

## CHAPTER 5

# Home Economics in Past and Present — Perspectives for the Future

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Home Economics has been a subject in school and education for more than 100 years in the Western world. Home economists have from the beginning been inspiring each other by visiting colleagues around the world, and very early the International Federation of Home Economics was established in order to broaden and deepen the knowledge of Home Economics through collaboration and exploration, and this is still the vision for IFHE, of which this book can be an example.

As part of the school curriculum and a foundation to general education, Home Economics has needed to define and be able to position the subject. Through the 100 years period the roles and valuations of the teachers have changed. Why and how the subject has changed is essential to analyze in order to understand the present situation and to give proposals for the future. Teachers within Home Economics have been and are still mainly female. This can be related to the subject itself, the home, which is a female domain. This domestic domain or sphere with its values, language and work, naturally has an impact on the school subject, the understanding, practising and education within the field.

In this chapter I will go through history to provide an understanding of the basic, essential and important aspects of Home Economics, take these aspects up to present time and make perspectives for the future.

As a start I will state some postulates to show some of the dilemmas and dialectics, which are on the agenda.

- Home Economics is a subject in a conflict between science (theory) and everyday life experiences (practice)
- Home Economics is gendered

- Home Economics is culturally dependant, society determined, individually featured
- Home Economics holds potentials, possibilities, and difficulties

These postulates are essential to bring to an open discussion for developing Home Economics in the long run. In short, the conflict of Home Economics and within the subject itself as an applied science, this has a problem of defining what Home Economics is and can be.

The gender part is based on the context home, kitchen and household, and furthermore context is culturally bound. Finally, Home Economics holds potentials both taken from history and the present. I will explore these issues through a historical critical approach, which has been part of my research for the last thirty years.

### Home Economics In the past

#### 1880s—1910

One of the Danish pioneers, Magdalene Lauridsen, expressed the mission for Home Economics as follows: “*to household (or good housekeeping) means to use what you have, in order to get what you want.*” By that she meant that the aim of Home Economics was that both coming teachers and students should learn to use and handle the resources of the home and household in the most prudent way. This was both a question of cooking and cleaning following the advices, which could be extracted from the new sciences of nutrition and microbiology. The visions were “*furthermore to raise the view of the housework, improve women’s education, apply scientific results, solve social problems, and understand the nature and demands of the child.*” The last issue, the nature of the child, was a new understanding of the bodily needs, as the school was sitting down listening, reading, and writing and that school could profit by including practical work in the school day. This can also be related to a pedagogical movement from Germany called the working school (Der Arbeitsschule). This movement represented by Kerschensteiner, a German headmaster working with craft, saw the practical work as part of literacy or Bildung (Kerschensteiner in Husen, 1980).

The subject was seen as an applied science in Denmark, but as expressed by another Nordic pioneers Helga Helgesen: “As both natural science and mathematics are seen as part of the general education (Bildung) in the school, they cannot lose their educational ability when the pupils learn to apply the sciences in a prudent way” (Helgesen, 1900).

The introduction was influenced by different angles and visions. Pedagogical theorists such as Kerchensteiner and Dewey were among the influential. Kerchensteiner was a German headmaster concerned with how a practical subject as craft could have an educational meaning or rather a meaning for ‘Bildung’ on boys. Dewey was concerned with the meaning of experiences within education, or learning by doing, which has become a motto for his research (see Husen, 1978, Dewey, 1998/1938).

Spokeswomen for Home Economics education were found among conservative and liberal circles. The first mentioned group aimed at heightening the view of household work and values within the home, and they viewed the home and house-

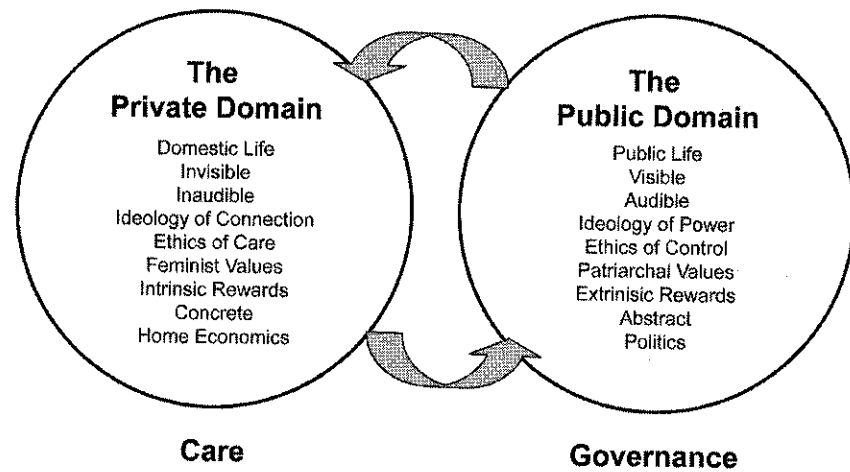


Figure 5.1

Two Systems of Human Action (Thompson, 1992 p. 31)

hold as isolated from the society. This separation can be compared to the Greek society in ancient history, where *oikos* (the Greek word for household) was isolated from *polis* (the society). The values in the two domains were totally distinctive as shown by Patricia Thomson (Thompson, 1992, 1993). Patricia Thompson uses the old Greek terms *oikos* for household and *polis* for society and points out the heritage from the Greek society with the different values within the two spheres. *Oikos* is dominated by the practical, female housework and private world whereas *polis* is/was the public place for free men to discuss and work with more theoretical and artistic issues. Thompson illustrates this in her model for 2 systems of action, Figure 5.1. The model is useful in showing this distinction between household and society and can to a part explain the dualism, which has influenced the view of the subject in Home Economics education.

Turning to the liberal movement, this party was more engaged in using scientific results from the growing natural science into the household area in order to assist the families in getting a better, healthier life; but they also wanted to further female education as such. They stressed the need of being educated formally as a need not only for boys but also for girls. Within this liberal group many frontiers in Home Economics were established, for example, woman founded private female schools and also teacher training colleges. One of these women, Nathalie Zahle, founded one of the first school kitchens, which could be used for female education in a period of the girls' lives when they were in 'bodily' growth and needed to do some practical work as she formulated this.

The last faction was the socialists. In Denmark, this faction was against Home Economics as part of the compulsory education, as they did not want the women to

be bound to the kitchen and they found or thought that more institutionalized community kitchens in the future would take care of domestic work. This was quite opposite to the American situation, as described by Doris Badir, where socialist feminists were thinking that 'Home Economics education provided solutions to the nation's social problems and represented a practical choice of study for women.' (Badir, 1993 p. 208)

Another influence for Home Economics at this time was found within the pedagogical and psychological theories which promoted the introduction of Home Economics. Among these was the thesis of Dewey of "learning by doing" and his laboratory school. Kerchensteiner's thoughts of the need for practical work in education were essential, too, and finally developmental theories of more psychological sort had an impact (Dewey, 1998, Kerschensteiner in Husen, 1980/1912). Taken together the arguments for Home Economics were feminist, pedagogical, psychological, educational, and social. The title of the subject became female domestic work or housework more directly. The textbook title of the most used material from 1912 to the 1970s was however Home Economics.

#### 1920s–1960s

After the first introductory period of Home Economics concerned with defining the subject and describing the aims, the Home Economics teachers were engaged in describing teaching methods, making textbooks and core curricula. A definite format of the lessons was developed, which has had an impact on thinking regarding Home Economics teaching. John Dewey inspired the teachers to install laboratory kitchens (Dewey, 1912/1998) and teaching was transformed in a way that every single pupil made her own task standing beside one another. This was then used as an introductory method followed by working in big kitchen divided into small family kitchens, where tasks were divided between '*the family members*', who were guided by textbooks describing how to work and containing the recipes of cooking or you may say the recipes of the good life so to speak. Both ways to design the school room are still seen all over the world, and so is the way to plan the teaching. The school kitchen has had and still has a very huge impact on thinking and conducting Home Economics in both positive and negative ways. Seen in a Home Economics history light, this period from 1910 to 1960s was focused on methods practical and educational. The theory of the subject, mainly natural scientific, was taught isolated from the practical part (Benn, 2000).

The word women was deleted from the title of the subject in 1938, but still the subject was only for girls, apart from the Copenhagen community, where boys were taught from the 1940s.

#### 1970s–1990s

In the late 1960s, women's liberation was gathering support, and house work was not considered to be so essential any more, at the same time as boys in the whole country were enrolled in the education. But women should earn their own money, be educated but not necessarily within Home Economics. Home Economics was downgraded both in the general opinion and also in the school system. Lessons were

shorter, cut down. The way to regard the subject was found more within creativity and as a break in the school day. This resulted in more focus on the practical issues, cooking and baking. In Denmark the subject was also grouped together with other practical-creative subjects, and therefore considered as such a subject. Group work and gender equality was however on the agenda, and from the aims the following can be seen:

- knowledge and experiences within consumer issues, planning and maintenance of work in the home
- skills in techniques and working processes, in rationalising the work in the home
- understanding of the meaning of proper composition of food
- aesthetical attitude regarding hygiene and organisation and maintenance of the home

In 1971 the inspector of Home Economics formulated the subject as follows:

“The subject encompasses in all classes theoretical, technical and practical work. It is ethical, aesthetical and pragmatic. Weight is put upon hygiene and economy...In Denmark we still work in such a way, that we link knowledge and skills, which the pupils have from other subjects together with the more general practical and technical tasks... The motto from the first year of education is: Simplicity, clarity and to go into depth (according to J.Fr. Herbart). Every pupil prepares and arranges her own portion.”(Sivertsen, 1971)

Regarding the last point — “simplicity, clarity and to go into depth” was not the full truth of Home Economics education, as time was diminished and problems regarding foods and food production had become more and more complex and difficult to understand. It was not possible just to recommend eating herrings for health reasons, if you did not know where they had been caught.

The subject title was changed to Home Economics or more directly translated home knowledge as it was called in Sweden and Norway, but still the focus was on cooking, food and nutrition and not home as such.

### 1990s

In 1995 a new curriculum was developed by a group of Home Economics specialists, the work was inspired by both national and international Home Economics work and also by general educational theories of the state and problems within home, society and institutions. The work of Patricia Thompson (), Buboltz () and Sontag () and Vaines () had a great impact on the formulation and description of the curriculum and also on the understanding of the home as *oikos* surrounded by *polis* or society (see Benn, ), and of the role of the teacher as an eco-centred person. In the words of Karsten Schnack we were in a period of challenges for education and didactics (Schnack, 1993). The challenges could and can be seen as both global and local, or as key problems which another philosophical pedagogue named Klafki has described (Klafki, 1994). These key problems must also have an impact in the Home Economics curriculum and syllabus, which the working group implemented in the aim (Ministry

of Education, 1996). From the aim of Home Economics the following principles can be derived:

- responsibility and care for the activities in the home
- practical, experimental and sensorial tasks
- development of self-esteem and joy of life
- take critical stand and act
- understanding of one’s own culture and the culture of others as expressed in the act of housework
- understanding of the meaning of use of resources considering the environment

### Home Economics at present

The tendency for a new school subject is in general, that firstly it has to promote itself, through encircling aims and visions. Thereafter it needs to stabilise and refine its content and methods. After that a period of stagnation often occurs and finally an evaluation is needed. This was clearly seen in a Danish analysis of school subjects in 1995 (this study is in Danish language only).

The period limits cannot be given as fixed time terms, it must be seen more as trends and tendencies. Historical characteristics from each period will more or less be carried on to the next period and also up until today’s education, Figure 5.2. The introduction period was going on from 1890s to 1910s, the stabilising period from 1920s to 1960s, the stagnation or (re)creative period from 1960 to 1980s, and we have the (re)evaluation period from the 1990s.

### Home Economics after 2000

What can be said of Home Economics today? In many countries the subject is compulsory for both boys and girls. The name and curricula differ from one country to another, the education in primary or secondary school or both, the name and the teachers. In

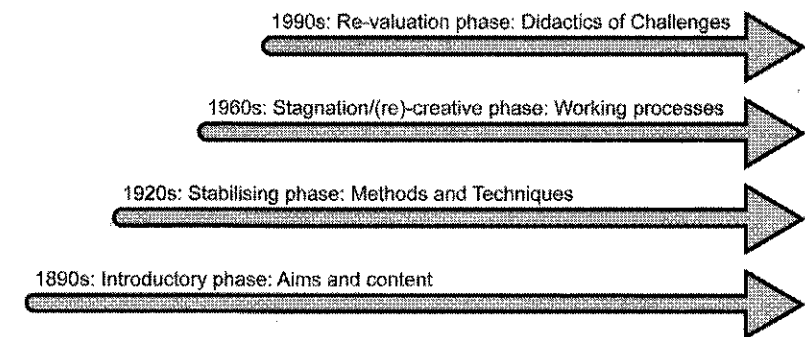


Figure 5.2

Focus in different periods (Benn, 1996)

Denmark the name Home Economics is seen as outdated, and the suggestion for a name from the Home Economics association is food and health as in the Norwegian title. Other groups wish the title to be food literacy (Bildung). The problem concerning the subject in the school is still resources, resources concerning time for the subject both within a year as over more years, it concerns economy in order to have materials for the teaching both text books, artefacts and food. Last resources are to be found as competencies of the teacher within the area of Home Economics, as teacher education has lesser time for the subject, and also further education of teachers.

The name signalises the content and focus of a subject, but still the Home Economics classroom is the school kitchen. The room defines part of what can be taught in the room, but it could be broadened and the 'laboratory' thought from Dewey could be taken seriously, so that pupils should 'labore' or experiment and experience in a lot of ways, sensory, scientific, and take theory and practice in together.

### Perspectives for Home Economics in the future

What does it imply to be a "home economizer" in the new millennium or to be educated in the 21st century?

I think 3 scenarios are possible as regarding Home Economics in the school system or perhaps I should mention the fourth also: "*Now is the time to take it apart for good*" as Gena Attar said in her evaluation of Home Economics in England. The reason was that Attar had experienced in her survey that teachers did not take up relevant issues in education, but educated on behalf of their problems and their own middle-class lives. They were not considering what the pupils needed to be able to manage in their roles as:

- Householders and educators
- Workers and producers
- Citizens (Kristensen, 1987)

What Attar really criticizes, is, that teachers do not understand society and culture as e.g. related to different life forms, different conditions in society, different individuals and human beings. But they teach Home Economics as a-cultural and a-historical. So this scenario where Home Economics is out of school is one possibility, which I will reject and instead argue that Home Economics education must be changed and teachers should be educated to make Home Economics a part of pupils' 'Bildung' as empowered citizens, prudent householders and creative producers for the benefit of their own life and that of others. That means that teachers have to consider their role in a way as described by Vaines as eco-centered taking into consideration that they should teach to live a life in a caring relationship.

But turning to the first mentioned 3 scenarios, I could see school and especially Home Economics classroom as:

- a cultural centre
- a survival centre or a centre for sustainability
- a laboratory for developing and challenges

Home Economics is or should be a subject for all human beings in a developmental perspective and in order to be able to live together. It should be a subject for educating citizens (global and local) to assist the lay perspective, which is a precondition for democracy, and educating householders to be able to act ecologically and economize. Finally, Home Economics has to educate caregivers that mean to care for the other and for the surroundings.

In the introduction it was mentioned, that Home Economics is a subject in a conflict between science (theory) and everyday life experiences (practice), but this is an issue which can be explored and researched in order to be able to teach in a way which combine theory and practice. It could be an issue for a common research project.

The gender issue is within Home Economics; but is a theme to deal with in Home Economics education offered for both boys and girls and conducted by both male and female teachers taking up gender themes in lessons concerning cooperation, gender perspectives on different household tasks and so forth.

Home Economics is culturally dependant, society determined, individually featured, I claimed in the introduction. This means that you have to see Home Economics in the cultural context you are part of. It does not imply that there is a national or regional culture to consider alone, but also the culture connected to different life forms, their values and priorities and differentiations among these. The society sets the rules for schooling and defines the curricula, but within these the teacher has her action room based on her/his view of education, learning and subject in cooperation with the pupils and sometimes with the parents. The individual both the teacher herself and all the single pupils are part of different groups and families, who have to be respected as human beings and have a role to play in the learning environment.

As it can be seen in the chapter, Home Economics holds potentials, possibilities, and also difficulties. The difficulties in teaching Home Economics can both be of external character and internal, the external is to be dealt with politically both at local level and national and perhaps international level. The internal problems and difficulties are partly within the subject, also inherited from history, but also within the single teacher and her understanding of the subject, of teaching and of the situation for the subject and the pupils in the 21st century. This understanding must be drawn to the surface and discussed within the profession, within teacher education and at the school level.

The possibilities and potentials are multifaceted and should be developed, as I have tried to reveal in the chapter. Parts from history are valuable to preserve and perhaps reconsider in new ways. Taken all together a home economist engaged in the subject for more than forty years must say in the wordings of the Norwegian philosopher Erling Lars Dale

"The school subject home economics is important, for example, for fostering positive attitudes towards carrying out tasks and taking care of obligations in everyday life.... Home Economics can be seen as a basic element in the students' ethical language, which encompasses care, responsibility and equal values in human interrelations." (Dale, 2000, p. 34, translation Benn)

## Summary

This chapter presents a brief historical overview of Home Economics, discuss the future possibilities for Home Economics in schools, as a tool for change and to develop literacy and 'Bildung'

- home economics history
- characteristics of the subject
- problems and challenges
- possibilities

## Discussion Prompts

- Consider how teachers in Home Economics could develop the classroom for further learning in a broader sense?
- How is your own Home Economics understanding?
- What does your understanding mean for teaching concerning goal, content, methods, materials?
- Compare curriculum from a couple of selected countries. Discuss the differences related to culture, content and the aimed competencies

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# CHAPTER 6

## History and Potential of Home Economics in the People's Republic of China

Peng Chen

This chapter focuses on the development of Home Economics in the People's Republic of China (P.R.C). Home Economics in China has experienced different stages of development from its introduction, from cancellation to its reconstruction. Home Economics' history is closely related to the nation's modernization process and with the evolution of women's social status. This chapter is organized chronologically into four sections: the predecessor of Home Economics in China, women's education in China; the introduction of Western Home Economics to China; the cancellation of Home Economics after the P.R.C. was established; and the reconstruction of Home Economics since 1978. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the potential of Home Economics in China through three lenses: education, research and extension.

To gain deeper, contextual understandings about the development of Home Economics, its history in China is also analyzed using both the critical theory of daily life (Yi, 2005a) and social gender theory (Zhou, 2011). Using the critical theory of daily life, we can understand the significance and value of the discipline in China: the modernization of the human. Using social gender theory, we can view the development of Home Economics within the different contexts, including gendered education, gender-neutral education and gender-sensitive education. Home Economics, which is closely connected with femininity, needs to go beyond the social gendered bias and make great contributions to the modernization of the human in China. Figure 6.1 provides a brief overview of the history of Home Economics in China, with more details provided in the following text.

Feudal Times	Introduction of Western, modern Home Economics	Cancellation of Home Economics in All Levels of Education	Reconstruction of Home Economics
1046BC-1840s	1840s-1949	1949-1977	1978-ongoing
For more than 2000 years, philosophers valued families as the foundation of social stability.	1840s foreign missionaries taught female students about caring for the home.	1949 People's Republic of China (PRC) was established under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.	1978 the PRC implemented reform policy and welcomed Western modernization.
Women's education was informed by the Confucian Classics and prepared women to be "an understanding wife and a loving mother."	1907 China's last feudal dynasty (Qing) established women's normal schools (teacher's college).	1950s Home Economics was cancelled in all levels of education because it did not meet the needs of the times.	1994 the PRC began establishing a socialist market system.
	1914 Feudal system over, new Republic of China government sent women overseas to be trained in Home Economics.	1950s Home Economics departments at universities were dismantled and merged into related disciplines (e.g. medicine, education and art).	Modernization and a socialist market system are transforming China.
	1919-1920 Home Economics was included in Women's Higher Normal School and missionary universities trained Chinese Home Economics professionals.		Home Economics is reappearing in a few higher education institutions but it is taught by non-home economists from related disciplines; it does not have a separate entry in the Chinese Classification of Instructional Programs (under Sociology) and it is viewed as experimental and not formal.
	1938 Minister of Education began promoting Home Economics in elementary and secondary schools.		The future of Home Economics in China is threatened by the strong push for technical career paths/success and narrow understanding of its mission and potential; many Chinese women are still wary of its perceived focus on women.
	Concurrently, during 1930s-40s, new social movements in China led to female university students rejecting Home Economics.		

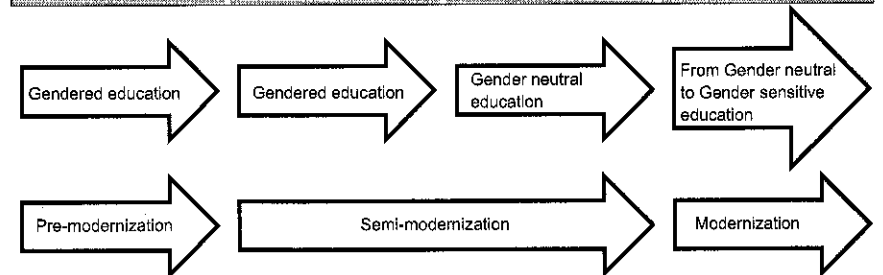


Figure 6.1

A brief overview of the history of Home Economics in China

### The predecessor of Home Economics: Women's education in China (221BC — 1840s)

Viewed through the macroscopic lens of a feudal society, China has attached great importance to the family since ancient times. Several philosophers pointed out that families were the foundation of social stability. Famous thinkers, like Mencius (about 372 B.C.-289 B.C.), put forward: "The foundation of the world is countries, foundation of country is families, and foundation of family is oneself" (Mencius Liloushang, 2001). This famous saying greatly influenced the governing ideas of Chinese feudal rulers. An important book on the institutional system in ancient China, *The Book of Rites* (about Warring States to Qin Dynasty)<sup>1</sup>, outlined the relationship among individuals, society and the nation. "To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must cultivate our personal life; and to cultivate our personal life, we must first set our heart right" (Daxue, 2001). *The Book of Rites* had a great impact on the Chinese culture. Ancient kings in successive dynasties all thought highly of the relationship among the individual, the family and the state, so they placed it at all levels of the official agenda, bringing it to the attention of all levels of people.

Viewed through the microcosmic lens of a feudal society, it can be said the family played an important role in regulating the relationship between the sexes. There were very detailed rules about the relationship among family members. More specifically, men ruling women was seen to be an effective tool. In the "Liwei Hanwenjia" (n.d.) (about 25 A.D.-220A.D.), the following rules were articulated: "the ruler guides the subject, the father guides the son, and the husband guides the wife." Under these rules, ancient women's education emerged as the times required. Women were asked to stay at home and learn their legal duty systematically, which was the requirement of the patriarchal society. Women were isolated from the public domain, accepting different education than that provided for men. Women's ideal role was to be an understanding wife and a loving mother.

The contents of women's education included sericulture and silk reeling, weaving, cooking, sweeping, the festival rite, how to conduct oneself for all occasions, et cetera. The core of women's education was three obediences and four virtues. Regarding the former, a single woman obeys her father, a married woman obeys her husband, and a widowed woman obeys the deceased husband's son (Yili Snagfu, 1996). The four virtues included the females' virtue, females' verbalism, females' visages, and females' handicrafts (Zhouli Tiangong Jiubin, 1996).

In the Chinese feudal society, education for women was gendered; women were separated from the men. The content of women's education was all about effective knowledge and skills accumulated by the ancestors under the guidance of Confucianism. Women were attached to men, and what they learned was much less valuable than what men learned. Although all levels of people paid much attention to the family, men were asked to be far removed from household activities, considered to be the domain of women.

### Western modern Home Economics introduced to China (1840s-1949)

After the opium war in the 1840s, China was forced into the modernization process due to constant invasions of Western powers. During the past one hundred-plus years, China, under the impact of modernization, has undergone its most significant changes in the past 5000 years. China experienced exogenous modernization, meaning that it was responding to external forces instead of initiating change voluntarily, from within. For this reason, the traditional culture was still influential during China's modernization process (rather than being left behind or replaced with new traditions, as is often the case with endogenous modernization).

Starting in the 1840s, foreign missionaries began to establish missionary schools and to recruit female students, teaching them the knowledge and abilities of housekeeping and of character formation. More importantly, the missionaries intended for female students to have careers and to live independently in society. What with Western cultural influences and the growing awakening of people's consciousness, several Chinese reformers, at the end of 19th century, started female schools and advocated for women to attend. Under pressure from the Chinese society at the time, the Qing government (China's last feudal dynasty), in 1907, established the women's normal school around the goal of creating an understanding wife and a loving mother. Consequently, women's education was formally incorporated into the school system. Although the contents of women's education did not essentially change, the normal school (teacher's college) altered the home school pattern.

After the 1911 Revolution overthrew the feudal monarchy, the Republic of China was established. The new government continued the women's education policy of the Qing dynasty. In order to solve the problem of a lack of teachers, the government, on the one hand, sent some excellent girls overseas to learn Home Economics, beginning this practice in 1914. On the other hand, it began to offer women's higher education (university level). In 1919, the Ministry of Education released the *Women's Higher Normal School Regulations*. The curriculum in the Regulations included a division for Home Economics, providing for sewing, craftwork and housekeeping, et cetera (Wang, 2006). In 1920, the Beijing Women's Higher Normal School began to offer Home Economics education. Following this initiative, some missionary universities introduced Home Economics from the U.S., training many professionals for China, such as dieticians and early childhood teachers.

During the same period, several social movements broke out in China, including the New Culture Movement in 1915 and the May 4th Movement in 1919. Democracy and science spirits began to be transmitted amongst the Chinese intellectual elite. The leaders of these movements opposed the traditional virtues mentioned earlier and advocated equity between women and men. Many educated women became supporters of this idea, going out of their family and throwing themselves into the battle against the old, oppressed culture. Not surprisingly, traditional female roles began to change.

In 1938, the Ministry of Education formulated the *Home Economics Education Extension Methods Below the Secondary Education*, which promoted the spread of Home Economics education in many elementary and secondary schools. At this time, there was also a noticeable phenomenon: many young ladies who accepted these pro-

gressive ideas refused to take Home Economics at universities. This boycott reflected their resolute rupture from traditions.

The ancient state in China was filled with war and social movements. The exogenous cultural crisis increased the number of critics and accelerated their doubts about traditional culture. Modern rational spirits began to brew in China. Chinese women started to challenge traditional gender roles and called for gender equity. But, this kind of rebellion only occurred in the small, intellectually elite group. Meanwhile, the lives of the masses were still greatly influenced by traditional culture. Therefore, although the government introduced foreign-informed Home Economics, the discipline looked quite different in China. The enlightenment spirits originating in Western Home Economics did not grow in China.

During the war era, the core of Home Economics was maternalism, which emphasized the relationship between women and children, the nation and the country. Although gender equity thought began to spread, the ideal model of women's education, "an understanding wife and a loving mother," did not, in essence, change. The dual-track, gendered approach to education between the sexes still existed. But, this kind of gendered education did not receive general recognition and implementation, and even suffered resistance from some female students in universities.

With the deepening of national crises, more and more female students threw themselves into the social movement for liberation. Most women considered learning Home Economics as a sign of backward thinking and began to learn from men as their role model. Gender differences diminished, even disappeared. Many women believed they would not get true equity until they had rushed out of the fencing-in of the family. Although this kind of understanding was very radical, it became an inevitable process in women's liberation all over the world, not just in China. Home Economics, everywhere, was affected by the women's movement.

#### **The cancellation of Home Economics after the PRC was established (1949–1977)**

In 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. They obeyed Marxism's women's liberation principle, incorporating the gender equity principle into the system's construction and into social practices. Gender equity became a basic national policy. The government advocated that women go outside of the family and take part in all kinds of activities, just like the men. Like in other countries, besides working outside of the home, most women undertook household duties after work when they returned home.

In that context, gendered education, such as Home Economics, was criticised. Also, with the political tension between socialism and the capitalism coalition, Home Economics education was considered to be rotten, hedonic, adhering to capitalism. It was seen as not meeting the needs of the times in China, in the middle of the 20th century. As a result, in the 1950s, it was cancelled in all levels of education when the government adjusted all national colleges and universities. The teachers and the equipment in Home Economics departments were merged into the related departments. For example, food and nutrition was incorporated into the medical college,

early childhood into the education college, and textile and interior design into the art college (Jin, 2006).

During this period, the typical outstanding women were "iron girls" who could do anything as well as men in the smelting, machinery, chemical, construction, transportation and other industries (Jin, 2006). Its essence was to deny the different physical fitness levels between the two sexes. This idea was rooted in women's education in the national liberation practices in the 1940s. The emotional characteristics and the life styles related to the private area (family and home) were denied and decried as humanism and as small bourgeois emotional appeal. This masculinism trend in women's education resulted from the national crises and from class struggles (Jin, 2006).

Women's education during this time was called gender-neutral education (Zhou, 2011). Women and men accepted non-gendered education in the schools. Government officials thought it was an effective way to liberate women; hence, they cancelled gendered education, which was considered a hindrance to the growth of female students (Zhou, 2011). In this context, learning Home Economics was equated to being housewives at home; such women were seen as lagging behind the times. Even today, this idea influences numerous women in China, remaining an important obstacle to rebuilding Home Economics.

#### **The reconstruction of Home Economics since 1978**

In 1978, China implemented reform policy and opened up and welcomed the Western culture, objectively and dialectically. In 1994, China began working towards establishing a socialist market economy system, succeeding at the end of the 20th century. China has witnessed unprecedented rapid economic development during the last 30 years, which has attracted attention from the entire world. So far, this vibrant economy has experienced, more or less, all of the developmental trends in the Western post-industrial society: aging, globalization, technological development, prosperity, humanization, commercialization, health and environment, acceleration, network organizing, and urbanization (the megatrends mentioned in the Stimulus chapter).

However, the Chinese people's experiences are quite different from those of the Western world. China is in a drastic social transition from an agricultural society to an industrial society, still in the process of comprehensive modernization. Modernization always refers to the transition of a traditional society to the modern society. There are many symbols of modernization, the first being the powerful transition from an agricultural society to an industrial society (Yi, 2005b).

The second key symbol of modernization is the modernization of the human, which refers to the fundamental transition of one *way of being* or behaviour pattern to another. In the traditional society, most people are accustomed to living in a limited space governed by the habits, traditions, customs, experiences, unrestrained regulations, conventions, common sense and emotions et cetera that are natural cultural components. The modernization of China means Chinese citizens have to be



convinced to change from the natural, traditional conditions to free, conscious conditions. Each citizen will have to become a creative individual who can adapt to the needs of science, technology and socialized mass production. Such people have the advantage of subjective consciousness, critical consciousness and a technical, rational, humanistic spirit (Yi, 2005b).

The third symbol of human modernization is cultural transition, which means being critical of the traditional daily life world. Daily life refers to: (a) daily consumption activities, such as food clothing, shelter and means of travelling; (b) daily communicating activities, such as miscellaneous chatting; and, (c) daily concept activities, which feature in repeated and non-creative, emerging in the daily consumption and communicating activities (Yi, 2005a). Therefore, human modernization is a process of stepping out of the daily life world (Yi, 2005b). It does not mean we can live without the daily life; rather, we must pursue getting rid of the old way of being so we can transition to the new.

China's traditional culture is still so very powerful. It is the most ancient, longest-living civilization in the world and the only one without interruption since its origination in the world. Although the Chinese people have begun to welcome the cultural spirit of reason and the contract, and to appreciate subjectivity, personality, freedom, self-awareness, creativeness, social participation awareness, critical spirit et cetera, the leading cultural type in China is still used to living by experiences and worldly wisdom rather than reason, legal systems and contracts. This situation is mainly reflected in two aspects. First, in the institutional dimension, China is farthest from modernity. Second, in the spiritual dimension, the rational spirit is not rooted in human survival, public life, social operation or system arrangement as essential mechanisms and regularity in China. As well, the intrinsic mechanism in the society, or the cultural spirit of the life world, is still in the pre-modernization stage (Yi, 2005a). There is still great tension between the exogenous modernization culture and the traditional culture.

Under this cultural context, people in China resisted the utopian idealism doctrine under the planned economy from 1950s to 1970s, and embraced the commercialization wave and utilitarianism thinking (Yi, 2005a). People gave up their traditional, ideal, elite culture of reasoning, the value of life and the ultimate concern for history and they regressed to the basic necessities of daily living and the natural instincts of man, and accepted the mass and consumerism culture, consciously or unconsciously.

With the enhancement of living standards, Chinese people now pay more attention to their daily life and to individuals' well-being, which are the key focus of Home Economics. Normally, Home Economics should attract attention from all kinds of communities. But, it is a pity it is severely despised, that it merely equals the nanny service now (to be discussed in the next section). Although some scholars are calling for the reestablishment of Home Economics, their weak voices have not been brought to the forefront. Why does this happen? On the one hand, the historical factors noted in the previous discussion make it hard to re-establish Home Economics in China. Home Economics as gendered education has depreciated under severe attacks over

the last 30 years, and is seen as a stumbling block to women's development. On the other hand, although people have begun to enjoy the material life now, they have not internalized the spirit of reason in their daily life. They rely on the habits, traditions, customs, experiences, unrestrained regulations, conventions, common sense and emotions in their daily life, which was not considered worthy of formal study. Therefore, by association, as a discipline that focuses on daily life, the development of Home Economics in China still encounters great difficulties.

### **The potential of Home Economics in China (education, research and extension)**

The potential of Home Economics in China is of special relevance to the process of human modernization, especially in the rural area. China has a very typical structure of urban and rural systems. Together, each of rural urbanization, the industrialization of agriculture, and farmers have almost become the core of modern modernization. On the one hand, the city economy features in big, modern, industrial production, the development of urban roads, communication, health and education and other infrastructures. On the other hand, the rural area is typical of a small-scale peasant economy and the infrastructures are falling behind those of the city.

The rural social security level is low; the rural living conditions and the living environment have deteriorated; the population quality generally lags behind that of the city. All of these factors are key barriers to modernization in China. Rural education is needed. What can Home Economics do in this process? The enlightenments from Home Economics in the United States showed that it could contribute to modernization through an integrated system of education, research and extension service. Home Economics could be like seeds rooted in the daily life of China. It could help the rational spirits (reason, contracts, law and the modernization paradigm) grow in the daily life of citizens, which could deepen the modernization process, moving it from the grand narrative structure into the microscopic world of family life. Modernization could come true if only we could get humans used to the new life style and to live it unconsciously.

The value and significance of Home Economics is greatly overlooked by Chinese mainstream thinkers. The current situation and developmental possibilities of Home Economics in China will now be analyzed from three perspectives: education, scientific research and extension.

### **Education**

Home Economics education is not appropriately positioned in the Chinese education system. In the Chinese Classification of Instructional Programs, within the university system, Home Economics does not have its own separate entry; instead, it is under Sociology, marked with an asterisk, behind which it is characterized as experimental in nature rather than formal. This classification means it is not readily visible and is not considered legitimate as a discipline on its own.

Although Home Economics as an experimental major has reappeared in a few colleges and universities in China (especially since the advent of the family service

industry, to be discussed shortly), the original reason for re-introducing it was to strengthen the economy (increase economic demand) and to relieve employment pressure. Currently, career-oriented programs are welcomed and valued in higher education settings, because they are seen as guaranteeing that students get a satisfying job after graduation. A powerful example affecting the future of Home Economics in China is the family service industry (the nanny example used above). As people's living standards rise, the family service industry has expanded rapidly, because both parents are working. For clarification, this service involves training people to be nannies and home workers. Family service refers to the family as the main object of service, run by a business operator providing for-profit, family-related activities (e.g., cleaning, washing clothes, cooking, home care, infant care).

The gap between the supply and demand of family service providers is huge in large cities, so large that in 2010, the Chinese State Council released a policy regarding accelerating the family services industry (Wenjiabao, 2010). The policy recognized that the family services industry has an important role to play in creating more jobs, improving people's livelihood, expanding domestic consumer demand and adjusting the industrial structure. Some scholars consider it a good opportunity for the Home Economics discipline. But, the policy only focuses on the family services industry, rather than the full scope of Home Economics as a discipline. This policy may be an opportunity to expand training and employment-related work with Home Economics extension service, but the effect seems so limited. What is worse, given the lack of theoretical clarification around the mission of Home Economics in China, more people will regard Home Economics as a component of the family services industry, which may confuse their understandings about Home Economics. Indeed, some college administrative staff members think Home Economics programs may be a good way to relieve college employment pressure and meet the huge demand of the family service industry.

Although Home Economics is a new term in elementary and secondary education, it has great potential in the on-going educational reform in China, unfolding since the end of 20th century. The educational reform is called *Quality Education*, and it emphasizes students' moral quality (character), human ability and physical and mental health. It reflects humanistic thought and pays special attention to the students' daily-life experiences. Home Economics could find exciting opportunities in primary schools. Home Economics could be the best source of applied life knowledge, either as an independent subject or incorporated into other subjects to help students make close links between education and their daily life.

As well, Home Economics has much to offer adolescents in secondary education. In this phase of their lives, students' physical and psychological development is undergoing huge changes, and they need various kinds of correct guidance about life and career. In secondary education, big college-entrance pressure, exam-oriented education is in vogue. Because many schools consider graduation rates (intimating a successful career) to be the only standard of success, it is challenging to spread Home Economics education in middle schools and high schools. Home Economics is focused on the home, the individual, family well-being and quality of life, which

includes, but is not limited to, success in one's career. China needs more insights into how to integrate the full spectrum of Home Economics content and processes into the secondary curriculum, because its inclusion would be so valuable.

### Research

Research on Home Economics and by home economists is still in the initial stages in China. First, Home Economics research lacks social recognition or legitimacy. Home Economics bears so many prejudices, and it is often classified into skills training rather than academic research. Second, Home Economics research forces are scattered. The different dimensions or aspects of Home Economics (e.g., clothing, food, housing, consumer, and family) are no longer together in one department, but are spread over several departments. This fragmentation makes it difficult for Home Economics to be whole again, even to see itself as a whole. Third, existing Home Economics research lacks deep analysis. Strictly speaking, there are few professional home economists in China; the scholars who are interested in the discipline mostly put forward suggestions based on their own disciplinary background, such as sociology, economics, education and history, rather than the conventional interdisciplinary approach associated with Home Economics.

Fourth, the research resources are limited and repeated, mainly focusing on the present situation in China and achievements overseas, which has less value for revelation. Fifth, the research forces are less powerful. Home Economics researchers and institutions are mostly from open university or vocational and technical college. There are few first-class universities paying attention to Home Economics in China. Sixth, research achievements are poor. There are few published Home Economics papers, monographs et cetera and those that are published are featured in low level, poor quality and marginalized venues. Above all, Home Economics research in China does not have *the right* position within the academy, which hinders its professional development. The current, awkward position (fragmented and spread over many departments) does not reflect the importance and the value of Home Economics in China.

### Extension service

Home Economics in China has not become a well-recognized discipline, so extension services are not carried out in large scale in the name of Home Economics. Recently, some governmental departments and non-governmental sections have launched several rural extension projects on women's literacy, practical technical training and other aspects of rural education. But, these are far from enough. We need a perfect Home Economics social extension system like that which is well established in the United States. Home Economics extension training could be an effective way to further human modernization, especially in the rural area.

Under the impact of urbanization, many Chinese peasants moved out of the countryside to the urban area. A large percentage of members of the rural labour

force (most of whom are men) go to non-agricultural industries (including long-term and seasonal), leaving women to do the agricultural work. In 2010, the number of Chinese migrant workers in the big cities totalled more than 240 million (Wuguo, 2011). They are engaged in all kinds of jobs and make great contributions to the modernization movement. The agricultural tasks in the countryside become the main work of rural women staying in the hometown. However, women in the rural area are poorly educated. They are relatively conservative and their lack of technology, concepts, operation ability and decision-making skills in the market economy has serious impacts on the rural modernization process in China.

Home Economics extension, closely linked with daily life, could contribute to the modernization process, especially in the rural area. The mission of rural Home Economics extension is to (a) introduce new knowledge, new skills and new ideas about family life and production to the peasants (especially the women staying in the rural area); (b) make them fully understand and accept the new ideas; and, (c) change the old way of daily life and production style so they can make family management, production and child-rearing more effective and scientific. Rural Home Economics extension, as an important part of agricultural extension, could play an important role in modern agriculture and rural development. The ultimate goal of Home Economics extension would be the development of all individuals (especially rural women), helping them gain higher self-esteem, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-improvement, thereby further promoting the modernization of Chinese citizens. Home Economics' contributions would promote the comprehensive modernization of China.

### Summary

In the feudal society, women's education, as the predecessor of Home Economics in China, was about accumulated life and production knowledge and skills of the ancestors, which was gender-biased and separate from men's. This kind of education confined women to the private area and made the woman become a subsidiary to the man in the family.

With the exogenous cultural influence, China has been changing greatly since the middle of the 19th century. The imperialist war and the civil war awakened the Chinese people. Under the illuminating spirit from the West, Chinese women began to get out of the family and contribute to the nation's liberation. In this period, Western Home Economics was introduced into China, but it did not grow because of cultural differences and the affairs of war.

In 1949, the P.R.C. established the idea of "the women are the same as the men," and women were asked to do all kinds of jobs, same as the men. Within the context of gender-neutral education, Home Economics was cancelled as a decadent culture, behind the age.

After 1978, China implemented the reform policy and opened up. With high economic growth and improved life quality, Home Economics reappeared again, albeit in a very narrow and fragmented form. In the process of modernization, Home Economics will be one of the indispensable parts of the process of human modernization, especially in the rural area.

The premise of the development of Home Economics in China is to realize the significance and the value of the discipline. In contemporary China, it plays an important role in human modernization, especially in rural people's modernization. Home Economics could help optimize people's living environments, and improve the quality of people's lives. Home Economics is required so that the modern citizen can accept the spirit of reason in daily life, not just rely on experience and common sense.

We must study the complex relationship between Home Economics and social, gendered roles. Being perceived as gendered, and focused on keeping women at home, is the key barrier to the advancement of the discipline of Home Economics in China. At present, many women still have serious misunderstandings of Home Economics. They erroneously equate learning Home Economics to doing housework and to being housewives. People need to be taught that Home Economics does *not* confine the female into the family. It can help all people learn how to live better lives within their near environments.

The discipline needs to be formally and intentionally developed. The reappearance of Home Economics education happened in the context of the expansion of the family service industry. The latter is but one of the basic aspects of Home Economics. We should develop a professional academic team, set up formal communication mechanisms, expand the academic institutional exchange platform and cultivate more professional talents. Currently, there are no shared concepts and theories in China. Home economists only have a faint voice in academic circles, let alone garnering official government support. It lacks a clear mission, purpose, body of knowledge and research paradigm. In China, Home Economics as a discipline should base its legitimacy on the modernization progress.

Home Economics in China needs to establish an integrated, cooperative system of education, scientific research and social extension. In the wave of educational reform, Home Economics has great potential in all levels of the education system, especially elementary, secondary and higher education.

Home Economics research could find an appropriate place in interdisciplinary research. For example, it could unite with educational research, women's studies, nutritional studies and rural studies. Home Economics extension services could play a significant role in the modernization process, especially in the construction of a new socialist countryside in China.

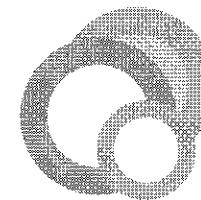
China is experiencing great cultural conflict. It is difficult for us to establish a relatively strong, uniform cultural value and spirit at present. Each of traditional culture, the modern rational spirit, and the post-modern cultural spirit influences our thoughts and our daily lives. Home Economics, as a daily-life-focused discipline, can greatly contribute to the progress of modernization and cultural transitions. It can help people overcome and move beyond the barriers of a traditional culture and learn the core spirit of reason, while regarding the malpractice and the crisis of the post-industrial society, rationally and critically. Although introduced from the U.S. at the beginning of the 1900s, it was interrupted for half a century. The reconstruction of Home Economics is still in its infancy. To aid this process, Home Economics needs to remain connected with the world.

## Endnotes

- 1 There were multiple authors of The Book of Rites. The time of writing is uncertain. Most of the chapters may be from Confucius' seventy-two disciples and some ancient books and records in the Pre Qin Dynasty (about 5700 B.C to 221 B.C.)
- 2 A note about referencing the Chinese Classics. Many Chinese books have been lost in the long history of China. For example, the Western Zhou Dynasty (about 1046B.C.–771B.C) was more than 3000 years ago. Nonetheless, copies of many documents still exist, but their authors are often unknown or estimated by historians. When this sort of material is cited in China, we just list the name of the old source, the name of the book it came from (if relevant), and the most recent modern publisher and publishing date. Each Chinese reference in this chapter is presented in this order: Pin Yin (the official system to transcribe Chinese characters into the Roman alphabet), the English translation and then Chinese.

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## Deaths, Disasters and Tasty Treats: Challenging Public Perceptions of Home Economics

Jay R. Deagon

The purpose of this chapter is to propose ways the Home Economics profession can harness the power of existing and emerging Internet technology to reinforce positive public perceptions, mitigate the effects of negative media and legitimize the role of Home Economics now and in the future. Three strategies are suggested 1) citizen and participatory journalism; 2) creating content with public appeal; and 3) consistent use of key terms when tagging articles on the Internet. Supporting these strategies is a snapshot of online news headlines to benchmark current patterns of reporting on global Home Economics events available for public access on the worldwide web.

### Ending the silent revolution

'Until critical situations arise, people and empires often remain reticent and slow to respond to the obvious clarion call for alterations in the status quo' (Agnello, White, & Fryer, 2006, p. 312)

The American radio program *Talk of the Nation* recently interviewed a history professor from Michigan State University. She advocated to 'bring back Home Economics' but in the same interview announced that 'the name Home Economics is dead'. This story caused me serious concern because I research in the field of Home Economics and therefore know that the name and the profession are far from dead ... agreed that we need renewal but not resurrection. Most disturbingly, this announcement was globally accessible to an English-speaking audience via a podcast on the Internet. To my deep satisfaction, the majority of the comments left on the *Talk of the Nation* website gave a resounding "aye" to the clarion call to "bring back Home Economics". There were

