
Teachers' Schools and the Making
of the Modern Chinese Nation-State,
1897-1937



China in the 1930s





Introduction



In 1997, a series of magazine and newspaper articles and radio and television broadcasts heralded the centennial of the establishment of China's first teachers' school. One year before the Hundred Days of Reform, Shanghai's Nanyang Public School (*Nanyang gongxue*) first opened the doors of a new section – *shifan yuan* (an institutional label that would soon be applied to new schools all over China – which had been created to train primary and secondary schoolteachers. Between 1897 and today, China has experienced reforms and revolutions; at every turn, the place of the teacher in society has shifted and, with it, efforts to create suitable teachers' schools. The modernization of education has followed a tortuous path, never straying far from the political and social transformations of the past century.

This book addresses one part of that story – the development of teachers' schools from 1897 to 1937, when the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War obliged many schools to close. I have written an account of the transformation of both institutions and society in the politically tumultuous decades of the early twentieth century, focusing on the unique nature of Chinese teachers' schools, which were a hybrid model that bridged Chinese and Western educational systems and ideals. Although based on a modification of Western models, these schools, through utilizing a local cultural and institutional inheritance that honoured the role of teachers as socio-political leaders, constantly adjusted themselves to the needs of Chinese society. One might say that teachers' schools propelled the age-old tradition of linking politics and education into the twentieth century.

The industrial age was marked by the emergence of education as central to modernity. By establishing modern schools, the state penetrated local society. Education, traditionally left to religious, kinship, and occupational organizations, became a public affair. As Ernest Gellner has noted, modern schools imparted a standardized national “high culture” to the masses, making modern economic, political, and social interaction possible.¹ Eugen Weber showed in his famous study of the “modernization of rural France”



4 Introduction

that mass education led peasants to identify with the nation, integrate into the modern world, and become conversant with urban official culture.² And in Southeast Asia, modern education created an imagined community crucial to the spread of nationalism.³ Although certain features have proven general in the development of modern education, each country has travelled its own particular road, producing distinct results.

The modern teacher has been both the creation of this momentous transformation and its instrument. In France, teachers were “harbingers of enlightenment and of the Republican message that reconciled the benighted masses with a new world, superior in wellbeing and democracy.”⁴ During the Third Republic, pioneering female teachers challenged a predominantly male profession and advanced the cause of sexual equality.⁵ Teachers also played the part of rabble-rousers: they educated and mobilized peasants in the early twentieth-century Russian and Mexican Revolutions.⁶ In spite of being a product of industrial society, the formation of teachers as a professional corps, their methods of training, and the role they played in the social and political arena varied in each society due to different cultural heritages and sociopolitical settings.

Unlike most Western states, at the turn of the nineteenth century, China already possessed a countrywide network of schools, supplemented by state and private academies and by the community and family schools that had for over a millennium prepared young men to sit for the civil and military examinations. Until the abolition of the civil service examination system in 1905, teachers were generally the by-product of these examinations. As early as the Tang Dynasty (618-907) the Confucian master Han Yu (768-824) had defined the responsibilities of the teacher as “passing down the essence of Confucian doctrine” (*chuan Dao*), “transmitting knowledge” (*shou ye*), and “elucidating the subtle meaning” (*jie huo*).⁷ The Chinese term for teachers’ schools, *shifan*, can be traced back over a thousand years. In late imperial times, it came to be applied to Confucian teaching officials (*ruxue jiaoguan*), who had a heavy moral responsibility to “serve as role models for people” (*wei ren shibiao*).⁸ The term was revived at the turn of the twentieth century and applied to modern professional teachers.⁹ Due to the high expectations associated with them, teachers’ schools were given a special position in the modern Chinese educational system.

In the late nineteenth century, Japan and many Western countries established special teachers’ schools to staff their expanding educational systems. Over time, the schools were replaced by teacher training courses in the regular education system, and programs were developed to certify teachers. Since their beginnings in the early twentieth century up to the present, Chinese teachers’ schools have maintained a vast independent system.¹⁰

The Chinese teachers’ school system was parallel to, but separate from, the regular system of secondary and higher education. It included secondary

teachers' schools, colleges, and universities as well as less formal training programs. This system extended from the capital to provincial cities and county towns. For most of the twentieth century, students preparing to work as teachers paid no tuition, received government stipends, and were obliged to accept the posts assigned them after graduation. In contrast to regular secondary schools and colleges, the curricula of teachers' schools were designed to meet the pedagogical needs of primary and middle schools. A stricter than normal moral training was part of young teachers' training, in the expectation that they would reform the common people and disseminate state ideology. The students and recent graduates of teachers' schools took on the political and social projects of each succeeding regime as Chinese political life zigzagged across the early twentieth century.

Previous Studies

Modern Chinese education has been a favourite topic of scholarly research in the West, in Japan, and in China. Western studies began by describing how a dynamic Western system displaced a static Chinese system, thus assigning the birth of modern Chinese education to the period during which Western-style schools were introduced. In his study of a small number of schools established by the officials of the Self-Strengthening Movement (Yangwu Yundong) in the 1860s to train engineers, military technicians, and translators, Knight Biggerstaff flatly stated that this was the beginning of modern education in China.¹¹ John Cleverley, on the other hand, claimed that the missionary schools marked the beginning of modern education.¹² This perspective implies that "modern" means "Western," and it tends to assume an inevitable opposition between "modern" and "traditional." Histories based on these assumptions have tended to overlook the internal dynamics of Chinese society, which produced the continuous development of the education system long before the advent of Western-style schools, and which continued to drive the transformation of Chinese education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, in these accounts, the destruction of Western-style schools in local riots, the refusal of some families to send their children to these schools, and the existence of experimental schools in which traditional links to the local community were revived are often simply viewed as a reactionary defence of tradition. Chinese experiences and programs that do not fit the modern Western model are often overlooked altogether.

Decades ago, Benjamin Schwartz perceived the problem of the "tradition versus modernity" model and pointed out its limits with regard to explaining the transformation of Chinese intellectuals, especially the May Fourth generation.¹³ Scholars have subsequently tried to avoid this dichotomous model by examining the interaction between Chinese and Western influences on education and, increasingly, by looking for the indigenous paths

to innovation. For example, Sally Borthwick's excellent study of traditional *sishu* schools juxtaposes them with China's modern Western schools, reminding us that the two types had existed side by side since the beginning of the twentieth century. Borthwick suggests that the dichotomous division between "modern" and "traditional" schools in China was artificial as modern and traditional educational practices interacted with each other and continued until the early Communist period.¹⁴ Wen-hsin Yeh's study of Western-style universities in Shanghai from the early twentieth century to the 1930s points out that the rise of new universities in Shanghai was the result of the traditional network of the imperial Jiangnan gentry-elite. These newly established academies displayed a cultural continuity that, though largely adopted from Western curricula, gave Confucian training an important position and sought to harmonize tradition and modernity.¹⁵ Ruth Hayhoe, examining the Republican period, perceived the influence of tradition. Concerns about geographic distribution and the equal distribution of educational resources were deeply rooted in the imperial system.¹⁶ Her study of China's universities presents a process of conflict, interaction, and adaptation, in which the Western concept of the university never made more than a partial appearance. The Western ideals of academic freedom and autonomy were transformed into a quintessentially Chinese tradition that emphasized the political responsibility of intellectuals.¹⁷ Joan Judge's examination of the textbooks used by the Qing government for women's education proves that "modern" and "traditional" are inadequate analytical categories. Among the role models presented in these books were not only famous Western women but also Chinese paragons of womanly virtue.¹⁸ Suzanne Pepper considered education from the angle of social equality, seeing modern education as a long-term conflict between formal, elite education and those who provided a radical critique of this approach.¹⁹

Most recent studies of local history attest to the interactions between traditional and modern schools. For instance, Stig Thøgersen's outstanding study of Zouping County tells the story of a fully engaged local society that embraced a range of educational practices offered by both traditional and modern schools. He hoped to go beyond the division between traditional and modern by viewing the changes and continuities in local schools through the eyes of the local people.²⁰ In his study of the educational reformer James Yen (Yan Yangchu) and his experiments of the 1920s and 1930s in northern Chinese villages, Charles Hayford convincingly shows that modern educators "were not passive victims of foreign influence, but active adapters and creative developers."²¹ Helen Chauncey's study of county level educational practices in Jiangsu demonstrates how modern schools "became instruments in elite strategies to assert control over social and material wealth" in the early Republican period.²² Traditional collectivities, such as lineages, were also involved in the establishment of modern schools. In his comparative

study of two counties in Zhejiang Robert Culp shows that members of both the gentry and the new elite responded to the state's call with regard to school-building enterprises.²³

Unfortunately, very few English language accounts have examined teachers' schools and their role in the development of Chinese education and the transformation of Chinese society.²⁴ While some have acknowledged the cultural and political importance of teachers as representatives of new concepts and the modern state in local communities,²⁵ teachers' schools have generally been viewed as quite insignificant, simply an attachment to the general educational system.

General educational institutions – elementary schools, middle schools, and colleges and universities – are still at the centre of all studies of Chinese educational history, undoubtedly because this segment of the educational system provides a good basis for comparison with the systems in Europe and America. In other words, scholars have treated Western institutions as a window through which to view China. From this window, teachers' schools, which lack a counterpart in today's Western system, have been invisible. An assumption that China's teachers' schools, like their nineteenth-century predecessors in the West, were designed to accomplish the pedagogical training of teachers, to function as an undifferentiated part of a modern educational system, has erased from the general narrative of modern education the special features and the unusual role of these schools in Chinese society.

The small number of English language works that focus on teachers' schools has been written by Chinese scholars. Chuang Chai-hsuan, who completed a doctorate at Columbia University's teachers' college in 1922, dedicated a chapter of his dissertation on Chinese education to the teacher training system. Chuang outlined teachers' status, the certification system, and the various teachers' schools that opened during the late Qing dynasty and the early twentieth century.²⁶ An article by J.P. Chu, "Normal School Education in China," appears in the 1923 *Bulletin on Chinese Education*, compiled by the Chinese National Association for the Advancement of Education.²⁷ In this summary, written for non-Chinese readers and based on official Qing documents, Chu briefly reviews the education of teachers before the establishment of the Republican government and provides detailed information about the administrative system, the curricula, and the distribution of normal schools and students during the first decade of the Republican era. Finally, a thin volume published in 1960 documents the development of teachers' schools during the first decade of Communist rule.²⁸ These works barely scratch the surface of the subject.

Japanese scholarship on Chinese teachers' schools has also been limited. A study by Igarishi Shoichi of the establishment of teachers' schools in the late Qing, published in 1969, reviews such early schools as Nanyang Public School and evaluates the place of teacher training in the new educational

system established between 1902 and 1904. Limiting himself to the pedagogical function of the new educational system, Igarishi overlooked the social significance of establishing teachers' schools during a transitional era.²⁹ Kobayashi Yoshifuni's recent study of Chinese teachers provides a detailed picture of the lives and social activities of primary schoolteachers in urban areas during the 1920s. Although he offers a brief description of teacher training, teachers' organizations and teachers' struggles against qualifying examinations and for financial security occupy centre stage.³⁰

Chinese scholarship has treated the topic of teachers' schools more extensively than has other scholarship and has recognized their distinctive qualities. Several book-length studies provide basic histories of teachers' schools, with sections on curricula and state policy.³¹ Rather reductively, these repetitive histories view teachers' schools as loci for the inculcation of official ideology. By focusing on government plans but rarely considering how they were implemented, such studies assume too much about the relationship between rules and schools. Like their Western and Japanese colleagues, Chinese scholars rarely cross the threshold of the schoolhouse to examine its social, cultural, and political role and the part it played in the transformation of Chinese education and society.

The Narrative: Interaction, Penetration, and Hybridization

After studying the Indian caste system, Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph concluded that when modernization encountered tradition it did not so much supersede it as penetrate it and then yield, in turn, to being infiltrated.³² Long before the coming of the Western powers in the nineteenth century, China had an immense and elaborate school system. In the transformation of that vast imperial system, what part became modernized and what part remained traditional? Could "the modern" combine with "the traditional"? How were local cultural resources adapted to a foreign institution? How did traditional ideas about education and the role of teachers influence modern schools and modern teachers?

I view both modernity and tradition as complex and changing concepts.³³ In the early twentieth century, many Chinese intellectuals, educators, and officials viewed Western countries as the embodiment of modernity and believed that, to the extent that China could emulate those countries, it, too, could become strong and wealthy. But they were facing a changing and diverse West.³⁴ Many Chinese educators, especially those trained in European and American universities, believed that modernizing Chinese schools had to involve using Western theories, models, curricula, pedagogies, and even textbooks. Within this mindset, various educational systems – including French, German, British, American, and Japanese ones – were studied and introduced to China. When an imported model did not work out, educators

would search for a new one. Although the British model played an important role early on during this period of the Self-Strengthening Movement,³⁵ it was the Japanese model that, in 1904, left the deepest mark on the first modern Chinese educational system. An American model was adopted in 1922, a French model in 1928, and a Soviet model after 1949. Clearly, modernity was an overlapping, multicultural work in progress.

Tradition, seen as a reactionary force by most modernizers, is, in fact, multifaceted. By the time the first modern educational system was established, the reformers were facing an already altered “tradition,” which included newly established Western-style schools dedicated to the self-strengthening programs, missionary schools, and reformed academies; contemporary topics had even been introduced into the civil service examination. At the same time, tradition was entering the first modern school system in the form of awarding graduates degrees with imperial titles. Nor was the traditional emphasis on moral cultivation abandoned: teachers generally clung to age-old pedagogy in classes devoted to the Confucian classics. The “tradition” that the 1922 reformers perceived in the previous educational system involved centralization and uniformity. The critics of the 1922 educational system also attacked what they saw as exclusive, urban schools in which students were being nursed by traditional, bookish study, with the idea of one day turning them into rich officials. Tradition had various faces and was perceived differently by different people.

As “modernizers” and “traditionalists” searched for solutions, they surveyed the social conditions of the day. Both struggled for dominance, and neither group won a decisive victory. Whether one joined the New Culture Movement, which repudiated tradition, or clung to Confucian values, it was clear that everyone was fighting on the same ground and facing the same issues.³⁶ To the modernizers, the previous Western models did not overcome the problems of traditionalism and would need to be replaced with a newer model. The traditionalists, on the other hand, blamed the problems they faced on the tinkering of the modernizers. By the 1920s, when popular educational and rural construction movements were emerging, the first generation of graduates from China’s modern educational system was already being viewed as part of traditional rural communities and was becoming an obstacle for the newer wave of social change. Radicals like Tao Xingzhi and conservatives like Liang Shuming both thought that modern schools retained too many (bad) traditional elements. Tao and Liang also agreed that the answer lay in the countryside, where local resources and traditional practices could be turned to account. It was in this environment of mutual blame, interaction, infiltration, experimentation, and innovation that some modern models and ideas were modified and tradition was revived and reformed. The result was a hybrid.



The development of modern schools, and teachers' schools in particular, played a part in the two processes that most influenced China's twentieth-century transformation: "localizing the global" and "nationalizing the local." The former involved a dynamic process in which institutions and educational traditions were transformed through a series of negotiations, interactions, infiltrations, and compromises with new ideas and methods, and from this process there emerged a hybrid model of Chinese education. Producing a modern Chinese educational system involved more than simply replacing Chinese models, textbooks, curricula, and pedagogy with their Western equivalents. Local educators experimented, creating a new approach to pedagogy that included aspects of both foreign and domestic cultures. The process of "nationalizing the local" involved efforts to culturally and politically unify and "nationalize" local communities through education – efforts that saw teachers' schools assigned a key role. The state used education and modern schools to create political unity, to train citizens, to promote national identity, and to extend state power to local communities.

In the late nineteenth century, acute domestic and international problems led members of the ruling class to call for reform. Even as Japan and the Western powers proved themselves utterly inimical to China's well-being, 1902 and 1904 saw the adoption of educational reforms drawn from Western and Japanese models. Key aspects of the reforms were designed to deal with the institutional and human legacies of the examination system and the schools established to feed it. The national teachers' school system that was introduced in 1904, which borrowed much from the Japanese system, was created on the institutional foundations of the imperial schools. One of its key mandates was the transformation of examination-trained literati into professional teachers and educational administrators.

Declaring a school "modern" or "Western-style" did not magically exorcise all traces of the examination system, dogmatic pedagogy, and the obsession with a small number of ethical and political texts written many centuries earlier. In fact, Western-style modern schools largely incorporated such educational traditions: when the modern educational system was established, many traditional academies and dynastic schools were converted into Western-style schools. This conversion ensured a strong continuity between the new and the old. On the other hand, while traditional schools were integrated into their locales, both institutionally and morally, Western-style schools were intentionally set apart. Moreover, the creation of Western-style schools in coastal cities exacerbated the already problematic gap between the literate elite and the masses. The new schools did not provide a means to educate the vast population of China; rather, they transformed a small part of the traditional elite into a modern elite. In other words, modern education took over and enhanced the role that traditional education had played in reproducing elite status and domination.

The radical experiments initiated in the late 1920s, such as Xiaozhuang Village Teachers' School, attempted to address the problems that examination culture was extended into Western-style schools and new schools were misfit in Chinese communities. These experiments challenged the urban-oriented system of new schools by bringing to the rural masses a modern education that sought to incorporate rural traditions and resources and to accommodate rural needs. Radical reformers promoted the Western emphasis on practical knowledge and tried to uproot the dogmatic and examination-oriented traditions that persisted in many new schools. The practical knowledge that was promoted included rural, local, and traditional knowledge – subjects ignored and often scorned by Westernized urban educators. Radical intellectuals also attempted to integrate schools into rural communities in order to make them centres of rural leadership and reform. Teachers would do more than teach new subjects: like the Confucian gentry, they would try to be village leaders and to exemplify moral values. The influence of such experiments would be profound, going far beyond the educational domain, strictly construed, to merge with the movement to transform rural society. Their echoes can be found in some of the more radical policies implemented by both Nationalist and Communist regimes.

From the eighteenth century, a time of rapid educational expansion, state and local governments expanded their control into primary education by encouraging the establishment of community schools and local academies. The establishment of teachers' schools at the beginning of the twentieth century served the same purpose. These schools, sponsored and controlled by the state, provided teachers and administrators who were trained to impart a unified curriculum that had been designed by state officials. Standardized examinations controlled entrance into and graduation from teachers' schools, ensuring a certain level of professionalism. Since the schools would carry out certain administrative duties in local education and governance, the state saw them as a way of reaching local communities.

In the early Republican period, education was regarded as a means of unifying the country, and the value of teachers' schools was generally acknowledged. It was in these schools that many teachers learned the vernacular language, Mandarin, whose universal use was considered to be a crucial element in building a stronger nation. Even when contending warlords atomized the polity, many of those who had been trained in teachers' schools clung to the pedagogical ideals they had absorbed. These educated elites influenced the state by staffing the bureaucracy, operating professional organizations, and continuing to build national unity at the local level, with or without the supervision of a centralized state.

The state and ambitious administrators saw teachers' schools as a means of modernizing local communities in a way that was in keeping with their distinctive visions of modernity. Radical intellectual reformers attempted

to use village teachers' schools to carry out rural social reform. Xiaozhuang Village Teachers' School, which I discuss at some length in Chapter 4, was not only a pedagogical experiment but also an effort to create a new social structure that would enable economic development and local democracy. The Nationalist government was quick to appreciate the political value of this enterprise, and it prescribed the Xiaozhuang model for all village teachers' schools. As state agents that penetrated rural communities, these teachers' schools displayed the "soft" side of the state-building process. They were expected to be naturally resistant to the pitfalls of an entrenched bureaucracy and to bring changes directly to villages.

But extending modern education to the village proved a fateful step. When hundreds of thousands of rural youths entered modern educational institutions, they brought with them their concerns and their discontent with the state – concerns and discontents that would eventually remap the politics of the day and reorient the direction of society. In the 1930s, once political radicalism had won the battle for the hearts and minds of those enrolled in local teachers' schools, these schools became centres for Communist recruitment. The re-emergence of the Chinese Communist Party in the mid-1930s, and its success in the 1940s, can be traced to the rural educational experiments of the 1920s.

The story of teachers' schools also follows the narrative line of women's changing social position in twentieth-century China. Traditionally, mothers had been children's first teachers – a role that drove gentry families, who hoped that their daughters would marry well, to see that girls learned to read and write. Efforts to expand the state's role in primary education and kindergarten for boys helped open the doors of public education to women and provided them with a legitimate role as professional teachers. This largely unintended development forever altered the position of women in Chinese society. As women crept higher and higher up the teaching hierarchy, the state was driven to hire more women to staff higher levels of women's teachers' schools, thus opening secondary and tertiary education to women. For decades, female teachers' schools provided a socially acceptable bridge that enabled educated women to extend their talents, influence, and activities to other parts of society.

Documents and Methodology

In searching through a number of Chinese archives, I discovered a large quantity of valuable sources for this book, including local historical documents, school records, personal correspondence, and data collected by education officials. Although I sometimes use government regulations and decrees to sketch the kind of policy making that was not always reflected in the classroom, for the most part, I depend on other official records to fill

this gap. For instance, I often turn to the immense number of bulletins issued by the central government and the provincial bureaus of education.³⁷ Previous scholars, who emphasize official regulations and educational policies, have overlooked these invaluable publications, which chronicle official communications (including instructive notes, memoranda, school requests, and official responses), inspectors' reports, annual school reports, school budgets, personnel files, school records, student lists, and much more. I focus on those documents that provide detailed information concerning what was actually happening in the schools. I also supplement and check these materials with archival documents, contemporaneous magazine articles, the memoirs and diaries of students and educators, local histories, and a number of important biographical collections.

Since the 1980s, many documents relating to education have been opened to the public, and Chinese scholars have made a great effort to compile a number of documentary collections containing a large quantity of original materials. Some of my material comes from these collections, most of which are of high quality (although intellectual predispositions have, as ever, impinged on the selection and organization of materials). I have also studied the tremendous output of Chinese intellectuals of the Republican era, who, with great excitement, recorded their visions of what education might become in China.

Teachers' Schools and the Making of the Modern Chinese Nation-State covers educational change throughout most of China and provides a broad view of the trajectory of teachers' schools. Although a case study focusing on a particular region or school would have permitted the use of greater detail, the extreme institutional instability of the four decades under consideration would mitigate its value. As Stig Thøgersen points out, the concerns of local society with regard to the goal of education differed from those of state and national reformers. Therefore, educational practices at the local level, which often had to meet personal goals, sometimes drifted away from the intention of official policies and the general tendency of educational development at the national level.³⁸ This difference sometimes reveals the limitations of the case study method. Since teachers' schools were secondary and tertiary establishments, their fate, by and large, was in the hands of central and provincial governments. Their pedagogy and curricula were as tightly controlled by the state as were those of any other kind of school. In order to evaluate the overall development of teachers' schools and their relation to social transformation, this book examines the history of these schools, from the establishment of the first teachers' schools in coastal areas to the merger of most such schools with regular schools in the 1920s, to the rise of experimental village teachers' schools in the latter part of that decade, to the Nationalist government's development of a system of more stable village

teachers' schools in rural and inland areas in the 1930s, to the expansion of women's normal schools from big cities to inland towns, to, finally, Communist efforts to train teachers in their revolutionary base areas.

In order to understand the history of teachers' schools during this period, the reader should supplement this book with case studies, thus ensuring that breadth is leavened by depth. Case studies – focused on specific schools, specific regions, specific moments – help us to understand the connection between policy and practice. Readers should consult Richard Orb and David Buck's early studies of education in Zhili and Shandong, respectively; Marianne Bastid's study of Zhang Jian's educational activities in Tongzhou, Jiangsu; Helen Chauncey's study of educational elites in Jiangsu; Stig Thøgersen's studies of Zouping, Shandong; Robert Culp's study of Zhejiang; Ruth Hayhoe's interprovincial comparative study; and Elizabeth VanderVen's recent dissertation on Haicheng, Liaoning.³⁹ These show that, from the beginning of the twentieth century up to the 1930s, local elites actively promoted educational projects proposed either by the central government or by national educational organizations. Most government regulations were carried out at the local level; the interests of local elites and the capacities of local governments invariably necessitated adjustments and refinements. Overall, these case studies suggest a fairly high degree of uniformity in educational development throughout China. Drawing on these works as well as on my own archival discoveries, I attempt to combine the broad view with the close-up view. In each chapter, I describe a single teachers' school, thus giving a national story solid grounding in a specific reality.

Because this book analyzes the role of teachers' schools in the social transformation of twentieth-century China, I look less at pedagogy than I do at the wider relationship between schools and society. In adopting a functionalist perspective, I am able to assess professionalization while avoiding the pitfalls of essentializing. I avoid most pedagogical issues involving curricula, schooling, textbooks, examinations, institutions, teaching, and so on as I believe that discussing these issues would distract from my focus on the social and political role of teachers' schools. This is a study of institutions and their relations with a broader society; it is not a study of teachers as a professional corps. An evaluation of teachers as a social group and of their activities in both school and society would require a different set of documents, a different approach, and a different book.

Summary of the Book

Chapter 1, which reviews the imperial school system, delineates the factors leading to the expansion of education during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It describes the efforts of the Qing imperial court to reform education and the civil service examination system, arguing that the social and political crises of the second half of the nineteenth century provided the incentive

for the educational reforms we see at the turn of the twentieth century. Reformers hoped that Western schemas might supplant an inefficient bureaucracy and an impractical educational system. This chapter also assesses women's education and women's traditional role as family educators in late imperial China, and it argues that the development of a new style of women's schools in the last decade of the nineteenth century was not primarily the accomplishment of Western missionaries (as is conventionally contended) but, rather, was deeply rooted in the survival strategy of an elite class and was developed in late imperial times.

Chapter 2 examines the political and educational reforms launched by the Qing court in the early years of the twentieth century, after military defeats at the hands of Japan and some Western states. The establishment of a new school system became one of the most important projects of the New Policy Reform. Though Japanese models inspired the leading reformers, these models were deliberately modified to reduce the chaos attendant upon political reform and the 1905 abolition of the civil service examinations. An analysis of data from the Liang Guang Advanced Teachers' College (1902-11) shows that teachers' schools provided expectant officials and surplus literati with a channel through which to achieve new identities as educational administrators and modern professional teachers. During this period, Chinese women's education also experienced an important transformation. In order to prevent educated women from turning into a subversive force, the Qing court built female teachers' schools, thus channelling women's education into training "the teachers of citizens," thereby supporting the state-building project. Thus, the task of educating women was transferred from the domestic sphere to the public realm, and traditional ideology, which espoused educating mothers to ensure the family's prosperity, was extended to training female teachers to ensure the nation's prosperity. These schools provided, for the first time, a legitimate role for women as educators in the public domain.

Chapter 3 explores the role that teachers' schools played in counteracting the instability that followed the 1911 Revolution and the steady growth of female teachers' schools. As regional warlords fought among themselves, professional educators tried to maintain the integrity of the existing educational system and hold the country together by separating education from politics. Educational bureaucrats, most of whom had been trained in teachers' schools, collaborated with local elites to continue implementing a unified educational policy. These educators formed a national network that was centred in teachers' schools and in the national and regional educational associations that functioned as an alternative system for educational administration (thus helping to hold the country together). Through the examination of 1,700 resumes of local educational officials, I attempt to show that "state and society" in the early republican period were not clearly divided

realms, rather they were overlapping and mutually penetrated. During the 1910s, these newly professionalized educators pushed through a series of reforms that advanced women's education and that provided more chances for girls and women. The transformation of the Beijing Female Teachers' School into the Beijing Female Teachers' College is an example of the expansion of women's education. This not only made public higher education accessible to women but also gave them the opportunity to teach at a higher level in the public schools.

Chapter 4 analyzes the efforts made by Chinese educational reformers in 1922 to modernize China's educational system by adopting American models. The struggle, which centred on teachers' schools during this period, represented Chinese intellectuals' different perceptions of modernity. Contrary to the intention of its framers, who hoped to lay the foundation for a democratic polity, the 1922 reform actually widened the educational gap between urban and rural areas. To fend off such growing disparities, radical reformers created hybrid village teachers' schools to challenge the Westernized system that was being implemented by the state, largely in big cities. A case study of the Xiaozhuang Village Teachers' School, and a reinterpretation of Tao Xinzhi's educational practice, shows that, by introducing traditional resources into modern schools, the radical reformers were attempting to develop a model of social organization that could reform and reorganize a disintegrating rural society. This chapter also looks at how female teachers' schools fared under the influence of the 1922 education reform. Although the reformers made provisions for upgrading female teachers' colleges to teachers' universities, in the area of women's education, the emphasis was on building regular female secondary schools in urban areas. This was a shift away from the policy followed through previous decades (which made preponderant investments in female teachers' schools), and it gradually undermined the importance of female teacher training at the secondary level and reduced women's opportunities in society. On the other hand, the newly invented village teachers' school developed a program for training female teachers for village schools, and this was seen as the first step towards the liberation of women in rural areas.

Chapter 5 examines how, during the 1930s, the new Nationalist government (also known by its Chinese name – Guomindang), established in 1927, built up a network of various types of local teachers' schools across the nation. Planning to reshape and control the countryside, the Nationalists, by expanding local teachers' schools, extended secondary education into rural areas. The schools were directed to engage in social reform programs and to assist the state in reconstructing rural communities. Three village teachers' schools – Xianghu in Zhejiang, Huangdu in Jiangsu, and Baiquan in Henan – illustrate the various techniques the government used to penetrate rural communities. They show that the teachers' schools of the 1930s

were an important vehicle through which the state built a power base in various villages. Chapter 5 also looks at the development of local female teachers' schools in rural and inland areas. Encouraged by the rural reconstruction movement, educators criticized the shortcomings of the 1922 reform and turned their attention to rural and working-class women. An examination of the Shandong Provincial Women's Normal School Number One shows that provincial female teachers' schools were one of the very few legitimate avenues through which rural and inland women could win a degree of social and economic independence. Moreover, teachers' schools introduced women to other professions, such as writing, editing, journalism, the arts, and the law, thus carving out more public space for them.

Chapter 6 examines the sociopolitical consequences of the expansion of rural education under conditions of economic decline and the surge of nationalism before the Japanese invasion of 1937. In this crucial period, rural teachers' schools became not only channels of social mobility for youth from less well-to-do rural families but also centres for Communist organizing. Using data taken primarily from teachers' schools in Shandong and Hebei provinces (two provinces that were the Chinese Communist Party's most important revolutionary bases in the 1930s and 1940s), I analyze the factors that made local teachers' schools the training centres for Communist revolutionaries as well as the venue for bringing to the countryside a revolution that had begun in the cities. After converting to the revolutionary creed in the local teachers' schools, young teachers returned to their home villages to ignite revolution and to become local guerrilla leaders. This helps to explain how the Communists were able to re-emerge after their major defeat in the mid-1930s to develop a powerful underground organization in rural areas.

The story of China's teachers' schools does not end in 1937. Substantial chapters could be devoted to the period from the Anti-Japanese War to the radical changes that followed the 1949 Revolution. The political role of the schools was endorsed by the Nationalist government during wartime but, under the Communist government after 1949, was superseded by other types of revolutionary organizations. On the other hand, their free tuition policy continued to help rural youth move up in society. The teachers' school system was revived in the late 1970s, after having been closed down during the Cultural Revolution, and it continued to prepare professional teachers during the reform era. But a series of threats has recently surfaced. The tuition-free policy has been abolished, a new plan for transforming teachers' schools into regular colleges has appeared, and college students of rural origin are having difficulty paying tuition. It seems that teachers' schools are once again facing an uncertain future.



1

The Imperial School System and Education Reform in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century: A Historical Review

At the turn of the twentieth century, a confluence of forces indigenous and exotic drove China's leaders to heed the call of educational reformers. A series of shocking blows to the imperial body politic inspired statesmen to study European schools; however, as Chang Hao has pointed out, it would be wrong to underestimate long-term developments that originated within Chinese society.¹ During the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) an array of new types of schools had opened, starting a trend that continued under the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). The introduction of Western-style schools in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth was part of a long period of experimentation, innovation, and reform. Throughout this period, many officials believed that China's social and political travails would only end if its educational institutions were reformed so that they could produce more able men to help the state deal with practical problems. As education expanded in late imperial society, it served an ever larger segment of male society, and female literacy increased among gentry-elite families in China's richer, more sophisticated regions. The story of the transformation of women's education at the turn of the twentieth century cannot be told without spotlighting late imperial female learning.

Schools and Teachers in Late Imperial China

During the late sixth century and the early seventh century, China formalized its civil service examination system, selecting imperial officials based on objective tests of knowledge that emphasized the Confucian classics. From that time on, education gradually came to be equated with preparation for the state examinations, which produced a class of literati-officials.² Teachers in imperial society formed a marginal group that was either directly or indirectly attached to the state bureaucracy. From the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, the educational system expanded until a countrywide network of schools extended from the Imperial University in

Beijing down to the village level. This expansion gradually changed the position of teachers and affected the nature of the educational system.

The School System in Late Imperial China: Ming and Qing

The school system in late imperial China was composed of dynastic schools (*guanxue*) and various types of unofficial and semi-official schools, including academies (*shuyuan*), clan and family schools (*zushu* and *jiashu*), charitable schools (*yishu* or *yixue*), and community schools (*shexue*). During the Ming dynasty, the *guanxue* school system formed an empire-wide network that was divided into two sections: central schools and local schools. The central schools included two imperial universities (*guozijian*), the highest imperial educational institutions in the Ming capital cities of Beijing and Nanjing,³ and other schools for imperial clan descendants. Local schools were composed of prefectural schools (*fixue*), district schools (*zhouxue*),⁴ and county schools (*xianxue*), which were built in every jurisdictional region.⁵ Previously, dynastic schools existed only at the prefectural level (*fu*); after the founding of the Ming dynasty, dynastic schools were set up in every county (*xian*) – a huge undertaking. The number of schools varied over the course of the Ming because, from time to time, administrative districts underwent rezoning. Based on the number of jurisdictions, contemporary scholars estimate that there were from 1,000 to 1,200 local dynastic schools in the fourteenth century and 1,471 after 1573.⁶

These government schools – which recruited local students known as licentiates (*shengyuan*), who had already passed the lowest level examination, in keeping with the county quota system (*xue'e*)⁷ – were the most important element of the Ming (and the Qing) educational system. The main task of these schools was to prepare students for the civil service examinations and to support them with government subsidies.⁸ During the first half of the Ming dynasty, teaching officials (*jiaoguan*) periodically gave lectures on the Confucian classics, checked attendance, assigned and assessed writing assignments, and evaluated student talent and behaviour. But from the middle of the Ming, due to the decline in the qualifications of teaching officials and in their pedagogical activities, the quality of education in these local dynastic schools degenerated quickly.⁹

The Manchu rulers of the Qing adopted the Ming school system with only slight modifications.¹⁰ Although lectures and both monthly and quarterly examinations were maintained at a minimal level until the Yongzheng reign (1723-35), dynastic schools gradually became the places where, from a bloated pool, the central government charitably placed those expectant elderly officials who had never received any job assignments. This policy further impaired the pedagogical function and activities of dynastic schools and turned them into places where students signed up for subsidies.¹¹

In addition to the government school system, another stream of education in late imperial society was formed by the academies (*shuyuan*), which had originated as early as the Tang (618-907) and developed during the Song (960-1127) and the Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties. The spread of private academies during the late Ming gradually drew students away from the dynastic schools. Like the dynastic schools, most academies aimed at preparing students for the civil service examinations, though some derived their prestige not from association with the state but, rather, with a famous scholar and/or with innovative academic activities. Many *shuyuan* were destroyed or banned by the Ming court due to their dissident scholarship during the mid-Ming and their deep involvement in political protest during the late Ming factional struggles.¹² The recovery of *shuyuan* during the Qing started with the Yongzheng regime, when the emperor ordered local officials to rebuild and develop them. The academies of the Qing period differed in some respects from those of the Ming. First, the Qing governments had a much stronger influence over them than had the Ming governments. Under the Qing, the academies lost their autonomy and became de facto organs of the state: most received financial support from local government, and most headmasters were appointed or hired by government officials.¹³ Second, the academies, formerly located in remote areas, far from political centres, were now relocated to cities and towns near administrative centres, allowing tighter government surveillance.¹⁴ Eventually they formed a provincial-prefectural-county hierarchical system that was parallel to the dynastic school system.¹⁵ Third, as their numbers increased, academies expanded to new areas, including rural communities.¹⁶ Although frequent openings and closures make it difficult to estimate the total number of academies nationwide during the Qing, that number definitely rose over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁷ Compared to the dynastic schools, the academies had more accommodating curricula, no quota limits, looser restrictions on students' geographic origins, and more flexible admissions standards. Still, dynastic schools maintained a basic institutional connection to the civil service examinations, from which they received annual quotas. These distinct features determined how private academies and dynastic schools would fare under the educational reforms of the twentieth century.

As is mentioned above, young men often began their formal education at clan and family schools, charitable schools, private schools (*sishu*), and community schools (*shexue*, in some places called *weixue*).¹⁸ Some scholars have suggested that village academies (*xiangcun shuyuan*) performed a similar function.¹⁹ Other scholars assert that, during the early Qing, charitable schools functioned as academies for advanced study, becoming elementary schools only later.²⁰ Some charitable schools in local communities taught only basic reading skills.²¹ Although debates have recently occurred regarding the names, characteristics, and functions of elementary schools in late imperial

society, no one disputes that elementary education during the Ming and Qing expanded greatly, penetrating even into rural communities. During this period, several kinds of schools carried out the task of teaching basic literacy and advanced study.²²

While it did not intervene in the affairs of village-sponsored schools or family schools, the state did encourage the work of community schools and certain types of charitable schools.²³ Imperial edicts promulgated by both the Ming and Qing courts, following a tradition inherited from the Yuan, ordered local governments to establish either a charitable school or a community school in every village and, in frontier regions, to promote literacy and moral education. As Sarah Schneewind has pointed out, such educational interventions sometimes conflicted with local religious forces and the fluctuating private interests of local officials.²⁴ It is true that the effectiveness and longevity of these schools varied, depending on the enthusiasm of local officials and the local economy;²⁵ in some cases, civil servants did more harm than good to the spread of literacy.²⁶ In any case, the appearance of community and charitable schools in late imperial society represented an effort by the state to oversee both elementary education and local society. Through these schools, the state tried to fill the cultural vacuum that private schools ignored.²⁷ This effort failed for a number of reasons, including social instability, the limited interest and authority of local officials, and a shortage of qualified teachers. Among these, lack of funds and teachers was probably key. Teachers were often poorly paid, and no formal standards were ever established for their professional qualifications, treatment, and occupational stability. As we will see, the modern school system, which was constructed after 1904, systematically tried to solve these problems by providing elementary schools with state-trained and state-supported teachers.

Teachers in Late Imperial Society

While the shortage of competent teachers for China's dynastic schools was immediately evident, no professional training was ever provided by the state. Teachers, at all levels, were either low-level bureaucrats or by-products of the examination system. In imperial society, educational personnel were divided into three types: officials and teachers in the dynastic school system; teachers in private academies; and teachers in family schools, private schools, charitable schools, and community schools. Very little scholarly work has been done on the training, selection, origin, educational and social background, and number of teachers in this period.²⁸

In addition to the faculty at the two universities in Beijing and Nanjing and the provincial education commissioners, the Ming court also named numerous other education officials, including district (*zhou*) education directors (*jiaoshou*), prefectural education directors (*xuezheng*), and county

education directors (*jiaoyu*) as the head of schools in each jurisdictional region. The teaching officials at each level were aided by two to four teaching assistants (*xundao*).²⁹ With the exception of the post of provincial education commissioner (*duxuedao*), which the Qing court renamed director of studies (*xuezheng*) in 1684, the successors to the throne retained all of the terms assigned in the Ming.³⁰ The duty of the provincial education commissioner was to promote and supervise educational affairs within the province; he did not have any actual teaching duties. Theoretically, educational officials were in charge of the educational affairs of their respective administrative areas and also served as teachers and headmasters at the dynastic schools.³¹ As previously mentioned, the schools declined in the latter half of the Ming, educational officials did virtually no teaching throughout the Qing, and the position of “educational official” became a nominal title, a sinecure that the court benevolently assigned to elderly literati or expectant officials.³² Not true teachers, these officials were still responsible for local educational administration and had the power to rank students in seasonal and yearly examinations. These special duties later helped these people to transfer into the modern educational bureaucracy.

The number of imperial teaching officials is also worth examining. According to Wu Zhihe, over 4,000 teaching officials swelled the ranks of officialdom during the Ming dynasty.³³ While the exact number of Qing educational officials has not been the subject of scholarly research, an approximation can be estimated from the organization of the school system at each jurisdictional level. After 1884, the Qing divided its territory into twenty-three provinces. During the reign of the Guangxu emperor (r. 1875-1908), there were 185 prefectures, 218 districts (73 of these were under the direct jurisdiction of provincial governments, giving them the same status as prefectures, while 145 were under prefectural governments), and 1,314 counties.³⁴ Adding up these various posts, one arrives at 1,735 educational officials. Each would have had two to four teaching assistants, possibly totalling 5,151. Taking into account that some frontier regions and small counties were too remote or too small to be assigned an educational official, and that many probably got by with few regular teaching assistants, we may safely say that there were about 6,000 educational officials during the Qing period.

The decline of teaching in dynastic schools may be related to the low status of teaching officials and to the method used to select them. Ming regulations decreed that no official with a rank higher than “the second class of the ninth rank” (*cong jiu pin*) – the lowest level on the bureaucratic ladder – could serve as a prefectural education director. Later, the rank of the prefectural education officials was demoted to “unranked” (*wu pin ji*) and then to “miscellaneous positions” (*zaliu*).³⁵ Thus, teaching officials were actually

excluded from the official bureaucratic system. If promising students were to enjoy the most favourable intellectual climate, their teachers should have been drawn from the most brilliant pool. According to Wu, the ruler of the early Ming did indeed make a plan to select teaching officials from a pool of “advanced scholars” (*jinshi*) by adding a special title, *fubang jinshi* (the supplementary list of *jinshi* degree; *jinshi* was the highest degree) to the civil service examinations. This plan, however, soon failed because everyone with an advanced degree tried to avoid teaching assignments since they led to miserable professional status and the paltry income of the dynastic schools. The Ming government was reduced to recruiting “university students” (*jiansheng*), “contributed students” (*gongsheng*), and provincial degree holders (*juen*, the secondary degree) to serve as teachers.³⁶ Little changed in the Qing: although the rank of teaching officials was raised to the “regular seventh rank” (*zheng qipin*), the highest rank for teaching officials at the prefectural level was still barely equal to that of a county magistrate.³⁷ The situation deteriorated over the course of the dynasty: since, by the mid-Qing, many teaching posts were sold for a fixed price (*juanna*), many of those who held these positions did not possess even the most rudimentary qualifications.³⁸ As we can see, the low qualification of teachers in dynastic schools was only to be expected.

Those who taught in private academies (referred to by a variety of titles, such as *shanzhang*, *yuanzhang*, *zhujiao*, and so forth) had achieved far greater academic distinction than had their official counterparts. Thanks to Liu Boji’s research on private academies in Guangdong Province during the Qing period, we know a great deal about the teachers in these institutions. While the majority had passed the palace or provincial examinations (these were the highest and intermediate level examinations), a few had only passed the qualifying examination. Many had retired from officialdom, had been excused from government service to observe the traditional period of mourning a dead parent, or had previously taught in government schools.³⁹ Research has also shown that, inevitably, there were some poorly qualified academy teachers who got their positions due to favouritism.⁴⁰ But, overall, the academies had to maintain their reputations by hiring noted teachers and, thus, attracting students.

Throughout the Ming dynasty, teachers at elementary schools were divided into two types (though sometimes they could be both). Teachers at the primary level (*mengshi*) were distinguished from those at the advanced level (*jingshi*).⁴¹ This division corresponded to two levels of elementary education, defined by contemporaneous ideas about children’s intellectual development. Primary schools (*mengxue*) educated younger male pupils and, in some family schools, young females were taught basic reading and writing skills (I treat female education in another section). Advanced elementary

education (*jingshi*, named for the principal subjects taught) trained students who already possessed basic skills and who displayed the intellectual talents required to pass the examinations. Liao T'ai-ch'u's study of traditional schools in the 1930s suggests that primary schooling could sometimes last for ten years, during which time students memorized a set curriculum of Confucian texts, the meaning of which was explained to them by their teachers only when memorization was complete.⁴² During advanced study, teachers continued to present rote interpretations of important books.

What little is known about those who taught in Ming-era clan schools, charitable schools, and community schools comes from contemporaneous works of seventeenth-century fiction.⁴³ In stories and novels, one routinely encounters schoolteachers who lived in abject poverty. If they held a degree at all it was the licentiate's degree; many had failed the examinations time after time. Recent research indicates that most schoolteachers were drawn from the local literati and that their employment conditions varied considerably depending on professional achievements, the type of school in which they worked, and the generosity of the school's management.⁴⁴ It is true that some of the local teachers who are mentioned in historical records enjoyed better working conditions, but these exceptional individuals entered the record only because they later won high office through civil service examinations. Almost by definition, those who did not pass the examinations and who remained trapped in village teaching jobs disappeared without a trace. However, the conditions in which they lived may be glimpsed through looking at documents concerning Qing-era village teachers.

The situation of schoolteachers in rural communities did not change much during the Qing. Evelyn Rawski's research shows that most schoolteachers were selected by school administrators or clan or village leaders from among the local literati who held the lowest degrees or who were preparing to sit for the lowest examinations. A teacher, the role model for the young men of the community, was expected to be both well educated and highly ethical.⁴⁵ Data on the educational backgrounds of the teachers in Zhili Province reveal that as many as 69 percent of elementary schoolteachers in one fortunate county were degree-holders, while in another county it might be only 23 percent. The data also show that the more teachers there were in a given county, the lower the percentage of degree-holders.⁴⁶ These numbers tell us very little regarding the question of the relative competence of primary and advanced elementary teachers, and they shed no light on how they divided the teaching of basic literacy and the teaching of advanced texts.

A range of factors, including social origins, educational background, and closeness to well placed officials, influenced the lot of teachers in late imperial society. Those who taught in academies (some of which were state-sponsored) enjoyed higher salaries thanks to their distinguished performance in the examinations and the status that accompanied their elite jobs.

The director of an academy could draw from several hundred to 1,000 silver taels annually, supplemented by student gifts. But an assistant teacher in the same school might only make forty taels.⁴⁷ Paltry official salaries obliged some state teachers to rely on donations from students.⁴⁸ Teachers in village schools received very low pay; and, when they were paid, it was often in kind – perhaps with a bag of rice, a piece of meat, or a bundle of vegetables. For instance, teachers in Guizhou village schools received only ten taels per year, and most teachers in clan and family schools and community schools were paid between ten and forty taels per year, probably determined by the level of the students they taught.⁴⁹ The vast discrepancies among teachers' income in premodern China, and the hardships suffered by those who taught in rural communities, foreshadowed the problems that would be faced by modern teachers (see Chapter 4).

Since the mid-Ming, a deep gap has opened between those members of the imperial bureaucracy who held real political power and those who attended to educational matters. The educational group was gradually marginalized through the demoting of ranks, the lowering of salaries, and the extension of terms of service. Ming educational officials occupied such low official status that they had no say in local administrative affairs or in county political activities. Whereas administrative officials normally served three-year terms before being considered for promotion or relocation, educational officials served for nine years, which effectively deprived them of any hope for political power.⁵⁰ Although the Qing court tempted educational officials with the prospect of being promoted to county magistrate, the large number of officials waiting for a position reflects a bleaker reality.⁵¹ Since some faculty of the academies were drawn from off-duty officials and those who held no official rank, they, too, lacked any direct connection to political power.⁵² When we examine the birth of the modern educational system and the first cohort of professional teachers, we should remember that, for centuries, teachers had been the most marginalized group in Chinese officialdom.⁵³ This helps us to understand just how important the establishment of independent teachers' schools was to the modern schooling structure. The marginalization of teaching officials in imperial times paved the way for the modern separation of the educational group trained in teachers' schools and the government officials who held real political power.

Liang Qichao and Educational Reform in the Late Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century's educational crisis stemmed not only from weaknesses endemic to the schools and the examination system but also from wider social problems, such as demographic growth, social unrest, and military disasters. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the appearance of missionary schools, with their distinct style, curricula, and tendency to promote female education, suggested a new option for would-be educational

reformers. When “Self-Strengthening” officials began opening new-style schools in the 1860s, they included Western learning in the curriculum. Still, the influence of Western learning and the appearance of modern schools were confined to coastal areas and treaty ports. Most proposed reforms focused on recycling suggestions that stressed education itself rather than political change and systemic reform. These proposals failed to address the challenges posed by social change and political crisis in late imperial society as well as the newly arrived foreign threats. As problems continued to pile up, prominent officials began to believe that China needed to pursue a more radical approach. Drawing on decades of ambitious proposals, Liang Qichao (1873-1929) drew up a comprehensive plan for starting afresh: his would be an educational transformation aimed at bringing real social change.

Problems with the Late Qing Educational System

The first problem of late Qing education was the tension between expanded education and the limited quotas of the dynastic schools. The conflict between increasing literacy and the number of candidates for the examinations, along with the limited quotas of dynastic schools, left the path for social mobility via the examination system very narrow indeed. Benjamin Elman has recently pointed out that, although the court responded affirmatively to local requests to increase the examination quotas and the number of students enrolled in dynastic schools, such cosmetic changes were far outstripped by population growth.⁵⁴ In 1741, China had a population of about 143 million, but, by 1850, it had reached about 430 million.⁵⁵ With the expansion of education, the number of literate people (with and without degrees) was growing. The quota for dynastic schools, however, did not increase until after the mid-nineteenth century, when the Qing court suppressed the Taiping Rebellion.⁵⁶ According to Chang Chung-li, prior to the rebellion, 1,741 state schools throughout the empire had enrolled 25,089 students in examinations that were held twice every three years. After the rebellion had been put down, the number of schools increased to 1,810 (due to the remapping of administrative districts), and the quota for total enrolment was increased to 30,113.⁵⁷ The total number of candidates competing for the licentiate's degree in any given year was approximately two million.⁵⁸ The rate of passing the lowest level examination stood at only 1.25 percent before the Taiping Rebellion and at 1.5 percent afterward.⁵⁹ In this situation, dynastic schools were forced to expand by producing many informal titles. Besides the “regular student” (*linsheng*), formal students who received financial support from the government (as the quota system promised), there were informal students. These included the “supplementary student” (*fusheng*) who received no financial aid and whose numbers were not limited by quotas, as well as the “added student” (*zengsheng*), the “specially appointed student” (*yisheng*),⁶⁰ and the “selected student” (*basheng*).⁶¹ The

number of these informal students sometimes exceeded the maximum number of formal students (as indicated by the original quota figure). For example, in 1836 Zouping County was assigned a quota of thirty students, but the number of supplementary students was over 400.⁶² The overpopulated dynastic schools disabled the quota system.

The odds of succeeding in the next test, the provincial examination, were just as daunting as were the odds of succeeding in the first test. Elman's research shows that, before the 1850s, the success rate at the provincial level was about 1.5 percent.⁶³ Many endured several consecutive failures (the provincial examinations were held every three years during the Qing) yet remained enrolled in dynastic schools in order to collect their subsidies. From 1865 to 1872, the Qing court gave some prefectures and counties more quotas as a reward for their financial support for the war against the Taiping rebels.⁶⁴ However, this only marginally increased their chances of success in the empire-wide competition for primary degrees, and it had the unpleasant effect of increasing the competition at the provincial level.⁶⁵

An educational system developed to feed the extraordinarily competitive examinations inevitably yielded huge numbers of surplus literati who never held official positions. Each time an examination was held, 98.5 percent of those taking it failed. How could these people make a living? Many turned to teaching.⁶⁶ The surplus literati who became teachers assisted the expansion of elementary education and of literacy, which, in turn, made examinations even more competitive. At the same time, rising examination quotas and the increasingly common practice of selling degrees and official titles created an overflow of fully qualified men who held no office. This group of marginalized official-literati became a force that advanced to fill the new schools and the school administration during the late Qing educational reform.

As dynastic schools became little but registration offices for local examinations and dispensaries for educational welfare payments, as well as a charitable place to house elderly literati and expectant officials, the court began to feel that it was losing control over local society, which it had formerly been able to monitor through educational institutions. The winnowing away of any meaningful function for dynastic schools was of particular concern because of the traditional role of the teacher as the ethical torchbearer for the community. The imperial state depended on the school system to inculcate and spread its ideology, and the dynastic schools were used to pacify local communities. Dynastic schools were typically situated in local Confucian temples, within which local gurus and worthies were worshipped. Wu Zhihe's remarkable research shows that, during the Ming, these schools functioned as centres for spiritual, cultural, and moral correctness. Local records, artistic works, and books were stored in schools, and important ritual events took place in them – seasonal sacrifices, social ceremonies, community

assemblies, and the paying of homage to wise elders, filial sons, and faithful wives. Ideally, every teacher and student was expected to serve as a moral exemplar for the local people, while teaching officials were expected to supervise the moral and social order of local communities.⁶⁷ When the schools became saturated with disqualified teachers and frustrated students, the image of the school leader as ethical exemplar collapsed.

The late Qing also saw the conflict between examination-oriented education and popular education, whose goal had deviated from what the state had intended for it. The spread of elementary educational institutions, such as clan schools, private schools, community schools, charitable schools, and village *shuyuan*, resulted in an increasing number of youth with basic literary skills.⁶⁸ As Woodside points out, popular literacy was a double-edged sword: it helped to reinforce community security and it also helped to develop some rebellious consciousness. Meanwhile, failed efforts to move up the social ladder also created intense social instability.⁶⁹ In the late Qing, unhappy literati and migrating peasants created a national crisis that lasted over a decade. Therefore, during the Tongzhi Restoration after the Taiping Rebellion, the reinstatement of dynastic schools and the examination system was an important way of rebuilding local order.⁷⁰ Social stability became a pressing concern, and this inspired educational reform during the second half of the nineteenth century.

On the other hand, some literati and government officials tried to find an outlet for a basically literate populace. They considered community and charitable schools not as a means of supplying talented people to the bureaucracy but, rather, as a means of keeping good people content with their lot in life.⁷¹ In 1826, Zhou Kai, the governor of Xiangyang Prefecture, issued a regulation for prefectural charitable schools:

[We] do not expect every child of the poor to reach [great literary] achievement [because they] have to learn farming when they are fourteen or fifteen. If they can read these three books,⁷² [they] will know in their hearts that “filial piety, brotherliness, loyalty, faith, rites, righteousness, honesty and a sense of shame” are the principles for managing a family. [These principles] will be of benefit all their lifetime. Although [they] could not go to [higher-level] schools to become refined literati [*xiushi*], they will be obedient people content with their life [*anfen zhi liangmin*].⁷³

At the same time, scholars who were promoting charitable schools for children from poor families also suggested a change in the goal of education: “Charitable schools are specifically established for children of poor families. If [the schools] teach them to read all the Classics, this will not only be beyond their capacity, but also will not meet their urgent needs ... This [East Guangdong Primary] Charitable School is established for the

purpose of teaching children from poor families to know basic principles of morality. Therefore, the curriculum [of this school] does not include contents related to the examinations."⁷⁴

The purpose of basic education no longer simply involved "selecting talented people for the state" but also involved providing students with "skills to support their families" (*yi wei yangshi fuyu zhi zi*)⁷⁵ and moral training to ensure that the empire was populated by "obedient people." We will see that this two-level system in elementary education, which established different types of education for different social sectors, was inherited by the modern educational system. The establishment of the modern school system, along with vocational training institutions, tried to address this long-standing problem.

The problems that the state faced in expanding education led to the decentralization and privatization of education, which undermined state power in local communities. Woodside believes that the state's gradual withdrawal from public education since the mid-Qing period and the increasing privatization of primary education fostered a strong discontent among the intelligentsia.⁷⁶ Since the state's efforts to extend its influence into local communities by encouraging community schools and charitable schools gradually withered due to lack of funding and teachers, great lineages concentrated their resources on training their brightest young men to win honour for their clans. The evidence from local gazetteers shows that, facing the extraordinary competition of the examinations, large families and clans adopted a strategy that invested resources in the most promising young men. The clan would arrange for students who did not have the talent to pass the examinations to learn practical skills, such as money management, farming, and a knowledge of the family business.⁷⁷ This strategy resulted in concentrating wealth and power in the hands of large families, and it left those from lower social strata struggling, thus increasing dissatisfaction with the privatization of education. Woodside points out that the desire to revive the legendary system of state controlled education that had existed before 1840 inspired political opposition and, in the early twentieth century, provided reformers with a strong motive for establishing a countrywide public school system.⁷⁸

Tentative Reforms of the Late Qing Educational System

Prior to the New Policy (1902-11) reform, the court modified the content of the civil service examinations, mandated pedagogical changes in old academies, and built new ones. As early as the 1880s, articles and memorials by reform-minded literati such as Feng Guifen (1809-74), Xue Fucheng (1838-94), and Zheng Guanying (1842-1922) broached the subject of radical change; however, it was not until 1895, when China was defeated in the Sino-Japanese War, that significant numbers of literati and officials started

to take the issue of reforming the examinations seriously. The court approved wide-ranging reforms only after 1901.⁷⁹

One area that did undergo substantial change in the second half of the nineteenth century was the academy. During the reign of the Tongzhi emperor (1862-74), 366 new academies were built; over the next thirty-four years, 671 more were erected.⁸⁰ Only a few of these, such as the Polytechnic Academy (*Gezhi Shuyuan*), placed Western learning at the centre of their curriculum, thus marginalizing Chinese learning.⁸¹ Some academies tried to shift the focus of learning away from the single purpose of passing the civil service examinations, giving greater scope to rediscovering how the traditional classics could provide answers to contemporary problems. Examples include Longmen Academy in Shanghai, Weijing Academy in Shaanxi, Zunjing Academy in Sichuan, and Nanjing Academy in Jiangsu. A small number of academies, such as Zhengmeng Academy in Shanghai and Chongshi Academy in Zhejiang, added Western learning to their curricula and were thus gradually transformed from old-fashioned academies into new-style schools (*xuetang*). Before 1895, the impact of Western learning on the daily lives of most Chinese literati was negligible, and what stimulus for reform they felt was engendered from within their own traditional frames of reference. The new and reformed academies produced a group of literati whose solid classical training had occurred in an environment committed to innovation; they would support the more dramatic reforms to come.⁸² After 1895, with the rise of the new nationalism, modern academies opened in the wealthy and progressive Jiangnan area at a dizzying pace, and many added Western learning to their curricula. In other parts of China, major changes did not take place until after 1900.

During this same period, many officials associated with the Self-Strengthening Movement established modern professional schools. Though few in number, these new schools produced engineers, linguists, and military officials who were needed for the government's self-strengthening projects. Examples are the Capital Foreign Language School (*Jingshi Tongwen Guan*, 1862) in Beijing, the Shanghai Foreign Language School (*Guang Fangyan Guan*, 1863) in Shanghai, the Guangzhou Language School (1864), the Fujian Shipbuilding School (1866), and a number of military academies.⁸³ Progressive provincial governors in Fujian, Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Hubei took leading roles in founding, funding, and staffing such schools during the 1890s.⁸⁴ While it could be argued that these schools failed to adequately strengthen China, they did provide a generation of mathematics, physics, chemistry, geology, and foreign language teachers for the schools that constituted the next stage in the transformation of Chinese education.

Despite an environment rich in practical innovation, dynastic schools did not respond to any proposals for change. Before there could be complete educational reform there would have to be political reform.

Liang Qichao and the 1898 Reform

In October 1896, after China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War, Liang Qichao, a prominent scholar and one of the leaders in the famous Hundred Days of Reform in 1898, published a long article on political and educational reform in a famous reformist newspaper, *Current Affairs* (*shiwubao*). In this noteworthy reform manifesto, "A general proposal for reform" (*Bianfa tongyi*), he proposed three alternatives for China's political and educational future. In the first, the court would eventually replace the current examination system with an empire-wide school system. Only this, he wrote, would ensure the success of reform. In the second, the court would enlarge the examination curriculum by adding more questions about practical skills and Western knowledge. He noted that this amounted to a compromise measure and could only achieve limited success. In the third, the court would reform the content of the examinations by adding a question about contemporary issues and practical topics. As Liang pointed out, this could only produce minor rewards.⁸⁵

Liang pioneered the idea of teachers' schools, possibly inspired by Japanese educational reform, from which he seized on the teachers' school, or normal school, as the "foundation of mass education." Anticipating the shortfall of qualified teachers for modern schools, he advocated establishing a teachers' school in every county and one at each jurisdictional level above the county. He hoped that the students who graduated from these schools would go on to teach in elementary schools. Other teachers' schools would prepare teachers to teach secondary students and college students.⁸⁶ Liang's proposal did not address either the ongoing shortcomings of the examination system or the dynastic schools; it simply showed how the huge number of surplus literati could be employed. No single plan could solve the problems that had hobbled China's political system for centuries.

Other reformers of the 1898 generation, including Kang Youwei (1858-1927), Li Duanfen (1833-1907), and Sheng Xuanhuai (1844-1916), also dodged the problems besetting the dynastic school system. In a memorial submitted during the reform, Kang suggested replacing academies and "improper shrines" (*yinci*) with Western-style schools; he mentioned nothing about dynastic schools.⁸⁷ The Guangxu emperor accepted Kang's suggestion and issued an edict urging all provincial governors to act.⁸⁸ The Hundred Days of Reform turned a blind eye to the dynastic school system and tried to revolutionize the examination system by transforming the academies into a national school system. Perhaps the reformers were wary of inciting conflict with conservative groups who had interests in the state school system. Many conservatives viewed academies, whose history was spotted here and there with anti-establishment activities, with distrust and insisted that the state's political stability was enshrined in the dynastic schools. Any change in that system would have affected the selection of

officials as a whole and might have mitigated the inculcation of state ideology. Though they had long since ceased to have any practical educational function, the dynastic schools remained a formidable obstacle to educational reform.

Women's Education in Late Imperial Society

Although the expansion of education in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries largely benefited male students, women were also affected, especially in economically and culturally advanced areas. Because of the important role mothers played in early education, the late Qing's intensification of the examination system encouraged gentry families to invest in their daughters' education. By the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese gentry began actively promoting women's education along lines borrowed from missionary schools. However, the ideological rationale for the changes in female education was deeply rooted in the traditional idea that women were the primary family educators. The driving force for this transformation was reform-minded gentry who were responding to a rising nationalism.

Women's Learning in the Inner Chambers

Recent scholarship suggests that the old adage "a woman is virtuous only if she is untalented" indicates the discontent that arose as women began to gain access to education in late imperial China. Beginning in the seventeenth century, women from gentry families in Jiangnan were involved in literary activities, and a group of female writers became fairly well known in elite circles. In the cultured urban milieu, courtesans were expected to cultivate elegant literary tastes.⁸⁹ Rawski estimates that nineteenth-century female literacy was between 2 percent and 10 percent but that it could have been as high as 25 percent in wealthy and progressive regions.⁹⁰ Slight by comparison with the population as a whole, literate women nonetheless managed to carve out a distinctive cultural realm.

Female education was also offering women a change in context, even exposing them to market forces as they began to profit from their literary skills. Susan Mann suggests that late Qing female education involved both literate and non-literate learning. Both forms of learning were strictly limited to the domestic sphere, and there was no government involvement.⁹¹ While women's education took place only in the home, literate women significantly expanded the bounds of learning. Their curriculum, which included classical texts, was not limited to moral instruction. Girls from elite families generally studied the same texts as did their brothers.⁹² Ko's research shows that, in the eighteenth century, some women were not only erudite but also taught in family schools and sold their artistic works to bring in much-needed income.⁹³ The appearance of women teachers and

published writers reflected the changing position of women in late imperial society.

Women of all classes received non-literate education, which, according to Mann, included moral inculcation and domestic skills training.⁹⁴ Different rituals, such as foot binding, the celebration of Double Seven Festival, the sacrifices to Leizu, and dowry preparation taught girls that being good wives and mothers meant staying at home, taking care of children, and putting to use the domestic skills they had learned.⁹⁵ It is worth noting that the three traditional elements of women's education – moral inculcation, literary study, and training in domestic skills – were maintained as three principal parts of the curriculum in early twentieth-century modern women's schools.

In the late Qing, changing conditions obliged both men and women to revise their vision of women's education, and a trend of nurturing talented women (*cainü*) in literary creation gradually emerged among the Jiangnan gentry-literati families.⁹⁶ Since the late Ming, some male literati had promoted the education and literary activities of their wives, concubines, daughters, and even daughters-in-law.⁹⁷ An education could do many things for a woman, including improving her ability to express herself and communicate with the outside world, improving her appeal as a prospective wife, and improving her ability to impart knowledge to her children, support her husband by managing the family wealth, and maintain family order by following Confucian teaching. In light of the fierce competition of the civil service examination, the education of gentry women was seen as strictly utilitarian: it would help maintain family prosperity by helping one's sons pass the examinations. Mothers played an important role in children's early education and were often expected to teach their sons their first characters. The woman who could do this and more could give her son an edge in the examination culture that would soon engulf him. On the other hand, mothers were also expected to be the primary educators of their daughters, teaching them to read, to behave ethically, and to perform their domestic labors.⁹⁸ Chen Hongmou, who wrote a treatise on the importance of women's education, believed that "a wise daughter will make a wise wife and mother. And wise mothers rear wise sons and grandsons."⁹⁹ It was indeed the consideration of "indigenous statecraft tradition," according to Paul Bailey, that assigned women "as guarantors of household virtue and prosperity".¹⁰⁰ However, Nanxiu Qian points out that women's education in the modern era also had another tradition, the tradition of "*xianyuan*" (worthy ladies), which emphasized a literate culture of elite women in imperial history.¹⁰¹ Given this, the idea that the mother should play the role of teacher within the family received a great deal of support among many male literati during the late Qing period, and it became key to the transformation of women's education at the turn of the twentieth century.

New Factors in Female Education: Missionary Schools and Overseas Students

In the mid-nineteenth century, Western missionaries introduced the first girls' schools in China. Before 1900, however, this development took place primarily in coastal areas. The first opened in 1844 in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province;¹⁰² by 1877, 524 pupils were enrolled in thirty-eight Protestant missionary schools for girls.¹⁰³ By 1896, the total number of female pupils in missionary schools reached 6,798; there were 308 schools at the time.¹⁰⁴ Historical records show that, before 1895, missionaries also sent a handful of girls overseas for study.¹⁰⁵

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the students at missionary girls' schools, and female overseas students who were sponsored by missionaries, were quite distinct from the image I presented earlier of genteel Jiangnan girls. From 1842 to the early 1880s, missionary schools encountered great difficulties in enrolling girls from well-to-do backgrounds. To attract students, early missionary schools provided free tuition and board, even paying girls' families to permit them to attend. Such arrangements had special appeal for poor families.¹⁰⁶ The situation shifted a bit during the 1880s since, by then, a small number of female students attended not because of financial need but because of religious conviction.¹⁰⁷ Starting in 1890, the missionaries were able to adjust their recruitment strategy and turn their attention to female students from the upper classes.¹⁰⁸

One sign of the changing class background of the girls who enrolled at missionary schools was the introduction of a tuition system. The earliest girls' school in Ningbo, for example, began charging for board and tuition at the end of the 1880s.¹⁰⁹ St. Mary's Hall in Shanghai, a girls' school established in 1881, was not very successful even though classes were free and students were supplied with a stipend. By 1890, the school had only thirty-two students; it started charging tuition after 1900.¹¹⁰ The most famous women's school, the McTyeire School for Girls (*Zhongxi Nüshu*), which was established by missionaries in 1892 in Shanghai, was specifically for Chinese upper-class women. "It was the first school which charged parents regular fees for the board and tuition of their daughters while in school."¹¹¹ The American Methodist Church established a girls' school in Fuzhou in 1859; during the early years of its existence, it had only one student, but, by 1888, it had thirty students. No student was charged tuition until 1894. In 1894, about one-third of the students in this school were child-brides (*tongyangxi*), but, by 1909, this group of students had become insignificant, constituting only one-eightieth of the student body.¹¹² This change implies two possible tendencies between the 1890s to 1900s: (1) more students and (2) fewer students from the lower social strata. American Methodist missionaries reported in 1907 that their school for girls would soon begin charging tuition, regardless of students' marital status or financial condition.¹¹³

The gradual exclusion of poor girls from missionary schools through the imposition of tuition fees indicates that the strategy of turning to the upper classes had begun to pay off.

Still, it would take time for this strategy to show results. Enrolment records indicate that missionaries did not attract many upper-class female students until after 1900. The McTyeire School for Girls in Shanghai enrolled only seven students in its first year,¹¹⁴ and, in 1900, it had only three graduates.¹¹⁵ St. Mary's Hall had the same experience: in 1900, the school had only one graduate.¹¹⁶ And, with regard to the American Methodist school for girls in Fuzhou, "Not till 1896 did it cease to be necessary to seek students and become possible to select students."¹¹⁷ It seems that missionary schools only really began to develop after 1900, when they turned to recruiting students from among upper-class women. This was also the time when girls' schools run by Chinese gentry took off.

As these schools trained girls to assist in missionary enterprises, the curriculum emphasized religious courses, languages, world history, and a basic knowledge of the natural sciences.¹¹⁸ English language classes and Bible reading were given priority over study of the Chinese language.¹¹⁹ In the missionary schools, the domestic skills Chinese society considered crucial to serving as an exemplary wife and mother were only extracurricular activities.¹²⁰ Women sent overseas studied medicine, which was most appropriate with regard to the agenda of the religious mission but was utterly unheard of in Chinese society. In her study of an early group of women who studied abroad, Ye Weili said, "Rather than seeing their medical practice as a self-fulfilling career in the modern sense, they looked at it essentially as a Christian service."¹²¹ Upon their return to China, these remarkable doctors both worked in and established Christian hospitals.¹²² Most of them never married and never became wives and mothers.¹²³ Not only did the missionary schools prepare women for lives that were aberrational by conventional Chinese standards, but the overseas education they provided Chinese women differed from the teacher training sought by the young women who, some years later, would be sent abroad by the Chinese government.

Despite their atypical nature, the girls' schools established by Western missionaries and missionary-sponsored overseas training were of significance for women's education in China in two ways. First, missionary schools brought the issue of female education, formerly confined to the domestic domain, into the public domain and raised the possibility of female education as a public undertaking. Second, missionary schools provided an example of girls' schools, some aspects of which the Chinese gentry adopted in setting up their own women's schools.¹²⁴ As change swept across China at the turn of the twentieth century, two distinct pedagogical streams converged, and the missionary experience blended with Chinese elite education to produce something new.

The Transformation of Women's Education: 1895-1900

While Zheng Guanying has been identified as the first spokesman for the general education of Chinese women, his ideas did not go much beyond training “virtuous women, virtuous wives and virtuous mothers (*liangfu, liangqi, liangmu*).”¹²⁵ The publication of Liang Qichao’s famous manifesto of 1896, “A General Proposal for Reform,” played a more significant role in the transformation of women’s education. In a section entitled “On Women’s Schooling” (*Lun nüxue*), Liang linked women’s education to the very survival of the nation. While it is difficult to unravel the patriarchal from the radical in this piece, Liang ambiguously asserts that “the weakness in this country [*tianxia*] is rooted in the fact that women are not educated.”¹²⁶ As Nanxiu Qian points out, blaming women for China’s weakness was representative of the 1898 male reformers’ view of women’s education, as they saw women only as economic resources. Therefore, educating women, in the eyes of male reformers, like Liang himself, was a way “to restore Chinese pride, despite the recent humiliations.”¹²⁷ From this approach, Liang accepted traditional ideas about mothers as the primary teachers of young children but, inspired by nationalism, he claimed, less ambiguously, women’s key role in children’s education and mothers’ importance with regard to raising decent male citizens.¹²⁸ It was Liang who transformed these ideas in a way that would help break the bonds of domesticity.

In 1897, Liang wrote a statement for the Jingzheng Girls’ School (*Jingzheng nüxue* – literally, the girls’ school of classical principles), which was opened that year in Shanghai by a group of local gentry. He declared that educated women benefited society in four ways: by assisting their husbands, by teaching their children, by helping their families, and by improving the [Chinese] race (*xiangfu, jiaozhi, yijia, and shanzhong*).¹²⁹ Liang belonged to the tradition of late imperial literati, which promoted female education for the sake of training wise mothers. But one finds something new in Liang’s articles. First, in referring to “two hundred million” women,¹³⁰ Liang shifted the focus from the elite class to all women. Second, he related the significance of women’s education to the fate of the country and assigned men and women equal responsibility. Third, he promoted the idea that women’s education should take place outside the family and should be based on the traditional (i.e., male) curriculum. Physical training was also necessary, he wrote, to improve women’s health so that they would have strong bodies to carry strong babies.¹³¹ By binding the nation’s fate to women’s education, Liang created a rationale for bringing women’s education into the public domain as well as providing an ideological basis for elite groups to begin building women’s schools. This link, however, was established on the basis that Liang excluded the “*cainü*” tradition from late imperial female learning, as Harriet Zurndorfer has pointed out.¹³² Female reformers, on the contrary, embraced Western knowledge while maintaining their own tradition

of “*cainü*” and “*xianyuan*” that emphasized women’s self-expression and intellectual independence.¹³³ Unfortunately, as shown below, women reformers’ voices were inundated under the high tide of nationalism and the urgent state-building program in the 1902 New Policy Reform, which adopted the male approach of 1898 in promoting a women’s public educational system.¹³⁴

Indeed, the prominent men who collaborated to found Jingzheng Girls’ School had been inspired by such ideas. The school admitted girls from gentry families, ages eight to fifteen, who already possessed basic reading skills. The school regulations stated: “Although the school advocates equal education for all classes and opposes discrimination on the basis of social status, opening this school is regarded as a pioneering action: this school is training teachers for the future. Therefore, it is necessary to select women from good families (*liangjia guixiu*).”¹³⁵ The founders and financial supporters of the school were all from literati-official families, and the first cohort of students was drawn exclusively from their ranks.¹³⁶ The school regulation that forbade students from “bringing their own maids to live with them” gives us an indication of just who was enrolled there.¹³⁷ Education for the upper classes followed the late imperial tradition of schooling women of the gentry. As we will see in Chapter 2, the imperial tradition as it applied to female education (which included literary study, moral training, and domestic skills training) was not soon shaken off.¹³⁸ By this time, as we saw above, missionary schools for girls had also become schools for the elite. From 1898 on, enrolment in both missionary schools and private schools run by Chinese gentry expanded. Something had changed: perhaps it was a new strategy on the part of missionaries, perhaps it was a revolution in elite attitudes, perhaps it was both. Missionary schools had an impact, but, ultimately, it was the Chinese elite that was the driving force in the transformation of Chinese women’s education.