

Article

Christian Education and the Construction of Female Gentility in Modern East Asia

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Abstract: This study explores the relationship between Christian education and the construction of female gentility in East Asia around the turn of the twentieth century. Because American missionary schools played an important role in the region, notions of female gentility were greatly influenced by the cultural values of the American middle class and, more specifically, American liberal arts colleges. The notion of the “new gentlewoman” helps to illuminate modern Protestant womanhood’s ambiguous relationship with feminism and nationalism. Recognizing that the Protestant notion of “female gentility” was internally racialized, in this study, I also pay attention to the question of race. While the scope of my research spans East Asia, in this paper, I examine Christian education in China, focusing specifically on Yenching Women’s College. I compare the college’s educational goals and curricula to the pedagogy at the male college of Yenching, the governmental women’s college, and other female colleges in Japan and Korea. In this study, I approach East Asia as a whole for several reasons: first, because a broader view of the region helps put the Chinese case into perspective; second, because the region was often dealt with together in missionary work; and lastly, because national differences cannot be assumed to be more substantial than other differences, such as those based on gender, class, generation, period, and province.

Keywords: gentility; Protestantism; new gentlewoman; missionary; China; Korea; Japan

1. Introduction

In this study, I explore the relationship between Christian women’s colleges and the construction of female gentility around the turn of the twentieth century in East Asia. Performing gentility was regarded as more important for female missionaries than for male missionaries, and as such, female students received more extensive instruction in gentility than male students at missionary colleges. Because American missionaries founded most of the Christian colleges in the region, the notion of female gentility was greatly influenced by the cultural values of the American middle class and, more specifically, the cultural values of American liberal arts colleges. I approach the American middle class as a shifting, heterogeneous term or a process of “making”, similar to E. P. Thompson’s view of the English working class (Thompson 1963). During the nineteenth century, certain occupations, lifestyles, and cultural values were formed following industrialization, urbanization, and “increasing equality of opportunity” in America (Archer and Blau 1989, p. 17). In relation to female gentility and Christian education in East Asia, I pay particular attention to professionalism and nuclear family as important American middle-class cultural values. As many new occupations, such as realtors, emerged around the turn of the century, the modern ideology of professionalism grew in the United States (US). The development of professionalism was associated with the growth of popular science, temporal division of work and leisure, and occupational organizations. Yet, Christian gentility kept a certain distance from professionalism as well as incorporating it.

As the word’s origin is associated with the gentry class, the notion of gentility does not center on “occupations” or “professions”. In English, “professionals” are distinguished from amateurs, other

workers, intellectuals, and the social strata of the gentry as a class (Freidson 1986, pp. 21–23). Moreover, the Protestant mission itself was not approached as a job or profession but, rather, characterized by religious “devotion”, “dedication”, and “commitment”. Protestant mission colleges for women in East Asia contributed to producing professionals and to professionalizing housewives’ work. I find that departments of home economics at mission colleges for women, such as that in Yenching Women’s College, are good examples of the implantation of the Christian civility of the American middle class in East Asia. Protestant missionaries in East Asia repeatedly promoted or implicated the idea that a woman’s place is in the home, but unlike the Victorian ideal of “the angel of the house”, the American middle class nurtured the ideal of professional housewives. Nuclear family was the main social unit of Western capitalism and also Protestantism. Female gentility based on such social backgrounds of nuclear family was not smoothly adapted to modern East Asia where extended family was still the dominant family type.

Around the turn of the century, liberal arts became the important field for elite education in East Asia. Interestingly, Philip West regards liberal arts as a kind of twentieth-century substitute for Confucian classics (West 1976, pp. 91, 124). Hyaeweol Choi argues that there was continuity between Confucianism and Christianity, because both attempted to locate women mainly in the domestic sphere, and she characterizes the Christian ideology as “divine domesticity” (Choi 2009; Choi and Jolly 2014). Modernity is a narrative term rather than a theoretical concept, according to Jameson (2013). The narratives of modernity regarding a “radical break” from tradition, such as Confucianism, were also repeatedly fostered by missionaries. In this process of reiteration, the binary ideology of West/East, modernity/tradition, and Christianity/Confucianism was constructed, and female missionaries exemplified modern women. The Confucian ethical code of gender stratification fortified female missionaries’ position in East Asia and to some extent helped the development of mission schools for girls in East Asia. The noble class in China and Japan did not seem hesitant about sending their daughters to girls’ schools and about switching from Confucian classics to American liberal arts for their children’s education. Both Confucian classics and liberal arts centered on character building and moral discipline and were detached from physical labor. I examine the educational goals and curricula of the Christian women’s colleges, comparing their pedagogies with the pedagogies of the governmental colleges.

Missionary colleges played an important role in producing “new women”, and in this paper, I try to explore the specific ways in which Christian education shaped the “feminism” and “nationalism” of the “new woman” discourses in modern East Asia. The ideal of the new woman promoted by Christian education cannot be fully explained by women’s emancipation or the “nation-building” project of the “new woman”. I find the notion of the “new gentlewoman” advantageous in exploring the tension between emancipation and constraint in Christian genteel womanhood. The Protestant mission seemed to have imposed heavier duties of gentility on women than on men. The new woman in Protestant education was characterized by domesticity as well as social contribution. Mission schools for women in the region also stressed women’s role in modern nation-building, but the political task was actualized only in the international order of the unequal relationships between the East and the West and also that among the countries within the region.

The different political situations of the countries in East Asia created differences in female gentility. Korea did not show a strong governmental leadership in education compared with Japan and China. Japan started such governmental reforms during the Meiji period and began regulating female education around 1900. In China, the government’s involvement in modern mass education, in particular in women’s education, started much later than Protestant mission education. Both in Japan and China, Protestant mission education was greatly or totally replaced by governmental education after 1945, whereas Protestant schools kept prospering in South Korea. I have also identified different histories of new womanhood in the region mainly because of the different political circumstances, although all three countries shared the new woman phenomenon with the rest of the world in the beginning of the twentieth century. In these three countries, the new woman discourses were generally

dominated by male intellectuals, and in Colonial Korea, the public cynicism toward and criticism of new women were stronger than in the other two countries. In the 1930s in China, “sensationalism” attached to the new woman was separately categorized by the loanword version, *modeng nüxing* (modern women), whereas the native word, *xin nüxing* (new women) maintained the idealistic image of the modern woman (Edwards 2000).

In this study, I approach the region as a whole for three reasons: first, although my main research area is China, a broader view of the region helps put the Chinese experience into perspective; second, I recognize that the region was often dealt with in a collective manner in missionary work; and third, I do not take it for granted that national differences are always more substantial than other differences, such as those based on gender, class, generation, periods, and provinces. In short, this is an examination of modern China approached via the regional context of East Asia rather than a comparative study that gives equal attention to each country. I try not to assume the nation as the primary unit for comparison and to provide insights that are difficult to gain in the research of each country individually. In terms of the educational objectives and curricula of mission schools, differences appear according to periods, denominations, regions, and school types, as well as countries. For instance, the educational goals of the Methodists and the Episcopalians were purportedly broader than those of the Presbyterians and Congregationalists in early-twentieth-century China. Notable differences also manifested between the curricula of male and female Christian schools in the region. The differences reflect how the American notion of female gentility was implanted in East Asia. As Karen Seat notes, American middle-class cultural values shaped the missionary education of Japan: “The majority of missionary educators in early Meiji sought to teach Japanese women how to make a home reflecting the values of middle-class Protestant America and their curricula reflected this goal” (Seat 2003, p. 326). This observation also applies to other East Asian countries.

2. Mission Schools for Women and Female Missionaries in East Asia

Until 1920, missionary colleges and universities accounted for more than 80% of higher education institutions in China. In 1921, there were only seven Chinese universities compared with the 16 missionary colleges and universities (Zha 2004, p. 3). American Protestant missions founded around 12 collegiate institutions in China between 1882 and 1912, and these institutions were subjected to more systematic regulations after 1922, when the United Board for Christian Higher Education in China was founded in New York.¹ Between 1902 and 1903, China introduced educational reform legislation modeled on the Japanese education system. The Japanese government decided to draw on elements of the German university system when founding higher education institutes, such as the Imperial University of Tokyo, because they recognized similarities between their own goals for social and economic development and those of nineteenth-century Germany (Altbach and Selvaratnam 1989, p. 28). Both Japan and China seemed to be attracted to the German education model, viewing it as advantageous when it came to the preservation of Confucian values. Founded in 1898, the Imperial University of Peking was influenced by the Imperial University of Tokyo and the German Humboldtian model. Unlike the 1902–1903 legislation, however, the new educational legislation of 1922 and 1924 followed the American university model, introducing a tighter monitoring system and regulations, and the 1933–1936 legislation resulted in increased centralized control by the government over higher education institutions (Zha 2004, p. 3). In the first half of the twentieth century, before the founding of the People’s Republic of China, governmental reforms of higher education seemed to have gradually reflected the influence of American Protestant colleges in the country.

¹ Shantung Christian University, founded by Calvin Mateer of the Presbyterian Mission in 1882; Peking University, founded by Bishop Charles H. Fowler and the Reverend Leander W. Pilcher in 1886; North China College at Tungchow (near Peking), founded by Davello Z. Sheffield of the American Board in 1889; and St. John’s College at Shanghai, first founded by Bishop Samuel I. J. Schereschewsky in 1879 and actually functioning as a college in 1890 (Liu 1960, p. 71).

In Korea, three major Christian mission schools emerged in 1885 (i.e., Ewha, Baejae, and Gyeongsin), and some data indicate that the number of mission schools reached 796 by 1910 and that the number of girls' schools exceeded the number of boys' schools. Meanwhile, the number of government-run primary schools (*so hakgyo*) grew from 38 in 1896 to 110 by 1905 (Jeong and Lee 1994, p. 20). To produce schoolteachers, the government also founded two schools, Dongmun and Yukyeong Gongwon, in 1886, and the reformers behind the Gabo Reform of 1894 emphasized the importance of modern education.

As is well known, missionary education played a significant role in the education of women in Asia. In China, missionaries ran 38 mission schools for girls in 1877 and educated more girls relative to boys than did government schools. American Protestant missionaries founded the first college for women 13 years before the government university admitted its first female student (Hunter 1984, pp. 22–25). In Japan, as the government took the helm in building a modern education system, including with respect to higher education, missionaries took initiative only in women's education from kindergarten to junior college (Nakayama 1989, p. 100). It is said that 34 major female mission schools were founded between 1870 and 1889 (Seat 2003, p. 327). The Japanese government concentrated its efforts on male education until the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), after which it enacted educational ordinances, such as the Higher Girls' School Law (1899), dramatically increasing the number of public girls' schools: the number of public higher education institutions for women grew from eight in the mid-1890s to 89 in 1905 (Seat 2003, p. 330). In their competition with public higher education institutions and also in their efforts to receive government accreditation, female mission schools started to present religious activities as "voluntary" and to teach the Bible as part of "Morals" rather than as religion in the twentieth century (Seat 2003, p. 331). The fact that the Japanese government had a firm grip on education seems to have been a substantial factor in preventing Christian education and Christianity from prospering in the country.

In Korea, women's education was pioneered by Ewha Hakdang (School). Mrs. Mary Fitch Scranton, who came to Korea in 1885 as a representative of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (established in 1869), started a girls' school in Seoul. On behalf of the Society, Scranton purchased five acres of land close to the American Embassy in Seoul and started to recruit students. Although the school charged no tuition or boarding fees, it had difficulties recruiting students in its early years due to the unequal relationship between men and women, public fear regarding foreigners, and poverty. The school expanded to include a middle school (*Jungdeung gwa* 1904), higher education (*daehak gwa* 1910), a kindergarten (1914), and a college or specialized school (*jeonmun hakgyo* 1925) that received accreditation as the first full-scale university in Korea in 1946 (Ewha Womans University Ewha yeoja daehakgyo). During Japanese colonization, only specialized schools (*jeonmun hakgyo* (K), *senmon gakkō* (J)) were allowed as higher educational institutions except for the Imperial University of Gyeongseong, which was founded in Seoul as one of the Imperial Universities of Japan in 1924. Yonhui, a prominent Protestant College and the predecessor of Yonsei University, was also a college (*jeonmun hakgyo*) during the colonial period.

Female mission schools in general attempted to educate women to become teachers, housewives, and medical workers. For instance, Ewha stated that they aimed to produce mainly three types of elite females: "housewives who will make progress of the Korean home; teachers who will be in charge of women's education; and medical workers" (Kim 2006, p. 21). The goals of missionary education of women were also configured in relation to nation-building in each country. For instance, Chinese mission schools for girls shared the goal of "producing useful women for a new China" (Chin 2003, p. 338). Such nationalist language was particularly strong at the Ewha Girls' School in Korea. The founder and the succeeding presidents of the school emphasized the (re)production of "useful women", including teachers and medical workers, to contribute to nation-building. In particular, they hoped that Korean women would ultimately run the school (Ewha Womans University Ewha yeoja daehakgyo). Similarly, in modern Japan, many women received higher education in the hope of getting "involved in influencing the direction of New Japan" (Seat 2003, p. 326).

Notable graduates of Christian women's schools became medical doctors or professors in their regions. For instance, seven female students graduated from the medical college of the Presbyterian Board at Canton before 1910, and Lee Sun-Chau, a granddaughter of the first ordained Chinese minister of the Methodist Church, Rev. Hok Shu Chau, was arguably the first female doctor to practice Western medicine in the country (Montgomery 1910, pp. 216–17). In Korea, Kim Jeomdong (also known as Esther Park) became the first female medical doctor after studying at the Ewha Girls' High School and the Baltimore Women's Medical School in the United States. Kim's success was widely attributed to her personal relationship with a medical missionary to Korea, Rosetta Sherwood Hall, rather than to the school itself. Kim was inspired by Hall's work helping people with impairments, married a man to whom Hall introduced her, and was brought to the United States together with her husband by Hall. However, in their female gentility pedagogy, mission colleges for girls seem to have been more concerned with producing professional housewives than professionals. Predicated on the notion of gender differences, Protestant education for women did not focus on equality between men and women. Ewha Girls' School and College, in its early years, carried out the "parental duty" of finding spouses for students to ease parents' reluctance to send their daughters to the school. The school also had week-long holidays for making kimchi for the winter (*Gimjang banghak*) in early November every year, during which students and teachers made kimchi together (Kim 2006). At Ewha, teachers and students also formed stronger bonds, which could be characterized as parenthood, as compared with mission schools for girls in China and Japan.

The proliferation of Protestant mission schools for women in East Asia stemmed primarily from the rapid growth of women's foreign mission societies in North America in the late nineteenth century. One historian estimated the number of such societies to be around 40 and the number of members to be more than three million around 1900 (Robert 2004). One of the more successful societies was the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which was founded in Boston, MA, in 1869. Mrs. Scranton who founded the Ewha School worked for this society. Around the turn of the century, there were more female missionaries than male missionaries in both China and Japan: indeed, by 1919, there were more than twice as many women as men in China and, in fact, as many single women as married and single men combined (Hunter 1984, p. 13). The Methodist Women's Society sent out only unmarried women as missionaries (Montgomery 1910, p. 37). In Japan, two-thirds of all foreign Protestant missionaries between 1859 and 1882 were women (Ballhatchet 2007, p. 180).

The Confucian ethical code of gender stratification in East Asia had particular significance for female missionaries in the field: "Women who had performed auxiliary work in American parishes, raising money and doing promotional work for projects carried out by men, found that the gender stratification of Chinese society worked to their benefit; it allowed them to claim sole credit for the initiation and completion of their own work" (Hunter 1984, p. 15).

Female missionary educators in general had distinctive academic qualifications. For female missionaries, performing genteel Christian womanhood was seen as a more effective missionary task than being directly involved in religious programs such as preaching. As Jane Hunter points out, "the key to the impact of missionary women on Chinese women's history lies less in their religious program than in the secular message transmitted by their lives" (Hunter 1984, p. 26). Missionary women tried to demonstrate the superiority of Christian civilization in their manners, behaviors, appearances, and refined tastes. Luella Miner, the founder of the North China Union Women's College, the predecessor of Yenching Women's College, emphasized the importance of women missionaries appearing graceful: "The American woman who will not try to make herself look presentable under the most adverse circumstances is considered a disgrace to the sisterhood" (Hunter 1984, p. 141). As Hunter points out, civilized female culture was not simply a matter of style but of substance too (Hunter 1984, p. 173). Christians, particularly Christian wives, were supposed to showcase the Christian home (Montgomery 1910, p. 218).

3. Bicultural Nobility at Yenching Women's College

Appointed by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions for service in China, Luella Miner founded the North China Union Women's College, the predecessor of Yenching Women's College, in the compound of the American Board Mission in Beijing in 1905.² Yenching University was founded sometime between 1915 and 1920, consolidating four schools: the Methodist-run Peking University, the North China Union College, the North China Union Women's College, and the School of Theology. Although the women's college merged with the men's college in 1920, in reality it maintained only minimal contact with the students and teachers of the men's college until 1926 when both colleges moved to the new university campus.

Mission schools and colleges, especially early on, attracted the children of aristocratic families, and 17 great-grandchildren of the famous statesman, Zeng Guofan and five grandchildren of Liang Qichao, a representative reformer attended Yenching College (West 1976, p. 91). Yenching College which was located in the former imperial gardens charged high tuition and built a reputation as a "school for the aristocracy" (*guizu xuexiao*). In Meiji Japan, daughters of the former samurai class attended mission schools, but many Japanese became interested in female education as women became important industrial labor forces in early-twentieth-century Japan (Seat 2003, p. 326). Meanwhile, Ewha School wanted to recruit the daughters of noble (*Yangban*) families but could not. Nevertheless, its beautiful campus on a hill in the center of Seoul attracted many daily visitors, and the school administrators used this as a way of attracting students.

Yenching's undergraduate curriculum closely resembled the American liberal arts model for over 30 years and attempted to provide bicultural as well as bilingual education (West 1976, pp. 91, 124).³ John L. Stuart, the president of the college set the educational aim of the college as integrating the "finest values" of the two cultures (Edwards 1959, p. 273). The bicultural gentility promoted by Yenching Women's College embodied the new gentlewoman's "modern-yet-modest" attitude: a compromise between "new" and "old" that achieved the total progressiveness of new women and overcame the conservatism of old gentlewomen. The bicultural prestige of being familiar with both traditional Chinese and modern Western cultures became the socio-cultural distinction of the college. Yet, Yenching's claim of bicultural nobility seems to show the continuity between Confucian values and Christian ideals, in particular in their shared goal of producing the sociocultural elite.

Female mission schools in the region typically offered English, science, and physical training courses, similar to male mission schools, and some missionary girls' schools in Japan included courses in Latin, Greek, and logic as well. Ewha emphasized physical training and education in foreign languages. As I mentioned elsewhere, Yenching Women's College emphasized instruction in Western music in comparison with Yenching Men's College.⁴ Choir classes were part of the compulsory curriculum for women from the pre-freshman to sophomore years (Yenching Women's College 1925, p. 11). American middle-class norms of femininity seem to have influenced the social codes of modern Chinese gentlewomen.

² In *Peking University Bulletin no. 20, Supplementary Bulletin Regarding Courses at Yenching Women's College 1924–1925*, Philip West says that dating the founding of Yenching to 1916, when its boards of trustees in New York and managers in Peking were formed, is convenient (West 1976, p. 3, 34–35).

³ One of the important decisions for mission schools in China was whether courses should be taught in English or Chinese. Shantung Christian University and North China College strongly promoted the Chinese language and tried to use as many translations as possible. Peking University (established in 1886, Bishop Fowler and the Reverend Pilcher) offered two optional programs: one taught in Chinese, and the other taught in English. St. John's University in Shanghai made the decision in 1881 to teach all courses in English except for Chinese literature and built a strong reputation in English instruction (Liu 1960, p. 74).

⁴ The women's college bulletin from 1924 contains a list of the various fees, including fees for piano and organ lessons at the college as follows: "Tuition per year \$50.00; Room, light, and heat \$10.00; Board, first grade, per semester \$23.00 (second grade \$18.00) ... Piano lessons, with use of instrument for one hour a day, per semester \$18.00 (without use of instrument \$12.00); Organ lessons, per semester \$5.00; Use of an organ for hour a day \$2.00" *Supplementary Bulletin Regarding Courses at Yenching Women's College 1924–1925, Bulletin 20*, p. 3. (Hong 2009)

In addition to its emphasis on music education, Yenching College's department of home economics was a point of distinction. The academic discipline of home economics seemed to integrate the American middle-class focus on science and professionalism with the Victorian ideals of genteel womanhood. Yenching College established its department of home economics during the 1923–1924 school year, and in 1928, classes were formally separated into three main specialties: home management (*jiating guanli*), home sciences (*jiating kexue*), and home arts (*jiating meishu*) (Schneider 2009, p. 138). In the 1930s, graduates of the department of home economics were supposed to work as middle school home economics teachers, food service managers in hospitals and other similar institutions, and daycare providers in social service organizations (Schneider 2009, p. 139). In the United States, a Department of Household Economy and Hygiene was established in the late 1800s, and scholars such as Ava Milam played pivotal roles in disseminating and shaping the academic discipline in East Asia, including at Yenching College (Schneider 2009, p. 131). Home economics departments can be seen as attempts to professionalize and standardize the work of housewives through the integration of science and liberal arts subjects.

4. The New Gentlewoman and Christian Womanhood in Modern China

I previously pointed out the significance for female missionaries of delivering Christian messages through their lives. I find that “new women” in East Asia took on a similar burden. In the three countries, the Chinese-character words “the new youth” (*xin qingnian*, *shin cheongnyeon*, *shin seinen*) and “the new woman” (*xin nüxing*, *shin yeoseong*, *shin josei*) were widely used in the early twentieth century. Although “youth” (*qingnian*) was a gender-neutral word, in reality, the “new youth” indicated mainly male intellectuals. It connoted progressive, self-conscious critics of society, and the gap between the two concepts of “new youth” and “new woman” was wide. While the “new youth” was the producer of public discourses, the “new woman” was the object of the public gaze. While progressiveness of *xin qingnian* was found primarily in their intellectuality, progressiveness of *xin nüxing* was recognized first and foremost by their lifestyles. The primary marker of a *xin nüxing* was her lifestyle or, more often than not, simply her fashion and hairstyle. This explains the public scrutiny directed toward new women's private lives and bodies. Miner's aforementioned remark showed her discomfort and annoyance with a journalist who wrote a critical report on the appearance of female missionaries. The implicit social supposition seemed to be that women, either modern or genteel, needed to demonstrate their newness or gentility through their lives more than through their intellectual output.

Helen Barrett Montgomery's book, *Western Women in Eastern Lands* provides a Christian perspective on the modern “new woman” phenomenon. She was a writer and the first woman president of the Northern Baptist Convention, which made her the first woman president of any religious denomination in the United States. In a chapter titled “The New Woman in the Orient”, Montgomery argues that the worldwide movement of women's liberation around the turn of the century, witnessed even in “the most backward and despotic” areas, accounted for a “wider adumbration of the spirit of Christ than we dream[t]” (1910, p. 207). After discussing the “great progress” Christianity made in the lives of women in Turkey and India, she claims that the new woman was most evident in China. The abolition of foot binding was above all seen as the greatest achievement of missionary campaigns in China. Montgomery defines the key characteristics of the new woman as resistance to the backward customs of subservience and superstition.

However, I believe that the Christian achievement in the area of women's liberation is better represented by the term “new gentlewoman” than by the term “new woman”. An important task for Christian missionaries was to introduce modern or “Western” civilization to the countries where they pursued their missions as an alternative to feudal ethics and superstitions, but missionary educators were careful not to provide radical college educations, especially to the nobility and women. Although it was not intended to describe genteel Christian womanhood, the word “new-style gentlewoman” (*xin guixiu*) in modern China effectively epitomized the principal characteristics of the Protestant ideal of womanhood. In his discussion of contemporary women writers, the Chinese critic Yi Zhen (Yu Yifu,

1903–1982) placed them into three categories based on the types of female characters in their stories: Bing Xin and Su Xuelin as “*guixiu pai zuojia*” (gentlewomen writers), Ling Shuhua as “*xin guixiu pai zuojia*” (new-style gentlewomen writers), and Ding Ling and Feng Yuanjun as “*xin nüxing pai zuojia*” (new-style women writers). Women writers were thus labeled as “gentlewomen”, “new gentlewomen”, or “new-style women” depending on how much their female protagonists subverted traditional social norms.⁵

All five female writers Yi mentioned in the article—particularly Bing Xin and Ding Ling—were representative women writers from modern China. Although Yi Zhen did not link gentility to Christianity, interestingly, the three writers he categorized as (new) gentlewoman writers had connections with Christianity. Bing Xin and Ling Shuhua graduated from Yenching Women’s College while Su Xuelin converted to Catholicism in the mid-1920s after studying in France (Hoster 2017). The new-style gentlewoman seemed to have embodied the enigmatic position between defiance and compliance—between Western-style education and traditional Chinese social mores—occupied by students and graduates of Yenching Women’s College.

A comparison of the Protestant college, Yenching Women’s College, to the governmental college, the Beijing Women’s Normal College, clearly elucidates the characteristics of Christian education for women. Both were representative elite colleges for women in Republican China. The Beijing Women’s Normal College was founded as the Capital Women’s Normal School (*Jingshi nüzi shifan xuetao*) in July 1908 at the suggestion of a royal secret inspector (*yushi*) Huang Ruiqi. As soon as the Republic was established, its name was changed to the Beijing Normal Women’s School (*Beijing nüzi shifan xuexiao*). In line with the Ministry of Education’s official promulgation of the establishment of the women’s normal college (*nüzi gaodeng shifan xuexiao*) on 12 March 1919, the government founded the National Beijing Women’s Normal College in April 1919 (Lei et al. 1993, pp. 329–32). Strategically established and supported by the government, the college was renowned nationwide as an elite higher educational institution for women in Republican China. The students were known to have received a high level of organized education. Notably, Li Dazhao and Lu Xun both taught at the college, and it produced a number of distinguished scholars and writers, as well as educators. For instance, Lu Yin (1899–1934), Feng Yuanjun (1900–1974), Su Xuelin (1897–), and Shi Pingmei (1902–1928) became notable writers. Teaching was one of the most promising jobs available to women at the time; thus, normal colleges generally attracted quite a few outstanding female students. Furthermore, the college’s location in the capital contributed to its attractiveness to distinguished female students from throughout the country in the same way that some prestigious colleges and universities in Beijing, such as Beijing, Tsinghua, and Yenching, drew excellent male students from all over China. Of course, it was much harder for female students to receive family support to enter a larger world, such as Beijing. The well-known story of Li Chao’s tragic death demonstrates the severity of the conflicts that sometimes arose between zealous female students and their unwilling families. It seems safe to say that there were more barriers preventing women from becoming “new women” than preventing men from becoming “new youth”.

While it was almost impossible for female students to pay tuition and other fees on their own at Yenching Women’s College, Beijing Women’s Normal College charged no tuition fees in principle.⁶

⁵ Yi treated Bing Xin and Su Xuelin as typical “gentlewomen writers”, explaining that the authors depict a love that stays comfortably within feudal manners (*zai lijiao de fanwei zhi nei*). Ding Ling and Feng Yuanjun were representative of the “new-style women writers”, because they promoted free love (*ziyou lian’ai*). Ling Shuhua was the only example of the “new-style gentlewomen writers”. The lady-wife (*taitai*) characters in her stories were, in their conduct, “close to the ‘new-style woman’ but in their mentality, cannot overcome the gentlewoman’s bad habits”, he explains (Yi 1933, pp. 4–6). About Ling Shuhua as the new gentlewoman, see (Hong 2009).

⁶ According to Wen-hsin Yeh, the Beijing Women’s Normal College did not charge tuition during the Republican Period: “With the exception of normal colleges (National Beijing Normal University and National Beijing Women’s Normal University), tuition was charged in all institutions of higher education during the Republican period” (Yeh 1990, p. 196). However, in her autobiography, Lu Yin states that she had to earn the tuition (*xuefei*) for entrance. In this instance, she may mean the boarding fee, or the National Beijing Women’s Normal College may have charged tuition fees before it became the National Beijing Women’s Normal University in 1924. In contrast, the tuition fee at Yenching Women’s College in 1924 was \$50 per year, and, with other fees, students paid about \$160 per year (Yenching Women’s College 1925, p. 6).

Socially, the family backgrounds of students at the college were not as lofty as those of students at Yenching Women's College. In general, if new women at Yenching College were recognized primarily for their beauty, new women at Beijing Normal Women's College were marked by their enthusiasm.⁷ The Beijing Women's Normal College came to play an active role in social movements and quite often served as the center of socio-political struggles, including the incident of 30 May 1925. The students at the college participated in and organized various student movements and cultural activities together with other colleges and universities in Beijing.

The differences between the two women's colleges in Beijing seem to have anticipated the destiny of Christian education in communist China. The bourgeois values of genteel femininity had only a confined application, and they yielded to a more radical or fundamental form of feminism and political activism. If the governmental women's college, the Beijing Normal Women's College, produced new women who actively pursued the total package of modernity including equality between men and women and national liberation, the Christian education for women at Yenching Women's College nurtured a moderate and standardized form of modernity. Ultimately, in the context of modern China, students at the Beijing Normal Women's College were closer to the "new woman" ideal, and those at Yenching Women's College more closely fit the "new gentlewoman" model.

5. Protestant Ideals of "The Angel of the House"

Female mission schools in general aimed to produce women who would create "civilized home[s]" with knowledge about modern family life. American missionaries were influenced by the Victorian ideals of "the Angel of the House" and projected women's images as wives and mothers with moral influence in the domestic sphere. This educational vision for women encountered various problems in different East Asian countries. For instance, Seat points out that "in Japan, the traditional view was that women were not adept at training children in morals" (Seat 2003, p. 325). Furthermore, in early modern East Asia, it was not uncommon for wealthy men to live with concubines as well as a wife in the same house, which made it difficult for the wife to become "the" angel.

Around the turn of the century, the Victorian genteel womanhood of "the angel of the house" was more influential in Japan than in China. Among many other factors including the political turmoil of modern China, the class structures of the two societies seem to have contributed to this difference. Immediately following the 1868 Meiji Restoration, the 1870s were years of radical and speedy modernization in Japan. With radical reforms including the implementation of compulsory education, the middle class grew to occupy a significant portion of society before the twentieth century. Meanwhile, in modern China, the ideal of the bourgeois gentlewoman remained alien, as the middle class was not as visible as it was in Japan.

In Japan, early Meiji Protestants focused on fulfilling Christian principles in their marriages and home lives. American Protestant boards, which included both male and female members, seem to have agreed that the family was at the center of their progress- and civilization-focused evangelism. Helen Ballhatchet says that a major purpose of mission schools for girls was to teach them about Christian home life, including the ideal of marriage as a love match between equal partners (Ballhatchet 2007, p. 180). The Confucian ethics of separating the genders after the age of six remained dominant in early Meiji Japan, and Protestant communities offered opportunities for socializing between genders. Many early Protestant leaders were keen to find Christian partners and establish equal conjugal relationships. Ballhatchet studied the marriage lives of five early Protestant leaders in Japan: Ibuka Kajinosuke, Uemura Masahisa, Ebina Danjō, Kozaki Hiromichi, and Uchimura Kanzō. She focused on the questions of how partners were chosen, how partnerships developed, and how the tensions that arose were

⁷ "In the early 1930s, the 'numerical superiority' of Yenching on three counts was widely recognized: its plethora of beautiful young women; the number of Western-style suits owned by its men; and the variety of social parties held on its campus" (Yeh 1990, p. 225).

addressed (Ballhatchet 2007, p. 177). The list of the male Protestant leaders included the leaders of the Kumamoto Band, the Sapporo Band, the Japan Congregational Church, and the founder of the non-church movement, whose wives were also deeply involved in Protestant organizations, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Ballhatchet found that the male Protestant leaders of Meiji Japan tried to distance themselves from the unequal marriage relationships in Confucian societies and to fulfill the "Christian idea of marriage" of a "pure joining together of two bodies and souls" (Ballhatchet 2007, pp. 184, 187). Uchimura Kanzō had the most conservative attitude towards women as seen in a letter in which he wrote, "a wife well used is a decided help in our future career; misused, a grand obstacle . . . ", and his marriage with Asada Take ended in a bitter divorce (Ballhatchet 2007, p. 190). Ballhatchet attributes Uchimura's conservative views of women to the insufficient gender interaction experience in the Christian community. She also found a general contrast between the male Protestants' progressive public personas and their conservative attitudes towards their wives in the domestic sphere, although the contrast between their public and domestic lives was much greater in the cases of the leftwing intellectuals of early Japan.

What I find noteworthy from Ballhatchet's study is the conflicts that typically arose between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. The Protestant better homes gospel was based on a small nuclear family girded by strengthened conjugal relationships and rational domestic management (Schneider 2009, pp. 126–27). If the vertical relationship between generations is the mainstay of the Confucian clan or family, the horizontal relationship of the married couple serves as the foundation of the Protestant nuclear family. In the Meiji transitional period, Protestant family ethics were not smoothly adapted to traditional family customs. The nuclear family gradually came together as a result of urbanization; however, both Protestant genteel womanhood and Confucian womanly virtues confined women to positions within the domestic sphere and stabilized wives' subservience to varying degrees. The remark by a secretary of one mission board, Rufus Anderson, seemed to represent the American Protestants' stance on the gender issue around the turn of the century: "Woman was made for man, and as a general thing man cannot long be placed where he can do without her assistance." A woman might thus be expected "to exert much influence in the department of education", but "the center of her appropriate sphere is, indeed, within the domestic circle" (Hunter 1984, p. 11).

6. The Racial Politics of Christian Gentility

Protestantism's compatibility with modern capitalism has been broadly explored since the publication of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930). In relation to modern mass education or capitalist education, Weber highlighted the different attitudes towards education and occupation held by Catholics and Protestants as follows:

Among the Catholic graduates themselves the percentage of those graduating from the institutions preparing, in particular, for technical studies and industrial and commercial occupations, but in general from those preparing for middle-class business life, lags still farther behind the percentage of Protestants. . . . Catholics prefer the sort of training which the humanistic Gymnasium affords. That is a circumstance to which the above explanation does not apply, but which, on the contrary, is one reason why so few Catholics are engaged in capitalistic enterprise. (Weber 1992, p. 6)

Similar differences between Catholic and Protestant education have also manifested in East Asia. In China, the Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries focused on transmitting Western knowledge and culture to the court and the nobility, whereas Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries expanded the boundaries of education to the masses (Kitson 2013). Meanwhile, pre-Meiji Japan limited Western learning to the contact zone of Dejima Island in Nagasaki; between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Japanese received Western knowledge mainly from Dutch traders in the areas of technology and medicine, calling this process "Rangaku" (Dutch learning). French Catholic missionaries came to Korea relatively late in the nineteenth century, introducing new

forms of knowledge, such as mathematics and astronomy. After Protestantism arrived around 1900, Protestant Christianity including Protestant schools rapidly expanded in modern Korea (Rausch 2008).

Robert D. Woodberry examined the associations between Protestantism and various dimensions of East Asian modernity including democracy and nationalism. According to Woodberry, Protestantism contributed to the “revolution” of mass printing not by advancing new technologies but by reconfiguring printing for the masses. For instance, he argues that missionaries spurred mass printing and journalism in China and reinvigorated the Korean phonetic alphabet (Hangul), which had been neglected by the literati class after its creation in 1443 in Korea (Woodberry 2007). In that sense, “print capitalism”, the term coined by Benedict Anderson, may also be reframed as “print Protestantism”. Anderson illuminates how capitalist entrepreneurs printed books and newspapers in the vernacular and how the mass printing industry and market contributed to the construction of national identities—in other words, “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983).

Protestant education helped to develop nationalist movements in the region. Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points Speech was framed as “Self-determinism of the Ethnic-Nation” in Korea and China, culminating in the March 1st Movement in Korea and the May Fourth Movement in China. While a great number of Protestants participated in the March 1st Movement, including the famous martyr and student at the Ewha Girls’ High School, Ryu Gwansun, the May Fourth Movement was anti-Western as well as anti-imperialist. This difference stemmed primarily from the feeling of “betrayal” that resulted from the Versailles Peace Conference (January 1919), which granted Shandong to Japan, as Woodberry also points out. This example seems to show how seemingly universal ideals of modernity, such as democracy and nationalism, were internally racialized values. The universal and timeless doctrines of Protestantism were implemented in a conspicuously racialized way. In fact, Rey Chow’s book *The Protestant Ethnic & the Spirit of Capitalism* rereads Weber’s text and other Western theories from a politics of ethnicity perspective and shows how Western theories, including poststructuralism, “essentialized non-Western others’ differences in the form of timeless attributes” (Chow 2002, p. ix). She adds the “white race” to Weber’s linkage between Protestantism and capitalism.

The gentility of missionary women also internalized and consolidated the cultural superiority of imperial subjectivity. Hunter emphasizes the social elitism of women missionaries, according to which they perceived themselves as guardians of civilization, and she identifies a correlation between the “women’s crusade” and the interests of the American government in China around the turn of the century (Hunter 1984, p. 173). As a “gentle” way of responding to the claim that sees (American) missionaries as cultural imperialists, Carol Chin calls American missionary women “beneficent imperialists” (Chin 2003). Cultural imperialism was predicated on the notion of racial superiority. Missionaries’ books, reports, diaries, and letters were often full of racial stereotypes—that is, the othering process of Orientalism. Lydia Liu discusses how the myth of “the national character” was constructed through such stereotyping of other races, as seen in *Chinese Characteristics* (Smith 1894), written by the influential American missionary Arthur Henderson Smith (Liu 1995). A paragraph from the book merits quotation here:

In the item of sleep, the Chinese establishes the same difference between himself and the Occidental as in the directions already specified. Generally speaking, he is able to sleep anywhere. None of the trifling disturbances which drive us to despair annoy him. With a brick for a pillow, he can lie down on his bed of stalks or mud bricks or rattan and sleep the sleep of the just, with no reference to the rest of the creation. (Smith 1894, sec. 11)

Missionary writings are often filled with vividly detailed descriptions in order to demonstrate their experiences in the “field”. The Edinburgh World Missionary Conference provided general surveys of non-Christian countries for their missionary work, including China, Korea, and Japan. The surveys undoubtedly included a great number of stereotypes, but interestingly, when they listed “unfavourable factors” for missionary work in Japan, they also included a somewhat self-critical voice: “the godless lives of many Europeans in Oriental ports, and the apparent impotence of Christianity in the West to cure such evils as gross impurity, pauperism, domestic discord, industrial strife,

international bitterness, and the race prejudice exhibited in connection with the anti-Oriental agitation" (World Missionary Conference 1910, p. 53)

Some women missionaries also shared with male missionaries a callous attitude of racial superiority, consolidating the subjectivity of white (American) women. For instance, Tisdale Hobart, the sister of a respected member of the Presbyterian women's board, openly expressed a concern which many missionaries shared, "the problem of the discipline of that race who served us", juxtaposing the relationship between missionary women and Chinese servants and the relationship between American women of the South and "their black people" (Hobart 1926, p. 84; Hunter 1984, p. 167).

7. Conclusions

In this study, I explored how missionary education helped shape female gentility in East Asia. I examined various questions surrounding Christian genteel womanhood, such as class, race, and nation. Early American missionaries to Asia believed that genteel Christian womanhood was the core of civilization and a strong means of overturning the entire structure of superstition and idolatry (Seat 2003, p. 325). Yet, as scholars such as Choi argue, Christian norms were also in tune with Confucian norms. Christian womanhood was well represented by the term "new gentlewoman" in a restrained form of modernity that included feminism. I have stressed the role of American middle-class cultural values and American liberal arts colleges in constructing the notion of female gentility in East Asia, because American Protestant mission schools were dominant in the beginning of twentieth century in the region. Although American middle-class cultural values cannot be seen as fixed characteristics, I have paid particular attention to the values of "professionalism" and "nuclear family", because they were important for the construction of female gentility in the region. Education of music was emphasized in mission schools for girls and the department of home economics was a distinctive contribution by American Protestantism. The Victorian virtues of domesticity mediated by American Protestant values of science were thus implanted in the region. In relation to "professionalism", I found emphasis on the "professionalization of housework" rather than the production of professional women in mission colleges for women. As the Protestant ideal of better homes was based on the model of the nuclear family, it created complexities when it was introduced to East Asia. Local new women's problems in embracing protestant domesticity were evident in Protestant families in Meiji Japan. Quite a few radical new women in Korea and Japan did not stick to Christianity. Among the three examined countries, Christian education remains very strong in Korea.

In East Asia, boundaries were blurred between efforts to "modernize", "Christianize", "civilize", "westernize", and "colonize". Throughout the twentieth century, Christian education took different routes in China, Korea, and Japan due to various factors, such as underdevelopment and state control. Colonial politics played a great role in shaping different forms of female gentility in the region. The Japanese government researched various models of education and had a firm control of education, and its colonization of Korea shaped Korean education greatly, in particular after Japan began to engage in "cultural colonization" in 1919. Whereas in imperialist Japan Protestant education did not take root, in colonized Korea, it prospered. Korean new women confronted greater barriers than Japanese and Chinese new women. In "semi-colonial" China, by which I mean China having been unofficially colonized by multiple imperialist forces, nationalist education was seen as an important way of keeping sovereignty, and the "new gentlewoman" of Christian genteel womanhood yielded to a more radical form of the "new woman".

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