

An analysis of the emergence and influence of female teachers in Guiyang during the Republican period

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Abstract: During the Republican period, female teachers in Guiyang took shape amid educational reform, school expansion, and changing social attitudes. Based mainly on materials from the Guiyang Municipal Archives, this paper adopts documentary analysis to examine the background of their emergence, their employment status, and their social influence. It finds that this group was predominantly engaged in elementary education, while their responsibilities extended from classroom teaching to student guidance, class management, and school administration. Their development facilitated the institutionalization of women's education, broadened career avenues and social participation of educated women, and made them an important force in Guiyang's modern educational transformation.

Keywords: Republican period; Guiyang; female teachers

1 Introduction

Female teachers played an important role in spreading new knowledge and ideas in modern China, and their development has drawn scholarly attention. Existing studies have mainly discussed their formation and characteristics [1], remuneration [2], and social influence[3]. However, research on female teachers in Guizhou remains scattered, and no dedicated study has yet examined those in Guiyang during the Republican period [4]. This article therefore examines female teachers in Republican-era Guiyang, focusing on their emergence, employment, and influence, so as to better understand modern education in Guiyang and changes in women's social roles.

2 Background to the emergence of female teachers in Republican-era Guiyang

As new-style education developed in modern Guiyang, the shortage of qualified teachers soon became a major constraint. Against this background, and amid educational reform, school expansion, and changing social attitudes, increasing numbers of women entered teaching and gradually became an important support for the new school system.

2.1 Educational policy as an institutional foundation

The rise of female teachers in Republican-era Guiyang was linked to the establishment of a modern system of women's education. In the late Qing period, the Qing court issued the *Regulations for Girls' Primary Schools* [5] and the *Regulations for Girls' Normal Schools* [6], setting rules for girls' primary and normal education and giving women's education a clearer basis for school operation. In 1901, the Qing court accelerated the transformation of education. During the Republican period, women's education was gradually brought into the modern school system. For example, the Provisional Government issued the *School System Order* in 1912 [7], and the Ministry of Education stipulated in the

New Educational Aims that "women, too, could not be left without education"[8]. These changes gave women's access to new-style education growing legitimacy and created conditions for the development of girls' schools and the emergence of female teachers.

2.2 School development and practical demand

As female student enrollment expanded and more girls' schools were established, Guiyang's modern schools needed more women teachers. Local educational institutions launched specialized teacher training programs in response to the demand. In 1915, Guangyi Girls' School set up a women's teacher-training class, cultivating a cohort of female educators who later took up teaching posts throughout Guiyang [9]. The Guiyang Provincial Women's Normal School was founded in 1921 and became an important center for training female teachers. In 1925, it opened an affiliated primary school where students could practice teaching, linking classroom study with real school experience [10]. Together, the growing demand for women teachers and the focus on practical training laid the groundwork for the rise of female teachers in Guiyang.

2.3 Changing social attitudes serving as ideological conditions

Changing social attitudes created better conditions for the growth of women teachers in Republican-era Guiyang. As modern schooling expanded and newspapers paid more attention to women's education, the issue gradually became part of public debate. Educators such as Cai Yuanpei and Tao Xingzhi also began to put the idea of "saving the nation through education" into practice. Cai Yuanpei argued that China's strength depended on wider access to education and that women's education should come first [11]. In 1934, Pan Gongzhan wrote in *Women's Monthly* that both men and women should have occupations and share social responsibilities if society was to move forward [12]. These views challenged the old belief that women belonged mainly in the home and created broader social support for them to become teachers.

3 Employment patterns of female teachers in Republican-era Guiyang

Under the influence of these factors, female teachers gradually emerged as a group in Republican-era Guiyang. In practice, they were mainly engaged in primary education, while some later became involved in school administration, offering steady support to the development of local education in Guiyang.

3.1 Dominance in elementary education

During the Republican period, female teachers in Guiyang were mainly employed in elementary education, especially in primary and girls' schools. In a sample of 100 teachers, women accounted for 55%, showing their prominent position in the local teaching force. Archival records show that they were closely involved in daily teaching. At Guiyang Municipal Jiaxiu Central School, for example, Ling Zhongfen taught music, physical education, Chinese and general knowledge, and history, while Fan Yizhen taught Chinese and general knowledge and arithmetic [13]. These cases suggest that female teachers had entered the regular curriculum of new-style schools and played a basic role in elementary education.

In terms of sources, graduates of women's normal schools formed a major part of Guiyang's female teaching force. Existing records show that 63.6% had such a background. Graduates of Guiyang Women's Normal School made up the largest share, at 36.3% [13], while others came from schools such as Guiyang Guangyi Normal School [14]. This indicates the key role of normal education in training female teachers and supplying local schools. Some female teachers also came from outside Guiyang, accounting for 32.7% of the total, including women from Anhui and Zhejiang. Zhou Hezhen, a graduate of Beiping Private Chunming Girls' Middle School, and Fang Yunxian, from Shanghai Wuben Girls' Middle School, both later taught in Guiyang [15]. Their arrival helped fill teaching posts in Guiyang's schools and, to some extent, brought educational experience from other regions.

3.2 Extension of duties into school administration

Although female teachers in Republican-era Guiyang mainly worked in elementary education, their duties were not

confined to teaching. As new-style schools developed and women received more education, some began to take part in student guidance, class management, and school administration, gradually moving from ordinary teaching to school-level management.

Xiong Tianyuan is a representative case. A graduate of Guizhou Provincial Guiyang Girls' Middle School, she taught at Jinsha No. 2 Two-Grade Primary School, Meitan County Junior Middle School, and Meitan County Girls' Primary School. She later served as both principal and teacher at Xinglong Short-Term School in Shiqian County, and as class teacher at Guiyang Municipal Xueya and Yuying Central Primary Schools. Her career shows a shift from teaching to management. An administrative order noted her long experience and "considerable insight into educational affairs", recommending her as principal of the planned Guiyang Municipal Qianling Road Central School [16]. This suggests that experienced female teachers were already able to enter school management and take on broader duties.

Other women held similar positions. Zhou Yicheng, a graduate of Jiangsu Provincial Suzhou Women's Normal School, served as principal of Guiyang Municipal Touqiao Central School. Jia Yuhua, a graduate of Guiyang Women's Normal School, worked as director of student guidance at Guiyang Private Dade Primary School [17]. These cases show that some female teachers had moved beyond classroom teaching and joined in school management and student guidance, marking their growing role in local education.

4 The influence of female teachers in Republican-era Guiyang

The emergence of female teachers in Republican-era Guiyang promoted the institutional development of women's education and expanded women's occupational and social participation, making them a force in local educational and social transformation.

4.1 Advancing the institutional development of women's education

The increase in female teachers supplied essential staff for the sustained operation of women's education in Guiyang. Liu Jiazhen and Yao Jing at Guiyang Municipal Qianling Central School show women's entry into local teaching. Wu Zongqi and Zhao Liangying, students of the Provincial Guiyang Women's Normal School who became teachers after graduation, serve as evidence that women's normal education had become a key training channel for female educators [18]. Together, these examples indicate that women's education in Guiyang gained a more stable basis in teaching, student management, and teacher training, shifting from school establishment and enrolment to sustained operation and institutional practice.

4.2 Expanding female teachers' occupational scope

The growth of female teachers also fostered the formation of professional identities among educated women. Rather than teaching only briefly, they served across different schools and built stable career trajectories. Jin Zhongxiu, a teacher at Guiyang Municipal Jiaxiu Central School, had previously served at Zhengyi Primary School, while Li Shufang had held teaching positions at the private Lusan School and the municipal Jiandao School. Fang Yun of Private Lixing Middle School had been a full-time teacher at Zhenyuan Normal School [19]. These resumes show that female teachers' work in Republican-era Guiyang already had continuity and mobility, and that teaching had become an important route into public occupational life for women educated in the new-style system.

4.3 Enhancing women's social participation

After entering school education, female teachers also took on wider social roles. The modern teacher has been both the instrument and the product of the transformation of education in the industrial age. In France, teachers were "harbingers of enlightenment and of the Republican message that reconciled the benighted masses with a new world, superior in wellbeing and democracy". During the Third Republic, pioneering female teachers challenged a predominantly

male profession and advanced the cause of sexual equality. Teachers also played the part of rabble-rousers: they educated and mobilized peasants in the early twentieth-century Russian and Mexican Revolutions. In spite of being a product of industrial society, the formation of teachers as a professional corps, their methods of training, and the role they played in the social and political arena varied in each society due to different cultural heritages and sociopolitical situations [20]. In China, women teachers played a particularly visible social role during the War of Resistance against Japan. While teaching at Chadien Primary School in Guiyang, Du Rong and Cheng Jingxue worked with underground Party members to spread anti-Japanese messages [21]. Liang Yan, meanwhile, leveraged her position at Qinghua Middle School as cover and turned the school into a base for continued patriotic education [22]. These cases show how the public role of women teachers in Republican-era Guiyang continued to expand.

5 Conclusion

The rise of female teachers in Republican-era Guiyang was shaped by several forces: modern educational reform, the growth of local schools, and changing social attitudes. Education policies provided women with an institutional foundation to access modern schooling and pursue careers in teaching. Local school expansion created a real need for female teachers, while new social views made women's work in schools more acceptable. In terms of employment, female teachers were mainly found in elementary education, especially in primary and girls' schools. Most took classroom teaching posts, but some gradually entered school administration, showing their growing place in the local school system. Their development helped meet the staffing needs of Guiyang's new-style education, supported the institutionalization of women's education, widened women's career paths and social participation, and added practical experience to regional educational modernization.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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