schools for girls became the style in twentieth-century China<sup>46</sup>.

A young woman in her adolescence or early twenties with proficient literacy skills in her native language and who demonstrated sufficient intelligence to take rigorous courses was eligible for admission to The Intermediate Bible School, also known as the “High Primary” level in Chinese education systems. Students would be carefully chosen in a station class or other elementary school before being advanced to the new kind of Bible school. The curriculum was developed based on this earlier study. Together with a five-year course of thorough Bible study, the course included the higher volumes of the *National Readers* and studies in the classics—physical and Biblical geography, general history, homiletics, apologetics, psychology, and mathematics.<sup>47</sup>

After being educated in Intermediate Bible schools, excellent graduates were grouped in the Lower Department of the Bible Teachers Training School. The requirements for admission included not less than twenty years old with a certificate from a recognised Bible school plus one year of practical work experience; or a certificate from a grammar school plus three years of practical work experience. The Bible was the primary textbook. Among the subjects covered by Bible books were Biblica theology, homiletics, church history, Sunday school methods, practical Christian sociology, and church music. Special training was provided for women’s meetings, in-house-to-house visitation, in-jail visitation (women’s department) and a

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<sup>46</sup> Mary Culler White, “Bible Schools for Women. Many Kinds for Many Uses,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 37, no. 4, December, 1916, 194-196.

<sup>47</sup> White, “Bible Schools,” 197-198.

practical study of comparative religions. The graduates may become teachers, capable of teaching less educated rural women or dealing with more knowledgeable people and also conduct Bible classes in non-Christian schools<sup>48</sup>.

The Bible Teachers Training School's goal was to demonstrate that they could get a course as thorough and up-to-date in China as they could in nations abroad. The requirements for admission to The Higher Department of the Bible Teachers Training School were (a) A diploma from a college; (b) A diploma from a high school, (The Ginling College list of accredited high schools is accepted.); (c) Graduates from the lower department of the school may, upon special recommendation of the faculty, be admitted to the higher department. The Bible was not the only textbook. There were courses in theology, homiletics, apologetics, comparative religion, church history, modern missions, sociology, parliamentary practice, practical bookkeeping, psychology, child study personal work, Sunday school methods, etc., besides thorough training in various forms of practical work. Be the home missionaries whose leadership will mean to China what the leadership of Christian women has meant to Western lands. In 1916, there were three accredited students. After graduating, they will be the Bible teachers for China's schools, the social settlement workers, the deaconesses for churches, and the members of the Young Women's Christian Association.<sup>49</sup>

As the learning level got higher, more requirements were put on the students. While the Bible was the principal subject of study, other disciplines were addressed as well, such as teaching National Readers, demonstrating the adaptability of the

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<sup>48</sup> White, "Bible Schools," 200-203.

<sup>49</sup> White, "Bible Schools," 204-206.

programmes offered to be adjusted and adapted to the local culture. Female missionaries could provide and finish the education of the upcoming generation of native Chinese missionaries by providing Bible schools at all levels. Whether it was an elementary school for food or a missionary training school for developing missionary abilities, they offered a wide platform for female missionaries to spread biblical teachings. Graduates could work in the mission field according to their level of learning, broadening career options for traditional Chinese women.

### **(3) Controversy in Spiritual Education: Patriotism and Christian Education**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, China was a new beginning of dynastic change, and the spread of new ideas was constantly intertwined with traditions. Although the same education was being developed, missionary education differed from indigenous national education, especially in spiritual guidance. The missionaries hoped the students to believe in Christianity, while the native Chinese cultivated patriotism and nationalism. As there was a significant lack of educational chances for women, the divergent objectives of educating to some degree could coexist harmoniously. However, these differences also produced Chinese criticism of missionary education. This part presents the views of several modern women on new education in order to analyse the development of local education and their ideas in China at that time. Then to understand the differences between missionary education and local education in China, this part analyses cases of women's education in *Woman's Work in the Far East* and Chinese society's criticism.

Around the 20th century in China, whether women could gain education was an issue for the whole society. Although women's access to education had been recognised politically, there was still much room for change in social attitudes. Upper-class women in developed areas such as cities, showed an agreed attitude: "It was only through education and the development of women's national awareness and vocational skills that women's rights can be truly promoted and effectively safeguarded based on the unity of women's personality and abilities."<sup>50</sup> Wu Zhiying(吳芝瑛), a female representative, gave a speech at Wuxi Jingzhi Girls' School in 1910 that explained the attitudes of Chinese society toward women's education. In contrast to the outdated belief that "it's useless for a woman to study," girl's school had a well-established education, offered a variety of activities, and covered a wide range of subjects, such as geography, history, physics, chemistry, and so on. Parents' attitudes had also altered, with "father and elder brother knowing that female can't stay away from study," they made efforts to save money and provided meals for girls attending school<sup>51</sup>. In traditional Chinese culture, daughters did not need to study in school and were naturally inclined to assist brothers in the household with their studies. But now the situation changed in some urban areas, this also reflected a huge change in people's views of the valuelessness of women's education.

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<sup>50</sup> Xiaohong Xia, *Wǎn Qīng Nǚ Xìng Yǔ Jìn Dài Zhōng Guó* 晚清女性與近代中國 [Late Qing Women and Modern China]. 2nd ed. (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2014), 128.

<sup>51</sup> Zhiying Wu, "Wú Xī Jìng Zhì Nǚ Xué Xiào Yǎn Shuō 無錫競志女學校演說 [Speech at Wuxi Jingzhi Girls' School]," *Wú Xī Jìng Zhì Nǚ Xué Zā Zhì* 無錫競志女學雜誌 [Wuxi Jingzhi Girls' School Magazine], no.1, 1910, 255-257.

The acceptance of the importance of female education in Chinese upper society aligned with the viewpoints of the missionaries. Being the country's first to support female education, missionary education in China had a significant impact and was widely distributed. *Woman's Work in the Far East* comprised a compilation of information from various regions in East Asia, reporting on a diverse range of educational practices. In contrast to female missionaries who had absolute command of the school in the late 19th century, the schools during this period had become more organized. Within girls' schools, female missionaries established a place for missionary-oriented cultural exchange between themselves, Chinese female assistants, female students, parents of students, and other Christian believers. Female missionaries who made contributions to *Woman's Work in the Far East* would include the locations of their educational institutions, which comprised kindergarten and primary schools (specifically for girls) as well as intermediate classes (offering vocational training). Female missionaries explained their educational system: "As an evangelist, I need the help of all grades of Bible schools. I need the station class to instruct and develop my women church members, -country and city; I need the elementary and intermediate Bible schools to furnish Bible women for a field that is ever opening new doors of opportunity; and, lastly, I need the Bible training school of more advanced type, for from this I must get the student type of woman evangelist who will become a leader among her own people and who will share with me the burdens and responsibilities of the work."<sup>52</sup> They actively contributed their ideas on the overall plans of women's

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<sup>52</sup> Mary Culler White, "Bible Schools for Women. Many Kinds for Many Uses," *Woman's Work in the Far East*, v. 37, no. 4, December, 1916, 193.

education to foster the continued growth of Christian education through a varied educational system.

Although both missionary education and local Chinese women's education had similarities in their educational system and subjects, the divergence became evident in the spiritual curriculum. Missionaries placed strong attention on the Bible and associated doctrines, making it the central focus of their education whereas in secular schools was nationalism and patriotism. For example, Qiu Jin(秋瑾), a pioneer of the Chinese Revolutionary Movement, advocated for female education based on gender equality. She argued women would have financial independence after completing vocational education, allowing them to collaborate with males politically to overcome the national crisis at the moment<sup>53</sup>. However, missionary education involves the fostering and development of religious beliefs and practices, less including country situations. The two education systems exhibited differences because of disparities in guiding ideology. These conflicts were less apparent in urban areas, where foreign ideas were more easily embraced. However, in more traditional and conservative Chinese regions, particularly in rural areas, conflicts might arise between the promotion of patriotic national education and religious education. Teaching nationalism in more traditional secular institutions could indicate hostility to foreign powers, and missionaries were certainly part representatives of Western civilisation.

During the student demonstrations in Beijing in 1919, the missionary praised it for “being a powerful weapon against foreign aggression and official treason”, and

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<sup>53</sup> Guomin Wang, *20 shì jì de zhōngguó fù nǚ* 20 世紀的中國婦女[*Chinese women in the twentieth century*]. 1st ed. (Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 2000), 82-86.

attributed contributions to Christian education “Only the Christian Gospel can produce this spirit and steady men into selfless devotion to the country’s needs.”<sup>54</sup> However, in Chinese society, Christian missionaries were deeply criticised for: “Christian churches hope to make China a Christian nation through education. Church civilisation as a cultural aggression.”<sup>55</sup> Female missionaries also found such statements: “In this hour of intense patriotism whose slogan is, ‘China for the Chinese the attitude of these schools may be distinctly anti-foreign, anti-Christian.’”<sup>56</sup> “They say it is all owing to ‘foreign ways’ that this generation of Chinese young women are so tempted and so sinning.”<sup>57</sup> It was clear that Chinese society remained in a state of contradiction regarding the change of society, and criticism of foreigners engaging in Chinese education was not a single case.

Apart from the debates surrounding guidelines for education, a significant proportion of Chinese women were not given access to education. For example, in 1912, missionaries held a girls’ education exhibition in Weixian, Shandong province, where “the position of the higher class women was no better than that of criminals confined in the jails.” In a region where the status of women was extremely low and the concept of gender equality was not widely accepted, organising a women’s education exhibition was an excessive thing, so there was little positive response from the people while the missionary-educated women publicised the event. A female missionary reviewed this

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<sup>54</sup> C. V. Lee, “The New Leaven”, *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 40, no. 3, September, 1919, 87.

<sup>55</sup> Jiaju Yu, “Jiào Hui Jiào Yù Wèn Tí 教會教育問題[Problems of Church Education],” in *Guó Jiā Zhǔ Yì De Jiào Yù 國家主義的教育[Nationalist Education]*, ed. Yu Jiaju and Li Juan. (Shanghai: Zhonghua Book Company, 1923), 138,140.

<sup>56</sup> “The Old is Yielding to the New in China To-Day,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 36, no. 4, December, 1915, 156.

<sup>57</sup> “Editorial,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 34, no. 1, March, 1913, 4.

exhibition of their female education: “This all may not seem strange to those who live in the ports or nearer the centre of the new movement, but it means a great deal to this section, this dreadfully custom-bound city and country.” while female church education was widespread in cities, it was a huge step forward in the countryside<sup>58</sup>.

#### **(4) Blind Children’s Schools and Vocational Training**

If female missionaries’ promotion for gender equality resulted from their own gender and awareness of the importance of women’s roles in households, then setting up blind children’s schools was a more advanced response to the need for equality and attention for minorities-- the disabled. “Chinese public must be educated before the blind boys and girls of China, particularly the girls, can have a fair chance to demonstrate.” Through running the blind children school, the missionaries analysed the most difficult part of the education of blind children in China at that time: “There are so many open-minded and large-hearted people interested in the cause who are willing to give the young blind graduate a chance to make good, on his own merit, but the fact of blindness places one on a lower social level and where the knowledge that it is possible for a blind person to deficient work and to be independent and self-supporting.”

<sup>59</sup> Such a perspective reflected progressiveness, with missionaries caring for the marginalised and offering a corresponding vision for the future.

Education for blind children was different from general education and was part of social welfare. In 1913, the Chief of Police also cooperated with the Church, blind

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<sup>58</sup> Robert Mateer, “Republican First-Fruits in Shantung,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 34, no. 1, March, 1912, 12-15.

<sup>59</sup> Mary Grace Knap, “Education of Chinese Blind Girls,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 40, no. 1, March, 1919, 5-9.

children from the lower class who were “frightened, crying, hungry, and dirty” to the missionaries to be settled, “cleaned and refreshed and put into their new clean beds.” The missionary commented that “these government wards are eager to learn what Eve is taught them and enjoy their work and play<sup>60</sup>.” The Church’s decision to educate blind children could be seen as a social choice made during a time when society had few resources to address social injustice. Despite these constraints, the Church was willing to take on the responsibility of educating and caring for these marginalized people. It is important to consider and evaluate this kind of education from both social welfare and education perspectives.

The case of the school for blind girls was often reported in the magazine, for example, the school for Chinese blind girls in Shiu Hing, South China. At first, a blind baby whose mother was too poor and too ignorant to take care of her after she lost her sight, then the church adopted the child. Later, as word spread by word of mouth, it gradually expanded to accept other blind students and expanded as a school. The school curriculum followed the Chinese government schools’ formulas: in addition to the Chinese studies, girls had one period of Bible each day, and two classes, fifteen girls in all, studied five periods of English a week. Developing industrial skills to support themselves was the final goal of blind school. “Every girl in the school is obliged to do some kind of industrial work, partly for the sake of the training in excellent hand, training which it affords and self-support.”<sup>61</sup> The career goals were not limited to

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<sup>60</sup> Mary W. Niles, Lucy Durham, “Meng Sam School for Blind,” *Woman’s Work in the Far East*, v. 34, no. 1, March, 1913, 15-18.

<sup>61</sup> Knap, “Education of Chinese Blind Girls,” 5-9.

industrial work, the missionaries hoped that the brighter girls may become teachers in schools for blind girls, or be able to fill positions as language teachers for foreigners.

The concept of vocational education was derived from realistic necessities. On one hand, missionaries wished the marginalized individuals in society to gain employment and achieve self-sufficiency, so they considered establishing self-governing factories where these graduates could be employed. On the other hand, during the education, the missionaries have been able to profit highly from the unpaid labour of the students to fulfil the industrial orders. The blind children were also in society positions that had been naturally confined to the pathetic range, there was practically no choice. Gao Shiliang argued that these schools differed from traditional vocational education because they also profited from the unpaid labour of their students<sup>62</sup>. At this blind school, third-grade girls were required to participate in two industrial classes daily to acquire practical skills. This particular course has shown to be financially beneficial for the school. “The girls are doing a large part of their own sewing, knitting various articles which we sell in the stores here in Shiu Hing, filling large orders for tatting from Hongkong stores, and making tooth-brushes which we hope to be able to sell here at a profit.”<sup>63</sup>

Contrary to the ambitious objective, the missionaries have created ambiguity over the purpose of education by involving girls in industrial labour and directly benefiting from vocational training. The missionaries hoped that these students would generate

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<sup>62</sup> Shiliang Gao. *Zhong Guo Jiao Hui Xue Xiao Shi* 中國教會學校史[History of Chinese Church Schools]. (Changsha: Hunan Education Publishing House, 1994), 106.

<sup>63</sup> Knap, “Education of Chinese Blind Girls,” 5-9.

income to sustain themselves inside the church's workshop but the process of training these students also served as a tool of generating profit. However, profits were made through the labour of the students, which was also needed for the basic operation of the school, and the female students produced benefits for the school and helped it to develop further, which could bring more marginalised people into the society into the school to study and live, which was undoubtedly a virtuous circle in the eyes of the female missionaries. This was also the reason why the community and government officials would choose to collaborate with the church.

## Conclusion

*Woman's Work in the Far East* was a seasonal publication dedicated directly to female missionaries, this publication features articles that depict the experiences of numerous female missionaries who worked in China during the early 1900s. From their words, it was evident that the female missionaries of that era possessed a great modern perspective. Although their work was closely related to family and household, female missionaries advocated that women possessed the capacity to labour beyond the confines of households and were not natively inferior to men. They focused on gender equality by arguing the abilities of women to accomplish anything that men could. The female missionaries shaped a cohesive group by sharing their personal and regional experiences to further immerse themselves in Chinese culture. Chinese women had a significant impact on female missionaries, and they, in turn, were influenced by Chinese women. The attitude, activities, and role models of female missionaries had a secular

impact on Chinese females. Many Chinese girls were inspired by their example, which gave them a new feeling of self-reliance. The foreign strangers' "physical freedom" left a strong impression on them. Students who received education within the Western church were at least taught how to read and write, and touched to anti-footbinding views. Despite graduating, women were mainly limited to household roles such as teachers, missionaries, and nurses, it at least propelled women into professional careers and financial independence from their families.

This article examines the activities of female missionaries between 1912 and 1921. With societal expectations, female missionaries continued to work as "teacher mothers" and advocated for women's education to achieve economic independence. They also focused on educating marginalised groups and promoting Western ideas in China. Female missionaries transcend their own gender boundaries and engage in public discussions and actions related to moral values and societal practices. They expanded their influence beyond their traditional gender roles by providing support in women's schools and social welfare. Female missionaries' way of thinking was influenced by both Western and Chinese culture. Their impact in China could not be ignored, as government officials collaborated with them and the general public was open to some of their perspectives and slowly changed.

Furthermore, this magazine prompts several research questions: Besides evangelism, was there any other driving force for female missionaries to come to China? Did any of them give up being a missionary and what made them do so? The magazine *Woman's Work in the Far East* provided insight into the position of women during that

era, offering a glimpse into the thoughts of women missionaries at the time and the envisioned future for Chinese society, which was not perfect but was certainly centred on women and the hope that it would be modernised as soon as possible.

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