

Cultural Integration and Deliberate Modification: Attempts to Reconstruct “Foetal Education” in Early Modern China*

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Abstract

After the late Qing Dynasty, foetal education (Taijiao) in traditional texts gradually shifted from women's self-discipline to one of the most effective ways to create a powerful country. This paper illustrates different factors that shape modern foetal education, arguing that foetal education had become a powerful symbol of Chinese modernity after several modifications made by Chinese intellectuals. In addition to absorbing knowledge from Japan and the Western world, foetal education also combines new concepts from eugenics. As a consequence, Chinese physicians who believed in foetal education tried their best to reinterpret it in a more scientific way. Furthermore, this study seeks to demonstrate the picture of “new women” in a particular transitory period from a feminist perspective as an exploration into the lives of women from various class backgrounds and a reflection of the modernity of China.

Keywords: Republican China; Foetal education; Cultural combination; new woman

I. Introduction

This paper aims to provide an elaborate delineation of foetal education as treated in Chinese translations of Japanese works, newspapers published in the Republic of China and books written by Chinese intellectuals. My study examines the “modernization” of traditional Chinese concepts; explores the historical development of crosslingual interactions among China, Europe and Japan in terms of both vocabulary and substantial knowledge; and shows how new forms of foetal education knowledge emerged with cultural collision.

Foetal education (“Tai Jiao” in Chinese), a millennia-long tradition in China, began as a way to cultivate princes and gradually became an essential part of common family fostering. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, when Western ideas kept impacting the ancient oriental civilization while traditional concepts were always perceivable, if not as loud, “foetal education” survived but was deliberately

modified as Western and Chinese cultures were brought together. After the republic was established, the new disciplines of eugenics and genetics found their ways into foetal education, which was now supposed to be an essential way to “strengthen China as a nation and Chinese as a race”.

According to *A Pragmatic Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese*, foetal education is “the ways in which pregnant women influence fetuses with decent behaviors and abundant nutrition.”^{[1](p791)} Now let us turn to the history of foetal education. The concept of foetal education first appeared in *Qingshizi*, a history written during the Spring and Autumn Period (c. 771 – 476 BC) and catalogued as a “rumour literature” by Bangu, the great historian in East Han (25 – 220 AD).^{[2](p1744)} Another work during the Han Dynasty, *Dai the Elder's Book of Rites*, states the following: “The methods of fetal education are inscribed onto jade tablets, put into golden cases and kept in the ancestral shrines of princes for the reference of posterity. As *Qingshizi* says, ‘in old times, the queen

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shall move to a tranquil and comfortable room in the seventh month of pregnancy, where she is served by the royal archiver with his brass on the left and the chamberlain with his cup. In the final months of her pregnancy, if the queen asks for indecent music, the master tutor shall accuse her of incivility, and if she asks for exotic foods, the chamberlain shall grip the cup and says, I will not allow the prince to be nurtured by it'. "[3] (PP59-60) As seen, foetal education was initially practised in the court for strong and wise princes. There is a chapter entitled "The Three Matriarchs of the House of Zhou" in the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* by Liu Xiang (c. 18 CE), which states the following: "By nature, Tai Ren was devoted, reverent, and unfailingly virtuous in her conduct. When she was a child, her eyes beheld no evil sights, her ears heard no perverse sounds, and her mouth uttered no careless words. She was able to teach the child in the womb. When she went to relieve herself in [the privy over] the pigpen, she gave birth to King Wen. At birth, King Wen was brilliant and sagacious. When Tai Ren instructed him, from one [of her precepts], he was able to understand one hundred [principles]. In the end, he founded the Zhou dynastic lineage." [4](P4) Thus, the conduct of the pregnant Tai Ren is believed to be the origin of foetal education.

Later, medical knowledge was gradually integrated into foetal education, and etiquette gave place to healthcare as more women outside the court walls were interested. Xu Zhicai (505 - 572), a renowned doctor in the Southern Dynasties, proposed a prescription for pregnant women by month. He connected the twelve meridians, or hypothetical paths through which the life-energy flows, with twelve months and accordingly made monthly rules about how mothers should eat, act and behave for the sake of their children. Moreover, his theory of "perceptive induction" states that what mothers see and feel directly affect the development of the foetus: "in its third month, the fetus is indeterminate enough to be subject to the external perceptions of its bearer. If the mother prefers a boy, she should draw a bow; if she prefers a girl, she should play with pearls and rings. If she wants her child to be fair, she should behold jade; if she wants her child to be wise, she should sit in tranquillity. Thus is the idea of perceptive induction." [5](P110) The naïve theory of induction can be considered a successor to the straightforward concept proposed in the compendium *Records of*

Diverse Matters (c. 290 AD) by Zhang Hua: "Do not see rabbits lest your child has cleft lips; do not eat ginger lest your child has extra fingers." With traditional Chinese medical theories being refined in the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581 – 907 AD), foetal education was enriched by, for example, Chao Yuanfang, a prominent doctor of the Sui Dynasty who developed the thesis of perceptive induction. Chao, in his *Origins of Various Diseases*, writes that a pregnant woman "should behold jade, watch peacocks and eat carps if she wants her child to be handsome; eat beef heart and barley if she wants her child to be intelligent; sit still and meditate if she wants her child to be virtuous...External perceptions actually affect the developmental process in the mother's body." [6](PP193-194)

According to the archaic theory of perceptive induction, a pregnant woman should approach good objects; avoid evil sights and words; abide by rules of eating, living and resting; and control her emotions and desires so that she can affect, if not manipulate, the gender and appearance, character and personality of the unborn child. In the late Qing dynasty, traditional doctrines of foetal education promised hopes of "saving our nation" to modern Chinese intellectuals, such as Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei, whose advocacy led foetal education to be gradually considered an essential way to "strengthen China as a nation and Chinese as a race". Liang Qichao stated that "fetal education is the foremost principle of Western racial studies" when he introduced gym classes to women's schools. [7](P1) At that time of massive cultural imports from both the Western world and neighbouring Japan, modern theories of medical studies, eugenics, biology and genetics aroused reflections on the inherited texts on foetal education. Thus, a process of construction was initiated, feeling its way between old and new and between China and the Western world. In transforming a set of maternal know-how into a discourse field of myriad elements, it kept reshaping how modern intellectuals understood foetal education and hence invigorated an ancient discipline in modern contexts.

II. Literature Review

Although there have been many books and papers on foetal education in the medical and educational fields, scholarly works dedicated to foetal education from a historical perspective are relatively lacking.¹ Discussions of how foetal

¹ There have been many recent findings on parental education. Examples include the following: Singh

Leher, Moh Yvonne, Ding Xiaopan, Lee Kang, Quinn Paul C. Cognitive flexibility and parental education

education was conceived in Republican China tend to focus on its significance to “strengthen the race” or merely describe it as practices of “obstetrics”, yet ignore the deliberate attempts of modern Chinese intellectuals to modify existing native concepts.² Although foetal education never disappeared in China, it was not always as it had originally been. Foetal education was introduced to Japan in the Tang Dynasty and reintroduced into China from

Meiji Japan. In the early 7th century, the Chinese medical works *Valuable Prescriptions* and *Origins of Various Diseases* appeared in Japan with their ideas regarding foetal education. However, after the Meiji Reformation, Japan was imbued with Western concepts, and foetal education underwent a radical transformation in which the educated elements of Japanese integrated eugenics and genetics into the existing knowledge system. In the early 20th

differentially predict implicit and explicit racial biases in bilingual children. *Journal of experimental child psychology*, 2020, 204; Eng Chloe W., Gilsanz Paola, Glymour M. Maria, Mayeda Elizabeth Rose, Mungas Dan M., DeCarli Charles, Whitmer Rachel A.. Do benefits of own education for cognition differ by parental education? Influence of intergenerational educational trajectories and cognitive performance in the Kaiser Healthy Aging and Diverse Life Experiences (KHANDLE) cohort. *Alzheimer's & Dementia*, 2020, 16; Shervin Assari. Parental Education and Nucleus Accumbens Response to Reward Anticipation: Minorities' Diminished Returns. *Advances in Social Science and Culture*, 2020, 2(4). However, there are only a few works directly related to this topic, including Olivia Krammer-Pojer. SCHWANGERSCHAFTS-GUIDE DER CHINESISCHEN MEDIZIN — ODER DIE ERZIEHUNG DES FETUS“ Pregnancy-guide of chinese medicine — or „fetal education“ . *Akupunktur & Aurikulomedizin: Zeitschrift für Akupunktur & Aurikulomedizin* - ZAA, 2019, 45(4); Sally Byford, Edward Weaver, Chris Anstey. Has the incidence of hypoxic ischaemic encephalopathy in Queensland been reduced with improved education in fetal surveillance monitoring?. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 2014, 54(4).

² Researchers in the Western world have a long tradition of studying childbirth and parenting in China, and many of their works contain discussions of foetal education: Alice E. Adams, *Reproducing the Womb: Images of Childbirth in Science, Feminist Theory, and Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994); Frank Dikötter: *Imperfect conceptions: Medical knowledge, birth defects and eugenics in China* (London: Hurst; New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China*; Kinney Anne Behnke (CA: Stanford University Press 2003) Yi-li Wu, *Reproducing Women: Medicine, Metaphor, and Childbirth in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). Dedicated academic contributions of

Chinese researchers are found in *Fetal Education from the Perspective of Aesthetic Education: Principles and Methods* and *Fetal Education and Aesthetic Education* by Yao Quanxing of Institute of Philosophy, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, which focus on the values of foetal education for aesthetic education. Other discussions of foetal education tend to be part of studies about the female body, female healthcare and female hygiene. For example, Jen-der Lee discusses the concepts of gender reversal, pregnancy healthcare and foetal education in her *A Women's History of Medicine: Gender and Health Care in Early Imperial China* (Taipei: Sanmin Shuju, 2008). Chou Chun-Yen, in her *Women's Hygiene in Modern China (1895-1949)* (Kaohsiung: Liwen Publishing Group, 2010), examines how traditional Chinese medical wisdom and modern medical sciences reshaped the mindset of women about menstruation, pregnancy and delivery. Xiao-Jing Ke, in her 2007 master's thesis *Making the New Motherhood: The Construction of the Knowledge of Nursing in Modern China (1903-1937)*, explains the positive and negative aspects of foetal education and how contemporaries understood genetics and eugenics. Besides, foetal education is discussed in many works on ancient Chinese customs: Xu Guilan, *Overlapping Parenting Customs in China* (Nanning: Guangxi Nationalities Publishing House, 2002); Qin Yongzhou: *History of Chinese Social Customs* (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2015); Gu Feng: *A Brief History of Marriage in China* (Beijing: China's Oriental Publishing House, 2010) and more. Papers about foetal education include the following: He Yunxia, “On the Origin and Development of Fetal Education in China” in *Journal of Nanjing College for Population Programm* 1995(1); Wang Xiaoting: “Ideas, Practices and Scientific Justifications of Fetal Education in Ancient China” in *Shandong Social Sciences* 2012(11); Zhang Xinsheng: “Doctrines of Fetal Education in Ancient China” in *Journal of Shaanxi Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 1982(12); and Zhu Ci'en: “The Evolution of Fetal Education in Modern Times” in *Journal of History and Chronology*, 2015(6).

century, foetal education, with its recent transformations, was introduced back to China as a vital part of "reproductive medical studies", and since it was then interpreted and spread by Chinese intellectuals, it serves as a useful mirror to reflect modernity in China.

In this paper, I will start with Chinese newspapers to demonstrate how Chinese intellectuals renovated conceptions of foetal education based on Japanese works. The next section is devoted to the statements and underlying conceptions of those who opposed foetal education. Finally, I will discuss the publicly active group of "new women" and their understanding of foetal education. I hope that this analysis of statements uttered by various groups of earlier modern Chinese intellectuals will present the development of a long-standing tradition, foetal education, against the background of cultural mingling and hence reveal the deeper implications of "deliberate modification".

The aims of this discussion are to provide a review of the vigorous vitality of traditional Chinese foetal education and to help us better understand how old customs were renewed over time. The cultural integration and deliberate modification of foetal education has allowed it to become a more scientific way for pregnant women to provide prenatal care to their babies. This discussion reminds us to not only focus on the superstitious side of traditional customs but also to observe its transformation under the influence of new knowledge.

However, there are still some study limitations of this paper. For example, the Japanese influence is not fully discussed due to word limitations. At the beginning of the 20th century, the principal channel through which Western political, social and gender theories flowed to China was the translated works of European, American and, especially, Japanese authors. Of the 533 books translated into Chinese between 1902 and 1904, approximately 60% were originally written in Japanese. The Chinese translations of two Japanese works, *Fetal Education* and *Womb Education*, presented a wonderful model for modern Chinese intellectuals to justify traditional wisdom with "scientific" discourses. Therefore, future research could provide a detailed introduction of the Japanese influence on Chinese foetal education.

III. "Employed Science to Foetal Education": Examples from Republican Newspapers

Although foetal education has always existed in China, it is not immutable and experienced a

process of spreading from China to Japan during the Tang Dynasty and back to China from Meiji Japan. At the beginning of the seventh century, the Chinese medical books "The Essential Prescriptions for Qian Jin" and "Theories on the Origin of the Lords and Diseases" were introduced to Japan, and knowledge of foetal education also entered Japanese society. After the Meiji Restoration, Western thoughts penetrated all aspects of Japanese society. As a result, the concept of foetal education changed drastically. Under the writing of Japanese intellectuals, Western eugenics- and genetics-related knowledge was incorporated. At the beginning of the 20th century, foetal education was reintroduced into China as an important content of "reproductive medicine" books. After the interpretation and dissemination of modern Chinese intellectuals, it became a "stone of other mountains", reflecting the modernity of China. Among the works, *Womb Education* by Itō Kinjirō (1902) and *Fetal Education* by Shimoda Jiro (1913) had the most profound influence. After these works entered Chinese society, they had great impacts on China's concept of foetal education. The "foetal education" in the books not only retains the embryonic form of traditional Chinese prenatal education thought but also adds brand-new Western "scientific" theories and exotic "examples", providing great inspiration for reshaping prenatal education to modern Chinese intellectuals who are eager to "strengthen the country and breed". Therefore, in the subsequent chapters on "foetal education" in Chinese newspapers and magazines, the remarks derived from the two books can be seen almost everywhere, which shows the depth of their influence on Chinese foetal education customs.

In the late Qing Dynasty and the Republican period, the nature of Chinese newspapers and magazines gradually evolved from the "political criticism of commoners" to an "intellectual field" that enlightened the people and served as a medium between the court and the public. One article states the following: "the world used to be ruled by guns until the 20th century and shall be dominated by newspaper houses afterwards."^{[8](P57)} As many newspapers for female readers and medical journals appeared, foetal education was no longer a negligible slogan under the discourse of "strengthening the country and the race" but rather became a serious topic for educated society.

Traditional foetal education is based on the theory of perceptive induction, that is, the right perceptions of the mother improve and the wrong perceptions of the mother spoil the character of the

foetus. Here, "right" and "wrong" not only regulate the external aspects of a pregnant woman's life but also regulate her emotions and states of mind. A number of newspapers or magazine articles published between 1900 and 1949 discussed the effects of the delight, anger, fear, sadness, anxiety, disconcert and other emotions of a pregnant woman on a foetus in detail. For example, *The Ladies' Journal* (1918), intending to prove the importance of temperance, reported how a wife of a rich merchant miscarried when her husband's release from prison made her wildly joyous.^{[9](P6)}

Although the conventional thesis that "the foetus is subject to the emotions of its mother" remained visible in newspapers in the Republican period, the modernist authors provided completely different explanations for why emotions are effective. These explanations, with their elements of modern medical and biological studies, almost completely agreed with Shimoda in the ways to argue for foetal education and hence demonstrated the significance of translated Japanese works for "reconstructing" foetal education in China.

As an educated man with a consistent interest in women's and children's issues, Zhu Wenying published newspapers articles including, among others, "Fetal Education and Eugenics", "A Study of Fairy Tales" and "Children Issues in Modern Times". "Fetal Education and Eugenics" had both words appearing in the title and understood the former as "an aspect of Eugenics". He says the following: "though fetal education doesn't completely determine if a child will be fine and strong or otherwise, it does have surprising effects on the unborn ones." In addition, he emphasizes that "the rumors that children of concubines are promiscuous, those of wine vendors sickly, those of rascals indecent and more are of course obstinately paranoid remnants of an obsolete society, yet scientific fetal education is surely worth noting". Here, "scientific" basically refers to eugenics, and such education is "worth noting" in terms of "(the relationship between) pregnancy and fetal education" and "necessary mental hygiene". More specifically, Zhu believes that the effects of emotions on a foetus are basically derived from their effects on the mother: "delight motivates heartbeats, breath, muscular tension and appetite; it benefits functions of digestion and nutrition, activates blood flow, dilates peripheral veins to make skin from head to toes rosy; and enhances health in a marvelous manner... Anger energizes the heart and therefore breath too much; blood rushing through veins makes one's face bluish red. Since anger directs one to take an aggressive

stance, his muscles will be so tense as to be rigid and his metabolism will be extremely active...Sadness weakens the heart, breath and hence muscles and metabolism and shrinks peripheral veins to make one appear sallow...Surprise may halt one's heartbeat and breath for a moment and then intensify the body in an unusual manner..."^{[10](PP15-16)} An interesting fact is that Zhu's emotion theory is largely identical to Chapter X "Mentality and Its Influences on Body" in Shimoda's *Fetal Education* in terms of content, phrasing and line of argument. Therefore, "Fetal Education and Eugenics" was probably inspired by the work of Shimoda.

A noteworthy fact is that Yao Pengxin's "Pregnancy and Fetal Education" is similar to Zhu's article in this aspect. Born into a family of doctors in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province, Yao was a famous gastroenterologist with training in both Western medicine and traditional Chinese medical knowledge. According to "Pregnancy and Fetal Education", "every action of the mother directly affects the fetus...proper diet, schedule, dressing, work, exercise, sleep, rest and many more are certainly important, yet there is an even more pressing issue, fetal education. Physical hygiene...is essential, but mental hygiene, especially for pregnant women, is also important. Exclusively focusing on physical hygiene yet neglecting mental hygiene can never produce fine children."^{[11](P52)} The fact that Yao, a doctor trained in Western medical studies, made utterances in favour of foetal education shows the compromising attitude of earlier modern Chinese intellectuals towards Chinese and Western medical knowledge. Yao did not believe that the two schools of medicine are conflicting, and his notion of "mental hygiene" as the counterpart of "physical hygiene" in the Western medical community was apparently influenced by Shimoda. "Pregnancy and Fetal Education" contains an excerpt of Chapter XI "Volatility of Pregnant Women" in *Fetal Education*: "Women are more emotional than men. In other words, the body of a woman is more susceptible to her mental state because her blood is thinner. Blood carries vitality. One cubic millimeter of a man's blood contains about five million blood cells, and the same volume of a woman's blood contains only four and a half million. Indigestion also has emotionalizing effects. Since the abdomen of a woman tends to be larger than that of a man, she is certainly more volatile. Yet another factor is the larger reproductive organs of women...Changes immediately happen within her breasts after conception...Emotional shock may stop lactation."

[11](PP26-27) Though Yao did not cite *Fetal Education* as his source, the almost same content and statistics allow us to justifiably infer that Yao's opinions were influenced by Shimoda.

In addition to the writings of Zhu Wenying and Yao Pengxin, similar arguments for foetal education were hardly infrequent in newspapers during the Republican period. While educated authors may have variously placed their emphases, they shared an inherently consistent logic: borrowing scientific knowledge from the Western world to explain how emotions affect pregnant women and their unborn children. Such articles largely overlap with *Fetal Education* of Shimoda and similarly seek to prove that foetal education is, instead of ungrounded metaphysical doctrines, a "science" with medical jargon, such as "peripheral vessels" and "blood cells". This phenomenon demonstrates the deep impressions of translated Japanese works on the modern concept of foetal education in China, as well as the anxious attempts of modern Chinese intellectuals to communicate Chinese civilization with Western civilization, which powerfully imposed the discourse of "science".

IV. Opposition from Eugenicists: Replace "Foetal Education" with "Foetal Fostering"

Researchers have suggested that modern intellectuals active in newspapers, magazines and publishing houses, or "the public domain", were an educated and knowledgeable group who aimed higher than most, kept striving for reform and were in tension with real-world politics and Chinese society as it was. [12](P138) These intellectuals had largely been members of the transforming gentry and were the primary advocates for new thoughts in the 20th century. The intellectuals discussing foetal education in modern newspapers were mostly open-minded towards novel concepts from the Western world. In addition after they were informed of genetics and biology, they gradually differentiated into two opposing factions. One faction believed that foetal education is "in line with" eugenics and thus can be confirmed by scientific theories, while the other faction accused foetal education of being completely unscientific and irrelevant to eugenics. The most representative opposing voice was uttered by proponents of eugenics who pressed to abolish foetal education in favour of "Foetal Fostering".

Pan Guangdan, a famous eugenicist, believed that foetal education was nonsense. As he wrote in "On Immutability of Nature and Fetal Education", "a fetus grows in accordance with the inherent path determined at the instant of fertilization. It is, so to

speak, a parasite on its mother. It asks for protection and nutrition from its mother and no more. However iron-willed and motivated the mother is, she can hardly influence the predetermined path of fetal development." [13] (P11) However, he made a distinction between superstitious "fetal education" and the propitious "Fetal Fostering". He said the following: "We recognize only Fetal Fostering, but not fetal education. How much better a pregnant woman, instead of directing her watchful eyes towards any kind of omens, good or bad, and horrifying herself about an ill-built embryo, focuses on her own nutrition, exercise and how to better herself! Even if her child is indeed incapable, she has no one to blame but for unfortunate inheritance. This is the true meaning of 'Do the best as one can and leave the rest to fate'" [14](P11) Another passage states, "Fetal education has no scientific foundations whatsoever. However, the fetus still needs to be fostered, and this is scientifically justifiable. A fetus needs protection and nutrition. Inadequate protection and nutrition hamper the growth of a fetus. If a pregnant woman has bad habits, an irregular schedule and an inharmonious family relationship leading her diet, activity, emotions to be unrestrained, then the safety and nutrition of her fetus must be affected and become an 'inherently incapable' person as people used to say. However, its incapability is not inherent, but the result of bad fostering at an early stage." [14](P13)

The sexologist Zhang Jingsheng approved of the concept of "foetal fostering" proposed by Pan and called it "new foetal education". He stated the following in his "Aesthetical Life Philosophy": "Now I advocate for a 'new eugenics', and it is simply a practical question of physically fostering the fetus. What I call 'new fetal education' means that a pregnant woman should be constantly well fed, comfortably and warmly dressed and kept clean and that she should do reasonable exercises and feel contented." [15] (P55) Chen Jianshan, an educator, expressed similar opinions in a small book: "Fetal education must mean that a pregnant woman should be exceptionally gentle and refined. If it's only a matter of hygiene, say eating nutritional foods and avoiding strenuous activities, we would have no objection. Yet if it extends to spiritual aspects, then a decent woman naturally does not need to do anything, while 280 days seem too short to turn an indecent woman into a demure lady. To expand the scope a bit, I think it would be best to preach the principles of mothering to pregnant women, in case one has to consider fetal education as something sagacious. These principles probably

will not make a fetus innately better but will definitely create a much better environment for a child to grow into a fine person.”^{[16](P58)}

In ancient Chinese medical works, the concepts of “foetal education” and “foetal fostering”, in their broadest senses, are interlaced into a comprehensive system that involves all aspects of a pregnant woman, such as nutrition, life schedule, diet, rest and emotion. Actually, most theoreticians tended to use the words in parallel. For example, Chen Menglei (1650 - 1714) put *Biographies of Exemplary Women, Valuable Prescriptions and Prescriptions for Women's Diseases*, all of which involve foetal education, into the “Fetal Fostering” department in his *Catalogue of Medicine*.^{[17](P5)} Surely, there is a narrower sense of foetal fostering that emphasizes the nutritional and protective aspects – one may find the most extensive elaboration in *Rules of Fetal Fostering by Month* by Xu Zhicai (505 - 572), yet even this book discusses foetal education.

Despite all the overlapping and indistinctiveness in older times, the two concepts were urged to be clear-cut by eugenicists of the Republican period who believed that foetal education was superstitious without any biological foundations while foetal fostering fit into the framework of eugenics. Thus, supporters of foetal education gradually abandoned the superstitious elements of their doctrines and turned towards “hygiene” and “eugenics”. They no longer gave “seeing rabbits produces fetuses with cleft lips” or “eating ginger increases chances to give birth to boys” as examples to underscore that the emotions and perceptions of a pregnant woman might affect her child. Instead, they advised their patients to “avoid physical exhaustion; avoid sadness and try to be optimistic; avoid pungent foods and, if possible, meat; avoid noises, clubs and bars; avoid cruel sights”^{[18](P2)} or suggested “moderate exercise, calm comfort and reading sagacious volumes”.^{[19](P11)} We can see that the statements of the eugenicists largely shaped the “reconstruction” of foetal education, and stringent disputes gradually turned into a constructive force to dispel superstitious elements from what had been demanded to be abolished.

V. “Luxurious practice”: Foetal Education in the Eyes of New Women

While educated men in the late Qing period frequently talked about “women’s issues”, women themselves were, to a large extent, only objects

instead of subjects in such discussions. After China lost the 1895 war against Japanese invaders, Chinese modernists proposed “opening women’s schools”. Since the first of such institutions, Jingzheng Women College, was established by Jing Yuanshan in Shanghai (1897), women’s education flourished across the country,^{[20](P4)} which, in addition to the girls returning from foreign colleges, created a group of cultured *new women* with modern learning. It was only natural that they made their own voices about foetal education.

Ju Huizhen, a graduate of Ming-De Women Higher Elementary School, a private school in Suzhou, became a housewife after marriage.³ As far as she saw, traditional foetal education was not contradicted by hygiene studies imported from the Western world, and both were useful guides to foster fine children. “Our traditional doctrines of fetal education emphasize moral cultivation, while the Western concept of hygiene highlights the physical aspects. They by no means contradict each other, and only by combining both sides can we produce good children.” When she “saw *Care of the Expectant Mother*, a book written by a Western author, on her desk, she asked her husband to read it to her while she took notes”, and the result was “Essential Guidelines for Pregnancy and Parenting” published in *The Ladies' Journal*. The article comprehensively explained the cautions in every aspect of a pregnant woman’s life: signs of pregnancy, calculation of the due date, diet, dressing, physical exercises, sleep, bathing, breast caring before and after delivery, prohibitions, and noteworthy illnesses during pregnancy.^{[21](PP24-30)}

Su Qing, a woman writer, emphasized the importance of childbirth knowledge. She stated that “a true education for women” should include a “general understanding of housekeeping and raising children” since “a professional or academic woman after all must get married and give birth, and as far as the Chinese society is concerned, a man can focus on his career or study and leave housekeeping and child-raising to the lady of the house; yet, few women are fortunate enough to find a lord of the house.”^{[22](P143)} However, she did not hesitate to make sarcastic comments on the involved “foetal education” of her age. She wrote the following in “Modern Motherhood”: “After watching a modern drama about marriage, the lady instantly shows symptoms of pregnancy. She has quite a few academic sources: *Common Rules of Childbirth, On Parenting, Motherly Love*, among others. Fruits and

Saving”, she can be called a housewife.

³ Since Mrs. Ju called herself “a manager of domestic chores” in another article “On Postal

vegetables of certain amounts must be served daily. Exercise and walking must account for a certain proportion of a day...Beautiful music, elegant books, calculation of the due date, prenatal visits to her gynecologist...What a tiresome period of nine months and more...In the two hundred and eighty, more or less, days, the husband must be exceptionally considerate and affectionate and devote all himself to the mental hygiene of hers..." When "the pain begins, she will incessantly ask her doctor with a tight frown: 'how is my cervix dilation', 'Ah, it's so painful. Doctor, is it too tense?'...You must ask such questions; otherwise, how can we tell that you are educated and enlightened?" [22](P285) Indeed, Su was having a hard time raising her children alone after her divorce by living on manuscript fees. As per the traditional ethics in China, the natural role of a woman is being a good wife and mother. However, intensive and all-around foetal care, what one calls a self-discipline for the sake of "family and race", was something quite difficult for pregnant women in general and even more difficult for women with careers. Her sarcasm showed, if implicitly, that such complicated procedures were largely impracticable.

Hu Ruzhen claimed in *A Journal for Mothers and Children* (1947) that foetal education should be considered a part of "healthcare for young children and their mothers"; however, in practice, it must consider the particular conditions of various pregnant women. "Those ladies with no serious employment" have "abundant time and money to do whatever they want. For them, healthcare as refined as possible is available..." However, for "the housewives kept busy in every moment of their tolerable life, all expenditures beyond necessities are worth carefully counting, and less-than-best procedures are all they can expect. Their physical exercise is doing chores as usual, but it's better not to work too hard or lift things that are too heavy. In terms of mentality, it's advisable to find some pleasures for and by themselves. Worrying too much should be avoided, if possible. Make at least one visit to a doctor, and just trust him..." However, there is still a third group, "the incapable" women. Life is most difficult for these women. They "are not unaware of the importance of healthcare, but poverty makes their bodies slack off day by day." However, "some careless women, relying on their favorable background, indulge in entertainments that spoil themselves and their fetus, knowing nothing about healthcare." [23](P14) Here, the "careless women" probably refer to the "modern gals", a subgroup of "new women". With all their modern education and modern ideas, they decided

that personal careers and social reformation were not what they desired and pursued sensory pleasures with their financial resources. Zhang Yilan criticized the motherhood of "modern ladies" when she was a student in the Department of Education at Peking University: "They are generally quite educated, and a few have foreign degrees. They are familiar with fashionable words, social etiquette and how to dance at a ball...They are married to state secretaries or prominent diplomats, and all they do is play cards, watch dramas or films, and hang out in parks. Otherwise they have to go out with their husbands, by car or carriage, paying visits, attend parties, and enjoy rich dinners. How occupied are their schedules..." [24](P86) There were also some critical caricatures and limericks about "mahjong mothering": "For too much pleasure can bore nerves, let's not be surprised if an idle lady focuses on mahjong wall-building with a baby in her womb!" [25](P7)

Ju Huizhen and Su Qing were both educated "new women", but their attitudes towards foetal education were quite different. As a housewife leading a life of abundance, Mrs. Ju had enough time and money to educate her children in the womb. However, Su was struggling to balance her family and career, and she felt more ironic than repulsive regarding issues of foetal education. The stance of He Ruzhen was somehow more representative. She spared herself the trouble of distinguishing between modern eugenics and traditional foetal education and found no difficulties in absorbing either as wisdom of "pregnancy healthcare". Compared to men, whose involvement was limited to theories due to their physiological composition, the educated women in the Republican period, as the agents of childbirth, naturally cared more about the practical aspects of mothering. However, if we consider the overall female population across the country, then we would undeniably find that few women were capable of "foetal education". As He stated, 'how can you expect the vast majority of "incapable", hungry and ragged pregnant women to "strengthen the race"?'

VI. Conclusion

As we have described and analysed how foetal education was "reconstructed" in the late Qing and Republican periods, we observe a bidirectional process of mutual infiltration and influence in which traditional wisdom was discerned, analysed and transformed while new knowledge established its position. Is it a fatalistic clash of civilizations or a deliberate integration of cultures? Here, native

elements were felt in the “invention of tradition” in response to concepts from foreign lands and, furthermore, in the continuous retrospection and reflection upon themselves. Because a host of “new words” and “new concepts” appeared as the result of imported knowledge, there was no lack of critical voices. ^{[26](P485)} The reconstruction of foetal education was indeed a deliberate mixture of Chinese and Western cultures, and the censure of eugenicists was a recurrent questioning of whether, to what extent and in what sense foetal education was epistemically sound. In summation, the modern theories of foetal education were created by their proponents as much as by their opponents, and the relatively scarce statements of “new women” as voices of disciplined agents were a valuable complement to the male perspective focusing on the rationale and the consequences of foetal education for the “household and nation”.

Japan, which had adopted foetal education from China and spread its own version back to China in the Meiji period, played a key role in the reconstruction of foetal education in China. With all their extensive influence, such Japanese works were by no means simply accepted, but rather they were modified according to native circumstances by Chinese intellectuals who, for instance, tended to emphasize the effects of the mother’s mentality and the government’s responsibilities for education and fostering. Therefore, it is not as simple as “impact and response”, but rather it is a matter of proactive selection from the Japanese theories of foetal education, which have already incorporated modern disciplinary knowledge and deliberately modified them in the continuous exchanges between China and the Western world.

If translated Japanese works served as an admirable model for reconstruction, then the criticism of eugenicists would be a reverse thrust against the superstitious elements of old-fashioned foetal education. Under the attack of eugenicists, instances of “perceptive induction” were increasingly replaced by scientifically justifiable elements that gradually became components of “mental hygiene” and, together with “bodily hygiene”, constituted a set of guidelines for pregnant women. The eugenicists’ distinction between “foetal education” and “foetal fostering” can also be considered to be a final “confirmation”, if not without some twists, that foetal education is something worthwhile. Remarkably, while foetal education and eugenics were similarly supposed to

“strengthen the Chinese race”, their influences were hardly comparable. Hu Yimin stated the following in “Relationship between Fetal Education and Monarchy”: “Since the American Edward S. Morse proposed the theory of racial evolution, Western sociologists have realized that the underdevelopment of a civilization and the disorganization of a human society are fundamentally caused by inattention to race bettering and hence epidemics of inferior, incapable people.” For eugenics, it “seems radical and inhumane...social reformers have turned to advocating for fetal education.” ^{[27](P4)} Therefore, as Hu saw it, foetal education was a reluctant compromise made by Chinese eugenicists who, given that their real tenants were difficult to publicize, developed a deliberately modified version of an established tradition in the hope that it would be a more effective instrument to improve Chinese society.

For the demanding situations of Chinese women in both life and education, women’s issues in late Imperial and Republican China were so dominated by men that even pregnancy and childbirth were primarily discussed, disputed and written by men. When the fatherland was suffering from internal disorder and external threats, educated men projected their anxiety over the national fate onto the bodies of the opposite sex, gazing at the mother’s body on which was imposed the mission to “strengthen the country and the race”. According to Hui-chi Hsu, a Taiwanese historian, “the image of Chinese new women was nothing more than an idealized persona projected by men in their attempt to solve problems of themselves or society, instead of a representative model in line with and based on familiarity with the actual needs of women.” ^{[28](P224)} Similarly, the agenda of foetal education was largely male-oriented without regard for the practical difficulties of women. Foetal education, as a discipline to “strengthen the country and the race”, must mean obligations of wife-mothers for the sake of the “family and household” and disciplinary shackles to keep them in the domestic domain. If we examine the massive population of women, we will see that the educated “new women” could be divided into, for example, housewives, whose novel concepts were tempered by old ethics; professional women, who preferred society to family; and hedonist “modern women”. Most female authors of foetal education were eclectic housewives. ⁴ They did not disagree with

⁴ Su Qing may be considered as “half a professional woman” since she began as a housewife but made

a living writing after her divorce.

the reconstructed foetal education by men and focused on how to put it into practice. However, foetal education was far beyond the reach of the vast majority of mothers, who were struggling to be tolerably fed and dressed. Furthermore, the affluent "modern chicks" were inclined to "navigate between ballrooms and clubs in high heels, corsets and heavy makeup and call that their regular job. Their life consists of rich cuisine, flamboyant sights, amorous sounds, acrimony and violence - is it the result of ignorant spontaneity or intentional will?"

^{[19](P11)} Therefore, the number of mothers who would restrain themselves from inappropriate perceptions and behaviours and could afford the expenses of decent living standards was not high.

Prasenjit Duara, in his research on Chinese intellectuals advocating for modernization, suggests that they frequently appropriated certain existing symbols, concepts and customs to construct a "tradition". Such traditions are, in fact, remodelled images or epistemological derivatives that can serve certain purposes once they are reorganized into new categories and assumptions in the narrative of modernization. ^{[29](PP8-14)} The endeavour to reconstruct foetal education by modern Chinese intellectuals was not only an academic discipline to "strengthen the country and the race" but was also intended as a proof that traditional Chinese wisdom was still influential. The attempts to "revisit" the tradition of foetal education and to interpret, if not always correctly, it with Western medical knowledge show that the Chinese intellectuals in a period when the self-professed "central empire" was repeatedly defeated and hence experiencing agonies over its cultures did not completely lose their faith in tradition. They believed that the long-standing Chinese civilization, once reformed and enriched with new knowledge, was able to refresh and develop itself in the new global system. Qian Jinyang, a practitioner of Chinese medical tradition, thought that "the ancient doctrine of fetal education and the currently prevalent eugenics are both based on the noteworthy fact that the mother is vitally connected with her child in the womb and hence is able to influence it." ^{[30](P31)} The famous doctor Chen Cunren states that the theories of eugenics are actually rooted in foetal education instead of being recently "invented" by Westerners. Such phenomena may imply that while China, in its earlier modern years, was severely stricken as a political entity, lost the axial seat in its own cultural sphere and found itself a peripheral member of another sphere, a number of fields remained in which traditional ideas were valued as current

standards. The "reconstruction" of foetal education may be considered to show how a Chinese cultural tradition was reinvigorated in ways in which old and new were entangled in a dialectic oppositional relationship, yet Chinese and Western elements were brought into a reciprocal unity.

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