



# Influence of foreign actors on women's education in East Asia

## What missionaries and the Japanese Colonial Government contributed to the education system

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### Introduction

It was probably a normal winter day on the streets of Vienna when on the other side of the world a ship was approaching the Korean harbor. Of coast of the Korean peninsula stood Mary F. Scranton and was thinking of the task ahead of her. It was the year 1886 and Mrs. Scranton was sent by the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Church in the United States to Korea. This woman was just one amongst a significant amount of missionaries that left Europe, North America and Australia/New Zealand to bring Christianity and Christian education methods to Northern East Asia. This poster will deal with the role of external influences that shaped the way East Asia's women were educated. Next to the contributions given by missionaries the Colonial Government of Japan had an impact on the education system in the region. The story of Mrs. Scranton will be continued in the main part of this paper.



The research question of this work is as following: *How did foreign actors influence women's education in East Asia?* We believe that external actors played a key role in the uplifting of women's education in East Asia. Japan, Korea and China experienced similar influences when it comes to the activities of religious missionaries from various countries. Later at the turn of the 19th century Japan itself became very influential in Taiwan and Korea.

### State of the Art

The topic of influences of external actors on female education has been discussed by a range of authors (e.g. Jongeneel 2009). However, the sources are not as comprehensive in the way that they cover broad and quantifiable information for all three North East Asian culture areas. Thus, this work provides a somewhat unique perspective about the topic.

### Methodology

The two mentioned external sources of influences were religious missionaries and the Japanese Colonial Government. This in turn provides the timeframe for this work: While the heyday of Christian missionary work took place in the 19th and early 20th century earlier missionary work has taken place. However, information regarding their impact of women's education is very limited. The end of Japanese colonial occupation in 1945 forms the other end of the timeframe. Secondary as well as some primary literature has been used for this work. The key sources are mentioned and the end of this poster while all sources are available on request. In order to meet the space limitations and in an attempt to increase readability descriptive information is enriched by stories of particular missionaries and their stories'. Thus two different perspectives are offered in this work.

### Old and New

In pre 1900 China there was no formal education for women. The public education was limited to the civil service examination system that stood open only for young men. Hence, if women received education at all it was private home tutoring. This costly endeavor stood open only to a very limited number of Chinese women. Schools set up by Christian missionaries did not prohibit the attendance of girls and, thus, were often the only possibility for lower class Chinese to receive education. Still, initially the number of such institutions and girls sent to be educated was low.

Following the treaty of Nanking in 1842 missionary work was allowed in some Chinese cities. During this first stage the focus of the missionaries lay on converting rather than educating. This was in part motivated by the secularization movement in the US and Europe.

In contrast to this general approach to missionary work in China there were already some who saw the benefits of education: Calvin Wilson Mateer arrived in Shantung in 1863 and started his quest for followers while his wife set up a school. Chinese classics were part of the subject as well as bible studies, natural science

and writing<sup>1</sup>. The teaching of reading and writing was especially important for early missionary work as initially only lower and illiterate classes of the Chinese society could be won for missionary schools.

At the turn of the century Christian education expanded vividly in part motivated by the failed Boxer revolution. In 1905 the classic Chinese Examination System was abolished and modern education was introduced. The western education taught by Christian schools was regarded as very pursue worthy. The number of such schools tripled between 1907 and 1920 with over 240 thousand pupils. Higher education was on the rise. In 1920 16 Christian colleges were operating. However, the Chinese wanted western education in contrast to westernization<sup>1</sup>. Data from the Christian Mission in China, collected 1918-21, found that there were already 50 thousand girls at Christian primary schools (in contrast to twice as much boys). While the share in public schools was reported as 99% male pupils. In addition, the literacy rate of Christian women was with 41% way higher than the national average<sup>2</sup>.

In 1925 the Chinese government took steps to reduce foreign influence in their education system. The trend of assimilation of Christian institutions into the national system continued throughout the second Sino-Japanese war<sup>1</sup>.

(Taiwan) Prior to the arrival of the Japanese in Taiwan the island experienced similar missionary activities to that of the mainland. However to a lesser extent. Due to the lack of central authority on the island, early Dutch and Spanish missionaries could introduce the first writing system. In 1884 the first female schools for higher education were founded by missionaries. The highest number of enrolled female students at the Tamsui Girls' Academy was eighty students. Missionary schools for the first time the history afforded the chance for all girls to get educated outside their homes

The Japanese Colonial Government implemented a policy of compulsory primary education for children following the domestic Japanese education policy: Education became compulsory for children between the ages of eight and fourteen. Yet, education for non-Japanese was of lower quality. School girls in Taiwan were educated with two major aims: to become obedient colonial subjects and to be followers of the "good wife, wise mother" ideal. In 1899 the

Japanese government ordered the establishment of minimum one institute for women's higher education in every prefecture. The primary school enrollment rose in 1911 to almost 98 percent.

(Korea) In 1896 The Independent wrote: "The most pitiful being in this world is the Korean woman... Woman's status is by no means lower than man's but he debases her". At that time Korean women could not be medically treated because of the lack of female doctors and female medical colleges respectively. The same holds true for higher education institutes for women.

In the private sphere of the family reigned the "inside-outside" rule. Housewives were prohibited to make even one step beyond their homes. The only goal of girls' existence was to raise children and be obedient housewives. In that aspect, spreading out the Christianity missionaries contributed not only for the improvement of women's physical health but also to alleviation of their living conditions.

Mary F. Scranton was the first woman missionary in Korea. Her mission was to support disabled Korean girls with medical help and provide women medical education. Scranton was also the founder of Girls Ewha Haktang – the first girls school for higher education in Korea. The first Korean woman physician and a well-known philanthropist Dr. Esther Park was a graduate of Ewha School. The greatest challenge that Ewha School and all other missionary schools had to overcome was the fear and suspicion of the local population.

At the missionary school girls studied not only nutrition, child care and interior decoration, but also English, algebra and geography. Female students at missionary schools were equipped with the knowledge and understanding of the changing society and the changing role of the woman as a "wage earner".

Similar to the developments in Taiwan, the Japanese colonial administration introduced elementary and secondary education for girls and boys. In 1924 the Japanese Keijo Imperial University was found. The main intention of the Japanese administration in



educating women was to alienate young girls from their national consciousness and convert them into loyal imperial citizens. K

dorean was replaced by learning home economics. In spite of that some women could really benefit from the Japanese educational system. The Colonial government tried to reconstruct the family practices as well. The forced child marriage was perceived as destructive. The female literacy rate grew considerably.

(Japan) The Jesuit missionary order arrived in Japan as early as 1549. At that time mandatory education for both genders was not even introduced in the most advanced parts of Europe. Not surprisingly, the education that was given in this early missionary period was for boys only. Over time Japanese policy towards missionaries became increasingly hostile and the country became more isolationistic<sup>3</sup>. Following the arrival of the Black Fleet sent by the US Japan was forced upon the so called unequal treaties. This external opening of the island country triggered further changes down the road which also impacted female education. Japan quickly adopted western style education. The education of women was seen as a means to an end: In order to be accepted as equals to the western powers the nation had to become more 'civilized'. The education of women was a necessary step to achieve that. Already by 1886 a compulsory four-year school term for boys and girls was introduced. Missionary schools became increasingly influential. The major differences apart from the lower number of students was the higher percentage of girls and the more advanced curriculum of the Christian institutions<sup>1</sup>.

In 1901 the Japan Women's University was opened which attracted more than one thousand students within the first six years. It had three departments: Japanese and English literature and economics. It is Japan's oldest private women university as was established by the Japanese Christian reformist Jinzo Naruse. As the nationalistic sentiment of the Japanese was rising. Christian institutions contributed to this by following the regulations set by the authorities. While there were some objections these voices decreased in volume over time. Over time, the Christian institutions were first aligned and then increasingly

integrated into central Japanese authority<sup>4</sup>.

Austria (Vienna) More than 500 years the University of Vienna was a pure male bastion. In 1896 was introduced the law that allowed women to obtain The Higher School Certificate –Matura in order to be admitted to higher education. Elise Richter was the first woman who completed an entire study in 1901. Mrs. Richter was also the first female professor at an Austria university.

### Results

Mary Scranton's vision years ago empowered women to creating their own future. While she specifically had the well-being of women in mind, other foreign actors significantly improved the education given to girls in China, Korea and Japan in the 19th and first half of the 20th century. There is no doubt that missionary schools and the reforms introduced by Japan played a very important role in providing literacy and new opportunities for women.

### Selected References

- <sup>1</sup> Jongeneel, Jan A.B. (2009), Christian Mission and Education in Modern China, Japan and Korea: historical studies, Frankfurt, M: Lang.
- <sup>2</sup> Stauffer, Milton T. (1922), The Christian occupation of China: a general survey of the numerical strength and geographical distribution of the Christian forces in China, Shanghai: China Continuation Committee
- <sup>3</sup> Nelson, John (2002), Myths, missions, and mistrust: The fate of Christianity in 16th and 17th century Japan, History and Anthropology, vol 13 (2), 93-111.
- <sup>4</sup> Omori, Hideko (2013), Religious education leading to higher education for women: Historical insights on modern Japan; Religious Education, Vol.108(5), pp: 529-54.

### The Research Team

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