

Keeping the Nation's House

Contemporary Chinese Studies

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Keeping the Nation's House

Domestic Management and the
Making of Modern China

Helen M. Schneider



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Keeping the Nation's House



Map of southeastern China with mid-twentieth-century provincial boundaries

Introduction

[A goal is] to cultivate children's happiness. The basic idea is that you want your child to feel satisfied. Even if the food is unsatisfactory, the clothes are inadequate, or the habitation is insufficient, you still should tell your child that it is very good. You do not want the child to be greedy and insatiable. In the future whether or not he is law-abiding, well-behaved, satisfied, or works for his own knowledge and does not simply enjoy the fruits of other's labor, these all start from this word: "Happiness."

In the 1940s, Nationalist Ministry of Education bureaucrats in conjunction with educators in teacher training schools developed social education experimental zones in China's interior. The purpose of the zones was to improve the physical and emotional quality of citizens by addressing all aspects of their daily existence. The training document from which the epigraph is taken shows the significance the ministry attached to a mother's role in developing the attitudes and behaviours conducive to a stable social order. The female and male intellectuals who worked in these zones, including Nationalist bureaucrats, educational leaders, and students, believed that improving the quality of how women dealt with the daily fundamentals of family management was key to the nation's long-term success and positive development. The goals of creating a stable society and saving China from national disintegration were directly and intimately related to the work of making families happier.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals felt that women were responsible for perfecting their management of domestic space in order to strengthen the Chinese nation. As the Qing dynasty experienced dramatic decline at the end of the nineteenth century, intellectual leaders believed that women, because they were uneducated and superstitious and had bad habits that were a negative influence on their children, were at least partly responsible for China's weaknesses. They wanted women to be better

prepared for their responsibilities as mothers and wives and, in the final years of the dynasty, Qing officials mandated that new schools for girls and teacher training schools should train women in important skills that would prepare them for their gendered responsibilities as household managers.

In these new schools, educators taught household management classes and encouraged women to take their roles as wives and mothers seriously in order to ensure the future stability of the nation. As more schools of higher education opened up to girls, the emphasis of domestic science shifted from a curriculum in housekeeping skills to the preparation of domestic managers with scientific skills. By the end of the 1920s, the field as it was taught in normal schools and colleges no longer trained women solely for their wifely roles; instead, the discipline of home economics prepared women who might not only manage households efficiently but also manage projects of social reform and help engineer a better China. The graduates of home economics programs and their fellow intellectuals, such as the participants in the wartime social education experimental zones, created and promoted a broader agenda of nurturing an emotionally stronger, physically healthier, and more productive citizenry prepared to meet the challenges of the modern age.

The discipline of home economics facilitated the formation of a group of white-collar professional women who advocated more rational ways of living and practical habits for all Chinese people. In the government's support for home economics and its regulation of the social education experimental zones, it is clear that one cornerstone of social order was the division of fundamental responsibilities between men and women. Educators, administrators, and officials alike clearly delineated these differences as they asked women to pay particular attention to domestic responsibilities, to matters of emotional development, to internal management, and to significant daily tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and child rearing. The discipline of home economics thus tells us much about how a system of gendered responsibilities was institutionalized and made foundational to the Chinese nation-state.

This book introduces readers to educated, professional Chinese women – home economists – who played an important role in their country's social and political transformations in the twentieth century. As an educational discipline designed to train women in managerial, scientific, and transformative skills, home economics developed in China as intellectuals infused the social space of the home with new political and modern significance. Like political theorists in the past, reformist intellectuals who designed the field stressed the foundational nature of the family for the stability of the state. Twentieth-century domestic reformers radically re-imagined the home as a

place where habits of citizenship were formed, and they believed that opening up the domestic, “inner” sphere to public scrutiny and to careful management were central parts of becoming modern. The discipline of home economics created a class of trained women with disciplinary and managerial skills who worked to transform the most fundamental of political spaces, the home, and who invested deeply in instilling new, modern ideas in the inhabitants of that space, the families of the nation.

Historians have largely overlooked the role of home economists as political actors and social reformers in the twentieth century. For many readers, “home economics” in any context may conjure up images of girls learning to cook or to swaddle plastic dolls. In the case of China, they might summarily dismiss educators who promoted the discipline in China’s colleges and universities as traditionalists eager to keep women in their “proper place.” Indeed, home economists in China have not been carefully examined by historians, perhaps because of such assumptions. More significantly, however, the contribution of home economics to China’s transformation has been neglected because of the discipline’s intrinsically political nature. Home economics addressed the fundamentals of human life – food, clothing, and shelter – and became a field where political actors and social reformers contested their differing agendas about how best to save the nation, how to imagine women’s contributions to society, and how to efficiently and rationally manage and develop China’s population. After the Chinese Communist Party founded the People’s Republic of China in 1949, ideological assumptions about the field led to its undoing as an academic discipline, even as some of the methods promoted by home economics practitioners to manage vital aspects of China’s population lived on in the regulatory efforts of the new regime. The basic assumption of home economists, that women had specific responsibilities to society, continued forward as well.

Home economics and women’s professional development advanced in fits and starts over the entire course of the twentieth century. The importance of the discipline gained greater recognition as China was beset by internal and external challenges. By the beginning of the twentieth century, China was in a state of real crisis. As the Qing dynasty crumbled and finally collapsed in 1911, elites explored many options for reforming society in order to create a strong state, among them the regulation of girls’ education. As the new republic faltered and political control fragmented among different warring factions after 1916, local educational elites developed programs to teach girls and women to be better homemakers as a path to a stronger China. In the late 1910s, imperialist incursions by western powers and Japan and political

uncertainty sparked a movement, known as the New Culture Movement or the May Fourth Movement, to reform China's culture and society.¹ One theme of the movement was women's liberation, which included calls for greater freedom from family restrictions and more educational opportunities. Teacher training schools accelerated their instruction of women, and many of these programs included preparation in domestic science.

As women gained new knowledge and skills associated with improving their abilities as managers of domestic space, it became apparent that they could use these skills outside the home. Some educators saw the potential of this paradoxical situation, and they took advantage of it. While claiming that women's "natural talents" as mothers and wives needed to be developed, educators taught gender-specific home economics skills that could, and often did, translate into professional careers outside the home. Over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, careers based on expanded notions of women's gendered responsibilities became acceptable forms of service to the nation and a source of empowerment for middle- and upper-class women.

The first long-running department of home economics opened near the end of the New Culture period, in 1924, at Yenching University (Yanqing daxue) in Beijing. Its founders designed a curriculum to prepare women to care for their own families and domestic spaces and, in addition, to train them for careers in social management. Yenching's institutional model did not immediately catch on, in part because of political turmoil. In the mid-1920s, the Nationalist party (Guomindang) took military steps to eliminate warlordism and to reunify China politically. Under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, a new Nationalist government was established in Nanjing in 1927. From the late 1920s until the Japanese invasion of China proper in 1937, this stronger centralized government attempted to regulate all educational programs and institutions. Educational and political elites continued to encourage the development of home economics (*jiazheng*), and other colleges and universities opened departments, often with the primary goal of training teachers of home economics who could then teach domestic skills to primary- and middle-school girls.

After the Japanese invasion and the retreat of the Nationalist government into the interior, the state intensified its efforts to manage the population and found that it needed increased support from Chinese intellectuals for projects of social engineering. The government discovered in home economists and other academics, a pool of willing intellectual labourers who worked to improve the "quality" of Chinese people in social education experimental zones. Believing that social stability and strength depended in part on familial peace and children's emotional health, they hoped to improve China by educating

women to become better family managers. Chinese intellectuals, including home economists, extended their ideas of what modern Chinese families should look like, and made great efforts to remodel women who lived without the perceived benefits of scientific and efficient household management practices.

State support for reformers' efforts to develop the nation by modifying behaviour in the homes of China continued in the 1940s, even as the Nationalists waged their civil war against the Communists. The women who designed home economics programs that opened in the 1920s and 1930s accelerated their efforts to create a pool of talented female managers in the 1940s. Their departments trained educators, nutritionists, social welfare workers, and child welfare experts whose disciplinary knowledge was sought by the Nationalist Party as it struggled to maintain control over the population and territory of China.

The victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949 led to significant changes in the field of home economics. By 1952 the new regime had dismantled the academic home economics departments and many of their home institutions. But the story of home economics did not end there. The field continued to exist in the professional contributions of home economics experts trained between the 1930s and the early 1950s. The women who remained on the mainland continued to serve society in their chosen careers, and in recent decades many of them have made consistent efforts to re-establish aspects of the field that might also help China as the nation develops today.

In the twentieth century the family's connections to political change intensified as the developing state apparatus and its intellectual operators saw the families and the homes of the nation as legitimate targets for public reform. Indeed, home economists helped open domestic space to a wider application of control by advocating certain types of reform and renovation. They believed that Chinese people should learn the habits of a more modern identity, hallmarks of which included efficiency, scientism, and hygiene. At the same time, the discipline cleared the way for a smoother operation of state power, which, following Foucault, is not simply a repressive external force that acts on individuals but instead becomes an internalized system of control and rationalized behaviour.² Advocates of better domestic management hoped that home economics, particularly as it was taught in educational institutions, would act as most fields of knowledge act – to discipline minds to think, and bodies to act, in certain ways. If home economics reached its potential as a discipline, it would have that salutary effect on Chinese minds and bodies as well. Educators believed that the physical practices of keeping the house in order, of bearing and raising good children, of cleaning and cooking, could be managed

more efficiently and rationally. They optimistically assumed that opening the space of the family to regulatory techniques, and training women in these techniques, would strengthen the Chinese state.

Intellectuals in Republican China dramatically re-imagined what women's responsibilities in the home, and in relation to the family, should entail. The history of home economics detailed in this book shows the ways in which this relationship changed. Following the work of other scholars, I classify ideas about the physical space of the home – and the work, management, activity, and organization associated with that space – as domesticity. This includes housekeeping, child rearing, and aspects of household management.³ I use the term “domesticity” guardedly, because for many historians it establishes family matters and the private interior of the home, a space usually associated with women's activities, as a “separate sphere” that is marginal to the ruling processes of the state.⁴ Quite simply, this dichotomy did not exist in China.

Chinese thinkers long imagined the supposed private realm of the family and the public realm of imperial power as interconnected spaces. In traditional Chinese statecraft, correct family management was foundational to the ruling of the state. The rites and rituals of the family established social hierarchies that were replicated in society as individuals deferred to the imperial order. In Patricia Ebrey's words, rituals of the family “convey basic principles legitimating social order.”⁵ If family rituals were carried out correctly, with everyone acting according to their place in the social system, then society would be prosperous, peaceful, and stable.

Because women had a significant role in family life, political thinkers connected their actions in the home to the creation of a stable society. Susan Mann's work has been most consistent on this point. For example, she has shown that the eighteenth-century political thinker Zhang Xuecheng acknowledged that even if women acted in a different social space, they were still central to the social and political order. “Zhang's understanding of women's public voices erases the line dividing public and private that western political philosophy has canonized. In short, the historical record of Chinese women – both their placement in it and their consciousness as recorded there – shows a pervasive awareness of the intimate relationship between family life and public politics.”⁶ The centrality of the family in political thought meant that there was no distinct dichotomy between the private space of the home and the ruling of the state.

Despite the theoretical connectedness of “public” and “private” spaces, what nonetheless has remained important in social discourse is the division between social spaces for men and women and the roles ascribed to each.

This has often been expressed by the long-standing idea that women should conduct their activities in the *nei* (or inner) realm of the home, whereas men should focus their actions on the *wai* (or outer) spaces. According to Susan Mann, “in High Qing discourse the principle of *bie* – separate spheres – is invoked to stress that wives and mothers inside the home embody the moral autonomy and authority on which husbands and sons must rely on to succeed outside.”⁷ Political thinkers, such as Zhang Xuecheng, saw women’s responsibilities in the domestic realm (*nei*) as central to the stability of the imperium. Political organization, either as imperial orders or in the formulation of a modern nation-state, was based on this very separation of responsibilities and labour into “inside” and “outside.”

In imperial times, women’s “inner” duties could vary widely, but in all cases the expectation was that women would contribute to the maintenance of morally upright and economically stable families. A wife’s actions as an “inner helpmate” contributed to the family’s rise to prominence or decline to failure.⁸ A woman’s most important task was motherhood, since bearing and rearing children were central to the continuation of the family and the lineage, and family instruction books often detailed to mothers how their morals influenced the fate of the family.⁹ Teaching by moral example and practising correct nurturing were important parts of child rearing. Daughters followed their mothers’ examples of domestic work, and elite mothers gave special attention to training them, as Ebrey has put it, “to be sweet, agreeable, deferential, and reserved.”¹⁰ In the later imperial period, literate elite women, such as those examined by Dorothy Ko in her monograph on seventeenth-century Jiangnan, could be charged with overseeing their sons’ preparation for exams.¹¹

In order for women to be able to aid in their sons’ educations, they had to be educated themselves. Girls’ education emphasized specific virtues and domestic responsibilities. Early Confucian texts, such as the *Book of Rites* (*Li ji*) clearly outlined the expectation that girls remain inside the home and cultivate virtues such as obedience and the skills of women’s “weaving” work.¹² The Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi expanded on the idea that women had the primary responsibility for domestic management and reminded women of their obligation to cultivate some of the same virtues as men, such as filial piety.¹³ In moments of particular national and social crises when male elites felt threatened by broad social changes beyond their control, they often tightened the prescriptions for their wives’ and daughters’ actions and virtues in the domestic realm in order to maintain their own social status.¹⁴

In addition to helping police the moral boundaries appropriate to their class, elites expected women to help maintain the economic status of their families by cultivating their productive capabilities within the home through

“women’s work.” Prescriptive literature summed up this distinction between “inner” and “outer” economic contributions and spatial distributions as “men till, women weave.”¹⁵ Social norms saw women’s production of textiles as a virtue, in part because they contributed to the maintenance of the family.¹⁶ In many parts of China, even after production of specialized cloth became more commercialized, women of the lower classes produced homespun cloth for their families’ use, and many women excelled at needlework or embroidery.

Wives, particularly in elite families, also served as household managers. For elite women, this meant that they organized and oversaw all the activities of the household, including the cooking and cleaning duties of the servants, and orchestrated family harmony.¹⁷ In the late imperial period, many families left the management of the domestic economy in the hands of women and expected that they would handle the income and accounts in a frugal manner. Indeed, by the late Qing, as Joseph McDermott has shown, elite women often had primary responsibility for their families’ financial welfare.¹⁸ Managing domestic space was an important responsibility; a wife who managed well and without complications enabled her husband to attend fully to public “outside” affairs.

A woman’s place within the hierarchy of the Confucian family determined her social responsibilities and her identity. In the imperial period, domestic responsibilities were always conditioned by the exact nature of one’s relationship to others. As a wife, a mother, a daughter, a concubine, a daughter-in-law, a niece, or an aunt, a woman would have different relationships and obligations. Tani Barlow has explained that social interactions within (and outside of) the family were not determined by an “oppositional logic,” but instead were ruled by a “yin-yang logic” that likewise determined other relationships in the social system.¹⁹ In theory, a woman carried out specific responsibilities in a family, almost always associated with the “inner” workings of domestic space, to balance the “outer” actions of male family members.

In the early twentieth century, as the imperial order collapsed, the relationship between intimate spaces of the home and public spaces shifted in emphasis. This shift, however, did not result in the rise of a Chinese “cult of domesticity.”²⁰ Used in the context of American history, the word “cult” assumes that there is a fundamental division between the internal (home) and the external (political) spheres and implies that the domestic is marginal to more “orthodox” operations of power.²¹ In China, there was no such separation between the domestic and operation of political power. Over the course of the twentieth century, women’s responsibility for carrying out domestic management remained important precisely because of the interconnection

between family matters and the state. The intellectuals whom I discuss here, men and women alike, viewed management of Chinese homes (domesticity) as central to national concerns.

This is not to argue that the idiom of “inside” and “outside” disappeared in the twentieth century. The *nei/wai* dichotomy clearly had, and continues to have, power as a fundamental operating principle. Bryna Goodman and Wendy Larson’s volume exploring the relationship between gender and space suggests, like Mann’s work, that *nei/wai* is not equivalent to a private/public separation. Instead, *nei/wai* is about how individuals actually inhabit each space. They argue that “even if the worlds of *nei* and *wai* were contextually defined and connected into a larger whole, their distinctions were experienced by many men and women as both clear and real well into the modern period.”²² *Nei* and *wai* did shape gender relations and created normative social orders. Furthermore, according to Goodman and Larson, “the social and political order depended on a strict gendered division of space and of labor.”²³ Men had a set of responsibilities associated with *wai*, and women a set of responsibilities, for their labour and their morality, associated with *nei*.

In this book, I eschew an immediate and overwhelmingly negative identification of *nei* with the subordinate position of women. It is essential to consider that many twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals did believe, as a theoretical construct, that women’s activities associated with *nei* complemented men’s *wai*-centred actions. They continued to believe in the significance of the family, and did not necessarily see domestic responsibilities as negative or as less important for the proper maintenance of the nation.

During the twentieth century, elites struggled to define a new China, their relationship to the state, and their roles in creating a stronger nation. They engaged in a process of debates, idealizations, and long, hard thinking about what a modern China would look like.²⁴ The male and female elites that I discuss in this book were professional people – academics, journalists, civil servants, or a combination of all three – and had several qualities of the intellectual class (*zhishi fenzi*), as Tani Barlow has defined it.²⁵ They believed themselves to be true representatives of the nation, and they used new “localized” signs to enhance their own positions.²⁶ As members of a literate elite, they had all received a middle-school education or higher. Many of them trained in missionary-founded schools, and in several cases went abroad for higher education, to Japan, Europe, or North America.²⁷ They interpreted knowledge from the Chinese past, appropriated meanings and ideas from outside China, and reinterpreted them for their Chinese audiences in order to further their agenda of strengthening the nation.

Intellectuals, likewise, were part of a longer tradition of educated elite who maintained that it was part of their responsibility, as enlightened members of society, to reform the Chinese people. Late Qing reformers such as Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sen bemoaned the fact that China's weakness was due in part to national characteristics that needed to be reformed.²⁸ In the twentieth century, intellectuals from literary superstar Lu Xun to home economist He Jing'an all felt it necessary to educate, enlighten, and civilize China's less fortunate, uneducated masses.

In their quest to build a stronger China, many intellectuals focused on the fate of the family. They continued to believe in the foundational significance of the family to the Chinese state, but they had different ideas about how to carry out real reform of this pivotal space.²⁹ As Susan Glosser has shown, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and the Nationalist and Communist state were all deeply invested in the creation and standardization of new family system in China. All of these historical actors encouraged the development of the "nuclear" or small family system (*xiao jiating*) because, as they believed, the extended, large family system, where three or more generations were "under one roof," restricted the development of productive individuals and civic virtue.³⁰ As Gail Hershatter wrote: "The domestic realm was identified as a key node for the installation of modern practices, epitomized by the 'small household' of a free-choice conjugal couple."³¹ In destabilizing the long-held ideas about women's responsibilities to the patriline, family reformers also opened up new interpretations of how women should inhabit "inner" spaces.

The twentieth-century transformations and the growth of home economics marked a significant shift in the ways that women occupied *nei* spaces and their movement into *wai* domains. Nation building, fragmented political power, imperialism, and the creation of modern citizen subjectivities all explain why these shifts occurred.³² As part of these changes, women experienced increased visibility as rhetorical markers of a modern (or backward) China in, as Mayfair Yang has put it, "public discourse and debate, cultural and ideological production, and mass-media representation."³³ In the post-Qing Republican period, some rhetorical constructions and debates about women in relation to the family often sounded much like those of old, but with new national-oriented (rather than family-oriented) emphases. Several scholars have discussed how, for example, the four-character term of "good wife, wise mother," constructed out of the separate terms *liangqi* and *xianmu* that had been in use in China since ancient times, emerged in this period as a merger of, as Glosser put it, "ancient Chinese ethical principles with contemporary nationalist concerns."³⁴ In the Republican period, intellectuals used the term to bring the ideas into line with new politics that promoted

the ideal for the good of the Chinese nation. Consistently, periodical literature of the Republican period advised women on aspects of being good wives and mothers as keepers of the *nei*. They expected that women would be good domestic managers. This meant they would purchase properly, cook healthy food, maximize the efficient use of their time and energy, and practise sound household economy. Most importantly, women had to reproduce and nurture children. In the Republican period, representations of women continued to be associated with their *nei* responsibilities.

At the same time, women were also newly visible in physical public spaces where they had not formerly been. An example of women's changing relationship to the *wai* was the formation of girls' schools in the last decades of the Qing dynasty. By the 1850s, foreign missionaries began to establish the first formalized education for Chinese girls, and many educated elites believed that women had to receive better education in order to raise better, more knowledgeable citizens. In the final years of the Qing, private individuals began to set up schools for girls and to print instruction books that combined the values of the classics and family instruction manuals with examples of foreign women.³⁵ Early schools for girls, Weikun Cheng has written, were on the margins of the public and the private, and later served as fully public spaces where the private, family concerns of a girl's fate met the concerns of the public in creating a new generation of modern citizens.³⁶ Institution-based education gave women a forum for existing more prominently in the public eye.

Educational institutions also provided sites where men and women could re-imagine and rearticulate their relationship to the state. This was particularly significant because with the collapse of the Qing, the Republican period was a time when old imperial orders and hierarchies needed to be transformed into new systems of power. Robert Culp has clearly shown how educators debated and experimented with ideas of modern citizenship in the schools of the lower Yangtze.³⁷ For these intellectuals, establishing a coherent educational system to teach ethics and civic morals seemed the best way to approach the challenges facing China. Likewise, Chinese suffragists pushed for greater educational opportunities as they negotiated a social order where they might share political rights with men. As Louise Edwards explains: "They did not challenge the fundamental premise that education was an important prerequisite for political power, rather they asserted that women could be educated to a standard equal to that of men's, and in turn legitimately claim access to political power."³⁸ Xiaoping Cong has also shown the links between education and nation-strengthening projects through a careful examination of teachers' schools. In her account, intellectual educators both experimented

with localizing educational ideas from abroad and drew on China's long educational tradition as they created a national educational system.³⁹ Furthermore, the education of women in normal schools provided new professional opportunities to women in the field of teaching.

As females entered the public space as students, their visibility spurred debate about what kind of citizens the new educational system should prepare. Girls had previously been taught at home, by their mothers. What should educators teach these students who were new to an institutional educational system? In his examination of early girls' and women's education in the decades before the 1920s, Paul Bailey argues that intellectuals promoted an agenda of "modernizing conservatism" that refashioned traditional ideas about women's skills and work (associated with "inner" roles) to promote national development.⁴⁰ He richly details how intellectuals imagined institutionalized education would prepare women to be more effective mothers and domestic managers. He argues that educators in the early reform period developed household management classes to emphasize girls' domestic roles and to create modern "good wives, wise mothers."

As women's connections to *nei* and *wai* changed, however, so too did the purposes of their education. This change occurred at the moment – or perhaps because it was the moment – when women could no longer be restrained in either the physical or the rhetorical space of the home. By the second decade of the twentieth century, intellectuals had reconsidered the relationship between *nei* and *wai* due to the imperatives of building a strong nation-state. Their identities no longer tied solely to their place in the family, women developed new social roles and took on responsibilities for national development. The content of domestic science shifted as educators strove to find solutions to China's many ills. Solutions seemed to lie in practical applications of transnational ideas, such as hygiene, consumption, and physical fitness, all of which might contribute to the making of the state and Chinese identities in Republican China.⁴¹ Intellectuals reconfigured these transnational ideas, applied them to domestic management, and deployed them to enhance women's status in the public sphere through the field of home economics.

Home economics drew heavily from one crucially powerful category of knowledge for Chinese intellectuals in the twentieth century: "Science," broadly defined. Scholars have explained how aspects of science, such as the theories of Charles Darwin, made the threat of China's disintegration seem possible and dire.⁴² Science, however, also held out the promise of national strength and power, a system of meaning that could help pull China out of the mire of "tradition" and avert the threat of national destruction. New Culture intellectuals such as Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi believed in the power

of science, pragmatism, and new modes of rational thought that science appeared to represent. Science provided a reason to hope that China's problems might be solved. As Wen-hsin Yeh has explained: "The insistent belief in scientific truth, meanwhile, represented a search for both an intellectual and a moral anchor in an era of confusion and disbelief."⁴³ Megan Greene has called this intellectual faith in science "scientism," which she defines as the "belief in the utility of scientific knowledge and a scientific approach to life to promote progress away from an unscientific backward past and towards an orderly, modern future."⁴⁴ Home economists claimed much of the same optimism about the power of their field to reorient, reinvent, and remould Chinese citizens for the sake of better and more stable lives.

Discursive formulations of "science" came from many different sources, one of which was information from abroad, including military technologies, techniques of sociology, or medical and hygienic knowledge. For example, Frank Dikötter has noted that during this period "modernizing elites referred to human biology instead of imperial cosmology as an epistemological foundation for social order."⁴⁵ In all disciplines, intellectuals believed that science (*kexue*) would be of great use in building a new, better, stronger society. It is these idealistic, utopian understandings of science that filtered into home economics, particularly since the field drew on many categories of scientific knowledge, including biology, chemistry, medicine, hygiene, and psychology.

The academic discipline of home economics in China developed as a means of professionalizing domesticity at a time when similar trends were occurring in other parts of the world. Home economics education developed quickly in the United States, where, by the earliest years of the twentieth century, it provided a scientific and modern base for the professionalization of social work, nursing, and teaching.⁴⁶ During the Progressive Era in the United States, educated American career women concerned themselves with righting the wrongs of the nation by establishing settlement houses and kindergartens and by pushing for government reforms. Indeed, the US government became more activist in the private sphere and more sensitive to ideas of social responsibility, took greater responsibility for social conditions, and became more involved in the home life of citizens – a process Pauline Baker has called the domestication of politics.⁴⁷

In the early twentieth century, the field of home economics began to coalesce internationally. Proponents of expanded disciplinary training from many parts of the world, notably Western Europe and Japan, started to communicate more widely. According to an institutional history of the International Federation of Home Economics (IFHE), by 1900 the discipline was

compulsory in some localities and countries, namely, “some Swiss cantons and in Germany, Belgium, and Great Britain.”⁴⁸ In 1908, teachers of home economics in these and other countries, excluding the United States but including Japan, met in Switzerland to form the IFHE.⁴⁹ As far as can be ascertained, China did not send a representative. The organization held periodic congresses, and in 1922 the theme of the conference was, as the institutional history puts it, dealing with “the training in rural home economics and with the training of adults.” The history continues: “It was becoming necessary to work out a form of training that would teach women to cope with their household work alongside their professional activities.”⁵⁰ The Chinese women intellectuals introduced in this book were aware of these trends in home economics education elsewhere in the world, and after the 1920s they designed curricula that reflected these developments, and primarily the trends of the field in the United States. Their goal was to find practical solutions to help Chinese women meet the responsibilities of domestic management.

The discipline of home economics created a class of trained women with managerial skills who tried to reform the most fundamental of political spaces, the home, and who were deeply invested in instilling new modern ideas into the inhabitants of that space, the families of the nation. As teachers, nurses, nutritionists, and social workers, graduates of home economics programs addressed the bourgeois concern over “squandering vital forces” of the nation, and became part of a state apparatus aimed at normalizing and routinizing actions – and to a certain extent, thoughts – in the nation’s homes.⁵¹ At the same time, their work to create a discipline of their own institutionalized patterns of gendered responsibilities that continued throughout the twentieth century.

The Chapters of This Book

The intellectuals involved in the project of family reform and who wrote about the improvement of family management targeted women of a certain class: not those women who laboured in the factories of Shanghai but those who were part of the growing bourgeois, urbanized middle class, a group that Marie-Claire Bergère has called the Chinese bourgeoisie.⁵² Women in this group had the financial means to hire servants and had access to higher education. During this period, the bourgeoisie were eager to distinguish their tastes and practices of consumption from those of either the very upper classes or the lower classes.⁵³

In the first decades of the twentieth century, many magazines for women were established to discuss and popularize the goals of improving education

for women and increasing their visibility in society. This book starts with an overview of expectations for women as presented in the periodical press before going into the ideas of home economics education. The periodicals examined in the first chapter set out the normative expectations for middle-class and upper-class women in the home. I examine different types of publications, from the more theoretical to “glossier” magazines, to give a sense of a system of interconnected and related signs and suggestions for women’s social roles. In all cases, the materials, read together, provide a sense of the general hopes that intellectuals had for women’s roles in the home. I read them as a set of social expectations that I call the “happy family” ideology.

Contributors to these journals imagined that household managers had several important tasks, including the triad of domestic management (food, clothing, shelter) and proper child rearing. One didactic drawing from an April 1937 edition of *Housewife’s Friend* magazine asks the rhetorical question, “Housewife?” (*Zhufu?*). (See Figure 1.1.) It shows a housewife, drawn here in a collapsed heap at the bottom of the page with a bubble saying “Housewives’ responsibilities” beside her. The panels criticize the woman for not taking proper care of the family. Instead of investing her time and energy in preparing food or clothing, necessary material goods appear to magically float out of restaurants and stores. The woman is apparently incapable of cleaning her house correctly, for spiders have spun cobwebs under the bed. Furthermore, she has left her miserable child in the care of a servant; the assumption is that the child is not being nurtured correctly. At the end, the woman is asked to “Get up!” to meet her responsibilities to the family. The intellectuals who wanted to improve family management believed in the utopia of perfectly controlled space, and perfectly managed action in that space. Almost all aspects of the happy family ideology became central parts of the academic discipline of home economics and the professional concerns of home economists.

The question soon became how these ideal domestic managers would be trained. In Chapter 2, I examine the intellectual debates over what form women’s education should take. Much of the original justification for institution-based female education was that educated women would raise a better generation of citizens; educated women’s children would be better prepared to meet the challenges facing the Chinese nation.⁵⁴ As Paul Bailey wrote about this education in the first decades of the twentieth century, “only an education that would transform women into frugal, hygienic and persevering household managers demonstrating loyalty to husbands and sensitivity to family harmony would guarantee social and moral order and hence national survival.”⁵⁵



Figure 1.1 “Housewife?” (1) “Where clothes come from” (Store); (2) “Where food comes from” (Restaurant); (3) “This is a bed”; (4) “Children are given to nannies to be taken care of”; (5) In the bubble: “Housewives’ responsibilities”; under her, it says: “Get up!”

Source: Ping Ye, “Housewife?” *Zhufu zhi you* [Housewife’s Friend] 1, no. 1 (April 1937).

This justification may have held true for the first two decades of the twentieth century, but over the course of the 1920s, the debates about what women's social roles were and about *how* women should be prepared for these roles continued. In other words, by the 1920s, educators, policy makers, and other intellectuals did not particularly debate whether or not women should be educated, but they did discuss what women should learn. What was still under discussion was the extent to which women should be trained for domestic responsibilities in the home.

I trace the debate over women's social responsibilities through educational journals that date from the 1910s to the 1940s, and archival minutes from meetings called by the 1942 Nationalist Ministry of Education on the subject of women's education. In general, I conclude that educators and administrators, male and female alike, agreed that women did need to be trained to be better wives and wiser mothers who would be able to raise good citizens and create strong families. Many concluded that the discipline of home economics could develop these talents. Chapter 3 outlines views on the field of home economics itself. Relying on educational journals, and a bit on popular magazines such as used in Chapter 1, I discuss the extent to which foreign ideas about home economics came into play as Chinese intellectuals made suggestions about the formation of their own version of the discipline of home economics. Chapter 3 also shows the remarkable unity of opinion between the Ministry of Education and proponents of expanded education for women on the need for home economics as a pragmatic solution to China's problems. I detail the ways in which Chinese educators started to organize the discipline using modern constructs of hygiene, child rearing, and scientific management.

Chapter 4 lays out the institutional configurations of the discipline of home economics. It outlines the significant development of the discipline in the 1920s and its institutionalization in home economics departments over the course of the next decades. I also discuss the ways in which the Nationalist Party became more involved in guiding the development of the field. Materials from the archives of the Nationalist Ministry of Education show that the government was quite interested in promoting practical classes for women, ones that could be used in the sector of public health and social work. During the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Ministry of Education was in constant communication with newly founded departments of home economics. They took steps to regulate the curriculum and the kinds of classes taught as well as the textbooks to be used, and even established or reorganized schools, which led in part to further development of home economics departments.

In Chapter 5, I examine the particular way in which women were active in the expansion of state disciplinary power through wartime social education activities. The chapter charts the trajectory of social education and family education experimental zones in the provinces of Sichuan and Gansu, using archival materials from the Ministry of Education. The work in these zones starkly reveals some of the motivations for the development of the field of home economics. When students and professors took the ideas about domestic space into rural areas and to poor urban homes, they acted as members of the national cultural elite. In order to transform China into a modern nation, they aimed to “civilize” their rural compatriots and organized their activities on the basis of social reform and moral purity. Rather than being entirely co-opted by male-led nationalist movements,⁵⁶ these female intellectuals translated and transmitted their own ideas of society based on overlapping concepts of rational homes and ideal communities.

Chapter 6 shows how home economists managed post-Sino-Japanese War social reconstruction and the upheavals of the civil war. I also explain how the academic discipline and home economists fared under the regulatory hand of a new regime, the People’s Republic of China. When the new education officials reorganized the fields of home economics into different departments, they ended an educational program that had been dominated by women since the 1920s. They did not necessarily provide comparable alternative avenues for female professional advancement, however, nor did they eliminate the enduring idea that men and women had fundamentally different social responsibilities.

The final chapter explains the professional and political legacies of home economists after the establishment of the People’s Republic. Using personal reminiscences of college-educated women who studied home economics in the 1940s and early 1950s in mainland China, I examine the ways in which the field prepared female professionals with skills in social management. The discipline produced a cohort of professional women who actively tried to improve the fundamentals of citizens’ quotidian activities. Graduates of home economics programs went on to become social workers, teachers, chemists, nutritionists, and public health workers, and this chapter outlines the ways in which they negotiated the disparaging attitude of the state toward their discipline during the Maoist period. Chapter 7 also briefly addresses the radical departures and continuities in the re-emergence of institutional *jiazheng* in the post-Mao era.

Although the ideals of early home economists were never completely realized, the discipline left behind continuing forms of gendered responsibilities.

The improvement in women's abilities to manage families and domestic spaces did not result in either their liberation from household work or increased recognition of the value of this work. Instead, it led to the persistence of ideas of female difference and of women's primary responsibility for managing the family. Both legacies, of expanded professional opportunities and of reinforced gender differences, are important keys in understanding national development in twentieth-century China.

1 The Ideology of the Happy Family, 1915-48

Ruling a nation and pacifying the earth begins with the home. If home-life [*jiating shenghuo*] is agreeable and satisfying, then the nation and “all under heaven” will benefit from abundance and a healthy population. Therefore, managing the home [*zhengli jiazheng*] should be deemed women’s important responsibility, and [they] must do their best to accomplish it.

In the early years of the twentieth century, many educated Chinese elite believed that their nation faced a dire crisis. The Qing dynasty, wracked by internal divisions and a weak imperial structure, had just begun to take radical steps to save itself through a series of reforms, western imperialist powers increased their calls for territorial control, and in 1895 Japan had dealt China a crushing defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War. Political and social thinkers alike indicated that their country needed to “wake up” and strengthen itself in order to meet the demands and challenges of an aggressive international system. The goal of “abundance” and the possibility of a lasting peace, as expressed in the epigraph above, appeared difficult to achieve.

Modern Chinese nationalism developed during this period, and in the struggles that China went through after the fall of the Qing dynasty efforts to define the country’s new political and social systems began in earnest. China wrestled with what it would mean to be a modern and strong nation on equal footing with other nations of the world, and there were open and flourishing debates about what this China would look like. During the New Culture Movement of the mid-1910s to the 1920s, the trend was to discredit China’s “tradition” in favour of new knowledge, including scientific ideas. Following the successes of the Guomindang in reuniting a large portion of China and re-creating a central bureaucratic structure in Nanjing, after 1926 the ruling party paid particular attention to ensuring the development of a centralized Chinese state. Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, the Guomindang’s interests in improving the lives of the Chinese people and

controlling the population dovetailed with those of intellectuals eager to see the strengthening of the Chinese nation. These concerns intensified after full-scale hostilities with Japan began in 1937, and continued through the renewed conflict between the Communists and the Nationalists in the 1940s.

During these years, the onus of these national changes fell on men and women alike. Many intellectuals, such as the contributor to the *Ladies' Journal* (*Funü zazhi*) quoted in the epigraph above, expanded on much earlier injunctions that a secure, peaceful, and strong state depended on correct management of the home. This chapter lays out the parameters of expectations for women, particularly in their roles as wives and mothers, by looking at the popular reiterations of domestic responsibilities found in periodical literature from the 1910s to 1940s.

Domestic space figured prominently in the imaginations of those who wanted to save China, and journal articles exhorted women to do better at meeting their responsibilities for family management. The intellectuals (*zhishi fenzi*) who contributed to these journals were members of the literate class who claimed authority due to their education and who mediated western and Chinese knowledge in order to encourage social change.¹ Proponents of better-managed families, including male and female journalists, bureaucrats, and educators, believed that individuals should be liberated from the confines of the extended family and old practices of family management to release their productive potential. In some cases, the journalists assumed the ideal of new families, of nuclear or “small families” (*xiao jiating*); in other cases, they clearly wrote about how a woman, as wife and mother, should manage her own autonomous domestic space.²

Taken as a whole, the articles discussed here present an ideology of a happy family, or an unattainable, imaginary, and very hopeful vision of how to build a better China by creating better homes and a more “agreeable and satisfying” home life. The ideology’s underlying assumption was that women had the fundamental responsibility for rationally and efficiently managing domestic space and the health (physical and emotional) of its inhabitants. The happy family ideology explained that women should create happy homes and contented families, and should take steps to realize the middle- and upper-class urban fantasy of a two-parent family with a few children in a clean, well-managed home. Authors specifically asked women to embrace the roles of wife and mother, and, through the perfection of home management and techniques of child rearing, to make separate yet equally valuable contributions to society. Women could contribute to the project of strengthening the nation by meeting their responsibilities and by repairing the weakened foundations of China, the family itself.

The challenge for these middle-class women, who were at times the advocates for and the target audience of the ideology, was that new scientific ideas and re-imaginings of correct domestic space constantly tempered the definitions of being a good domestic manager. Chinese women laboured under an imperative of rapidly changing standards of efficiency, rationality, and quality. By outlining specific responsibilities and activities in the home, journalist-intellectuals created an ideology of the happy family that gave rise to modern expectations for and commonsense ideas about Chinese women, and consistently reinforced the naturalness of women's responsibilities in the home.

Proponents of the happy family ideology, men and women alike, provided a view of gender that suggested that women and men were equal but that each had important responsibilities in his or her own sphere of influence and expertise. For example, one contributor to *Funü xunkan* wrote in 1928 that the happiest family formation consisted of one man and one wife of the same class, the same power, and the same morals living together as a family. Author Shi argued that many social problems could be solved if people embraced the real purpose of families, which had little to do with "satisfying sexual needs" or "ensuring the continuation of the family line." Families, Shi wrote, could be separated into two basic types: happy and unhappy; "a family is not happy because they live in a three- or four-story foreign style house but because they are bound together by pure love." Most importantly, Shi continued, "[a family is] both the man and the woman believing that the meeting of their two sexes into a new unit will enable them to make even more magnificent and efficient contributions in society."³ The nation would be stronger if men and women coordinated their efforts, each meeting their gender-specific social responsibilities. This formulation of a happy family as a small, cooperative, emotionally connected unit is representative of many of the views of happy family ideology presented in this chapter.

Women's responsibilities, as detailed by the happy family ideology, can be roughly reduced to the ability to both create and consume. In terms of their creative abilities, women needed to first develop their own self-consciousness about the importance of their domestic roles. Most significantly, Chinese women needed to create good Chinese citizens by bearing and nurturing children. By emphasizing motherhood, contributors to women's magazines stressed women's eugenic connections to the nation and to the strengthening of the Chinese race. As Frank Dikötter has pointed out, "the strengthening of the population and the improvement of the race were represented as the essential pre-requisites for national survival, an immense effort in which every single individual was meant to participate actively by closely monitoring his

or her reproductive potential.”⁴ For women, I argue, the responsibility for creation went well beyond the creation of a physical child. Once women became wives, they had to create a correct social space through cleaning (creating a hygienic home) and through the preparation of healthy, nutritious food to maintain the right kind of domestic atmosphere in which children, and the children’s fathers (the women’s husbands), could flourish.⁵

Contributors to the journals discussed here also expected women to be good consumers. Women were responsible not only for purchasing the right kinds of goods but also for knowing the national origins of those goods’ producers. They had to learn to use labour and materials correctly. Good household managers had to maximize the use of their own time and energy, and to use the labour of others in the home correctly. This chapter, therefore, looks at the suggestions of journalist-intellectuals for how women could refashion their lives and activities in order to create better Chinese homes. Its purpose is to provide a snapshot of what the happy family ideology suggested women do in order to understand their social responsibilities, make their daily lives easier, and aid in the project of national rejuvenation.

Tracing the Happy Family: The Sources

Traces of the happy family ideology exist in the Chinese print culture of the early to mid-twentieth century that targeted a female audience. This chapter specifically examines magazines that discussed the well-being of families, provided entertainment for families, or included suggestions about how to improve the home during the Republican period (1911-49). The earliest sources used here date from 1915, the founding date of *Funü zazhi* (*Ladies’ Journal*), and the latest source was from 1948, the end date of *Jiating niankan* (*Home Almanac*). Throughout this period of more than thirty years, the happy home ideology could most often be found in the *jiazheng* (home economics, home management) section of magazines or journals of the day. Some articles were theoretical and provide evidence for how intellectuals linked the importance of household management to the fate of the Chinese nation. Other pieces, from the equivalent of modern-day “glossy” magazines, worked at the level of prescriptive literature for women, detailing ideals of home management and providing didactic instructions on material improvement of the home.

One of the primary sources for this chapter is the Chinese *Ladies’ Journal* (*Funü zazhi*). It was one of the many journals directed toward an emerging bourgeoisie, and it assumed that its readers had middle- and upper-class sensibilities.⁶ The journal benefited from the extensive publication network of the Commercial Press in Shanghai, which published it until 1931.⁷ For the

first few years of the journal's run, around 2,000 or 3,000 copies were published each month; by the 1920s, the number had reached 10,000 each month.⁸ Because each copy of the journal may have been widely shared, the number of readers was probably even greater; one commentator in the 1930s estimated that as many as ten people may have read each copy of any journal.⁹ The composition of the audience shifted over the years: both men and women read the journal, and their educational level improved in the 1920s.¹⁰

The journal's content and target audience make it particularly useful in an examination of discursive constructions of the happy family. Jacqueline Nivard has noted that *Funü zazhi* was "more of a trend follower than a trend setter." It was neither "radically feminist" nor "militant," but instead presented a "liberal review open to new currents and ideas."¹¹ Yung-chen Chiang has also used the journal to explicate the circulation of gender discourses, including domestic science, and argues that in fact the magazine did go through phases in its development. After 1921, he shows, its primarily male contributors "promoted a discourse that extolled women's procreative mission for the Chinese race," and "pounded the themes of femininity and domesticity into its female audience."¹² As Chiang explains, contributors accomplished this with a good dose of scientific theories from abroad, including ideas about biology and germ theory. Articles varied from specific instructions for managing a home – cooking eggs, for example – to more theoretical pieces on the relationship between domestic space and the fate of the Chinese nation. The *jiazheng* sections often discussed social interactions, including how women should conduct themselves in marriage and other family relationships.¹³

Although the logic of happy family ideology can be found in *Funü zazhi*, it was not alone in presenting scientific and modern justifications for the "commonsense" significance of women's domestic roles. This chapter also draws on other long-running journals, including *Nü duo* (or *Nü duo yuekan*), *Funü xunkan*, and *Funü gongming*. *Nü duo* (*Women's Messenger/Women's Bell*) was published by the Christian Literature Society and, as a result, served as a medium for many translated ideas about Christianity and other forms of foreign knowledge. Like other publications, it encouraged women to work on building strong families and suggested techniques for better home management. It also included both theoretical and didactic articles related to the happy family ideology.

The Hangzhou-based *Funü xunkan* (*Women's Review*, or English self-titled *Chang-Hwa Ladies' Magazine*) was founded in June 1917. In the 1930s, the magazine joined broader national movements to change women's consumption practices by emphasizing the significance of "national products."¹⁴ In June 1933, the Introduction stated that "the intention of the magazine is to improve

the strength of women's education, taking the well-being of the home as the aim." It added that the magazine was "looking for contributions on the following: home economics research, women's problems, children's education, and the state of social customs."¹⁵ In its revamped postwar incarnation in 1946, *Funü xunkan* provided even more information about international developments and what women should know about the world. Throughout its run (until 1948), the journal encouraged its readers to create better homes, and argued that this would improve their social position.

For the early editors of *Funü gongming* (*Women's Echo*, 1929-44), correct family ideologies had to do with women's responsibilities, which they explicitly tied to women's rights. As they explained in the first issue's Introduction, they founded the magazine to clear up misunderstandings about women, and they argued that despite talk of "liberation, freedom, equality," many women wasted their energies and did not carry out their social responsibilities.¹⁶ This question of women's responsibilities became particularly pressing in the 1930s, with the incursion of the Japanese into Northern China. During this period, articles emphasized the well-being of the home and explained how women could improve their management of domestic space.

Other vernacular commercial magazines also reiterated the happy family ideology by publishing advice on household management. The short-lived *Jiating zazhi* (*Home Magazine*, 1922-23) stated in 1922 that it was "not a research or scholarly magazine, or a magazine that promotes any ideology (*zhuyi*) ... At the very least it will give people a kind of happiness, something that won't harm them." The very "non-ideological" nature of this magazine, and the fact that the editors claimed it would "follow the ideas of most people in society,"¹⁷ makes it a useful tool for understanding the assumed naturalness of the ideology for its readership. *Jiating liangyou* (*Home Companion*, 1937-?) was likewise clearly designed for bourgeois consumers who aspired to the kinds of idyllic home spaces portrayed in its pages. This chapter also refers to *Kuaile jiating* (*Happy Home*, 1936-37), which morphed into *Jia* magazine in 1937 and retained the same English title. In the 1940s, editors bundled select articles in the annual supplement of *Jia* magazine called *Jiating niankan* (*Home Almanac*), which ran from 1944 to 1949.¹⁸ These more commercial and "glossier" magazines, as well as the more theoretical journals, are all used here to provide a glimpse of the happy family ideology.

In some of the more theoretical meditations on women's responsibilities in these journals' pages, intellectuals during the Republican period clearly grappled with the question of women's domestic role. They questioned the idea that in a modern China all women had to meet their domestic responsibilities. For example, in 1935, the *Funü xunkan* editors asked their readers

to respond to the question: “Where should women go? Leave the home to find a job; quit the job to return home?” One respondent, Huang Huajie, argued that since the family “is the cradle of life, personality, and the cradle for citizens,” women’s domestic responsibilities were most important.¹⁹ Huang pointed out that men had to support their families, perhaps financially, and in much the same way women had to care for their families. Huang further wrote that women had to “know about themselves,” and continued: “They should not believe that leaving the family to have a job is a fashionable thing. A decorative thing in the office is no better than a good [*xian*] housewife [*zhufu*].” In an alarmist expression of women’s responsibilities, Huang continued: “In the process of restoring our race I think it is important to encourage new wise mother, good wife-ism [*xianmu liangqi zhuyi*].”²⁰ In other words, both men and women had to meet responsibilities to the family and to national restoration, but women were to be, in particular, good wives, wise mothers, and good housewives (*zhufu*).

Contributor Huang’s ideas about household management were not atypical in the Republican period. The happy family ideology held that women’s work in the home should be considered equally beneficial to society as men’s work in their careers outside the home. It defined the norm for the majority of women. Although Huang limited his understanding of “housewife” to those working in the home, other happy family ideologists referred to the “housewife” as a woman who managed her home *and* had a career outside the home. No matter what else she did, a woman’s primary social, and political, duty was to make sure that the home was organized and orderly, and that the inhabitants were happy and healthy. Happy family ideologists went to great lengths to explain how domestic responsibilities for creating and consuming correctly and thoughtfully needed to be a central part of the Chinese woman’s identity.

Emotional Management

Contributors to journals asked women to create healthy and harmonious family relationships as part of their domestic management responsibilities. The idea that women should serve as moral arbiters in order to ensure the continued, or improved, success of the family remained important. The happy family ideology reinforced the older idea that women needed to balance family members’ emotions, and held that correctly regulated families would buttress the nation as a whole. This element of the ideology, what I call “emotional management,” remains remarkably consistent in the women’s journals of the Republican period. A woman had to first cultivate her own

right attitude toward her family role, and then take steps to regulate the emotions of her husband and children.

In order to meet the dictates of correct emotional management, many proponents of healthier families suggested that women had to first be aware of their own responsibilities. A 1919 contributor to *Funü zazhi* suggested to readers that “if you pay attention to your own cultivation, then the cultivation of the family will follow.” The contributor continued with the standard argument of concentric circles radiating out from the family: “If you cultivate your household, then the cultivation of the nation will follow – society will have good people, schools will have good students – all of this starts with an outstanding home.”²¹ This proponent of better domestic management linked the awesome responsibility of social ordering to an initial investment in individuals’ self-awareness and self-cultivation.

Creating an outstanding home, others argued, was women’s urgent responsibility and a first step in improving their place in society. In a 1929 article about women’s necessary consciousness, a contributor writing under the pseudonym Zi Wo (Myself) wrote: “Women in the old family system had duties they were not able to fulfill and rights they were not able to enjoy. If we want to gain rights and responsibilities, we must start from reforming the family system. Whether this good family system can be implemented or be effective totally depends on whether women have the right consciousness and determination.”²² Zi Wo argued that a first step was to treat other women in their extended families as equals. Next, they should recognize that men and women had equal responsibilities, such as sharing childcare. These kinds of steps to formulate a “new family system” would lead to women’s “self-liberation” and were the first steps in “civilization’s progress.”²³ In other words, Zi Wo asked women to improve family practices for the betterment of the nation and themselves. Unlike other proponents of happy family ideals, Zi Wo did not let men off the hook: they needed to expand their responsibilities in the home.

Most proponents of the ideology did put women squarely in charge of this domestic renewal, and many mentioned the good wife/wise mother idea as a model. In a 1932 articulation of this ideal, contributor to *Funü gongming* Mei Hongying wrote: “The family is the place where ultimately we find unlimited happiness ... I think that *xianmu liangqi* is the solution.” Mei went on to explain that by embracing this role, women took responsibility for personal fulfillment and national strengthening at the same time, and took steps toward their own liberation.²⁴ Happy family ideologists commonly argued that the so-called liberated “modern women” were not actually “liberated” because

they neglected their domestic responsibilities. For Mei, and many other proponents of the happy family ideology, women would truly realize a kind of liberation once they accepted and excelled in their social roles as wives and mothers.

Contributors asked that after a woman had established her own correct attitude toward the family, she create a harmonious relationship with her husband. A happy family rested in large part on this relationship, and journal contributors presented this as a significant part of the ideology. Some of the statements are reminiscent of earlier Confucian authors of family manuals or guidebooks for women. For example, in the first *jiazheng* section of *Funü zazhi* in 1915, author Yu Xu'ai placed the need for women to obey their husbands at the top of a list of "women's household responsibilities." Yu also argued that wives had to protect their husbands from becoming affected by negative influences.²⁵

Although the idea of obeying the husband was dropped from most lists of wifely emotional responsibilities in later years, articles continued to assert that wives were responsible for nurturing the affective web of social relations and buttressing the correct morality of the family. In the 1939 issue of *Jiating liangyou* (*Home Companion*), one article provided advice on creating a harmonious relationship between husband and wife that was purportedly based on a survey of 300 women and some of their husbands who had been married for over twenty-five years. Some advice was for husbands (one woman, for example, asked her husband not to "completely concentrate on your work, I want you to spend some time with the family"), but most of the suggestions were about what wives should do to manage the emotional health of the family, in addition to taking care of the house (*guanli jiazheng*). Husbands noted that their wives should be a constant, moderating emotional bulwark, who would not cause the husbands' moods (*xinli*) to "vacillate" and "be unstable"; wives were asked to balance the needs of the children as well as the emotional needs of the husband.²⁶ Indeed, an earlier essay in the same magazine, entitled "Housewives' Responsibilities," encouraged wives to be patient with their husbands (a wife should not lose her temper) and to serve their husbands and children as much as possible; it also warned them not to praise another man's ability to make money in front of their husbands.²⁷ For those who promulgated ideas of the happy home, the emotional well-being of the home's inhabitants was an important element in defining a good wife's responsibilities.

These expectations for women to construct the correct emotional space continued in the 1940s. A "test for good wives" from the 1946-47 *Jiating niankan* (*Family Almanac*) encouraged women to answer questions and to

score themselves on whether they were a “good wife.” Questions in the category of emotional or social management included:

- Do you allow your husband to have normal entertainment with his male friends?
- Do you encourage your husband to be ambitious, to be more motivated and to improve himself?
- Do you have proper interest in your husband’s career?
- Are you willing to entertain his friends, to make friendly contacts?²⁸

A wife was to score herself on each question. If the total was too low, she would need to pay more attention to being a good wife.

In each of these examples from 1910s to the 1940s, it was clearly a woman’s responsibility to recognize her significance in managing the family, and then to create and nurture the right kind of emotional space for herself and her husband. Of course, family management also involved caring for children’s emotional and physical needs. The ideology of women as creators and cultivators of the happy family also dictated that a woman should be a wise mother. Indeed, many proponents of happy families believed “wise mothers” to be central to the project of creating a stronger Chinese nation.

(Re)Creating

The happy family ideology firmly held that women were the best choices for the care of young sons and daughters. Intellectuals based this assumption in part on women’s biological differences from men, but it also reflected the eugenicist concern for physical and mental strengthening of the Chinese people. In imperial times, medical professionals and political reformers alike advanced ideas about how the quality of the mother (morally and physically) would have an impact on her children. For reformers in subsequent decades, human reproduction continued to be significant in the quest for national strength.²⁹ Because of their ability to bear children, most intellectuals (including the journalists discussed here) did not consider women’s place in society separate from their reproductive roles.

The association of women with their reproductive role is remarkably consistent in these journals, and likewise feeds into the development of the field of home economics. One 1935 contributor to *Funü xunkan* stated: “Chinese women are the mothers of the Chinese race – they have the responsibility to nurture the Chinese race to be healthy and complete (*jianqian*), because children will become the pillars of society.”³⁰ Intellectuals who contributed to women’s magazines assured readers of the value and significance of their

roles as mothers, and bolstered these ideas by presenting specific, and often very scientific-sounding, claims about how women could be good mothers. These included information about being a mother before and after giving birth. In general, claims about how women should be good mothers fell into the categories of physical and emotional concerns for women's reproductive capabilities, physical and psychological care for developing children, and instruction and teaching of children.

Intellectuals concerned with family strengthening paid particular attention to care of the female body as it related to reproduction. A translated article in the 1915 *Funü zazhi* showed, through text and pictures, how developing girls should exercise because their bodies developed differently from those of boys.³¹ It pointed out that girls between the ages of twelve and eighteen needed to develop their strength gradually in order to provide a "good foundation for the day that they are mothers."³² Caretakers of boys, evidently, need not exhibit the same level of concern.

During the early Republican period, contributors to women's magazines saw times of menstruation and lactation as fraught with danger. They believed that during menstruation women were susceptible to diseases that would jeopardize their future as reproductive citizens. One 1915 contributor to *Funü zazhi* described the process of menstruation and warned that "it is important to take precautions during menstruation, to avoid too much exertion and cold drafts because the capillaries can become infected."³³ Likewise, a 1923 article in *Jiating zazhi* entitled "Women's Special Times" also recommended that menstruating women take particular precautions, noting that "girls go through great changes during this time, making them more susceptible to nervous disorders (*jingshenbing*)."³⁴ The article also encouraged women not to work too hard, to keep quiet, to get enough sleep, and to avoid drinking alcohol and eating strongly flavoured things, including ginger, pepper, or sour or vinegary foods.³⁴ Since these authors believed that the strength of future children depended on women's bodies, signs of women's fertility were considered important moments in their reproductive life.

Similarly, women had to protect their capacity to produce milk that would nourish their children after birth. Contributors to women's journals exhorted women to pay attention to new fashions that could conceivably harm the body. A sleeveless garment that restricted the breasts came under the particular scrutiny of one 1915 author: "It is considered pleasing to the eye, but how can something that restricts the chest be considered beautiful? It prevents women's natural development, and hurts the physiology of the breast."³⁵ The article noted that although "western women bind their waists and Africans put pressure on their heads," fashion was no reason to destroy a woman's

reproductive capabilities. The author implored her fellow countrywomen not to bind their breasts, and argued that wearing the sleeveless garment was like “committing genocide.”³⁶ A woman’s primary concern was to meet her responsibilities to China by raising healthy children, and this article equated a woman who harmed her body with someone set to destroy the Chinese race.

These kinds of calls for women to cease paying attention to fashion at the expense of their biological development accelerated in the 1920s and 1930s. Antonia Finnane explains that breast binding became fashionable in the early years of the twentieth century, when a tight-fitting *qipao* was in vogue.³⁷ The tide began to turn against restricted breasts as more intellectuals, such as Lu Xun, and contributors to women’s magazines drew connections between weak children (and, by extension, a weak China) and women’s bound breasts.³⁸ According to Hsiao-pei Yen, the Nationalist government became involved in the “natural breast” movement in the 1920s, going so far as to pass a law prohibiting breast binding in Guangdong in 1927, for the sake of women’s health.³⁹ A woman’s role as mother was placed first and foremost, and fashion should only complement her procreative responsibilities.

As with developing girls and reproductive women, happy family ideologists urged pregnant women to take special care of their biological and psychological selves. Contributors to the journals discussed here believed that a woman’s actions during pregnancy would have an effect on the quality of her unborn child. The specific recommendations for pregnant women echoed some that Dikötter suggests also come under the rubric of fetal education, often sounding like those from the late imperial period.⁴⁰ These concerns were not just with the body of the child but also encompassed the idea that a woman’s actions and thoughts during pregnancy would also have an effect on the emotional and intellectual health of the child. In other words, a mother had to pay attention to her child’s education, even when the child was still in the womb.

Some of the precautions and actions suggested for pregnant women sounded much like those suggested for menstruating women. The 1915 *Funü zazhi* article that described what to avoid during menstruation also asked that women remain calm during pregnancy, and avoid foods that might “harm the nerves.”⁴¹ Author Shen Fang also discouraged women from exercising before and after meals, and after “strenuously using their brains.”⁴² Shen likewise explained the importance of hygiene, and added that pregnant women should spend time in bright and well-ventilated rooms and pay attention to other moments of susceptibility to disease during bathing before the fourth month (because of the possibility of miscarriage), defecation (constipation meant that poisons might enter the bloodstream), and sexual intercourse

after the sixth month (which might harm the mother's milk and therefore the child). Emotional well-being and happiness were also part of Shen's regimen for pregnant women, as laughing "eases digestion and strengthens muscles, prevents sickness. If one doesn't laugh every day it can be detrimental to one's health."⁴³ One journalist echoed these warnings in a 1934 article that suggested that pregnant woman should take some exercise outdoors, but should also avoid strenuous activity such as dancing, travelling along bumpy roads in a rickshaw, or being jostled in a car or train.⁴⁴ Clearly, these proposals were directed toward women of a class that could and did take rickshaws and trains or go dancing to begin with. Through their claims to be presenting scientific knowledge and new ideas, the articles re-emphasized the importance of being a wise middle-class mother.

The layer on layer of seemingly commonsensical ideas about how to be a modern woman preparing for motherhood strengthened the happy family ideology as a whole by reinforcing the complexities of household management. Care of women's bodies at moments of reproductive significance was directly related to additional skills necessary to be a good mother once children were born. This is not unlike the spread of ideas of scientific motherhood in the nineteenth-century United States. As Rima Apple has put it, these ideas served in part to elevate the nurturing of children to the status of a profession, and the application of scientific innovation to what were considered mundane daily tasks enhanced the status of domestic labour.⁴⁵

In the Chinese context, a happy family and therefore a flourishing state could not be produced without women's careful attention to the correct moulding of the Chinese people. According to one 1931 writer, creating healthy children was "a job with a hundred and twenty thousand different kinds of challenges."⁴⁶ Women had to make an effort to understand some of these ideas, and pay attention to their children's physical and emotional health. Without the proper attention, imperfectly managed families might corrupt children who could otherwise have been strong and productive citizens.

The issue of raising children successfully generally centred on the care of the body, or the child's nourishment, clothing, and hygiene, and the care of the spirit, or the child's emotional or moral development. When intellectuals discussed child rearing in these magazines and journals, they often used the term "family education" (*jiating jiaoyu*). This term appears to have had slightly different meanings depending on who employed it, but broadly speaking, it was the education, training, or care that children received in the home or from their family. As one journalist put it in the 1940s: "The scope and characteristics of *jiating jiaoyu* can be divided into two parts. One is rearing [*yangyu*], which emphasizes rearing and protecting the body of the child, and

the other is moral instruction [*xunjiao*], which emphasizes the emotional [*jingshen*] development of the child.”⁴⁷

In the prescriptive literature, care of children’s health was often quite detailed. For example, as part of a discussion about what should be taught to new mothers, one 1930 article provided very specific advice about how to care for children after they were born. The list included lessons on cleanliness and bathing, clothing, and children’s physical size and development; the development of the five senses (*wugong*), teeth, and eyes; what kind of air and light children should be exposed to; how to hold the child; the organization of the children’s room (it should face the southeast or southwest to get sunlight); and food and milk.⁴⁸ Another 1937 article talked about germs (“don’t let your child be kissed by too many people, it spreads germs that can be harmful to the child”), cleaning children, and children’s nutrition.⁴⁹ In terms of the child’s height and weight, this article argued that Chinese children did not measure up to children in other countries, and mothers needed to work harder to help them reach international standards in these metrics.

Parents had the obvious role of providing their children with the basics (food, shelter, clothing); a more complex issue was the moral development and instruction of children. Indeed, to some extent, happy family ideologists emphasized the “moral” aspect of family care for the child when they wrote about family education (*jiating jiaoyu*). Even before 1915, contributors to journals concerned themselves with the emotional development of children. An excerpt from a 1903 journal for women describes how a compromised education would affect the adult citizen: “People already know the importance of *jiating jiaoyu*. For example, if a family’s child studies hard, and they are clean and tidy, then when people see the child they will say that it is because he has had a good upbringing (*jiajiao hao*). If the children are impolite and misbehave, every time people see them they will say it is because they have a bad upbringing.”⁵⁰

It was one thing for the family to lose face, but what intellectuals were increasingly concerned about in the twentieth century was that incorrect family education was creating the wrong kinds of citizens. The 1903 article went on to argue that Chinese people had a deficient understanding of *jiating jiaoyu*; families taught boys to get an official career and not bring disgrace to the family, and instructed girls to be “humble, obedient, tender, and controlled by men.” In a plea for better education, the article argued that “this kind of education is called ‘slave education’ [*nuli jiaoyu*]. It is impossible to create outstanding and brave citizens [*guomin*] out of this kind of education. Now when we talk about *jiating jiaoyu*, we should start with changing all the old bad customs in order to create self-governed and independent citizens,

only this will bring about a good outcome.”⁵¹ Good habits taught in the home would create the conditions for a civilized and independent citizenry, consisting of men and women alike.

During the Republican period, concerns shifted away from proper child rearing for the good of the family to a preoccupation with child rearing or family education for the good of the nation.⁵² In many ways, ideas of *jiating jiaoyu* during the New Culture period were a thorough criticism of the “traditional” ways of raising children.⁵³ Contributors to the journals and magazines discussed here wanted to refashion Chinese understandings of childhood and rework early childhood practices in order to preserve China, but they continued to expect that women would have the primary responsibility for childcare, as in earlier centuries.⁵⁴ Happy family ideologists saw proper child rearing as absolutely central to the project of national strengthening.

In the early years of development, before the child was old enough to attend school, a “wise mother” would know about modern ideas and model behaviours that the child would emulate. As a result, a wise mother had to be skilled in teaching her children, and for some this meant that mothers should understand modern concepts of child psychology. As one 1919 contributor to *Funü zazhi* pointed out, it was no longer acceptable to teach children through “fooling, scaring, scolding, and hitting.” Instead, mothers had to take the time to explain to children right from wrong, using simple language and examples.⁵⁵ Journal contributors asked women to organize home life to foster the happiness of the family, particularly that of the child, so that he or she could grow up to be a emotionally healthy and moral citizen.⁵⁶

Proponents of scientific child-rearing ideas included such figures as child psychologist Chen Heqin (1892-1982), who wrote widely about the importance of parental attention to children’s psychological development.⁵⁷ Because Chen is credited with introducing modern ideas of child psychology to China, one 2004 volume called him “the father of early childhood education.”⁵⁸ In addition to being a theoretician on early childhood education, he also spent much of his career developing training for teachers in the fields of psychology and special education, and advocating child welfare. Like many other intellectuals of the May Fourth generation, this specialist in developmental psychology, also known as H.C. Chen, spent time studying abroad. He received his BA degree from The Johns Hopkins University in 1917 and his master’s degree from Columbia Teacher’s College in 1918, and spent additional months there before returning to China in 1919. After his return, he taught child development and education at various institutions in Nanjing and Shanghai, established several nursery schools (including the Nanjing Gulou Nursery School in 1923) and kindergartens, and served as the head of the Chinese

Education Department of the Municipal Council in Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵⁹

In his early work on child psychology, Chen Heqin described the problems that Chinese faced in the realm of childhood. One of the first problems that he identified in an article on child psychology in 1921 was that adults fundamentally misunderstood the nature of childhood. He wrote that “we think of children as little people,” and noted that adults believed that only children’s smaller bodies distinguished them, that their basic characteristics and abilities were like those of adults.⁶⁰ In order to correct the many wrong impressions about childhood that had coloured the expectations of parents, Chen introduced foreign theories about child psychology to his audience, with terminology and foreign scholars’ names in English in his text.

Chen bridged the western theories of childhood education and long-standing Chinese stories about childhood and child rearing. For example, in his article on child psychology, he discussed characteristics of children such as their natural interest, their ability to imitate (such as their imitation of language and customs), and their innate curiosity. As though to emphasize the significance of mothers in the processes of child rearing, however, he mentioned the idiom *Mengmu sanqian*, which refers to the story of Mencius’ widowed mother moving her son three times because of the surrounding morally polluting environment.⁶¹ By using the example of this model mother, Chen reminded parents (*fumu*) to be aware of their actions because “one word, one gesture” could be picked up by children.⁶²

Besides the points about children’s natural interest, curiosity, and imitation, Chen discussed the significance of play in imparting moral lessons to children. Understanding basic principles of child psychology would enable parents to create a citizen (*gongmin*) who would be able to meet the challenges facing China.⁶³ “Play,” he wrote, will “nurture the kinds of morals that citizens should have,” including self-discipline, self-regulation, faithfulness and honesty, independence, cooperative work, and rational obedience. The list points to Chen’s belief in the importance of nurturing children who will be able to think for themselves rather than following blindly. Creating the right kind of environment, letting children play, and providing the right toys would also develop children’s brains and their motor and sensory skills from a young age. In the early 1920s, Chen continued to develop his work on early childhood education. He studied the development of his two eldest children, particularly his son Chen Yiming. He recorded his observations based on Yiming’s development and combined these with a study of other works in two books published in 1925, *Ertong xinli jiaoyu* (*Research on Child Psychology*) and *Jiating jiaoyu* (*Family Education*).⁶⁴

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