

Article

Evangelizing “Home”: Laura M. White’s Translation and Intellectualizing of Home Economics in China (1891–1931)

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Abstract

Since the late Qing, Christianity helped reconfigure China’s modern intellectual landscape not simply by importing “Western knowledge” but by constructing the epistemic frameworks through which knowledge was named, classified, and circulated. This article examines how the Christian idea of “homemaking” was scientized through translation and became *jiazheng* (家政, Home Economics) in Republican China, emerging as a new discipline within women’s education. It centers on Laura Marsden White (1867–1937), an American Protestant missionary and pioneer of women’s education who founded China’s first Christian women’s monthly, *Nüduo* (The Woman’s Messenger, 1912–1951) and initiated its *jiazheng* column as an institutional infrastructure for domestic science knowledge. Foregrounding White as a missionary–translator and translingual mediator, this study argues that her work participated in the construction of modern home economics rather than merely transmitting a ready-made field. Strategically aligning her translation with Confucian gendered ethics, White rendered home economics intelligible as *jiazheng* while simultaneously reorganizing household practices into a systematic, science-based curriculum. By circulating scientific knowledge, standardized curricular categories, and credentialed forms of expertise, White recast women’s domestic responsibilities as socially recognized knowledge and employable labor. Her translation offered Chinese women a historically specific route into schooling, writing, and public service, allowing them to negotiate the traditional gender divide without abandoning the culturally legible language of the family. Translation thus serves as both a medium of Protestant moral pedagogy and an engine of disciplinary formation and gendered social change.

Keywords: Laura Marsden White; missionary translator; *Nüduo*; home economics; knowledge production



Academic Editors: Mingyu Lu and
Qinghe Xiao

Received: 7 February 2026

Revised: 16 March 2026

Accepted: 17 March 2026

Published: 20 March 2026

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1. Introduction

Since the late Qing dynasty, Christianity has played a formative role in the reconfiguration of China’s modern intellectual landscape. Missionaries were not merely transmitters of Western scientific knowledge; rather, they actively participated in the restructuring of epistemological frameworks through which new forms of knowledge were conceptualized, classified, and circulated. A substantial body of scholarship in religious and social history has documented the role of missionary enterprises in the emergence of modern Chinese disciplines (He 2008; Bays and Widmer 2009; Goossaert and Palmer 2011), while studies on Christianity and modern Chinese subject formation further demonstrate how Christian encounters contributed to new moral vocabularies, civic imaginaries, and conceptual categories (Dunch 2001; Wong and Mak 2024).

Despite the richness of this literature, the constitutive role of translation in these historical processes remains insufficiently theorized. Although earlier scholars have acknowledged missionaries' mediation of Chinese educational systems and conceptual vocabularies through transcultural practices (Liu 1995), translation has largely occupied a marginal position in broader discussions of religious history and disciplinary formation (Fu and Sun 2024). Even where translation has been addressed—most notably in studies in scientific and technical fields such as physics, geometry, and medicine (Wang 2024; Li and Fu 2024)—it is often treated as an instrumental or auxiliary activity rather than as a dynamic epistemic force. As a result, translation studies have yet to be fully integrated into the historiography of modern Chinese knowledge, particularly in relation to religion-inflected disciplines and everyday forms of knowledge production.

This article addresses this gap by examining *Nüduo* (女铎, The Woman's Messenger, 1912–1951), a Protestant monthly founded by the American missionary Laura Marsden White (1867–1937). Through a close analysis of its editorial strategies, authorship, and readership, this study focuses on a discipline that has received relatively little sustained scholarly attention: home economics. Introduced to China alongside American Protestant evangelism in the early twentieth century, home economics functioned as a hybrid field that combined Christian moral teachings, Western pedagogical models, scientific approaches to domestic management, and gendered discourses of womanhood. Central to this missionary project was the reconceptualization of “home” within the rapidly transforming sociopolitical conditions of Republican China. While existing scholarship recognizes that this discipline involved ongoing processes of adaptation and translation (Glosser 2003; Schneider 2011; Zhao 2020; Du 2021; Y. Zhou 2025b), the multilingual and translational practices through which these processes were enacted, and their broader implications for religious and cultural exchange, remain underexplored.

Building on the conceptualization of missionaries as “cultural capitals” (Li and Gao 2025), this study foregrounds White's role as a translingual mediator who introduced Western domestic knowledge across linguistic and cultural boundaries while articulating a Christian-inflected vision of home economics in China. Although previous studies of *Nüduo* have highlighted its historical significance in shaping modern Chinese society (Y. Zhou 2022, 2023, 2025a, 2025b; Wong 2019, 2021, 2022; Fan 2024), much of this scholarship relies predominantly on monolingual sources and a limited range of secondary materials. By adopting a translation studies perspective, this article reconceptualizes the modern Chinese notion of “home” as a composite construct produced through the interaction of Christian homemaking ideals, Western educational theories, and the sociopolitical dynamics of Republican China. I argue that translation was not simply a means of transmission but a productive mechanism that generated a new semantic field, one that later shaped discourses of nationalism, constitutionalism, and modernization.

Methodologically, this study reconstructs an intellectual and print network centered on White and demonstrates how *Nüduo*'s household management column functioned as a serialized pedagogical corpus. Through processes of translation, reinterpretation, and adaptation, this corpus reworked Confucian moral principles, contributed to the expansion of women-oriented print culture, and fostered nationalist sentiment among Republican intellectuals. White's appropriation of home economics transcended the binary of foreign versus indigenous knowledge, advancing a universalized maternal ideal that linked Christian faith with practical guidance for women's everyday lives. Rooted in her theological convictions, pedagogical commitments, and evangelistic objectives, White's serialized domestic teachings reveal the evangelization of “home” as a historically contingent and contested process. Marked by negotiation, tension, and creative transformation, this process underscores the productive frictions inherent in translingual domestic discourse.

Through the case of *Nüduo*, this study demonstrates how translation functioned simultaneously as a site of religious conversion and a crucial arena for reimagining modern Chinese womanhood.

2. Laura M. White and Her Preaching for “Home” in Girls’ Missionary Schools

2.1. A Protestant Uplift

In 1867, White was born in Baltimore, Maryland. Before working as a missionary, she taught in public schools in Philadelphia for five years, then attended Wellesley and Chicago Training School, graduating in 1890. In 1891, White joined the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (WFMS 1891, pp. 9, 95). In the same year, under the auspices of the Philadelphia branch of the Society, White was assigned to Chinkiang, China, and embarked on a forty-year career of evangelization.

White’s sailing to China was among the rapidly expanding women’s overseas Protestant work, with a goal, as Hill (1985, p. 23) argues, to “uplift heathen woman, to elevate her to the heights inhabited by Christian womanhood in America.” Sharing the ambition to assist in the extension of the gospel to women and children of the Chinese race (Heathen Woman’s Friend 1891, p. 107), White devoted her first two decades in China serving in girls’ missionary schools. From 1891 to 1907, she taught as a music teacher at Chongshi Girls’ School (崇实女中) in Chinkiang, China. White was then assigned to Nanking as the primary principal of Huiwen Girls’ School (汇文女中) in 1907, where she was tasked with upgrading junior girls’ schools to college-level institutions (White 1913b, p. 303).

Notably, in her pedagogical practice in Chinkiang and Nanking, White not only educated her Chinese students to reach the “heights inhabited by Christian womanhood in America” (Hill 1985, p. 23) but also nurtured them with a comparative mindset to become more aware of the cultural differences between East and West through learning and publishing. Her own idea of educating a group of young Christian Chinese students was fostered through consistent observations of Chinese families and societies, as documented in her travelogues sketching multiple indigenous fates of girls (White 1893a, pp. 277–79; 1893b, pp. 64–65; 1898, pp. 96–97; 1901, pp. 589–92). “Would that to today, in China,” advocated by White, “there were more of these cultured, traveled, broad-minded Christian Chinese, having the Hellenistic mission of bridging the gulf between West and East, for the Evangel to pass over” (White 1902, pp. 126–27).

The evidence indicates that, unlike her contemporaneous American female missionaries in China, White adopted a cross-cultural perspective, perceiving the cultural values of East and West as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. This view shaped her belief that Chinese girls should not be seen as a marginalized group in need of education and salvation but as a promising cohort capable of embracing the evangelical mission and driving meaningful social change. A 1913 missionary report exemplifies this perspective, in which White reflects on the evolution of her pedagogical approach after a decade of educational work in China:

At once, I commenced on an institution that should be modeled on my own Alma Mater, an eastern college in America. All thought was on what in the lines of American College education I could give them, not on what they needed to receive. And I made those poor dizzy schoolgirls revolve around an American College ideal, instead of making all my ideals revolve around their needs. (White 1913b, p. 303)

This passage illustrates White’s early approach, which aimed to impose an American collegiate ideal on her students, without fully considering their distinct cultural and educational

needs. Over time, however, White recognized the limitations of this approach, marking a shift in her mission. What began as an evangelical endeavor driven by Protestant religious goals gradually transitioned into a more secular pedagogical strategy, increasingly attuned to the specific political and cultural context of early 20th-century Republican China.

White further advanced this secular vision by distinguishing girls' education from that of boys. She was among the first to recognize that "little by little it was proved that a girl's education needs to be different from a boy's," asserting with conviction that "a woman's course of study has the right to be different" (White 1913b, p. 304). This recognition of gender-specific educational needs enabled White to tailor her missionary work in a way that more directly addressed the needs and aspirations of early 20th-century Chinese women, allowing for a more culturally and contextually relevant approach to evangelism and education.

Despite this strategic distinction, White's philosophy of women's education shared a commonality with other American missionaries in her belief that "homemaking" was a fundamental duty of women, emphasizing the importance of cultivating domestic skills. In a speech delivered before the Central China Educational Union at Kuling in 1911, she analyzed how a college-level education of women was crucial to propel China's transition to the next stage of progress. The speech was delivered at a time when White had fully experimented with her preaching plans over twenty years of pedagogical practice in southern China. White summarized and identified her evangelizing endeavor into the educating of "homemaking", indicating that "the art that the educated woman needs to learn" is one "of reigning over the little unattractive kingdom from which she would escape because she has been walled in too long, the Kingdom of Home" (White 1911, p. 645).

In Christian theology, "home" encompasses a range of duties that are deemed essential to the moral and social order, with the Bible long affirming the invaluable role women play in the household. For White, the problems surrounding "the house and household" were framed as a distinct body of knowledge that women were naturally inclined to manage. This perspective aligns with the Christian ideal of womanhood, which emphasizes women's responsibility for domestic tasks as part of their divinely ordained role. White argued that the knowledge of "food and clothing" had been women's domain since the dawn of human civilization, referencing the biblical narrative of "Adam delved and Eve span" to underscore this point (White 1913b, p. 304).

To make "homemaking" more "attractive" for her Republican audience, White adopted a culturally appropriate approach in advocating the importance of women's domestic duty. She was not entirely ignorant of China's own gender history in her evangelizing work. As she indicated in the speech, "never again will 'Records of Virtuous Women' contain stories akin to that of the filial daughter-in-law who lay on the frozen stream until the warmth of her tender body melted the ice thus enabling her to obtain three fish for the mother-in-law." White believed that the "days of childlike, unreasoning docility and servility are over" (White 1911, p. 645). Apparently, in retelling a Chinese story of a gender exemplar, White attempted to redefine the womanly ideal for Republican China, as opposed to what had been defined and confined by Confucianism, which emphasized domestic moralities of filial piety.¹

Such a culturally hybrid advocate of home learning, in a way, exhibited an appropriate approach to women's missionary work in early 20th-century China. The concept of "cultural appropriateness", which emerged in academic discourse on Western colonialism during the 1970s, encapsulates the idea of sensitivity and respect for cultural differences. As Kenneth Coutts-Smith discusses in his 1976 work, this concept emphasizes the need to adapt practices, translations, and representations to resonate meaningfully with the cultural context of the target audience (Coutts-Smith 1976). Michael North later refined this

idea into “voice appropriation,” highlighting how dominant voices can marginalize indigenous perspectives (North 1994). In White’s case, her work sought to legitimize the Christian ideal of home service by invoking Chinese Confucian notions of the “Virtuous Woman.” This fusion of Christian and Confucian ideals reveals White’s sensitivity to Chinese traditions of home learning, aligning her teachings with local norms and values. Her periodical work, particularly the *jiazheng* column in *Nüduo*, illustrates this approach, providing a platform to disseminate her views on women’s domestic roles, which will be further explored in subsequent chapters.

2.2. Scientizing “Home”

White’s Protestant efforts soon earned her recognition in the Christian Literature Society for China, later renamed Guang Xue Hui (广学会, the Christian Literary Society). In 1912, invited by the former General Secretary of the Society, Timothy Richard (林乐知, 1845–1919), White resigned as principal in Nanking Missionary School and took on the position of the chief editor of *Nüduo*. As documented by *Nüduo*’s Chinese editor-in-chief, Xu Nailu (许耐庐), Timothy Richard “had long enjoyed a profound acquaintance with White, admired her talent and virtue, and earnestly requested that she edit a periodical to serve as a guide for the women of China” (Xu 1931, p. 7). White acknowledged his consistent encouragement, noting, “I cannot help but think of my dear old friend, Mr. Timothy Richard...each time we met, he urged me to write. His persistent encouragement moved me, and I was compelled to devote myself to editing in order to fulfill his earnest wishes.” (White 1925, p. 2). Motivated by this mentorship, White took up the editorial mantle, setting *Nüduo*’s mission to “awaken, educate, and empower women while addressing entrenched societal inequities” (Xu 1931, p. 7).

Under the sponsorship of the Society and the guidance of White, *Nüduo* was founded in Shanghai in 1912 and ceased publication in 1951, exemplifying White’s appropriative approach to evangelizing.² In the inaugural issue, Xu Nailu stressed the journal’s purpose, stating that *Nüduo* was launched to address the “decline of moral order” and the “suffering endured by the people.” He highlighted the urgency of illuminating the “dark and obscured spheres of womanhood” and correcting their “tendencies of ignorance and submissiveness” by inviting White to edit and translate the journal (Xu 1912a, p. 2).

One significant contribution of *Nüduo* was White’s promotion of scientific homemaking as an essential educational agenda. In 1931, White refined her scientific approach to the learning of “home” into a systematic curriculum of home economics. She viewed domestic knowledge as inherently tied to natural order and societal progress, stating, “the new science sees nothing isolated, but everything linked with natural laws and in its proper proportions” (White 1913b, p. 304). She viewed the idea of “homemaking” as more than a Christian calling for women’s natural duty and as a systematic knowledge with sub-disciplines. For White, equipping women with tangible knowledge about these disciplines was as transformative for modern China as it was for the larger political spectrum. As she stated, “some knowledge on the subject of chimneys, drains, hygiene might work reforms in our new China more important than those wrought for the medieval serf of Europe” (White 1913b, p. 305).

White emphasized the absence of available resources in China on foundational domestic subjects, posing, “Why not make a scientific study of the home? What books have been written or translated on the subjects of Domestic Science, Home hygiene, Child Psychology, and kindred subjects?” (White 1913b, p. 305). She attempted to emphasize the study of practical knowledge at home. For example, “the study of foods” was “linked with the evangelizing visions of plants and animals” and “connected with the chemistry of the kitchen and with certain laws in social and Home Economics” (White 1913b, p. 306).

As a prevalent curriculum in late-nineteenth-century America, home economics was not decided upon as an official term until 1899, when female activists began to call for the teaching of home economics in schools.³ In introducing home economics to China's newly born Republican regime, White intended to adopt a gender-specific approach in girls' education. For her, what may help save Chinese women and coexist in their full salvation "includes a present salvation, physical and mental, as well as spiritual". By "present", White proposed to give away the gender-homogeneous ways of teaching and turned to translate and teach a series of knowledge that met the real needs of the Chinese girls. She further concluded that this specific aspect of studying is the primary goal of women's education in China: "After five years of experimenting in nineteenth-century methods of woman's education, our ideals at Lawrence Hall in Nanking are changing into visions of the possibilities that may be builded into the Chinese Woman's Kingdom of Home." (White 1913b, p. 305). She argued that a woman cannot take from her school a nobler gift than the power of looking at her home from this broader cultural view that "makes drudgery divine." (White 1913b, p. 306) To White, the study of "food", "hygiene," and "kindred" certainly met the standard of her gender-specific discipline. As she concluded, "this is what we pray the girls' school in China may learn to stand for. This is what our magazine, *The Woman's Messenger*, must stand for" (White 1913b, p. 307).

White's early evangelistic efforts in China reflect a complex hybrid of theology and secular pragmatism, intertwining Christian beliefs with the practical needs of the time. Initially, she arrived in China with the Protestant aim of uplifting Chinese women. However, over time, her approach evolved, incorporating pedagogical reflections influenced by American educational models. Despite this shift, White's advocacy for a gender-specific educational approach remained rooted in Christian ideals, particularly in her emphasis on the domestic duties assigned to women. In what follows, I will reveal the translation and circulation of "homemaking" knowledge in *Nüduo* under the co-editorship of White and her Chinese students, through which their appropriative approach was executed and manifested.

3. Home Economics in Circulation: White's Translation of *Jiazheng* in *Nüduo*

3.1. White's Appropriate Approach

To understand how White conceptualized and promoted home economics in *Nüduo*, her approach to translation must first be examined. In *Nüduo*, translation functioned not merely as a literary endeavor but as a critical knowledge base that underpinned the periodical's foundation and the development of its domestic science section. White actively sought contributions on domestic knowledge from American academics. Notably, on 24 February 1912, prior to the official launch of *Nüduo*, White placed an English advertisement in *The Woman's Journal*, an American women's periodical published from 1870 to 1931:

There has come to a cry for literature to be translated for the uplift of the women of China, so urgent and far-reaching in its possibilities that it will touch the heart of every progressive worker and receive a prompt response. May I pass it on through *The Woman's Journal*? In connection with our college work, I have consented to edit a Chinese woman's journal, financed by the Christian Literature Society. Much of the work on the paper will be done by our college girls, for I aim to make a good translating department a feature of our college." (White 1912a, 24 February, p. 62)

As the advertisement reveals, White's efforts extended beyond engaging with Chinese girls to fostering connections with her American colleagues. She viewed translation as a means of "bridging the gulf between West and East, for the Evangel to pass over" (White 1902,

pp. 126–27). By framing the establishment of *Nüduo* as “a cry for literature to be translated for the uplift of the women of China,” White emphasized translation as the foundational pillar of the periodical, positioning it as both a practical and a symbolic strategy for cultural and intellectual exchange.

As part of her translative strategy, and aligning with her emphasis on home economics, White, along with her Chinese editors, made a formal announcement in the inaugural issue of *Nüduo*, presenting the Chinese translation of home economics as “*Jiazheng* 家政”:

彼不能从军之女子，遂不得谓为新国民耶？传曰：国之本在家。又曰，家齐而后国治。又曰：君子不出家，而成教于国。是治家，即所以治国。况女子本有操持家政之天职乎……我女同胞苟能结团研究家政，以井臼为城池，以闺阁为帷幄，以薪米为饷糈，以箕帚为干戈，相与同心戮力，以逐其肮之丑名。是不亦军事团乎？ (White 1912b, p. 2)

[Should women who cannot serve in the military not be considered citizens of the new nation? It is said that the foundation of the state lies in the family, and good governance begins at home. Managing the household is itself a form of national service and a woman’s natural duty. If women unite to study *jiazheng*—treating the home as a fortress and their tools as weapons—and work together to overcome the reputation for disorder, is this not also a form of service to the country?]

White’s core translation strategy draws on China’s Confucian doctrine of *jiaqi guozhi* (家齐国治), but recontextualizes it ideologically for Republican women. While linguistically distinct from its English counterpart, White’s translation of “家政” is historically and culturally significant. Although “家政” literally translates to “home and politics” in Chinese and did not reflect the term “economics” on a lexical level, the two terms, “home economics” and “家政”, did share a conceptual alignment. Notably, the English word “economics” is derived from the Greek term “oikonomia,” which historically referred to the management of household affairs. Similarly, the modern Chinese interpretation of “家政” encompasses disciplines like cooking, nutrition, childcare, sewing, nursing, family finance, and management. This conceptual overlap justifies White’s choice of words, as it situates home economics within a framework that resonates with Chinese linguistic and cultural traditions.

Beyond the linguistic choice, White’s translational strategy exemplifies her culturally adaptive approach in introducing *jiazheng* to *Nüduo* readers. The above manuscript demonstrates how she invoked Confucian teachings (“the foundation of the state lies in the family, and good governance begins at home”) to elevate the importance of homemaking to a national level. As traditional Confucian classics indicate, the “home” was a cornerstone of Confucian state governance. Though the doctrine itself was never meant for or used to refer to women’s education, White recontextualized this concept for women in Republican China and portrayed household management as a “patriotic” act. By framing women as critical agents of reform, capable of “uniting to study the ‘home’ and treating their tools as weapons,” White elevated domestic work to a form of national service.

Historically, *jiazheng* in China was embedded in a patriarchal framework within the Chinese system of rites and laws, which underpinned ancient Chinese social order. The term first appears in the *Shiming* (释名, Explanations of Names) of the Eastern Han dynasty: “The father’s elder brother is called ‘Shifu,’ which signifies the succession of the family line. He is also called ‘Bofu,’ meaning ‘the one who holds the family’s power’ (父之兄曰世父，言为嫡统、继世也；又曰伯父，伯，把也，把持家政也)” (Liu et al. 2008, p. 99). Here, *jiazheng* encompasses all domestic matters, with the male elder (“Bofu”) as the authority figure.

During the Sui and Tang dynasties, a gendered division of labor persisted as “men outside, women inside (男主外, 女主内)”, with men dominating the public sphere and women overseeing domestic matters. However, despite this shift, women’s education remained subordinated to men’s. While women had access to *jiazheng* texts like *Lie Nü Zhuan* (列女传, Biographies of Exemplary Women), *Nü Jie* (女戒, Admonitions to My Daughters), and *Nü Lunyu* (女论语, Analects for Women), these works primarily focused on domestic virtues, moral conduct, and relationships within the household, largely excluding public participation. As such, *jiazheng* education remained confined to a feudal, clan-based system. As recorded in *Li Ji* (礼记, Book of Rites), “妇人有三从之义, 无专用之道, 故未嫁从父, 既嫁从夫, 夫死从子 (A woman follows the three levels of obedience: she obeys her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her son after her husband’s death)” (Xie 2018, p. 151). Similarly, *Zhou Li* (周礼, Rites of Zhou) states, “九嫔, 掌妇学之法, 以教九御妇德、妇言、妇容、妇功” (The nine concubines are responsible for teaching women’s virtues, speech, and domestic skills)” (Li and Chen 2019, p. 73), underscoring that *jiazheng* education continued to serve the patriarchal order.

White’s understanding of *jiazheng* retained the traditional political importance of the “home” as the foundation of social order but redefined it as a domain of female agency. In her hands, *jiazheng* became a gender-specific category of domestic science that uplifted women’s potential to contribute to political and public life. This culturally adaptive perspective formed the foundational ideology of White’s editorial approach in *Nüduo*. As White increasingly emphasized the importance of home learning, she again adopted a localized strategy by presenting a panoramic view of American household education practices. In a Chinese article titled “Jiazheng xuexiao 家政学校 (Home Economics Schools)” published in 1913, White traced the historical roots of domestic education in both Chinese and Western traditions. She asserted that “thoughts concerning external affairs have always belonged to men, while thoughts concerning domestic affairs have always belonged to women” (White 1913a, p. 10). Like her inaugural address, White drew direct analogies between Chinese women’s duty in “zhinei 治内 (managing domestic affairs)” and the broader task of “zhiguo 治国 (managing nations).”

Relying on Chinese historical precedents, White reinforced the necessity of home learning in shaping societal development. She cited influential figures such as “Suiren 燧人氏,” “Chao 巢氏,” and “Xiong 熊氏,” who contributed to Chinese progress, while lamenting that “the study of *jiazheng* has been long neglected, which should be considered a critical issue” (ibid., p. 10). White further likened “a virtuous wife in a family” to “a virtuous minister to the state,” emphasizing that “yijia zhufu guanli zhi shi 一家主妇管理之事 (the responsibilities of a housewife managing her household)” are no different from “guowu dayuan zhiyu guo 国务大员之于国 (a state official managing the affairs of the nation)” (ibid., p. 11).

White also reflected on American history, critiquing the past undervaluation of home economics, which was deemed “servant’s work” and overlooked in women’s education. She argued that such neglect had undermined the development of American women and urged China to “take lessons from this historical misstep” (ibid., p. 11). Through these arguments, White positioned home learning as central to both family stability and national governance.

However, White’s adaptive approach was not shared by all of her male contemporaries in the Christian Literature Society. Her educational philosophy, particularly the mindset towards the role of indigenous women, diverged greatly from that of prominent figures such as Andrew Young John William Allen (林乐知, 1836–1907), a leading American Methodist missionary who also worked for the Society. According to the Society’s *Annual Report*, Allen asserted that “China has become a protectorate of Christian nations,

placed under our authority for education and enlightenment” (*Annual Reports of Christian Literature Society for China* 1901, p. 86). For Allen, Confucianism represented an antiquated and inherently flawed system, one in desperate need of radical transformation. In his 1903 work *A Comprehensive Survey of Women’s Customs Across the Five Continents*, he denounced the neglect of women’s education within Confucian traditions, claiming that “Confucianism in China does not even educate women; this is truly a sign of a half-civilized society... outside of Christian teachings, there is no other way to liberate humanity and achieve salvation” (Allen and Ren 1903, p. 15). His condemnation of Confucianism, which he regarded as an intellectual straitjacket, highlighted his belief that the only legitimate path toward societal advancement for China was through the exclusive lens of Christian doctrine. For Allen, any attempt to reform Chinese women’s education within Confucianism was not just misguided but inherently doomed to fail.

Timothy Richard, White’s referrer and mentor in the Society, echoed Allen’s critique of Confucianism in his writings on the education of Chinese women. In *A Review of the Times* (万国公报), the Society’s official journal, Richard argued that indigenous Chinese doctrines were fundamentally inadequate for the empowerment of women, asserting that, “Generally, Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam each regard women as unrelated to key matters, not realizing that neglecting women and not teaching them the affairs of managing a household ultimately leads to discord (大抵儒释道教与回回教, 每视教女为无关要键, 而不知女而不学于治家之事, 终有所不合)” (Richard and Yuan 1892, p. 48). Although Richard acknowledged the importance of domesticity, a value shared by White, his dismissal of Chinese cultural frameworks as incapable of offering meaningful avenues for women’s advancement reflects a broader disdain for indigenous intellectual traditions. This viewpoint was especially evident in an 1899 article, where Richard positioned Chinese women as intellectually inferior to their Western counterparts. Drawing on allusions from the *Shi Jing* (诗经, Classic of Poetry), Richard represented Western women as idealized, almost mythical figures, asserting that the “beautiful women of the West” were revered for their moral superiority. This imagery of Western women, seemingly distant and untouchable, served to underscore his belief that Chinese women were incapable of attaining similar levels of intellectual or moral development. He wrote, “Western women, who have yet to set foot on Chinese soil or interact with the Chinese people, focus solely on reforming China from afar. Amidst the rugged mountains and valleys, they are seen as distant, almost idealized figures—the beautiful women of the West, whose thoughts seem like close companions in a woman’s private space. Yet, the Chinese people remain utterly confused by this (西女足未践中国之土, 目未接中国之人, 惟以一心遥匡中国, 榛山苓隰, 西方美人, 云谁之思, 闺中良友。然而华人皆懵如也)” (Richard and Cai 1899, pp. 6–8). Here, the “beautiful women of the West (西方美人)” referred to Western female missionaries.⁴

White did not subscribe to the prevailing missionary narrative that positioned Chinese women as intellectually inferior to their Western counterparts. On the contrary, her pedagogical reflections, based on over two decades of teaching in both the United States and China, led her to a more nuanced conclusion about the potential of Chinese women. She argued, “Some say that Chinese women may not be as talented as American women. I disagree. Having taught in the United States for over twenty years, I find that American women lack the endurance and patience that Chinese women possess. This shows that Chinese women surpass their American counterparts (或曰华女恐不如美女子之多才, 曰不然, 余在美国教书二十余年, 觉美女性情不如华女忍耐也。此可见华胜于美)” (White 1915, p. 1). White’s assessment of Chinese women’s character—particularly their endurance, patience, and resilience—was grounded in her firsthand experience, which led her to see these qualities as virtues that were undervalued or misunderstood in Western discourse. Moreover, White’s insistence on the equality of American and Chinese women

in terms of their emotional and practical capabilities further emphasized her belief in the inherent strength of Chinese women. She remarked, “American women may achieve success more quickly, while Chinese women take a more gradual path. As for qualities like love, sincerity, passion, and the ability to get things done, there is no difference between them (不过美女速成, 华女缓成耳, 至于爱心衷心热心以及办事之才, 则无分彼此矣)” (White 1915, p. 1). This remark not only reflects White’s recognition of Chinese women’s unique virtues but also highlights her rejection of the binary opposition between “Western progress” and “Eastern stagnation” that was prevalent in the missionary rhetoric of her time.

White’s divergence from Allen and Richard’s ethnocentric outlooks can be understood as a fundamental shift in missionary practice, rooted in a more inclusive, culturally adaptive approach to evangelization. Unlike Allen, who saw Christianity and Confucianism as irreconcilably opposed, White viewed the two as potentially complementary, with Confucian ethics offering a framework through which Christian teachings could be integrated more meaningfully into Chinese society. By incorporating Confucian gender ethics into her educational approach, White not only localized her Christian mission but also affirmed the cultural significance of Chinese traditions. This marked a departure from the hegemonic narrative of Western superiority that underpinned much of the missionary activity of the period, positioning White as a figure who sought to engage with Chinese culture rather than dismiss it outright.

3.2. From Curriculum to Column

Under the meticulous groundwork laid by White and her Chinese student editors, the *jiazheng* column was established in 1912 alongside the inception of *Nüduo* itself. In the inaugural issue of *Nüduo*, White articulated the column’s central motif: “Women in China eagerly pursue the so-called ‘freedom,’ yet have not truly grasped the essence of ‘true freedom’; thus, this column contains writings emphasizing the natural duties that women ought to fulfill (中国女界竞尚自由, 未能得自由真相, 故所载多妇女应尽之天职)” (White 1912c, p. 1). Through this statement, White critiqued the concept of freedom embraced by many Republican Chinese women, positioning it as a misled and incomplete understanding of autonomy. For White, the prevalent pursuit of “freedom” overlooked the foundational principles of Chinese morality and women’s social responsibility. True freedom, she argued, lay in embracing domestic responsibilities, redefined through the lens of home economics, grounded in Christian values and practical skills.

This interpretation of “true freedom” resonated with Xu Nailu, the Chinese editor of *Nüduo*. In the 1927 *Missionary Yearbook* published by the Christian Literature Society, Xu recalled the founding rationale of *Nüduo* as a response to the unbridled enthusiasm for freedom and equality among Chinese women during the Republic’s early years. Xu reflected,

当时中国政改共和, 一般妇女竞尚自由, 侈谈平等。举国若狂, 滔滔皆是。本会前总理李提摩太博士以为中国之女子, 诚宜解放, 顾解放之后如何处置, 不可不有杜渐防微之计……设非有一种相当文字为之标准, 似不易收美满之效果。此女铎报之所以应时而出世也” (Xu 1929, pp. 15–16)

[At the time of China’s transition to a Republican government, the social frenzy for freedom and equality among general women swept the nation, creating a fervent atmosphere. Dr. Timothy Richard, former president of the Society, believed that while it was necessary to liberate Chinese women, it was equally important to have measures in place to guide this liberation and prevent potential excesses... *Nüduo* was launched in response to these circumstances, serving as a standardized literature to achieve satisfactory social outcomes]

Xu's statement underscores the publication's foundational aim: to address the risks associated with unrestrained notions of women's liberation during a period of social upheaval. White, aligning with Xu's rationale, critiqued radical socialists of the time who championed women's education but, in her view, misunderstood the concepts of equality and freedom, which she believed led to the abandonment of moral values and the violation of social norms (White 1912c, p. 1). Thus, *Nüduo* positioned itself as a moderating force, seeking to redefine women's emancipation within the parameters of moral discipline and practical utility.

What united White, Xu, and Richard was a critique of the dominant nationalist rhetoric of the time, which promoted progressive, public-oriented gender roles for Chinese women. In the late Qing and early Republic periods, a subset of Chinese intellectuals and women activists engaged in a radical rethinking of traditional cultural norms, including the role of women. Some of these intellectuals, as well as anarchist publishing groups, advocated for the complete rejection of traditional female roles, a sentiment reflected in the small student journals leading up to the 1911 Revolution (Zarrow 1988; Hershatter 2004; Dooling 2005; Liu et al. 2013). These early feminist movements, influenced by revolutionary ideologies, sought to connect the oppression of women with modern class divisions, economic exploitation, and traditional culture.

For instance, Chinese feminist pioneer Jin Tianhe (金天翮, 1873–1947) advanced the idea of a collective national identity for women in *The Women's Bell* (女界钟, 1903), one of the first Chinese feminist manifestos to critique patriarchal oppression (Xiong 2003, pp. 1–6). Similarly, female social activists like Tang Qunying (唐群英, 1871–1937) called for Chinese women's active political participation, specifically advocating for women's suffrage and the right to hold public office (Strand 2011, pp. 98–101). Another influential figure, the revolutionary feminist and writer Qiu Jin (秋瑾, 1875–1907), used the *Chinese Women's Newspaper* (中国女报) as a platform to urge “two hundred million female compatriots” to join the revolution, emphasizing that “the rise and fall of the nation is the responsibility of every man and woman 天下兴亡，匹夫匹妇各有其责” (Qiu 1907, pp. 13–16).

However, White's advocacy for women's education was not completely at odds with these revolutionary discourses. Both White and the radical feminists shared the view that Chinese women should not solely focus on domestic issues but should actively participate in nation-building and social reform. Yet, White's perspective differed from figures like Qiu Jin in that she did not advocate for the complete abandonment of traditional Chinese family values. Rather, White reinterpreted Confucian ideals of household management as essential to women's self-actualization and professional development. She encouraged Chinese women to pursue personal liberation through the acquisition of domestic knowledge, which she framed as a means to serve society. White framed women's homemaking responsibilities as foundational to both ideal citizenship and motherhood, thus reinforcing the interconnectedness of domestic duties with broader social and political ideals.

This strategy was clearly reflected in the content of the *jiazheng* column, where White integrated a vision of women's roles that emphasized both moral discipline and practical engagement with society. The following table exhibits the primary topics of the translated works in the *jiazheng* column under White's editorship (See Table 1).

As shown in the table, the topics discussed in this column included a wide array of subjects ranging from food preparation, Western recipes, and kitchen management to sewing, embroidery, and the principles of the sewing machine. In addition, the column addressed interpersonal dynamics, such as spousal financial management, family harmony, and navigating in-law relationships, signaling its broader educational aims.⁵

Table 1. Translated articles and their summaries in the *jiazheng* column under White’s editorship (1912–1931) ¹.

Theme	Topics	No. of Translated Works	Summary of the Translations
Domestic science	Kitchen and Cooking	73	Culinary techniques, Western recipe systems, and kitchen manuals.
	Hand Sewing and Garment Alteration	138	Principles of sewing and embroidery and tips for using sewing machines.
	Cultivation and Rearing	25	Methods for protecting silkworm seeds, cotton planting, and winter melon planting.
	Spousal, In-law, and Sibling-in-law Relationships	23	Economic allocation between spouses, tips for keeping a harmonious family, and navigating relationships with in-laws.
	Home Economics Theories	10	Theory of family improvement, general home economics, and Swiss household management.
Hygiene	Household Hygiene	40	Knowledge of family hygiene and summer household organizations.
	School hygiene	20	Principles of school cleaning and disinfection.
	Medicine, diagnosis, and treatment	68	Introduction to infectious diseases such as smallpox vaccination, the common cold, tuberculosis, and influenza.
	Women’s hygiene	24	Fetal protection, menstrual cycle knowledge, and the harmful effects of tobacco and alcohol.
Childcaring	Child psychology	67	Mother–infant relationship, child-rearing methods, and infant psychological protection.
	Child etiquette	46	Children’s attire, etiquette, and personal hygiene habits.
	Child physical health	30	Knowledge on children’s sleep, nutrition, medical conditions, and breastfeeding.

¹ All data presented in this table were collected and compiled from the articles that are marked as translations published in the *jiazheng* column of *Nüduo*.

One notable aspect of the column is its emphasis on practical guidance, such as “Sewing and Embroidery” and “Principles of the Sewing Machine,” which aim to equip women with essential domestic skills. This emphasis on technical know-how not only reinforced the traditional association between women and domestic labor but also presented household management as a specialization requiring intellectual engagement. Similarly, topics such as “Food Preparation,” “Western Culinary Recipes,” and “Kitchen Management” suggest an editorial strategy that blends local and global culinary knowledge, offering a nuanced vision of modernity that integrates Chinese and Western influences.

Another key feature of the column is its attention to hygiene and public health. Subtopics like “Household Hygiene” and “School Hygiene” emphasize the integration of scientific principles into daily life, reflecting broader cultural trends aimed at producing a health-conscious, modern citizenry. The topic selection demonstrated an editorial effort to position women as stewards of both private and communal well-being.

The column also prioritized social relationships and harmony within the household. Topics such as “Spousal Financial Management,” “Family Harmony,” and “Navigating In-law Relationships” illustrate a focus on educating women about maintaining functional and peaceful domestic environments. By framing these interpersonal areas as essential knowledge for readers, the column highlighted the moral and emotional labor expected of women in upholding traditional family structures.

4. Gendered Curriculum Taking Shape: Home Economics as a “Mothercraft”

4.1. Founding a Shared Domestic Discourse

Building upon the series of *jiazheng* topics outlined above, White sought to actively engage readers in the exploration of home economics through a bilingual question-and-answer format. To facilitate this interaction, White introduced the Fudaohui Wenti (妇道会问题, Questions from Women’s Association) feature within the column, where editors posed questions on homemaking techniques and responses were solicited from readers for inclusion in subsequent issues.

The Figure provided above illustrates this format, where questions were typically presented in English and answers were requested in Chinese (See Figure 1). In Issue 6, White’s questions centered on the psychological development of children within domestic settings “1. How can a child be broken of the habit of talking at the top of his voice? 2. How can a boy of nine who is a ‘bookworm’ be led to take an interest in active life?” 3. How can a boy of ten, who is not a willfully disobedient child, but who often ‘forgets to mind’ be taught to remember? 4. How can a girl of twelve, who wishes to be first in her lessons at school, be sustained in this ambition, and yet kept from worrying too much about her lessons?” (White 1914, pp. 8–9).

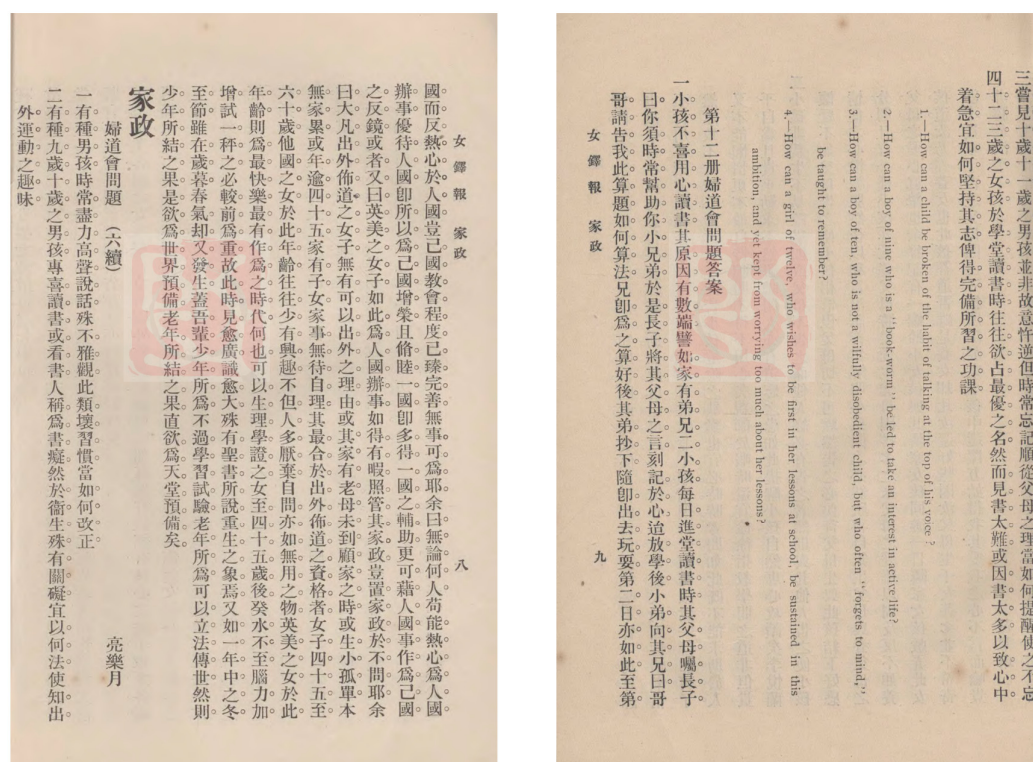


Figure 1. Bilingual layout of the *Jiazheng* Column, “The Sixth Issue of Questions from Women’s Association” (White 1914, pp. 8–9), accessed from *National Index of Chinese Newspapers and Periodicals*, digitalized by Shanghai Library.

The bilingual layout itself cultivated a sense of translation awareness among *Nüduo*’s readership, fostering both linguistic and cultural engagement. Moreover, the content of the *jiazheng* column reveals an evolution in White’s conceptualization of home economics. While initially envisioned as a gender-specific construct, the column expanded its scope to address psychological and developmental questions concerning both boys and girls. This integration of psychological knowledge into everyday domestic life reflects White’s effort to redefine home economics as a domain not merely confined to women but as a broader

framework for fostering family well-being. This approach demonstrated *Nüduo*'s role in bridging progressive educational goals with practical domestic concerns, offering tools for its readers to navigate the intersection of family dynamics and modern psychology.

The discussions on home economics in *Nüduo* often stemmed from the everyday activities of school gatherings in which student editors were involved. In the article "The Method of Making Western Pastry 泰西油酥制法", Zhou Chelang (周澈朗, 1891–?) narrated an anecdote from the annual English assembly at her girls' school, using this story as a vehicle to introduce the method of making pastry. According to the text, the pastry recipe came from a student named "翠文" (Cuiwen), who proposed substituting the school's "猪油" (lard) for Western "奶油" (butter) to prepare pastries for the school gathering, serving them as refreshments after the event. Cuiwen provided a detailed explanation of the process, which involved mixing half a cup of sugar, half a cup of milk, two eggs, and flour to make the pastry. This demonstrates the close connection between the culinary skills presented in the *Nüduo* home economics column and the daily life of girls' schools. In Cuiwen's instructions on making pastry, cooking clearly transcended the boundaries of private domesticity to become a practical skill for public engagement (C. Zhou 1913, pp. 8–9).

Student editors of *Nüduo* actively produced hybrid regimes of everyday cosmetic practice by integrating Western chemical knowledge with indigenous domestic materials. In the column "Domestic Trivia" (Jiashi suolu 家事琐录), the editors introduced eleven forms of beauty and personal care techniques framed as ordinary, practicable routines, including "洗发水" (shampoo), "乌发油" (hair blackening oil), "生发" (hair growth), "治卷发" (curl treatment), "美容术" (skin care), "豆腐擦面" (tofu facial application), "肤纹化粗为细" (smoothing coarse skin texture), "去雀斑" (removing freckles), "去痣" (removing moles), and "美眉术" (eyebrow enhancement). Although these practices were presented as quotidian and accessible, they embodied a deliberate synthesis of heterogeneous epistemologies: indigenous ingredients such as "豆腐" (tofu), "茄子" (eggplant), "核桃" (walnut), "香瓜" (cantaloupe), and "川椒" (Sichuan pepper) were combined with substances associated with Western chemistry and modern hygiene, including "无敌牌牙粉" (Invincible Tooth Powder), "硼酸" (boric acid), "牛乳" (milk), and "肥皂" (soap). The eyebrow care regimen provides a particularly revealing example of this epistemic hybridity. The editors offered a detailed, procedural account that combined boric acid—introduced as a hygienic and quasi-medical agent—with green tea extract, a familiar substance embedded in Chinese dietary and medicinal culture:

每日晓妆时以硼酸一份，水五十分，反复洗其眉毛，更以刷浸于绿茶煎汁之中，竭力摩擦之，如是日久，则眉际不期，而现非常之美态。惟斯时苟觉发痒，不可搔以爪，须以软刷顺毛徐徐擦之。 (Yang 1918, p. 18)

[During the morning grooming routine, one part boric acid mixed with fifty parts water should be repeatedly applied to the eyebrows. Then, a brush soaked in brewed green tea should be used to vigorously rub the area. Over time, this method will naturally enhance the appearance of the eyebrows, creating an exceptionally pleasing effect. However, if itching occurs during the process, the area should not be scratched with fingernails; instead, a soft brush should be used to gently smooth the hair in the direction of growth.]

This mode of knowledge production was made possible by the editors' transnational positionality and their access to cross-linguistic sources of information.⁶ Crucially, although these practices were categorized under the rubric of "home economics," their social implications extended well beyond the domestic sphere. The emphasis on routine grooming, branded products, and bodily visibility reveals the editors' aspirations toward public self-presentation and consumer participation. Beauty practices functioned not merely as mark-

ers of domestic competence but as strategies for engaging with emerging regimes of urban modernity and commodity culture (Stevens 2003; Barlow 2008; Judge 2015). In this sense, *Nüduo*'s cosmetic discourse articulated a distinctly Republican-era female subjectivity, one that was at once scientifically informed, consumption-oriented, and publicly expressive.

Beyond practical discussions of technical skills, the *jiazheng* column in *Nüduo* also featured numerous theoretical analyses that linked family dynamics to national destiny and social reform. One example is Han Kuangruisheng (韩邗瑞生), the Chinese translation of the English article "Character and Education 品格与教育", which, through an exploration of child psychology, emphasized the pivotal role of family education in shaping national character, underscoring its significance (K. R. Han 1923, pp. 11–14).

A similar argumentative framework appears in Wu Ruonan (吴弱男)'s article "On Family Reform 家庭改良论", also published in the home economics column. Wu, who had studied in Britain for many years and was an avid reader of *Nüduo*, was deeply engaged in journalism. In this article, she argued that the state of Chinese families is closely tied to national strength and proposed the need for family reform. Wu traced the Western concept of "family," observing that while Western families typically adhered to a nuclear structure of one husband and one wife, Chinese families often comprised multiple smaller units that collectively formed an extended family. She further advanced her argument by examining the relationship between family structure and national prosperity from five perspectives:

- (一) 西方家庭之组织易养成国民之独立性，而吾国则适养成其依赖性；（二）西方家庭之组织可以发达国民之国家观念，而吾国则桎梏人于家族主义之下；
- （三）西方家庭之组织可以强国种，而吾种日趋于弱；（四）西方家庭之组织可以发展国民生计，吾国之组织则必使国民日趋贫乏；（五）西方家庭之组织可以高尚国民之品性，而吾家庭乃足使人齷齪。（Wu 1912, pp. 6–8）

[1. The structure of Western families fosters a sense of individual independence among citizens, whereas the structure of families in our country cultivates a sense of dependence; 2. The organizational model of Western families promotes a national consciousness, while ours confines individuals within the bounds of familism; 3. The familial organization in Western societies strengthens the vitality of their populations, whereas ours leads to a gradual decline in strength; 4. Western family structures contribute to the development of national livelihoods, while ours results in increasing impoverishment; 5. The structure of Western families elevates the moral character of their citizens, while ours leads to pettiness and degradation.]

Wu's interpretation of familial concepts in Chinese and Western contexts clearly extended beyond White's original vision for the *jiazheng* column. Wu situated home economics within a broader framework of Chinese national destiny, asserting that family reform is inherently connected to the larger goal of national strengthening. Within this framework, women, as central figures in fulfilling domestic responsibilities, were inextricably linked to the cultivation of national character and the advancement of national prosperity.

As demonstrated in the preceding analysis, the *jiazheng* column in *Nüduo* offers a multifaceted approach to the construction and dissemination of gendered knowledge in early 20th-century China. Its primary topics, ranging from cooking and household hygiene to interpersonal relationships and domestic economy, illustrate the evolving role of women within both domestic and societal contexts. Through this column, White established a shared framework for the production and transmission of domestic discourse, integrating a significant body of scientific "mothercraft" literature into the fabric of everyday domestic practices. White contributed to cultivating a gendered vision of domesticity that positioned women's roles as central not only to the household but also to the nation.

4.2. The Translative Aftermath Beyond *Nüduo*

The translation of home economics through the *jiazheng* column in *Nüduo* had far-reaching societal consequences that extended well beyond the confines of the periodical itself. As White introduced and consistently published discussions centered on child-rearing, hygiene, cooking, makeup, and household cleaning, these topics generated substantial public engagement, sparking a national conversation that contributed to the development of public discourse during the Republican era.

While *jiazheng* had already emerged as a popular subject in Republican women's periodicals (Qian 2008; Mann 2011; Sung 2018; Z. Han 2024), White's approach distinguished itself from other gendered publications by proposing a new vision for Chinese schoolgirls grounded in a systematic, modernized framework of Western scientific disciplines. Rather than imposing foreign doctrines or using imported textbooks as a sole instructional method, White sought to actively involve girls' schools in *jiazheng* through a dynamic and collaborative model. By encouraging bilingual contributions on home economics, *Nüduo* offered a platform for women across different educational levels to share their experiences and offer practical knowledge, creating a knowledge exchange that was unique in its inclusivity and feedback-oriented nature. Through this periodical mechanism, *Nüduo* readers and editors became co-creators in shaping the body of *jiazheng* knowledge.

Many student editors and contributors of *Nüduo*, through their sustained participation in this bilingual publication and their submission of practical household techniques, transitioned into professional careers as writers and editors. White's efforts thus helped lay the foundation for the professionalization and systematization of self-expression among Republican women. These publications provided not only an avenue for the development of practical skills but also a more formalized platform for discourse. Figures such as Li Guanfang (李冠芳, ?–?) and Zheng Shenhua (郑中华, 1898–?) exemplify how participation in the translation and dissemination of domestic knowledge played a pivotal role in building their professional paths.⁷

One notable example of this is Li Guanfang's 1914 Chinese translation of an English essay, "Lun Zhongguo Fujia Nüzi Zhuangshi zhi Langfei (论中国妇家女子妆饰之浪费, On the Wastefulness of Chinese Women's Cosmetics)". The original essay, written by a senior student at the McTyeire Home and School for Girls in Shanghai, critiqued the excessive use of cosmetics by Chinese women, advocating for a more frugal lifestyle. In her translation, Li extended the original discussion by emphasizing the virtue of thrift as a national duty. In her concluding remarks, Li reflected on the societal implications of women's roles, writing,

我国富翁三复思之，不以女子无饰为愧，而以女子无才为愧，且不仅以女子无才为愧，更以女子有才而不能为国家尽义务为愧，庶乎其可矣。 (Li 1914, p. 12)

[In our country, wealthy men repeatedly reflect on this: they do not feel ashamed of women lacking adornment, but of women lacking talent. It is not merely the lack of talent that is shameful, but the lack of talent that fails to serve the country. This is the real shame.]

While the original essay focused on the domestic use of cosmetics, Li reframed the discussion within the broader context of women's national duties. Her work exemplified White's interpretation of home learning as a tool for public engagement, highlighting the imperative for women to cultivate their talents and contribute to the nation's progress. Li's perspective was a direct extension of White's vision for home economics, positioning domestic skills within a framework of national responsibility.

This shift in perspective underscores how *Nüduo* evolved from a forum for home-based learning to a critical platform for engaging with national issues. What began as an exploration of domestic life and techniques expanded to a broader space in which women

could situate themselves within the larger context of Republican development. Domestic knowledge, as promoted by White, was no longer confined to the private sphere but became an essential element of women's involvement in the public and national arenas.

White's promotion of *jiazheng* also facilitated the institutionalization of home economics as a formally recognized, gendered curriculum in modern China. Following the establishment of the *jiazheng* column in *Nüduo* and its sustained introduction of translated home economics knowledge, the National Beijing Women's Higher Normal School (国立北京女子高等师范) founded a Department of Home Economics in 1919. This was quickly followed by similar departments at Ginling College in Nanjing (金陵女校), Yenching University in Beijing (燕京大学), Fu Jen Catholic University (辅仁大学), and other institutions. The creation of these academic departments marked a pivotal moment in the recognition of home economics as a legitimate field of study within the higher education system, while also signaling its diffusion into broader societal structures.

Beyond the civil and institutional initiatives, the Chinese government further institutionalized *jiazheng* by incorporating it into the legal-educational framework. In 1929, the Republican Ministry of Education promulgated the *Nüzi Gaodeng Shifan Xuexiao Zhangcheng* (女子高等师范学校章程, Regulations for Women's Higher Normal Schools), officially recognizing this knowledge as a gendered curriculum within the country's educational system. This process was not limited to higher education. Home economics knowledge also permeated the textbooks and curricula of primary and secondary education. For instance, the 1931 timetable for the junior division of Nanjing Huiwen Girls' School included home economics as an elective subject alongside *meishu* (美术, fine arts), *yingyong yingwen* (应用英文, applied English), and *zhusuan* (珠算, abacus). At the senior level, home economics was further subdivided into categories such as *zhiwu xue* (植物学, botany), *jiating jiaoyu* (家庭教育, family education), and *ertong xinli* (儿童心理, child psychology) and incorporated into the elective curriculum (Nanjing Huiwen Girls' Secondary School 1931, pp. 15–20). These institutional divisions of knowledge reflect White's early advocacy for the categorization and systematization of home economics, as expressed in the *jiazheng* column.

In early twentieth-century post-revolutionary China, White's service-centered Christian perspective on femininity, which emphasized women's domestic roles, was often dismissed as conservative, given the growing advocacy for women's public and political engagement. However, White navigated this cultural tension by reframing homemaking as a scientific discipline. By integrating "scientific" methods into the traditionally moralistic domain of domestic duties, she sought to elevate women's roles while fostering their agency. White's pedagogical approach enabled Chinese women to transcend the confines of moralized domesticity, offering them the tools to acquire knowledge and skills that extended beyond traditional family roles.

White's use of George Matheson's framework of the three stages of a woman's life, "primitive, awakening, and self-sacrifice", is particularly significant. She applied this to the Chinese context, asserting that "China's women have already sampled the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and entered upon oaths of progress and science" (White 1911, p. 645). For White, homemaking was no longer confined to a rigid Christian duty but redefined as a modern, scientific discipline that could elevate women's social and professional agency. This redefinition allowed women to engage in both the private and public spheres, facilitating their mobility and expanding their roles within society.

Importantly, White's vision of home economics, or *jiazheng* (家政), was essentially different from the traditional Chinese practice of *nügong* (女红, women's work), which primarily encompassed skills like embroidery, sewing, and cooking. While these tasks overlapped in practical terms, the underlying frameworks were vastly different. In the *nügong*

tradition, domestic skills were tied to Confucian values of propriety and moral duty, serving to reinforce patriarchal household structures. In contrast, White's *jiazheng* reframed these same practices within a modern epistemological context, positioning homemaking as a field of professional knowledge rooted in scientific principles. This transformation shifted women's roles from performing moral duties to acquiring systematic knowledge that could be institutionalized and recognized in public spheres.

The epistemic shift White introduced had two core components. First, *jiazheng* detached domestic labor from the traditional ethical framework of duty and propriety, recasting it as a field of systematic knowledge supported by disciplines such as biology, chemistry, and psychology. This shift moved home economics from a realm of moral instruction to one of scientific inquiry and rational methodology. Second, *jiazheng* redefined the social value of domestic expertise by aligning it with professional training and public service. In White's vision, the home was not merely a private sphere but a site where women could acquire competencies that were recognized and transferable to public roles in education, health, welfare, and governance.

Thus, *jiazheng* was not simply a modernization of traditional women's work or a semantic rebranding of domestic tasks. It represented a fundamental reconfiguration of female subjectivity. By offering women access to scientific knowledge, standardized curricula, and credentialed expertise, *jiazheng* redefined women's value from moralized domesticity to socially recognized knowledge and professional labor. In doing so, it provided a historically specific avenue for women to enter education and public life, enabling them to transcend the Confucian gender divide of "men outside, women inside (男主外, 女主内)" while maintaining their roles within the family.

White's vision resonates with contemporary trends in China that emphasize women's domesticity in the service of family and nation. In a period marked by national modernization, White's framework allowed women to reconcile their domestic roles with national service. Her model promoted an active, educated form of domesticity that aligned women's labor with social reform and nation-building. Rather than relegating women to a passive, private role, White's *jiazheng* empowered women to contribute meaningfully to the development of both family and state. In this sense, White's approach to women's education served not only to uplift their roles within the household but also to integrate them into the broader political and social fabric of modern China.

5. Conclusions

White's translation and dissemination of Western home economics knowledge through *Nüduo* exemplify the historical reconfiguration of "home" as a site of moral and intellectual negotiation in Republican China. Her work articulated a translingual process in which the domestic sphere became a medium for reconciling scientific rationality with religious ethics and Confucian moral frameworks with Protestant domestic ideals. By adapting late-nineteenth-century American models of domestic education to the Chinese context, White reformulated the relationship between gender, knowledge, and faith. Her translation practices register an enduring tension between modernizing aspirations and cultural continuity, showing how missionary domestic discourse operated simultaneously as an instrument of moral reform and a conduit for the transmission of new forms of knowledge.

In comparison with her male contemporaries, White's missionary strategies display a distinct orientation toward cultural accommodation. Whereas missionaries such as Andrew Young John Allen tended to reject Confucian gender ethics, White selectively incorporated them into her pedagogical design. By reframing *jiazheng* as a discipline combining moral instruction and scientific practice, she localized Western domestic pedagogy

within Chinese social ethics. This approach reflects an alternative mode of religious translation that emphasized negotiation rather than opposition, situating White's work within a broader field of gendered missionary mediation. Through this framework, the evangelization of "home" emerges not as a unidirectional process of cultural transfer but as a dialogic formation shaped by both missionary intention and indigenous reception.

The *jiazheng* column in *Nüduo* further illustrates how missionary print culture intersected with the evolving modes of knowledge production in Republican China. The column positioned domestic work as an intellectual and moral enterprise, linking household management to the nation's reformist and hygienic agendas. Its focus on practical concerns such as health, sanitation, and education indicates the extent to which domestic discourse participated in the construction of a modern epistemology of everyday life. White's editorial and translational practices, situated within a network of missionary education and women's print culture, thus demonstrate the complex intersections between gendered authorship, transnational translation, and the institutional frameworks of Republican knowledge production.

The present study also opens avenues for future inquiry to trace the broader significance of White's contributions in relation to parallel developments in modern China, including comparable reformist pedagogies and vernacular knowledge projects beyond missionary circles. A fuller historical review of missionary domestic science education in the 1930s and 1940s and later periods would clarify the longer institutional afterlives of the practices examined here. This could also recover more fully the voices and interpretive agency of White's Chinese student editors; further work could read their writings more systematically alongside localized Republican-era discourses on gender, labor, and citizenship. These lines of inquiry would strengthen the historiography of transnational and local negotiations that *Nüduo* both recorded and helped to generate.

Funding: This research was funded by Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities of China, Xiamen University (厦门大学中央高校基本科研业务费项目) grant number: 20720251048.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Manuscripts used in this research are stored in Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Boston University, University of California, and Shanghai Library.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ White's reference to the Confucian definition of women's virtue points to the *Lienü Zhuan* 列女传 (Records of Virtuous Women), a collection of exemplary female biographies compiled by Liu Xiang 刘向 (ca. 77 BCE–ca. 6 BCE) in the Western Han dynasty. The text categorizes female virtue into six types (Maternal Models, Worthy and Enlightened, Sympathetic and Wise, Chaste and Compliant, Principled and Righteous, and Accomplished Rhetoricians) and often praises women who preserved chastity through extreme acts such as suicide or self-mutilation. By invoking such a Confucian exemplar, White demonstrated an awareness of what she perceived as the problematic dimensions of local gender ethics while proposing "home learning" as a more "reasonable" moral framework that combined Christian and Confucian ideals.
- ² According to records from the Christian Literature Society, Laura M. White served as the inaugural editor of *Nüduo* (*The Woman's Messenger*) from 1912 to 1931. Due to health issues, she frequently returned to the United States for rest after 1922. Upon her return to China, *Nüduo* remained her primary platform for literary contributions. Her period of active submissions to the journal concluded in 1928. See *Annual Reports of Christian Literature Society for China* (1901).
- ³ Although domestic principles were taught as early as the mid-19th century, the term "home economics" was not formalized until the early 20th century. The 1899 Lake Placid Conferences cemented the term "home economics," with activists advocating its inclusion in school curricula nationwide. Literature on homemaking gained popularity due to increased literacy and access

to printed materials. For more details on the history of the American home economics curriculum, see Hamon and Smith (2014) and Goldstein (2012).

- 4 Richard's phrase is drawn from the *Classic of Poetry* (诗经). In the original poem, "xi zhou 西周" refers to a territory of the Western Zhou dynasty, while "xifang meiren 西方美人" denotes a traditional Chinese dancing master. In the present context, the expression was used metaphorically to refer to female missionaries from the West.
- 5 The translated articles in the *jiazheng* column are primarily informational texts or practical guides. In terms of content, they lack the strong fictional or narrative qualities often found in translations from other columns. Regarding length, these translations vary significantly, with some spanning several pages and others being less than a hundred words. Due to the diverse and fragmented nature of these articles, which were often sourced from foreign publications, locating their original texts is challenging. As a result, engaging in comparative textual analysis between the translations and their source texts offers limited scholarly value and presents practical difficulties. Nevertheless, the selection of materials published in the home economics column aligns closely with the curriculum of missionary girls' schools where the *Nüduo* editorial team operated. Moreover, these choices reflect White's own views on women's roles, which form the central focus of this discussion.
- 6 The transnational character of *Nüduo*'s editorial process is exemplified by the collaborative mode of literary production adopted by White and her female students. As Xu Nailu recorded, White and her Chinese students met regularly to review, select, and co-edit manuscripts for publication. According to Xu's recollection, the process began with an initial round of linguistic proofreading conducted by White and Xu, followed by a detailed review undertaken by the female students. Once a manuscript passed these stages, it was discussed collectively by teachers and students. Only when a consensus was reached was the draft accepted for publication; otherwise, it was rejected. This translingual and transnational model of collaborative editing was not unique to *Nüduo* but rather reflected a broader pattern within Protestant missionary publishing practices in early-twentieth-century China, where knowledge production routinely depended on sustained cooperation between foreign missionaries and Chinese collaborators. See Xu (1912b) and Fryer ([1880] 1996, pp. 412–25).
- 7 Li Guanfang 李冠芳 (?–?), originally from Sichuan, was the daughter of a pastor in the Methodist Episcopal Church. From 1907 to 1914, she attended Nanking Huiwei Girls' School, where she was a student of Laura White. Between 1926 and 1927, she pursued graduate studies at Boston University in the United States, earning both a master's degree in literature and a master's degree in religious education. In 1931, she returned to China and became the editor-in-chief of *Nüduo* while also serving as a faculty member at the McTyeire Home and School for Girls (Zhongxi Nüshu 中西女塾).

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