

Missionary Journal, Chinese Education 2

This article was published in a missionary journal printed in the cities of Fuzhou and Shanghai. *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal* operated between 1868 and 1912. It was read by English-speakers living in the major cities of China as well as abroad. In this paper, Mrs. Farnham addresses her “missionary sisters” on the matter of working to convert Chinese women. Farnham points to education as the surest means of influencing “the girls who shall become the future wives and mothers of China,” reflecting a shared belief with the audience that it is in these roles that women have the greatest impact on society. The title of the paper notwithstanding, Farnham’s article also reveals that Western missionary women are not necessarily content working with Chinese women exclusively. They prefer to extend their efforts to men, perhaps because they do not believe their own rhetoric about woman’s moral authority in the home?

Source: Farnham, J.M.W. “Women’s Work for Woman.” *Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal* 16 (1885): 218-219.

WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN.* By Mrs. J. M. W. Harnham. *A paper read before the Shanghai Conference of Missionaries, March 31st, 1885.

Of the many vital questions which come up to us in our Mission work, perhaps none is more important or far reaching than that of work among women; and though each missionary must and probably will work out a plan of her own, yet the interchange of thoughts and views on the subject will no doubt be helpful to us all.

"How shall I best influence for good the women with whom I come in contact?" is a question which I believe finds an echo in the heart of each missionary sister not only in this conference, but in every Mission station. I suppose everyone who has undertaken any work at all among the women of China has found the same difficulties, among which may be enumerated—Our inability to reach the better class, their ignorance, their not knowing how to read, and their utter absorption in the daily affairs of life, so many of them having to eke out their daily food. "I have no time," is the constant reiteration. How then shall we work? How reach the mothers of this land?

One way, which I think will commend itself to us all, is through their children. As far as my experience goes, I cannot say I have ever felt much encouragement in visiting from house to house indiscriminately, even in company with a native assistant; on the contrary I have nearly always felt that what we said had gone into one ear and out at the other. I have never found any difficulty in getting into their houses, have generally been kindly received, and often enjoyed

chatting with some friendly woman, but the trouble is, one seems to make so little impression. We feel, however, very differently towards the mothers of the scholars with whom we come in contact in our day-schools. The fact that we are educating their children commands their respect and I think in many cases their gratitude. In following the little ones to their homes, I have felt I had a decided object in view, something tangible to work upon. Much of the lesson taught during the day is taken home and talked of, so that there is no such utter ignorance of our doctrine as among those who have had no contact with us.

Another effective way of working is Industrial Classes. The extreme poverty of most of the women to whom we have access makes it impossible to obtain regular attendance for any length of time. I have never been able to get up a class, without some pecuniary inducement. A sewing class of from twenty to thirty women has been to me a very hopeful way of working; and though I have not been able to carry on one for any extended length of time, yet I think, with the help of a good native assistant, such a class may be made very useful. One of our best workers in Ningpo has had a class of this kind for many years. I am unable to give any statistics, but I know many Christians have been the result of her labors in this way.

I think, however, there can be no doubt that our most effective and hopeful work is among the girls who shall become the future wives and mothers of China. Failures there always will be in every branch of work, and we shall find discouraging features in whatever we undertake, but as I look back upon the past, school work commends itself as

being the most productive of results.

The training of native bible-women, such as Miss Fielde has engaged in so successfully, would seem to be an eminently desirable work to any one who felt called and fitted for it. It will be asked shall women confine themselves exclusively to labors among those of their own sex? I believe there is a diversity of opinion on this point; and those who are sent out by societies who confine their operations to women alone, must of course abide by such decision. I think, however, societies would do well to allow more liberty to their missionaries in this respect. There are many ladies who feel they can have more influence over boys than girls; and though woman's great and first mission may be to those of her own sex, yet if Providence would seem to indicate that more efficient work could be done for those of the opposite sex, I should surely say, go on and do it. How important it is that the boys should be trained to respect woman, and we believe that in this training, woman *ought* to take a prominent part.