

A New Paradigm of Home Economics in Taiwan

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Home economics is a field of study that helps individuals and families to adapt to life, to improve their life, and to enhance the quality of life. The central focus of home economics is the well-being of family and individual in their everyday activities.

The Chinese hold ethics as the national founding principle, and the idea that home is the basis of the country as political philosophy. One of the Classics, "The Great Learning ()", stresses the sequence that one should first cultivate his (her) moral character (), then manage his (her) family matters (); finally, he (she) is able to administer a country () and bring peace to the world(). The education also guides students to start from character building, which requires students to develop a mature personality and cultivate their intellect. A sound personality is thought to be the basic requirement for creating a perfect family, ruling a country and bringing peace to the world. Home economics originated in the ancient women's education. Women were taught practical skills, such as weaving or sewing as well as virtues, manner of speech, deportment and appearance, so that they can properly handle daily activities.

From 1930 to 1960, courses on home economics stressed home management- knowledge of handling family matters, which means to organize and improve family life from a social perspective, to master or apply various skills and to arouse the interest in dealing with daily housework, and to solve a good variety of problems with scientific methods. From 1960 to 1980, home economics focused on the domain of knowledge and services, for example, family education, improvement on household goods and services, researches on the changing needs of individual and family. The ultimate goal is to make the community, country, and the world a

better piece for family. After 1983, the scope of home economics expanded and became a life education that investigates into the existence of the entire humanity, the surrounding environment, and the interaction between the two.

Meanwhile, in the year of 1972, the home economics course in junior high schools defied the convention that should be taught to girls only, while industrial arts courses to boys. However, it is not until 1994 when the Ministry of Education proclaimed the junior high school course standards, that all students, boys and girls alike, are required to take home economics. The proclamation marked a new era of making home economics a shared course for both genders, unlike the traditional approach of treating it as a part of women's education. Thus, sex segmentation was abolished, the prejudices and discrimination against the female were eliminated, sex equality was introduced, more opportunities were provided for students to learn about the opposite sex. This new mode of equal learning contributed much to mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation between the two sexes, upon which a harmonious society can be built.

With the recent advancement in technology, development in economics, the change of society, and the rising of women's consciousness, the traditional way of life is changed; family structures and functions are different, a new family life style has emerged, women's social participation has increased, which results in a growing number of female employment, and diversified roles of family members. As a consequence, the values, ethics, and consumption pattern are no longer the same. Since family and individuals are a part of the society, those changes create a complex problem that can hardly be solved with empirical approach. From the perspective of contextualism, home economics emphasizes the interweaving influences of the immediate physical and social environment surrounding every individual and family. The environment here includes the changing time and space.

Since the rise of postmodernism, the modern presumptions about human rationality, subjectivity, and epistemology have come under close scrutiny, in the mean time, the modern society has also been deeply reflected upon. These changes highlight pluralism, fragmentation, and segmentation, in accordance with the

position of de-constructing, de-centering, and anti-rationality. Therefore, the domain of home economics moved beyond empirical-analytic science and hermeneutic science, but instead it is critical science. The complexity of family matters cannot be properly understood with values free, it takes interpersonal communication to solve the problems related to ethics, values, and moral judgments. Families as well as individuals are situated with and ecological environment; as a result, people's thoughts and conduct are guided by the socio-cultural values. To free people from authoritarianism, instrumental rationality, distorted social system, and personal inner pressure, home economics should be grounded in critical theories. Through constant questioning, self-reflection, liberalization, and intellect restructuring, people will gain better self-understanding, learn more from self-reflection, and reach higher level of self-fulfillment. Apart from that, people will undergo constant growing and transcend existent knowledge, beliefs, habits, and other social inhibitions. The ultimate goal is first to eliminate the constraints of gender stereotypes, to communicate from the perspective of pluralism, to achieve mutual respect and understanding among various ethnic groups which can help families participate cooperatively, rationally and morally in the critique the conditions which inhibit reform toward a more humane and rational world and set the new social goals. Home economics empowers individuals and families, enhances family life, and ultimately helps build communities and nations, as well as makes the world more humane and just.

Keeping in mind the features and changing directions of the impending 21st century modern home economics should integrate with other realms of knowledge such as humanity, natural sciences, social sciences, philosophy, and arts. The field should summarize, analyze, and interpret all experiences critically so that it will be able to change and create the environment actively, in which humanistic, democratic, pluralistic and international characteristics can be revealed. This is a goal to strive for by home economics as a field of knowledge in order to deserve continuous study.