

This article was published in a Protestant missionary journal based in Canton that operated from 1832 until 1851. Its readership included both the foreigners living in Canton and home religious communities in Britain and the United States. In this article, the editors introduce a letter “from the pen of a Christian lady” who has presumably been working with overseas Chinese families in a mission outside of China. This woman advocates for the Christian education of Chinese women in order to better equip them for their “moral duty” of nurturing within the home, a task for which they are now “ill qualified.” The introduction to the letter is as interesting as the letter itself. The preface is addressed to “the females of Europe and America” and calls on them to respond to “the universal degradation of their sex” in China. Implicit in this summons is the assumption that these “females” would recognize their superior situation with respect to Chinese women. In other words, the Chinese case is presented as proof positive that the gender order in the West represents the pinnacle of civilization.

*Source:* “Schools for the Education of Chinese Girls.” *Chinese Repository* 3 (1834): 42- 43.

2. Schools for the education of Chinese girls. The following communication is from the pen of a Christian lady, who for a few years back has been engaged in educating Chinese girls. Brief as the paper is, it will not fail to direct attention to a subject, which hitherto has been almost entirely neglected. The character and condition of this part of our race in China are very imperfectly known to the people of Christendom. Could the females of Europe and America witness the universal degradation of their sex in ‘the celestial empire,’ proudly and impiously so styled, ways and means would speedily be devised to shed light on these benighted minds. We heartily recommend the following paragraphs to their perusal.

“It is desirable that the attention of Christian ladies should be directed in a greater degree to the females of China, to pray more earnestly to the Lord for them, and in every possible way to endeavor to teach them the knowledge of salvation by Jesus Christ. It is melancholy to view so large an empire given to idolatry. In attempts to turn it to Christ, female instruction should not be undervalued; females have a great influence both up on the morals and the politics of a nation. Youth are generally under the superintendence of the female sex. But how ill qualified is the Chinese woman for this or any moral duty! She is acquainted with no revelation from her Maker; as the standard of duty; and by which she can form her principles. She does not know the Redeemer who came to deliver from sin and from condemnation. A kind, heavenly Father is not the object of her faith and worship, but dumb idols which cannot help. She is under the influence of debasing fears and superstitions, and emphatically ‘without God and without hope in the

world.' I have witnessed companies of Chinese women collected together, but seldom for wise or benevolent purposes. I have visited sick beds and death beds; but those women were not acquainted with the consoling word and promises of God, to render the former more easy, or to enlighten the latter with a ray of hope for the future. Contrasted with them what comforts and consolation do Christian females possess!

It is an important question, what can be done for the improvement of the circumstances of Chinese females in the present state of China Proper? There are systems of exclusion and seclusion there, which prevent at present much being actually attempted for their improvement. Moreover the sex is generally and greatly despised. Very few females in China can either read or write.

“In a missionary station without China Proper, it has been pleasing to witness for some years the gradual decline of prejudice against female education. The first attempts to obtain girls for instruction were unsuccessful. At present there are several schools in which children are reading Christian books exclusively. The books taught are Dr. Milne’s tract, a dialogue between two friends, one a convert to Christianity, and the other a heathen; and tracts by Mr. Collie and Mr. Medhurst, containing chiefly statements of Christian doctrines. The chief result of these schools at present is a decline of prejudice in the minds of children and people. As yet no converting influence has been perceived; but the Lord will bless his word and instruction given out of it in due season.

“It is consoling and cheering, to the hearts of all who now labor for their good, resting on the sure word of promise, to anticipate the time when idolatry and the kingdom of Satan will be overthrown in China; when the system of seclusion will be done away, and when the Chinese female will bear her part in society, and be ready to devote her enlightened mind and her sanctified talents, to the glory of the Savior who has redeemed her.

“May God pour down upon his people a spirit of prayer on their behalf, and send laborers into this field, influenced by the love of Christ and wholly given up to his cause, not counting their lives dear unto them that they may advance it, and may Christian female instruction keep pace with all the other improvements of the age.”