



“Women and crooks are unteachable” 贤妻良母 현모양처

Good Wives and Wise Mothers in East Asia 良妻賢母

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Introduction

Women's education in China, Japan and Korea was influenced by a lively discourse on the role and status of women in society. The role of women in society is closely related to the nature of women's education, which is seen as a crucial factor to women's political, social and economic emancipation.

The concept of Good Wife Wise Mother (GWWM) was a dominant gender ideology aimed at shaping women's role in society with notable differences in China, Japan and Korea. It was used to refashion existing traditional Confucian ideas, to assimilate them with the requirements and needs of the modern nation state. This change gave rise to a growing debate on the content of formal women's education. In contrast to non-formal (educational activities outside the formal system) and informal (the lifelong process of acquiring knowledge), formal education is full-time, state-sanctioned, hierarchical and institutionalized (Coombs & Ahmed, 1973: 8), however still no guarantee for equal educational opportunities.

Women's rights movements have criticized GWWM because it is seen as a crux to the persistence of traditional beliefs confining women's role to reproduction and thus prolonging gender inequalities in East Asia. The research thus aims to understand how the development of the GWWM concept and how the response by women's rights movements has formed formal women's education in East Asia.

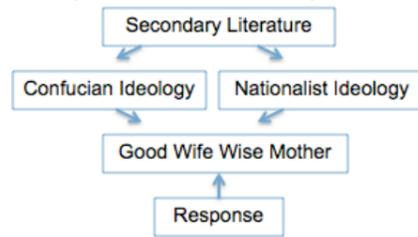
State of the Art

Chung (1994), Lee (1995), Nyitray (2010) and Ko et. al. (2003) examine the role and the status of women in Confucian cultures. Koyama (2013), Sechiyama (2013), Uno (1993) and Choi (2009) found that the origin and development of the concept of GWWM was a result of the complex intersection of various notions including Confucianism, colonialism, nationalism and western modernity, that obligated women to comply with the existing patriarchal structures.

Methodology

An initial analysis of the secondary literature identified factors of influence that had an impact on the development of formal women's education. The research question was then addressed by conducting a comparative analysis of the secondary literature, examining the impact of Confucian and Nationalist Ideologies, dominant concepts and reactions on the role of women and the impact of women's

education in East Asia. Ideology is defined as “a consistent and integrated pattern of thoughts and beliefs...advocating a conduct and action pattern responsive to... [such] beliefs” (Loewenstein 1953: 691).



Confucian Ideology

Confucian ideology was centered on moral education and as there was no formal education, the home was considered the place where children needed to learn certain values (James, Clark & Wang, 2004: 411). Confucius believed clearly defined roles brought harmony within a family and society. While fathers were the 'master of the family' (一家之主), mothers were responsible for the household and raising the children (Chuang, 2009: 29). The Confucian doctrine “women and crooks are unteachable” (Liu & Carpenter, 2005: 277) underlines the discrimination that women faced and they were told to obey the ‘Three Obedience’s’, defining their role in society and in the family.

China: (sāncóng 三从) Regardless of class, a women's place in society was confined by the ‘Three Obedience’s’, which designated a woman's relation to (1) her father, (2) her husband and (3) her male offspring over the course of her lifetime (Nyitray, 2010: 149). **Japan:** (sanjū 三従) Japanese Confucianism assimilated the Chinese idioms of such gender hierarchy (Slote and De Vos, 1998: 211). Neo-Confucianism further held back women's rights and during the Muromachi period (1338-1573) women lost their right of ownership and were dependent on male family members. Confucian ethics were often spread in the form of manuals, such as *The Greater Learning for Women*, which regulated under what circumstances men could divorce their women: “She does not obey his father and mother, she is lecherous, jealous, has a nasty disease, is barren, talks too much or steals” (Sugano 2011: 257).

Korea: (*jeol dae* 절대) Korea also adopted Confucian teachings with the founding of the Joseon period (1392-1897). Society was structured as a sex-segregated system and Confucianism further underlined patriarchal principles, for e.g.: *Sum-Jong-Ji-Do* (women should obey fathers, husbands, & sons) and *Nae-Oe-Beob* (a wife's role is housework, a husband's public affairs). (Han 1996: 107). Confucianism as an ideology solidified the

existing patriarchal structure of society via norms and practices and clearly identified the role of women in society. Women's education remained predominantly informal, whilst any non-formal education would be subjugated to that of men's.

Nationalist Ideology

Nakamura Masanao coined the term GWWM in 1875 to pioneer women's education and to represent the ideal for womanhood (Shivers, 1983: 22). The original idea was a mixture of Confucian and nationalist ideology. On one hand it's origin was derived from *'The Greater Learning for Women'* (Kodate et al., 2010: 314), but while studying in England, Masanao's experiences also allowed him to witness the high degree that women played in child education (Ochiai & Aoyama, 2012: 11). The formation of nation states was crucial in this regard as Masanao believed this was a requirement for a modern nation: “If we gain the ideal mother, then we will gain the ideal child. In the future, if it passes down to our remote descendants, Japan will become a strong nation...” (Ochiai & Aoyama, 2012: 11). The GWWM concept departed from the notion of women being flawed, to a notion that women had value in raising ‘good’ children and contribute to the nation.

Japan: The notion of contributing to the nation state was further defined through the association between the mother's body (*botai* 母体) and the nation's body (*kokutai* 国体). As producers of children, women were regarded as a prime source of national strength (Mcveigh, 1996: 318) and the purpose of education was purely to enrich the country and strengthen the army (*fukoku kyōhei* 富国強兵) (Hara, 1995: 96). While men had to increase the wealth of the nation state by either becoming hard workers or brave soldiers, it became a woman's duty to serve their men and families (Hara, 1995: 96-97). The policies of the Japanese state adopted the GWWM concept and various ministries also articulated goals for women. Mori Arinori, first minister of education in 1887 claimed, “the fundamental basis for an enriched country lies with education, whose basis is with women's education...in the process of educating girls and women, we must put across the idea of serving and helping their country” (Hara, 1995: 96).

China: The Chinese equivalent of Masanao is Liang Qichao who emphasized the “educational role of mothers in the West and called for the promotion of women's education” (Ochiai & Aoyama, 2012: 11). He believed through education girls would be better equipped to cope with the duties of

being a wife and mother (Lee, 1995:355). He also expressed that building a strong nation required women to be financially independent (Lee, 1995: 356-367). After the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform movement in 1898 and his subsequent defection to Japan, his commitment to women's education deepened. The failure boosted revolutionary forces in China and ultimately contributed to the Xinhai revolution in 1911. His writing managed to inspire not only Chinese scholars but also “educated ladies [who] were still repeating the theme Liang had expounded seventeen years earlier” (Wang, 1999: 69).

Korea: In contrast to China, Korea was a colony of Japan from 1910 to 1945, and received direct GWWM education as part of Japan's colonial government (Ochiai & Aoyama, 2012: 12) GWWM was used as a tool to ensure the reproduction and education of healthy and productive colonial subjects (Hong 2001: 254). When the Korean government established the first girl's public school, its goal to train students to become ‘wise companions and benevolent mothers’ echoed the Japanese model (Choi 2009: 6). The Korean use of the concept GWWM in the late 19th and early 20th century was a “reflection of Japanese influence” (Sechiyama, 2013: 75). The purpose of the concept GWWM was not women's emancipation, in terms of equal opportunities, but rather to influence women's views of the nation and to promote an education that would give them the knowledge to raise a new generation of ‘good’ citizens (Sechiyama 2013: 61).

Response/Reaction

The rise of nation states and the need to produce strong offspring provided women with the initial opportunity of formal education. Even though women were barred from entering politics, the concept of GWWM allowed women to join the highly political discourse on the role of women. (Wang, 1999: 70). The turn of the century coincided with an increasing number of women who not only rejected the concept of GWWM but who also significantly added their own voices to the gender discourse.

Japan: Women were becoming increasingly educated and increasingly interested at shaping society. While in 1890 only 30 per cent of eligible girls received formal education, that rate increased to 97.4 per cent by 1910 (Nolte & Hastings, 1991: 157). Female journalists such as Yosano Akiko and Yamakawa Kikue took the stage to debate women's roles in society, thus ending the state's monopoly over gender

construction (Nolte & Hastings, 1991: 176). Akiko became interested in social and political reform and attacked the contemporary concept of GWWM: “Women are people the same as men” (Nolte & Hastings, 1991: 180). Kikue also became emerged in the debate and wrote: “Women's education is for their own sake. It is not for the sake of their husbands or their children, just as men are not educated for the sake of their wives and children” (Nolte & Hastings, 1991: 194). Akiko, Kikue and other feminist writers focused at changing women's lives in society by attacking the concept of GWWM and demanding equal educational as well as political opportunities.

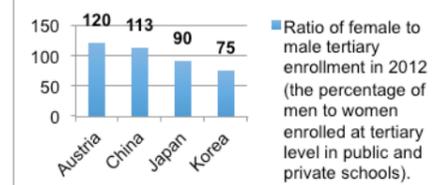
Korea: Here the concept GWWM remained primarily relevant for the middle class who had received formal education and had been taught the importance of being a virtuous wife and mother. Choi mentions, “when there were few jobs for women, becoming a [GWWM] represented the most realistic career option available to the small cohort of educated women (Choi, 2009: 9).” A debate soon emerged, similar to Japan, on the role of women in society. In the 1920s, the *East Asia Daily* ran several articles between women in two categories: “those who subscribed to the ‘New Women’ ideal and sought to carve out their own place in society and old fashioned women who fulfilled traditional roles (Hyun, 2004: 45).” The term ‘New Woman’ referred to women who received formal, Western-style education. These women wanted to develop their individual potential and go beyond the limits of their patriarchal society (Hyun 2004: 44). Thus, “the emergence of new ideals for Korean woman challenged the ideology of [GWWM], which had traditionally defined Korean womanhood” (Yoo 2008: 81). **China:** Feminist voices and journalists contributed to the Xinhai revolution, but also worked beyond to challenge “the hegemony of the nationalist movement over women” (Ma, 2010: 253). For e.g.: He Zhen, founder of the feminist group Women's Rights Recovery Association, opposed the Qing-Dynasty and Confucianism, separating feminism from nationalism, and proclaimed: “Women's liberation [was not] for the sake of the nation but out of moral necessity” (Zarrow, 1988: 796) Women within the Guomindang “organized women's societies and edited women's journals along party-approved lines” (Ma, 2010: 254). This shows that while writers were not able to write freely, they were able to discuss social reform. One example in a *Women's Support* issue in November 1935 read: “Only when men are willing to be good husbands and wise fathers should women accept the duties of [GWWM]” (Ma, 2010: 255).

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In 1824, Mme de Rémusat, a Paris court lady, expressed: “Man must be formed for the country's institutions; women must be formed for man... Our natural state and dignity are as wives and mothers.” The expression ‘domestic ideology’ in Europe was used to describe the set of ideas that emphasized women's qualities: sensitivity, emotionalism, and maternal instincts were attributes that emphasized family as their ‘natural’ place (Simonton: 2006, 107).

Higher education	First students abroad	First (regular) students
China	1911	1920
Japan	1871	1913
Korea	1896	1910
Austria	1896	1897

Source: University of Vienna; Hara, 1995:97-100; Lee, 1995:353; Sob, 2008: 5-6



Source: World Bank (2015)

Conclusion

GWWM was a very influential gender construct, which successfully shaped traditional Confucian ideology, to address the requirements and needs of a modern society. The initial development of nation states allowed such a change to take place as East Asia competed with other countries. Yet as GWWM increasingly educated women in East Asia, they actively debated and improved women's education and thereby changed the societal role of women.

References

Choi, 2009; Chuang, 2009; Chung, 1994; Coombs & Ahmed, 1973; Han, 1996; Hara, 1995; Hong, 2011; Hyun, 2004; James Clark & Wang, 2004; Ko et al., 2003; Kodate et al., 2010; Koyama, 2013; Lee, 1995; Liu & Carpenter, 2005; Loewenstein, 1953; Nolte & Hastings, 1991; Nyitray, 2010; Ma, 2010; Mcveigh, 1996; Ochiai & Aoyama, 2012; Sechiyama, 2013; Shivers, 1983; Simonton, 2006; Slote & De Vos, 1998; Sugano, 2011; Uno, 1993; Wang, 1999; Yoo 2008; Zarrow, 1988.

Research Team

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