

‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ Ideology and the Shaping of the Ideal Woman through State Women’s Education in Manchukuo, 1932–1938

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On March 1, 1932, the Manchukuo government issued the Declaration of the Founding of the Nation (Ch.: *Jianguo xuanyan*, 建國宣言), announcing the establishment of Manchukuo. Its capital was settled in Changchun, which was later renamed Xinjing. On March 9, Puyi arrived in Changchun and announced that he would become the Chief Executive of Manchukuo and, since then, a new nation was established in Northeast Asia. As a newly established state, the primary task of the Manchukuo government was to maintain social order, stabilize the country for development, and rapidly construct a national identity. Therefore, under the actions of intellectuals and bureaucrats in Manchukuo and Japan, the Ministry of Education of Manchukuo and related departments quickly reformed the existing education system in Manchukuo and designated a series of official propaganda strategies. Policymakers tried to construct a new national identity of Manchukuo in a short time, and in this discourse system, the conception of women was regulated, and the requirements for ideal women in Manchukuo were derived.

The ideology of the Kingly Way was the foundation for the national ideology of Manchukuo,¹ with the ideal image of women integral to this ideological system. Consequently, women, constituting a significant portion of the population, became targets for comprehensive education and reform through the ‘Edification of the Kingly Way.’ The policymakers and intellectuals of Manchukuo viewed women as crucial to promoting the nation’s development and thus held great concern for their transformation.

Confucianism has long dominated East Asian thought and culture, including China, Korea, and Japan. Under the Confucian discourse system, the concept of the Kingly Way (Ch.: *Wangdao*) advocated by Confucianists revolves around moral and benevolent governance by the monarch to achieve prosperity and stability within a state. It contrasts the Hegemonic Way (Ch.: *Badao*), which relies on a forceful rule and aggressive expansion.² The Kingly Way emphasizes the ruler’s adherence to morality

¹ On the motivation and efforts of Zheng Xiaoyu, an intellectual in Manchukuo, to promote *Wangdao*, see Li, “Nationalist Propaganda And Woman Question,” Master thesis, (University of Guelph, 2023), 58–61.

² In East Asia, countries under the influence of Confucianism tended to look to ancient texts to support the legitimacy of their rule, and the idea of *Wangdao* in Manchukuo was one such example. In early twentieth-century East Asia, it seemed to most people that Eastern culture was based on benevolence and righteousness, known as the *Wangdao*, while Western culture was based on force and profit, known as the *Badao*. For its detailed connotations and definitions, as well as its relationship to contemporary East-West interactions, see Ziqi Wang, “‘Wangdao’ or ‘Badao’: Comparative Study of Ethics in the Art of War and On War,” *International Journal of Frontiers in Sociology* 19, no. 3

and benevolence in administering the state, while the Hegemonic Way employs harsh penalties and laws, often instilling fear through the brutal bureaucracy. Confucian scholars rejected the Hegemonic Way and promoted the Kingly Way, asserting that long-term peace and stable development can only be achieved through the latter.

Since the establishment of Manchukuo, the education system in Manchuria has been reformed under the guidance of the Kwantung Army, as well as the core of propaganda of nation-building, and women's education was one of the top priorities. In a student essay published before 1937 by *Fengtian Jiaoyu* (*Fengtian education*),³ a second-year middle school student, Yao Fulin (n.d.) wrote that:

*The strength or weakness of a nation depends on the number of talents, and the number of talents depends on the rise and fall of education. So education, is the foundation of nourishing talents, and the source of rejuvenating the nation. Education can be divided into three categories: family education, school education, and social education. [Among] the three, family education is incredibly essential. How can I say that? [It's because] when a person is naive, one's will be not firm, one's character is not determined, one is prone to doing good, and prone to doing evil..... As for how to revitalize family education? Now it can be summed up in one sentence: the only way is promoting women's education.*⁴

According to Yao's perspective, family education holds paramount importance among various educational forms. Therefore, the key to elevating the overall standard of family education lies in the broader dissemination of women's education. Yao contends that the literacy and educational attainment of children are intricately linked to that of their mothers. This rationale elucidates why the administrative officials and

(2021), 27. For its promotion and dissemination in Manchukuo, see Rui Li, "Nationalist Propaganda And Woman Question In Manchukuo's Early Period: Education, Mass Media, And Literature," Master thesis, (University of Guelph, 2023), 55-56.

³ *Fengtian Education* was a joint publication of the Office of school inspector of Ministry of Education of Fengtian Province and Fengtian Education Association, which mainly published government administrative orders, disseminated the latest information on education, discussed education issues, and conducted academic research on education. *Fengtian Education*, published in ten or twelve volumes per year, depending on the circumstances, and sometimes special issues were published. The exact date of its first publication remains to be seen, but this journal existed in 1935. This journal mainly published articles in Chinese, but sometimes articles in Japanese were also published.

⁴ Office of school inspector of the Ministry of Education of Fengtian Province, ed., *Wei Manzhouguo qikan huibian (er): Fengtian jiaoyu* [The "Bogus" Manchukuo Periodicals Collection II: Fengtian Education] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2009), 4014.

intellectuals of Manchukuo during that era fervently endorsed the cause of women's education.

Nevertheless, following this line of reasoning, women's education was expected to be distinct from men's, as women were perceived as a distinct demographic from men, both from biological and sociological standpoints. Policymakers in Manchukuo conceptualized women's education accordingly. In the mindset of the intellectuals in Manchukuo during that era, the primary way a woman could contribute significantly to the nation's vitality was by fulfilling her responsibility to educate her family's children. Hence, the Japanese slogan "Good Wife, Wise Mother" (Jp.: *ryōsai kenbo*) was actively propagated, emphasizing this particular role for women.

Japanese 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' and Chinese 'Wise Wife, Good Mother'

The concept of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' was a part of Japan's modern women's education, and it still maintains an essential influence on contemporary Japan and even the entire of East Asia.⁵ During the Meiji Restoration period (1868–1912), school education for women was started as the theory of women's education appeared in the form of good mothers. In 1875, the Japanese Enlightenment thinker Nakamura Masanao (1832–1891) published an article entitled "Creating Kind Mothers" in *Meiroke zasshi* (Meiji six Magazine),⁶ pointing out that "people must create kind mothers to change their mood and customs and enter the realm of enlightenment, and only wise mothers will have good children," and "to create a wise mother, the key is to teach the girl."⁷ Nakamura's views can be regarded as the beginning of the ideology of the ideal woman of "Wise Mother" in the early Japanese Enlightenment.

Under heightened Japanese national consciousness after the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), the idea of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' was established as a state-sanctioned educational philosophy for women in high

⁵ Zhuo Li, "'Liangqi xianmu' yu 'Xianqi liangmu' de butong mingyun: jindai Zhong Ri nūzi jiaoyu bijiao [The Different Destinies of Good Wife and Virtuous Mother Versus Virtuous Wife and Good Mother: A Comparison of Chinese and Japanese Female Education in Modern Times]," *Japanese Studies Forum* 183, no. 1 (2007), 3.

⁶ *Meiroke Magazine* is a Japanese-language magazine founded in 1874 and published between 1874 and 1875, with its first issue published on April 2, 1874. The founders of the magazine were members of the Japanese intellectual group "Meirokeisha (明六社)," which included Fukuzawa Yukichi (福澤諭吉, 1835–1901). It was one of the first publications in Japan to cover works of Western culture. Given that it is a publication from the Meiji period, it often discusses topics related to education, touching on the morality of the family and the country. It published twice or three times a month, and it ceased publication after number 43 on November 14, 1875.

⁷ Yasuhiko Yuzawa, *Nippon fujin mondai shiryō shūsei, dai go kan: kazoku seido* [Compilation of materials on Japanese women's issues, Volume 5: family system] (Domesu, 1976), 384–389.

school ordinances for girls.⁸ However, in the Edo period (1603–1867), Japanese women’s informal education in the upper class was generally based on Confucianism and only required sewing, cooking, and weaving. The daughters of samurai families and upper-class townspeople could not be recognized as full-fledged women unless they had mastered the four elements of women’s morals, women’s words, women’s virtues, and women’s arts.⁹ As Koyama Shizuko argues, the women’s instructions of the Edo period exclusively listed the virtues of a wise wife or daughter-in-law as the ideal image of women. In other words, obedience to her husband and mother-in-law was the most required quality, and the education was also aimed at raising a woman who could fully realize her role as a good wife and daughter-in-law.¹⁰ Although this is an older version of the ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ concept in Japan, the importance of women’s education could already be noticed.

To those mentioned above, the ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ of the Meiji Restoration period underwent a significant change. The slogan “Good Wife, Wise Mother” gradually changed its meaning by establishing the secondary education system for girls. In its perfected form, the idea holds that a woman must respect and obey her husband as a wife and mother, to “create heirs for her ancestors and to train those who will serve her in the future.”¹¹ According to Fukaya Masashi, this ideology differs from Confucian images of women and Western sensibilities by emphasizing women’s contribution to the nation and is “a unique ideology born during Japan’s modernization process.”¹² That is the difference between the ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ of Meiji Restoration Japan and the ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ of the Edo period, heavily influenced by Confucian ideology. As a result of this prevalent Japanese ideology before the Second World War, ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ was also introduced to Manchukuo by Japanese intellectuals and encountered the Chinese ideology of ‘Wise Wife, Good Mother’ (Ch.: *xianqi liangmu*).

Before the twentieth century, in traditional male-centred Confucian Chinese society, the place of women was only in the family. Confucianism’s traditional rituals focused on the virtuousness and goodness of women, and ‘Wise Wife’ and ‘Good Mother’ were women’s highest social and family ideals for a mother to be a role model for her

⁸ See Masashi Fukaya, *Ryōsai kenbo shugi no kyōiku* [Good Wife, Wise Mother education] (Reimei Shōbo, 1966), 11.

⁹ Jie Zhang, “Shimoda Utako no ‘ryōsai kenbo’ joshi kyōiku kan [Utako Shimoda’s ‘Good Wife and Wise Mother’ View of Female Education],” *Hikaku Nihon bunkagaku kenkyū* [Comparative Japanese Cultural Studies], no. 14 (2021), 83.

¹⁰ Shizuko Koyama, *Ryōsai kenbo to yū kihan* [The norm of “Good Wife, Wise Mother”] (Keisō Shobō, 1991), 19.

¹¹ See Yoshito Inoue, “Meiji · Taishō ki ni okeru ‘Ryōsai kenbo’ shugi to kōtō jogakkō seito no jissen ishiki: kōyūkai katsudō toshite no ‘enshū kai’ no kōsatsu kara [A Schoolgirl’s Practical Consciousness about ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother Education’ in the Meiji and Taishō Periods],” *Kanazawa Seiryō daigaku ningen kagaku kenkyū* [Kanazawa Seiryō University human sciences] 12, no. 2 (2019), 25.

¹² Fukaya, *Ryōsai kenbo shugi*, 14.

children and to bear the burden of feeding them and be a role model for society. In traditional Confucianism, a woman did not have to be educated. The most crucial role of a woman was to offer everything to her husband's family. Public opinion did not promote women's education, and it was believed that educated women could quickly become a destabilizing factor in the family and society. It was seen that being a wife and mother, no matter how "wise" or "good," had little to do with "learning," per se.¹³ Therefore, in Confucian traditional society, women's education was not as crucial as in modern Japan.¹⁴

The difference between the traditional Japanese and Chinese mottos, 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' and 'Wise Wife, Good Mother,' reveals attitudes towards women's education in Japan and China. Although Japanese women were to become a kind of highly educated nannies, in terms of the 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' of Japan, the Japanese consider a mother should be an ideal wise woman; only in this way could they educate good children.¹⁵ Moreover, the "wise" mother in Japanese terms was a modernly educated mother. Therefore, the importance of women's education in Japan can be seen in this ideological requirement for a "Wise Mother."

Objectively speaking, the "Good Wife, Wise Mother" doctrine had a positive sign that should not be ignored. From the formation process of the 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' in Japan, the Japanese attached great importance to the virtues that a wife should have as a husband's helper and a mother in educating children. Knowledge and education are the main criteria of a 'good and wise' modern Japanese woman. As the first teachers of their children, Japanese women positively affected their children's education and improved the modernized quality of the nation as a whole, which was invaluable for the modernization of Japanese society. This idea from Japan was also reflected in the above essay of middle school student Yao Fulin, who was influenced by Manchukuo education. Yao's essay is an excellent example that Japan ultimately influenced women's education in Manchukuo.

In contrast, the Han Chinese version of 'Wise Wife, Good Mother' does not overemphasize the role of mothers in family education. 'Wise' is used to describe the wife, who is expected to be the husband's wise internal

¹³ Li, "'Liangqi xianmu' yu 'Xianqi liangmu'," 3.

¹⁴ In the early years of the Republic of China, the idea that girls should not be educated was already opposed by many people who were deeply influenced by Western culture. They believed that women were also members of society, and that the purpose of girls' education should be to train them to be independent and to be able to fulfill their potentials in society. Although this idea was still not the mainstream at that time, it was an important call for gender equality in education. See Wai Sum Fung, "Jindai nǚzi jiaoyu fazhan tanxi: cong 'xianqi liangmu' dao xiandai 'xinnǚxing' [An analysis of the development of women's education in modern times: from 'good wife, wise mother' to modern 'new women']," *Neng Yan Journal* 16, (2017), 130.

¹⁵ See Shizuko Koyama and Gabriel A. Sylvain, "The 'Good Wife and Wise Mother' Ideology in Post-World War I Japan," *US-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement*, no. 7 (1994), 35.

assistant (Ch.: *xian neizhu*,) in a family, and ‘good’ is used to describe the mother, who is not given much educational responsibility but takes care of the children. In this ideology, women’s education is less important because they do not have to educate children, but only as a wise internal assistant, to help their husbands develop their careers. If they were from wealthy or socially privileged families, their children were sent to private schools in traditional China for their education. As a result, women’s education was correspondingly neglected, and few cared whether they are educated.

At the same time, the difference in the importance given to women’s education also reflects the difference in the status of women in Japan and China in modern times.¹⁶ Although the status of women in East Asia remained low in the twentieth century and women were still regarded as a group that did not have the same rights as men, the difference between the ideologies of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ and ‘Wise Wife, Good Mother’ reveals the different status of women in Japan and China. In the Japanese concept of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother,’ women’s right to education was emphasized, and women were seen as part of a strong nation. In contrast, in China’s ‘Wise Wife, Good Mother,’ it does not seem to matter whether the woman is educated or not because the education of the child has nothing to do with the mother.

After ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ was introduced to Manchukuo by modern Japanese enlighteners, it was intertwined with ‘Wise Wife, Good Mother.’ Many Manchukuo government officials, and even many intellectuals, could not distinguish the nuances. Although Manchukuo still mixed used the title ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ and ‘Wise Wife, Good Mother’ in most educational institutions and official propagandas, all of its connotation was replaced by the Japanese version’s ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother,’ which differs from the traditional Chinese concept of women’s education. For convenience, since women in Manchuria were still mainly taught and wrote in Chinese, ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ will be used below to refer to most of the ideal images of women promoted in Manchukuo.

‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ in Women’s Education of Manchukuo

In ancient times in our nation, men dominated outside, and women dominated inside; the interior of a family is of course presided over by a woman. Families come together to form a society, and societies come together to form a nation. Therefore, the good or bad of the family situation, can also greatly affect the good or bad of the nation, just like schools can affect the nation.

¹⁶ See Julia C. Bullock, “Coeducation in the Age of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’: Koizumi Ikuko’s Quest for ‘Equality of Opportunity,’” In *Rethinking Japanese Feminisms*, ed. Julia C. Bullock, Ayako Kano, and James Welker, 89–102. Also see Teruka Nishikawa, Wesley Berg, and Janice Brown, “From ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ to the Otaka Award: Japanese Women Composers 1868 to the Present,” *US–Japan Women’s Journal. English Supplement*, no. 22 (2002), 87.

And women are also responsible for the education of their children at home, so the female teacher-training schools' students, at least should have one special mission within the family to be a "Good Wife, Wise Mother" ... Because a few years ago, women, especially those who graduated from female teacher-training schools, could not understand the national conditions of their own nation, [they] ignored the teachings of the ancient sages, blindly imitated the Westerners' superficial knowledge, so that the organization of the family is shaken, and the society and the nation will become more and more unstable.¹⁷

The excerpt presented here is derived from a public lecture delivered in 1935 by Bai Guangtian (n.d.), an individual associated with the Fengtian Provincial Women Teacher-Training School. During this period, the theme of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' permeated the educational institutions in the prominent urban centers of Manchukuo. This discourse serves as corroborative evidence of the progressive influence of Japan's 'Wise Wife, Good Mother' perspective on Manchukuo. Under the auspices of the fundamental notion that "women should receive an education," the implementation of women's education in Manchukuo commenced in an incremental manner. It encapsulates the evolving educational landscape in Manchukuo, marked by the assimilation of Japanese ideals and the gradual shift towards recognizing the importance of women's education in shaping the nation's future. This narrative exemplifies the interplay of cultural influences and societal transformation within the context of Manchukuo.

After the fall of the Qing Empire (1912), there was an influx of Western and Japanese values into Manchuria, resulting in changes forged by modern thinking and imperialism. Ideas of gender equality from the West brought significant impact and confusion to the land. An article by Liu Rongfu (n.d.), published in 1937, described this situation:

From the end of the Qing Dynasty to the period of the Republic of China, women's education was booming, and the European wind and the American rain¹⁸ permeated the eastern land. At that time, women were very competitive, and advocated equality in education between men and women. Either fight for suffrage, or pretend to be an official, [they] compete with men for power and profit, [which] leads to many evils. With a little education, [they will] set themselves in high status, and abolish women's vocation. [They are] not

¹⁷ Office of school inspector of Ministry of Education of Fengtian Province, *Fengtian jiaoyu*, 3320.

¹⁸ This idiom refers to the cultural influence from Europe and America.

willing to do it, not wanting to do it, that is really absurd. Men and women are physically different, have different personalities, and have different abilities. Is it not a big mistake to force agreement for the sake of education? I privately think that men and women could have the same opportunities to receive education, but the purpose and mission of education must not be to cut the feet to fit the shoes,¹⁹ forcing them to be the same. No matter how talented a woman is, and how well-educated she is, her vocation for raising children, and her responsibility as a housewife, cannot be erased... The essence of Japanese women's education, focuses on the principle of "Good Wife, Wise Mother," so the trend of women's education can be seen. Therefore, in the period of the Republic of China, when there would be one more graduate from a women's education school, and one less wife or mother who could perform their duties in the family, it was a pity.²⁰

After criticizing the Western value of so-called gender equality, Liu Rongfu praised the Japanese women's education system. In his opinion, Japan's 'Wise Wife, Good Mother' theory seemed to be a more moderate and less "radical" concept of women's education. In Liu's article, traditional Chinese, modern Japanese, and modern Western concepts of women's education could be considered as three levels. First, women's education in traditional Chinese Confucian society was at the lowest level, where women were not required to be educated and were subordinate to their own families until adulthood and to their husband's families after adulthood. Second, Liu's descriptions mocked these women, who, in Liu's words, were a group of illiterate women with no spiritual aspirations; women's education in modern Western society was the highest level, where women were considered equal to men in terms of gender, the right to vote, the right to participate in politics, the right to equal access to education, and even the right to choose their lifestyles freely.

Liu held the view that women who deviated from traditional roles were perplexing to him. These women, according to Liu, were not adhering to the fundamental duties expected of their gender, and their audacious attempts to question the established social standing of men were something he found deeply objectionable. In Liu's perspective, the ideal model for women's education in Manchukuo rested in a middle ground, aligning with the modern Japanese approach to women's education, which he considered to be a harmonious balance between traditional Chinese values and modern Western influences. In his vision, this balanced approach represented the

¹⁹ This idiom means to be forced to adapt to an impractical or inelegant solution.

²⁰ Office of school inspector of Ministry of Education of Fengtian Province, *Fengtian jiaoyu*, 4543–4544.

pinnacle of women's education in Manchukuo, where women could strive for progress without challenging the existing social order. This perspective underscores Liu's particular stance on women's education within the cultural and societal context of Manchukuo.

The distinct feature of women's education in Manchukuo lay in the fact that, although women had access to the right to education, the content they received diverged significantly from that of men's education.²¹ Nevertheless, this unique educational system in Manchukuo was dominated by 'Good Wife, Wise Mother.' The outline of the new academic structure issued by the Manchukuo government in May 1937 in Japanese, stated that:

*As for women's education, the same thing was done by changing the name of the female middle school to a female national high school, teaching practical subjects such as housework, sewing, and handicrafts, and providing practical training for women to become "Wise Wife, Good Mother," thereby contributing to the improvement of family life in our nation.*²²

This official government proclamation explicitly outlined the distinct characteristics of women's education in Manchukuo. It mandated that women's educational curriculum should encompass subjects such as housekeeping, sewing, and handicrafts, setting it apart from the educational pursuits of their male counterparts in the middle school system.

Second, vocational education for women was also one of the characteristics of women's education in Manchukuo. Since the Meiji Restoration in Japan, the need for women's employment was felt in various industries, such as telephone and telegraph operators, salespeople, and nurses. The aim was to achieve a society in which women could be employed in businesses and educated with knowledge and skills appropriate to their national and sexual identities. In response to this need, women of the middle and lower classes were encouraged to "improve their virtues and upgrade their intelligence and abilities."²³

Zhang Hengchao (n.d.), a member of the educational delegation from Manchukuo during that period, offered insights on the progress of vocational education for women in Japan. He expressed the belief that "the effectiveness of women's vocational education in Japan has been notably proven," underscoring its success. Furthermore, Zhang advocated for the enthusiastic promotion of women's vocational education within Manchukuo. His observations and recommendations underline the

²¹ See Wenwen Wang, "Training National and Vocational Women: Characteristics of Curriculum of Female Secondary Education in Colonized Manchuria," *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies* 3, no. 3 (2019), 2.

²² Office of school inspector of Ministry of Education of Fengtian Province, *Fengtian jiaoyu*, 4158-4161.

²³ See Zhang, "Shimoda Utako no 'ryōsai kenbo'," 97.

influence of Japanese practices and the call for the adoption and enhancement of similar educational initiatives for women in Manchukuo.²⁴ Hence, it is imperative not to overlook the importance of granting women access to vocational education. *Nüzi guomin gaodeng xüexiao guicheng* (Regulations of the Female National High School), issued by Sun Qichang (1885–1954), who was the Minister of the Ministry of Livelihood of Manchukuo, on October 10, 1937, had the following requirements on the number of class hours for each subject in female national high schools (Tab. 1., the data units in the table are all in one class hour):

	National Morality	National language		Education		Housework		Sewing and Handicrafts	Vocation		History and Geography	Math	Science	Painting	P.E.	Music	Total	Percentage of Hou., Sew. and Han., Vo.
		Manchurian	Japanese	Theory	Practice	Theory	Practice		Theory	Practice								
1 st year	2	3	6			2	2	5	2		4	3	4	1	2	2	38	28.9%
2 nd year	2	3	6			2	2	5	2		4	3	4	1	2	2	38	28.9%
3 rd year	2	3	6	2		3	4	8	2	3				1	2	2	38	52.6%
4 th year	2	3	6	2		3	4	8	2	3				1	2	2	38	52.6%
Teacher- training program	2			6	23				3	4						2	40	17.5%

Tab. 1 Subject class hours for each academic year of female national high school in Manchukuo after 1937²⁵

The provided table indicates that the subjects listed primarily revolve around theoretical content during the initial two years of the female national high school curriculum. However, in the latter two years, there is a notable upsurge in the number of instructional hours dedicated to practical application. It is worth noting that courses pertaining to women's education accounted for 28.9% of the curriculum in the first and second years, and this percentage significantly increased to 52.6% in the third and fourth years.

By this juncture, a comprehensive understanding of the progress and standing of women's education in Manchukuo prior to 1938 has been established:

*In the area of women's education, [we should]
endeavour to women's moral cultivation, in order for*

²⁴ Office of school inspector of Ministry of Education of Fengtian Province, *Fengtian jiaoyu*, 4251–4252.

²⁵ Office of school inspector of Ministry of Education of Fengtian Province, *Fengtian jiaoyu*, 4379–4391.

*her to achieve her 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' mission, with a particular emphasis on practical training.*²⁶

Under the tutelage of the 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' ethos and the pervasive influence of Japanese culture, the unique brand of women's education tailored to Manchukuo's specific attributes began to take form. This educational approach placed a primary emphasis on domestic skills, with complementary training in vocational skills, all with the overarching goal of cultivating women capable of fulfilling the distinct requirements of Manchukuo.

However, while the advancement of women's education rights in Manchukuo had made some headway, a considerable disparity persisted, notably in comparison to achieving true gender equality. This contrast was starkly evident in the contrasting curricula of men's and women's education. The educational system in place, bearing significant resemblance to that of Japan, was aligned with Manchukuo's national slogan, the 'Edification of the Kingly Way,' emphasizing the propagation of certain values and standards specific to the nation's ideology.

Consequently, the promotion of the 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' slogan in Manchukuo seemed, on the surface, to be a means of enhancing the status of women and endorsing their right to education. It functioned as a tool for advancing the objectives of nation-building and reinforcing nationalism within the state.

'Good Wife, Wise Mother' under the 'Kingly Way' in Manchukuo

The world trend of feminism also flowed into Manchukuo as Japanese imperial powers gradually entered Northeast Asia.²⁷ As the world trend developed, there was a call for the emancipation of women in Manchukuo. The official policy of Manchukuo also responded to this, but it was the promotion of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother,' and honour for "Filial son, Virtuous Wife (Ch.: *Xiaozi jiefu*)," which means children are expected to support their parents and obey their authority, and women are expected to behave themselves and remain faithful to their husbands:

Our Manchukuo is based on the Kingly Way to establish the nation. Promoting Eastern morality, is the Kingly Way politics' first vital thing. Therefore, our nation's filial sons and virtuous wives, will be honored,

²⁶ The Manchurian Imperial Government, ed., *Manzhou jianguo shinian shi* [Ten years of Manchukuo history] (Hara shobo, 1969), 703.

²⁷ See Ya-Chi Tsai, *Zhizao zhanzheng yinying: lun Manzhouguo de funü dongyuan (1932–1945)* [The Manufactured Shadow of War: on the Feminine Mobilization in Manchukuo, 1932–1945] (Academia Historica, 2010), 157.

*to be the people's model. This is the precursor to the customs' change.*²⁸

This was not an attempt by the Manchukuo government to promote traditional Confucian ideology in Manchuria but a response to the trend of women's emancipation.²⁹ The traditional Confucian concept of the 'Kingly Way' has been imbued with contemporary relevance by the Manchukuo government, and certain Manchukuo intellectuals have offered their own interpretations of this transformation. A female commentator, Lin Lei (n.d.), wrote that:

*Our 'Kingly Way,' is benevolence, peace, loyalty and bravery to pursue public affairs. All Manchukuo's people's gains and losses are joint, and do not allow divergences in opinion. However, Manchuria's valuing males and attaching less importance to females' custom has become an immortal convention. Now the Kingly Way's Manchukuo has descended, it's really a women's emancipation time. The so-called women's emancipation is cultivating their moral character; managing their household, and men and women are in the Kingly Way's Garden. Men have their duty, women have their housework, the family is happy and harmonious.*³⁰

Manchukuo bureaucrats and intellectuals developed their logic to meet the world trend of women's emancipation. Under the guidance of the 'Kingly Way' ideology, women should strive to become beneficial for the nation. Lin also gave her interpretation of women's emancipation, that is, a woman, an ideal wife, should improve their moral and intellectual cultivation, manage their own families well, and thus cater to the pursuit of the 'Kingly Way.' Men and women should have their roles to play so that families can be harmonious and the nation can prosper. Furthermore, managing their household has another meaning: to be an ideal mother, to educate their children to help them become qualified citizens. In Lin's theory, the woman manages the household; if she fails to be a 'Good Wife, Wise Mother,' then all the other endeavours of the family will fail. In this passage, it is argued that women can only truly break the traditional culture of inequality between men and women by starting with the family and doing the household chores well. Thus, Lin could be said to have captured

²⁸ Ministry of Culture and Education of the State Apartment of Manchukuo, *Wenjiao nianjian*, 746.

²⁹ Tsai, *Zhizao zhanzheng yinying*, 223.

³⁰ Lei Lin, "Wangdao zhengzhi xia de funü [The Women under the Kingly Way's Politics]," *Shengjing shibao*, April 2, 1937. From Internet Archive. www.archive.org (accessed Nov. 17, 2022).

both the trend of the times and the official ideology of Manchukuo, the Kingly Way.

Moreover, the success of women's mobilization in European countries during the First World War was evident worldwide. Therefore, it became urgent to enhance women's social status, give them peace of mind to manage their families well, thus strengthening Manchukuo statehood. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Manchukuo had a system of women's education in which many domestic-related courses, such as sewing and housework, were arranged for women. At that time, the shadow of war was hanging over East Asia, and the responsibility of keeping every family running was placed on women. The fusion of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' with the Western idea of women's emancipation resulted in more, different forms of womanhood, in which Manchukuo officials wanted women to provide a certain level of productivity on the one hand, and on the other hand, wanted women to stay within traditional social norms.

In this way, women in Manchukuo were effectively given dual identities. The first identity was 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' in the family, and women were given the task of taking care of the family. Those women needed to maintain a stable family relationship, handle daily housework and support their husbands in their careers. They were also responsible for their children's education and for fulfilling their family education responsibilities. In another identity, the women of Manchukuo were asked to be the 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' of the nation, and they were asked to contribute to it. They were required to acquire basic literacy and productive skills to enable them to participate in society's work. As Bai Guangtian argued in a speech, given in 1935 at the Fengtian Provincial Women's Teacher-Training School in Fengtian:

The [women's] training goals are certainly based on the two special missions mentioned above. With the above mission:

First, in order to be a good teacher in the social aspect, [1] must have the habit of hard work; [2] must have a natural interest in affairs.

Second, in order to be a "Good Wife, Wise Mother" in the family, [1] have a happy mood; [2] have a healthy body; [3] have the ability to manage all family affairs.³¹

In short, women were taught by the edification of the 'Kingly Way' in order to become the new 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' that Manchukuo needed. Driven by the world trend of women's emancipation and under the shadow of war, the social status of women in Manchukuo was enhanced to a specific scale. However, this was only a little progress; there was still a

³¹ Office of school inspector of Ministry of Education of Fengtian Province, *Fengtian jiaoyu*, 3320–3321.

long way to go before attaining equality between men and women. Therefore, the promotion of the ideology of “Good Wife, Wise Mother” in Manchukuo can be described as a product of a fusion of traditional Chinese and Japanese Confucian concepts, Western ideas of women’s emancipation, and the Kingly Way. The fundamental objective of this initiative was to meet the imperative requirement of Manchukuo, a burgeoning state in Northeast Asia, to expedite its nation-building process effectively.

Conclusion

As a part of the ‘Kingly Way’s’ teachings, promoting a ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ had become a national motto. In the concept of the Manchukuo elite, their nation was composed of many families. Moreover, the household was controlled mainly by women. Therefore, to improve the ideological propaganda of the Kingly Way, it was necessary to start by educating women. In line with the worldwide trend of women’s emancipation, Manchukuo government officials began to ask women to take on social and professional responsibilities and dedicate themselves to the nation. Those ‘civilized’ women of Manchukuo became an integral part of the Japanese Empire’s Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ is the ideal image of a woman who was introduced to Manchukuo from Japan. With the spread of Western feminist ideas to East Asia, the right of women to education was gradually emphasized. However, under the influence of the deep-rooted Confucian patriarchal society, women in Japan and Manchukuo had limited access to education, which was also different from that available to men. The state apparatus, represented by the Manchukuo government, still tried to apply traditional patriarchal discourses, including the slogan “Good Wife, Wise Mother,” which places women in the position of being patriarchally disciplined. It is an ideology similar to statism, and it is also a typical example of feminism being disciplined by patriarchy.

The promotion of the ‘Kingly Way’ served as a vehicle for the government of Manchukuo to experiment with a novel form of national dynamics and represented an act of nationalism aimed at accelerating the enhancement of national unity within this newly established country. The discipline of women in the ideal Manchukuo was an indispensable part of the construction of national identity, and it was also a means of propaganda that the policy makers hoped to use to stabilize the society and implement a series of consequential policies. This study recognizes that, for women, the concept of the ‘Edification of the Kingly Way’ was profoundly influenced by the ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ ideology. In stark contrast to the circumstances in China during the early twentieth century, where women’s education was not a focal point, this approach in Manchukuo afforded women of various social strata and ethnic backgrounds a degree

of access to education. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that the underlying motivation was, at its core, aligned with nationalistic objectives. The Second World War was not that long ago, and what happened in history still continues to influence contemporary societies, cultures, and thoughts in Northeast Asia, and even in East Asia. This study focuses on the issue of women in Manchukuo and its relevance to nationalism, which can also provide researchers with an understanding of the social and cultural perspectives of contemporary East Asian societies.

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