

## Queen Bee and Housewife: Extension of Social Moral Education into Private Sphere in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*

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### **Abstract:**

As one rare work on domestic life and private sphere in Greek and Roman cultural history, Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* has significant character in its instances and arguments. Quite a lot of examples set forth in this work are taken from experiences of public life; the major arguments in the *Oeconomicus* are the extension and borrowing of the conclusions of Xenophon's other works on political and military affairs in public sphere, such as his *Cyropaedia*, *Agesilaus*, *Hiero* as well as his *Spartan Constitution*; and the ideal husband and housewife in the dialogue also own typical attribution of king and queen. Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* is one theoretical attempt to apply experience of public life, especially Xenophon's own thought on social education to private sphere; and has great influence in classical cultural history. Nevertheless, as one piece of historical document on ancient Greek family life, the utopianism and sense of social gender construction also deserve scholars' notice.

**Key Words:** Xenophon, the *Oeconomicus*, Private sphere, Ancient Greece

## CHAPTER I

Among the primary documents on classical Greek society, most historical, political works and even poems and dialogues focus on the public sphere only and talk about political or military subjects. Detailed works on the private sphere are limited. As an exception to the general rule, Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* is quite noteworthy as a book on domestic affairs. Nevertheless, due to the lack of external evidence and ambiguity of its background, there is disputation about the nature of the content of this valuable dialogue among scholars, which lasts from the age of Roman Empire up to now.

As an Epicurean living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., Philodemus considers *Oeconomicus* as a philosophical work, and declares that he cannot understand fully certain thoughts in it. According to his view, the philosopher Socrates should not study how to make money by domestic labour. Following the doctrine of Epicurus, he believes that wife and family are not necessary elements of happiness. And he also comments that the assertion of Socrates in the dialogue that a husband should be responsible for his wife's faults in family life is absurd.<sup>1</sup> Modern scholars care more about the historical value of *Oeconomicus*. L.R. Shero declares that the prototype of the 'good wife' in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* must be his own wife Philesia, which deserves further historical research.<sup>2</sup> Stewart Irvin Oost takes a far more conservative opinion than Shero, yet he still agrees that *Oeconomicus* is a historical record about the opinion of Athenian aristocrats on family and gender, because generally speaking Xenophon's thought is not quite original.<sup>3</sup> As one of the most important researchers of *Oeconomicus* since the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sarah B. Pomeroy claims that the work is both 'the only extant Greek didactic work to draw attention to the importance of the oikos as an economic entity',<sup>4</sup> and a book which 'covers a wide range of subjects including agriculture, philosophy, and social, military, intellectual, and economic history'.<sup>5</sup> In 1995, she published by now the most academic and up-to-date commentary in English of *Oeconomicus*, in which she translates the whole text of the dialogue, summarizes the scholarship on *Oeconomicus* since the classical age,<sup>6</sup> and discusses in detail the information of gender, family, housework, economics and religion contained in the book.<sup>7</sup> One of her basic opinions on the nature of *Oeconomicus* is that it is the product of Xenophon's frustration after his misfortune in political and mercenary career and exile, and draws his attention from the public sphere to the domestic economy.<sup>8</sup> Gabriel Danzig puts forth another view that the external form of *Oeconomicus* is a guide on practical

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<sup>1</sup> Philodemus, *Oeconomica*, 6.1-20.

<sup>2</sup> Shero (1932), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Oost (1978), 225.

<sup>4</sup> Gray (2010), 31.

<sup>5</sup> Pomeroy (1994), vii.

<sup>6</sup> Too (1995), 247.

<sup>7</sup> Bradley (1999), 477.

<sup>8</sup> Pomeroy (1994), 5.

affairs similar to Ovid's *Art of Love*, while its nature is an ethical dialogue under the disguise of an economics treatise<sup>9</sup>.

Due to the absence of decisive evidence of the date and background of *Oeconomicus*, it is not easy to determine the very nature of this complex work. However, in my opinion, the examples, theoretical system and detailed assertions in *Oeconomicus* itself provide certain valuable clues to later readers, which may help us to gain a better understanding of the origin and character of this important dialogue.

## CHAPTER II

For a start, it may be helpful for us to examine *Oeconomicus* 7.17-37. Ischomachus advises his wife to pay more attention to the organization of housework and says, 'I suppose that they are not trivial matters, unless, of course, the activities that the queen bee (ἡ ἐν τῷ σμήνῃ ἡγεμῶν μέλιττα, literally 'the female bee in charge in the hive') presides over in the hive are trivial.'<sup>10</sup> Afterwards he patiently explains to his wife the responsibility of the queen bee: she presides over the hive, sends bees out to work instead of allowing them to wander around; she keeps in mind everything taken into the hive and manages to keep it safe until it is to be consumed, and then distributes it justly among the bees; she supervises the construction of combs and ensures that they are built firmly as well as quickly; she also takes charge of the tending of offspring and sends new-born bees out to establish new colonies when they are mature enough.<sup>11</sup>

At first sight, we must admit that the queen bee described and the idealized housewife do share common features. Nevertheless, if we study the vocabulary and content of this text closely, it is not hard to recognize that the responsibility of queen bee is far more political than domestic. In order to clarify this point further, it is necessary for us to analyse briefly the image of bees as a typical symbol in classical works.

The bees described by writers of pre-classical period (especially Hesiod) are mystical but are still informative for us. The most famous description of bees come from Hesiod's *Theogony*, in which he claims that the race of female women, 'a great woe for mortals, dwelling with men, no companions of baneful poverty but only of luxury', is just like drones, who enjoy their lives in the white honey-combs built by bees and 'gather into their stomachs the labor of others'.<sup>12</sup> Another noteworthy myth comes from the work of Semonides of Amorgos, who says that the most hard-working women come from bees, which manage household well and 'grow old in love with a loving husband', and are therefore 'the best and the most sensible whom Zeus bestows as a favour on men.'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Danzig (2003), 57.

<sup>10</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 7.17.

<sup>11</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 7.33-34.

<sup>12</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 590-599.

<sup>13</sup> Semonides, 7.83-93.

It is hard to make sure whether Xenophon was inspired by the two poems mentioned above directly. It is obvious that at least Xenophon does not borrow the image of bees from Hesiod, as the latter compares women to evil drones instead of diligent queen bees. And we are also not certain if Xenophon reads Semonides' poem. But it seems that in Greek cultural tradition bees are connected with females and the quality of diligence in work, the meaning of which is just what Xenophon wants to express here.

Nevertheless, I would argue Xenophon actually wishes to say more than that. In fact, the image of queen bee in Greek literature is highly political. The clearest evidence of the attitude of Xenophon's contemporaries to bees comes from Aristotle's zoological writings. In *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle divides the members in the hive into bee (μελίττα), drone (κηφήν) and king (βασιλεύς).<sup>14</sup> The Greek word 'βασιλεύς' is clearly political. In *Historia Animalium*, Aristotle further points out that there is complex and strict social orders among bees, most of which are governed by two kinds of 'leaders', who are in themselves distinguished by red and dark colours and differ in dignity.<sup>15</sup> According to the theory in *Historia Animalium*, bees, human beings, wasps and cranes are the four 'political animals (πολιτικαί)', who share among themselves 'public work (κοινὸν ἔργον)'.<sup>16</sup> Even political struggles in human society can also occur among bees. Aristotle believes that if there are too many 'leaders' in one hive, the community is to be destroyed by the disaster of partisan division.<sup>17</sup>

Another famous passage on bees in classical texts is the end of Virgil's *Georgics*, which is composed in Roman age but might be based on or borrowed from classical Greek and Hellenistic literature. The poet applies a charming style to describe the story about how bees can revive through beef.<sup>18</sup> In the view of Jasper Griffin, the bees in the description signify Roman citizens, who 'kill themselves with work and gladly die for community'.<sup>19</sup> From the instances above, we can see clearly that the image of bees is closely connected to politics and public activities in Greek and Roman tradition. To some extent, their public spirit is even contradictory to the concerns of the private sphere.

Even more convincing evidence comes from Xenophon's own writings. It is noteworthy that Xenophon does not apply the metaphor of bees only here, but also in *Cyropaedia* and *Hellenica*, in both cases queen bee clearly signifies political leader. In *Cyropaedia* Artabazus says to Cyrus the Great, 'for my part, O my king, for to me you seem to be a born king no less than is the sovereign of the bees in a hive. For as the bees always willingly obey the queen bee and not one of them deserts the place where she stays; and as not one fails to follow her if she goes

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<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 759a19-22.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, 553a27-29.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, 488a2-9.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, 553b18-19.

<sup>18</sup> Virgil, *Georgics*, 4.552-558.

<sup>19</sup> Boardman, Griffin, Murray (1986), 257.

anywhere else — so marvelous a yearling to be ruled by her is innate to them; so also do men seem to me to be drawn by something like the same sort of instinct toward you.’<sup>20</sup> And in *Hellenica* Xenophon narrates, ‘but it chanced that Thrasydaeus was still asleep at the very place where he had become drunk. And when the commons learned that he was not dead, they gathered round his house on all sides, as a swarm of bees around its leader.’<sup>21</sup> So it is quite evident that queen bee actually stands for a competent political leader or military general in Xenophon’s mind.

Fabio Roscalla and some other scholars even argue that the metaphor of queen bee actually comes from a political belief widely held in Persia, that Persian King is the queen bee of his people. Besides, the passage cited above from Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*, their evidence includes that Aeschylus calls Persian soldiers ‘a swarm of bees, having left the hive with the leader of their army’,<sup>22</sup> and there is also an apparent allusion to the king of Assyria as bee in *Isaiah* 7.18.<sup>23</sup> In any case, it is certain that queen bee represents political leader as well as woman and labor. Any well-educated Greek readers of the *Oeconomicus* can realize the political sense of the queen bee metaphor and there is no doubt Xenophon himself understands that clearly, too.

So does Xenophon use an improper example here? In my opinion it is not the case. After reading *Oeconomicus* thoroughly, we can discover that the author draws connections and comparisons between private and public spheres intentionally, and attempts to apply his thought on social moral education to construct his mode of domestic administration. The private life in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* is not the opposite of political sphere, and it is far from a historical record of his own experience or the typical mode of Athenian family management. It is the extension and anamorphosis of the social educational theory predominant in Xenophon’s thought.

### CHAPTER III

As a matter of fact, not only does the queen bee analogy have a potential political meaning, but almost all instances in the *Oeconomicus* are taken from political and military life. In 5.15-16, Socrates says, ‘And the man who leads his men against the enemy must contrive to produce the same result by giving gifts to those who behave as brave men should and punish those who disobey commands. On many occasions the farmer must encourage his workers no less than the general encourages his soldiers.’<sup>24</sup> In 8.4-22, Xenophon applies four examples of public sphere in succession. First, he uses the instances of army and navy to explain the necessity of obeying order in housework.<sup>25</sup> Then he describes how the sailors can place all kinds of tools on board

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<sup>20</sup> Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 5.1.24-25.

<sup>21</sup> Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 3.2.28.

<sup>22</sup> Aeschylus, *Persians*, 126-131.

<sup>23</sup> For more details, see Roger Brock in Tuplin ed. (2004), p.254.

<sup>24</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 5.15-16.

<sup>25</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 8.4-9.

perfectly well, which explains that it is helpful to sort and store domestic items in an orderly way.<sup>26</sup> Finally, Xenophon draws the comparison between shopping in a market and finding domestic items to prove that purposiveness is indispensable in family management.<sup>27</sup> Further, in 9.15, the author advises that a good housewife check everything at home from time to time, just as a commander-in-chief checks the guard; she must make sure that the tools are preserved well, similar to the official who is responsible to keep horses and cavalry in good fighting condition.<sup>28</sup> At the very end of the whole dialogue, Xenophon returns to analogies of sailors and soldiers once more. He points out that a good captain can command his sailors well enough to ensure the ship moving forward in full speed, while an inept captain cannot inspire the spirit of the sailors or avoid blame from them after the sailing. The case of general and soldiers in a battle is also the same. These rules can be applied perfectly well in housework.<sup>29</sup>

After reading these, it is no longer difficult to understand the tease of Socrates to Ischomachus in the dialogue, 'By Hera, Ischomachus, you show that your wife has a masculine intelligence.'<sup>30</sup> That is because all instances Ischomachus shows to his wife are military or political, which prove the principle in the public sphere. According to classical Athenian concept, these affairs can be understood and put into practice by men only, not by women. Of course, as the author is a soldier himself, the choice of examples must have something to do with his own experience and interest. But the frequent appearance and large proportion of political and military instances still reveal to some extent the reliance on experience and theory in public sphere of the composition of *Oeconomicus*, which makes Pomeroy's description of it as the product of Xenophon's frustration after his misfortune in public area seem less credible.

## CHAPTER IV

A second character of the *Oeconomicus* is that its viewpoint with regard to the private sphere is strikingly similar to Xenophon's theory of social moral education. Judging from the propositions of Socrates and Ischomachus, the most important basis of household management is the competence of the husband and the housewife, foreman who organizes the housework on his behalf. The typical narration of that view comes from the discussion between Socrates and Critobulus, a person who failed to manage his family well:

Socrates: And I can show you men who treat their wives so as to have fellow workers in improving their estates, while others treat them in such a way that they cause utter disaster.

Critobulus: And should the husband or the wife be blamed for this?

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<sup>26</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 8.11-16.

<sup>27</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 8.22.

<sup>28</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 9.15.

<sup>29</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 21.2-8.

<sup>30</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 10.1.

Socrates: Whenever a sheep is in a bad way, we usually blame the shepherd, and whenever a horse is vicious, we usually find fault with its rider. As for a wife, if she manages badly although she was taught what is right by her husband, perhaps it would be proper to blame her. But if he doesn't teach her what is right and good and then discovers that she has no knowledge of these qualities, wouldn't it be proper to blame the husband?<sup>31</sup>

As the leading figure in the latter part of the dialogue, Ischomachus expresses the same opinion. When he finds that his wife does not understand how to keep the items in the household, he blames himself first: 'It's not your fault, but mine, because when I put the household into your hands, I failed to give you any instruction about where everything was to be put, so that you might know where you ought to put them away, and where to take them from.'<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, on behalf of the husband in the management of housework, the housewife is also responsible to teach useful skills to the servants nearby. Ischomachus admonishes his wife

But, wife, your other special concerns turn out to be pleasant: wherever you take a slave who has no knowledge of spinning, and teach her that skill so that you double her value to you; and whenever you take one who does not know how to manage a house or serve, and turn her into one who is a skilled and faithful servant and make her invaluable;<sup>33</sup>

According to the three paragraphs cited above, Xenophon's mode of household management is pithy and clear. Instead of scolding and punishing the servants directly, the husband should learn how to educate, help and supervise his wife; and the 'good housewife' can teach the indispensable household managing skills to every servant in the family. However, what is noteworthy here is that this organizing mode in the *Oeconomicus* is by no means original. Actually, it is direct application of the theory of social education set forth by Xenophon in his other historical and political works.

In my opinion, the way of argumentation in *Oeconomicus* is almost an extension and transformation of the opening preface of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. In the plot of *Oeconomicus*, Critobulus is in sorrow because he cannot manage his private life well. Socrates shows him the great danger of ignoring the art of household management, and sets forth the example of Ischomachus as an example. While in the preface of *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon deplores that:

The thought once occurred to us how many republics have been overthrown by people who preferred to live under any form of government other than a republican, and again, how many monarchies and how many oligarchies in times past have been abolished by the people. We reflected, moreover, how many of those individuals who have aspired to absolute power have either been deposed once for all and that right quickly; or if they have continued in power, no matter for how short a time, they are objects of wonder as having proved to be wise and happy men. Then, too, we had observed, we thought, that even in private

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<sup>31</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 3.10-11.

<sup>32</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 8.2.

<sup>33</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 7.41.

homes some people who had rather more than the usual number of servants and some also who had only a very few were nevertheless, though nominally masters, quite unable to assert their authority over even those few.<sup>34</sup>

Then the rest of the work introduces Cyrus the Great, in order to show how he managed to construct excellent social order and public morality by political skills and mature constitution, so as to avoid the disasters mentioned above and achieve the aim of social education, that is to say the elevation of morality of his subjects and the harmony of the whole society; and his mode of administration is also very similar to that of Ischomachus.

Again, in Xenophon's *Spartan Constitution*, the image of the Spartan king Lycurgus is of the same nature as Cyrus the Great and Ischomachus. Xenophon comments, 'Lycurgus, who gave them the laws that they obey, and to which they owe their prosperity, I do regard with wonder; and I think that he reached the utmost limit of wisdom.'<sup>35</sup> According to this narration, through wise legislation, strict supervision and his own demonstrative behaviour, Lycurgus successfully set up admirable morality and public order in Spartan society, and laid the basis of Spartan prosperity and hegemony in future generations. Therefore, wise legislation and people's obedience to law are of crucial importance for the elevation of morality. In *Ways and Means*, another work apparently composed in his later years, Xenophon also admits that it is the core theory in his political and historical concept.<sup>36</sup> Here we can still recognize theory on the public sphere but which is also similar to the statement in the *Oeconomicus*, that competent leaders and strict regulation can ensure the efficiency of an organization. In *Oeconomicus*, Ischomachus and the ideal housewife just play the role of educator like Cyrus and Lycurgus in household as the latter two did in Persia and Sparta. They represent perfect characters to people around themselves and serve as models of morality just as Cyrus does. Like Lycurgus, they make rules for servants and make sure that these regulations should be obeyed.

In the ideal model of the *Oeconomicus*, what goes hand in hand with being a good husband and housewife is reasonable household order and laws. Ischomachus says to his wife, 'For there is nothing, wife, as useful or good for people as order. For instance, a chorus is composed of people. But whenever every member does whatever he likes, there is simply chaos, and it is not a pleasant spectacle. But when they act and sing in an orderly manner, these same persons seem to be both worth watching and worth hearing.'<sup>37</sup> Ischomachus further stresses that one of the key roles of good housewife is as guardian of 'household law (νομοφύλαξ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ)'.<sup>38</sup> In context, household law ensures that everything at home is placed in order and all the servants receive rewards and punishments they deserve according to their behaviour. This idea also

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<sup>34</sup> Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 1.1.1.

<sup>35</sup> Xenophon, *Constitution of Lacedaemonians*, 1.1-2.

<sup>36</sup> Xenophon, *Ways and Means*, 1.1.

<sup>37</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 8.3.

<sup>38</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 9.15.

comes from Xenophon's political beliefs. He expresses the idea in many works that rational and respected laws are of key importance for social moral education. In *Spartan Constitution*, one major aspect of education for Spartan children is to educate them to respect law.<sup>39</sup> The constitution of Lycurgus places Spartan youths under the supervision of law at all times.<sup>40</sup> And this kind of law not only prevents people from committing crimes, but also forces them to improve their own living condition by just means.<sup>41</sup> One criticism in *Hiero* against tyrants is also that they ignore law and public order themselves, therefore fail to set up worthy examples to their people.<sup>42</sup> Therefore the household order and law in *Oeconomicus* is also connected closely to public law regulating social orders.

A third suggestion in *Oeconomicus* is to reward and punish properly, which is naturally connected with the household law and is one of the most important means of training qualified servants. In Ischomachus' view, the most important way to inspire slaves to work hard is to provide enough food for them when they perform well.<sup>43</sup> The husband and the foreman should also make sure that 'the clothing and the shoes for the workers are not identical, but some are of inferior quality and others superior', so that they can 'reward the better workers with superior garments and give the inferior ones to the less deserving'.<sup>44</sup> Parallel arguments appear in Xenophon's political biography and dialogue, too. In *Agesilaus*, Xenophon praises Agesilaus because he mastered the art of rewarding his friends.<sup>45</sup> In *Hiero* he also suggests that a good king should know when to bestow his wealth for his people's happiness in order to win favour for himself.<sup>46</sup> Even in some less important statements we can also notice the influence of Xenophon's theory on public sphere and social moral admonishment. The emphasis on the loyalty of the foreman in 12.5 reminds us of the belief that loyalty is the first and most important virtue for general in *Agesilaus*;<sup>47</sup> while the necessity to respect the will of gods before engaging in agriculture also accords the narration in *Anabasis* on the importance of prophecy before battle.<sup>48</sup> In conclusion, a lot of evidence proves that the major points in *Oeconomicus* come directly from Xenophon's thought on political and military affairs, especially his suggestions for social moral education in *Cyropaedia*, *Hiero* and *Spartan Constitution*. Xenophon believes that experiences and theories in the public sphere are totally applicable for family life, and borrows them in his *Oeconomicus* without much transformation.

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<sup>39</sup> Xenophon, *Constitution of Lacedaemonians*, 4.6.

<sup>40</sup> Xenophon, *Constitution of Lacedaemonians*, 2.10-11.

<sup>41</sup> Xenophon, *Constitution of Lacedaemonians*, 10.5.

<sup>42</sup> Xenophon, *Hiero*, 4.10-11.

<sup>43</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 13.9.

<sup>44</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 13.10-12.

<sup>45</sup> Xenophon, *Agesilaus*, 1.17-19.

<sup>46</sup> Xenophon, *Hiero*, 11.1.

<sup>47</sup> Xenophon, *Agesilaus*, 2.1.

<sup>48</sup> Danzig (2003), 72.

## CHAPTER V

Still more convincing evidence is that Xenophon himself points out in *Oeconomicus* frequently that household management is one important aspect of the monarch's art of governance. In 4.4, Socrates states that agriculture and army are the two most important things in Persian kings' eyes. The greatest Persian king, Cyrus the Great often rewarded excellent farmers, and what he was good at is 'cultivating land and defending the land he had cultivated'.<sup>49</sup> The reason why Persian kings value agriculture might be the concern for the food supply only, not his interest in housework. But it seems that Xenophon already indicates here the correspondence between household management and political governance. A more obvious proof exists in the dialogue between Ischomachus and Socrates. Ischomachus is worried that though his way to control slaves is efficient, it is so simple and primary that he may be laughed at by Socrates. But Socrates answers him and says:

It certainly is no laughing matter, Ischomachus. You know, whoever can make people skilled in governing men can obviously also make them masters of men; and whoever can make people skilled masters can also make people skilled to be kings. So the person who can do this seems to me to deserve great praise, not laughter.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, according to Ischomachus' statement, the law of the polis can be directly used in household management. He himself applies certain regulations in the laws of Draco and Solon in order to teach his slaves to be honest.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, it is clear that in Xenophon's mind the application of public law into household management is not only practical but also beneficial and praiseworthy. Ischomachus also refers to some laws of Persian kings, because they regulate how to reward the honest people,<sup>52</sup> and serve as a supplement of those of Draco and Solon, which emphasize punishment too much. In my opinion, the utilization of public laws in family management is not only Ischomachus' suggestion here, but also the basic idea and approach which Xenophon applies to compose the *Oeconomicus* himself.

On the other hand, an ideal household manager should also possess the quality of king. Ischomachus tells his wife that she should 'praise and honour a worthy member of the household to the best of her ability, like a queen, and scold and punish anyone who deserves it.'<sup>53</sup> In the conclusion of the whole work, he once more emphasizes the correspondence between a good household manager and a wise king: if the workers 'are stimulated when the master appears and a new vigour descends on each of the workers and mutual rivalry and an

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<sup>49</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 4.16.

<sup>50</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 13.5.

<sup>51</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 14.4.

<sup>52</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 14.6-7.

<sup>53</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 9.15.

ambition in each worker to be the best, I would say that this master possesses a portion of the nature of a king.<sup>54</sup>

In sum, as one of the few ancient Greek works to discuss the private sphere, the *Oeconomicus* borrows largely from experiences, theories and even figures from the public sphere. Most examples in the work come from political and military life; the theory shown in the dialogue is actually a transformed version of Xenophon's social education; to some extent, even the husband and housewife in this work also stand for king and queen in public life.

## CHAPTER VI

In my view, the application of the experiences and theories in public education in construction of the *Oeconomicus* is no accident for Xenophon. It is determined by the nature of classical Athenian family life and the character of his system of thought.

First of all, in the daily life of the Athenian upper class, the wife is the natural object for education by her husband. This fact is not only determined by the social concept on gender, but is also influenced by the age difference between the couple. In *Oeconomicus*, Critobulus' wife was a small girl when she got married;<sup>55</sup> and Ischomachus' bride is only 15 years old.<sup>56</sup> Their knowledge and vision must be limited. According to the estimation of scholars who studied relevant inscriptions available systematically, in classical Athenian upper class, the average age for marriage of men is around 30 years old, while women generally get married at 14.<sup>57</sup> In that case, it is necessary for husband to teach his wife certain skills in daily life, and to be responsible for her behaviour.<sup>58</sup> The relationship between them is very similar to that between teacher and student, or leader and staff. That fact provides a possibility for Xenophon to apply his experience and theory of social education in domestic sphere.

Nevertheless, the character of Xenophon's own thought plays a far more important role in forming his methodology in the *Oeconomicus*. Among classical writers, only Xenophon and Aristotle (in his *Politics*) noticed and discussed the role of domestic manager in great details. That is by no means an accident. In the traditional view of Athenian society, basic education, especially in the domestic sphere is usually carried out by women and servants. Generally speaking, Athenian common people admit the importance of education itself, but they lack sufficient respect for educators. Demosthenes even mocked Aeschines by saying, 'You taught letters; I attended school. You conducted initiations; I was initiated. You were a clerk; I a member of the Assembly: you a third-rate actor, I a spectator of the play. You used to be driven

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<sup>54</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 21.10.

<sup>55</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 3.13.

<sup>56</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 7.5.

<sup>57</sup> Pomeroy (1994), 268.

<sup>58</sup> Pomeroy (1994), 231.

from the stage, while I hissed.’<sup>59</sup> Similar to clerks and actors, the social standing of teachers in classical Athens is low. And the status of pedagogue, the attendant of children for their education, must be more miserable. Images on vases and terracotta often depict pedagogue as a bald foreigner with a shaggy beard and a stick,<sup>60</sup> who is likely to be a slave. Some contemporaries of Xenophon, such as Plato and Isocrates, emphasized the importance of good teachers of philosophy and rhetoric. But their interest in educators of ‘elementary affairs’, such as moral regulation, labour and other professional skills, is far less than Xenophon, though these qualities themselves are very important in Plato or Isocrates’ ideas. It seems that they would also take it for granted that only housewives, baby-sitters and pedagogues should be responsible for moral education of common people (except for those extraordinary ones who are suitable for philosophical and rhetorical education), as most contemporary Greek believe. However, according to Xenophon’s thought on social education, the role played by the educator in the development of morality is crucial, therefore he must be the leader of the whole society as well (Lycurgus, Cyrus the Great, Agesilaus, Hiero, and so on). With his good behaviour, wise law, competent staff, proper reward and punishment, piety to gods, a good leader can improve the morality and spirit of the whole society, and impose his positive impact to every sphere in life.<sup>61</sup> As a matter of fact, the emphasis on education and educational art can be seen in almost every work by Xenophon, including the *Oeconomicus*.<sup>62</sup> In his eyes, as the educator and organizer in private sphere, the person in charge of domestic affairs should also be respected and studied.

What is more, unlike Plato and Aristotle, the methodology of Xenophon pays less attention to abstract philosophical terms, but focuses on the mode of management. This preference encourages him to break the borders among different spheres and construct his macroscopic, universal thought system. Therefore, we can recognize almost identical theoretical modes in *Hiero*, *Cyropaedia*, *Oeconomicus* and *Memorabilia*. As one of the pioneers in the area of domestic science, Xenophon might have no many former works for reference apart from some short poems such as Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. As a result, he applies the mode for social management and education summarized from public sphere into domestic area, invented an influential genre of writing in Greek and Roman literature, and made a great contribution to the academic research of Greek private sphere.

## CHAPER VII

In my opinion, the *Oeconomicus* is neither a historical record of the experience of Xenophon and his wife Philesia in family life nor a thoroughly new achievement accomplished after the

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<sup>59</sup> Demosthenes, *De Corona*, 265.

<sup>60</sup> Christes, Johannes (Berlin). ‘Paidagogos.’ *Brill’s New Pauly*. Antiquity volumes edited by: Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider. Brill, 2011. Brill Online. University of Edinburgh. 07 August 2011.

<sup>61</sup> See Gray in Gagarin and Fantham (2010), s.v. ‘Xenophon’, 267.

<sup>62</sup> Pomeroy (1994), 267.

author abandoned his political career in frustration. It is an attempt of Xenophon to extend his theoretical system from public sphere to private sphere after his theory on social moral education was established. Socrates and Ischomachus are both carriers of Xenophon's own thought on social education. In 1964, Frederick Beck comments in his *Greek Education: 450-350 B.C.* that 'For the student of Education Xenophon is an interesting but disappointing figure. On such questions as the subject-matter of Education or its philosophical basis he has practically nothing to contribute.'<sup>63</sup> In his opinion, Xenophon's system of education is incomplete because he ignores cultural education entirely — 'no reading, no writing, no study of literature or mathematic',<sup>64</sup> therefore 'the scope of his system leaves untouched whole areas of human interest and experience'.<sup>65</sup> That might be quite unfair to Xenophon. As a matter of fact, Plato, Xenophon and Isocrates all lay great emphasis on the importance of cultural education, but in different ways. Plato devises the system and methods of cultural education in his philosophical works such as the *Republic* and the *Laws*; Xenophon composes works for the very aim of cultural education and moral elevation; and Isocrates puts rhetorical education into practice. Along with the *Cyropaedia*, *Hiero*, *Spartan Constitution* and the *Agésilas*, the *Oeconomicus* is another evidence of Xenophon's great effort of broadcasting his idea on social education among Greek intellectuals. And it is particularly noteworthy because it is also an attempt to apply his experience and theory in public life into domestic sphere. In Xenophon's belief, the positive influence of great leaders, such as Cyrus the Great, Agésilas and Lycurgus in public moral education, and the wise laws of Draco, Solon and Persians are also applicable in family life and domestic labors and he is confident that the knowledge can help everyone gain wealth, orderly life as well as happiness. This work has certain significant influences in the history of Greek and Roman thought.

First of all, the *Oeconomicus* takes the domestic sphere as the equivalent and extension of the public world, and therefore improves the status of family life and women who live in the household in Greek literature. His view is unique among Greek writers and especially differs from those of Hesiod, Greek philosophers and Attic dramatists.

In Hesiod's opinion, life in reality is miserable,<sup>66</sup> and farming is a forced punishment on mortals from Zeus.<sup>67</sup> He admonishes his brother that the purpose of work is to avoid more serious disasters.<sup>68</sup> Most other Greek writers' views are not so extreme, but almost all of them believe that family life is inferior to political, military and intellectual affairs. Pseudo-Aristotle's *Oeconomica* discusses four different economics, and asserts directly that

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<sup>63</sup> Beck (1964), 244.

<sup>64</sup> Beck (1964), 248.

<sup>65</sup> Beck (1964), 253.

<sup>66</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 174-175.

<sup>67</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 42-105.

<sup>68</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 397-400.

private economic is the least noteworthy among them.<sup>69</sup> Aristotle also writes in *Politica* that, 'the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part.'<sup>70</sup> According to his logic, the part (family) cannot survive without the whole (state), therefore it must be inferior and less important. In most works of the Attic dramatists, the responsibility of women is to be obedient to their husbands,<sup>71</sup> and their existence is trivial and even negative.<sup>72</sup> Xenophon is familiar with that idea and even mentions through the mouth of Socrates the contempt of common Athenians for domestic labours.<sup>73</sup> But his thought expressed in *Oeconomicus* improves greatly the importance of domestic sphere.<sup>74</sup> According to Xenophon's view, both domestic and public works are indispensable, but the will of the gods entrusts the former to women and the latter to men.<sup>75</sup> Of course, women's life is still confined to home.<sup>76</sup> But the role they play becomes noteworthy.<sup>77</sup> The value of the good housewife is justly recognized. Their responsibility is no longer passive obedience. Their active part even requires the elementary ability of writing.<sup>78</sup> This picture is quite different from the one depicted in most Attic tragedies.<sup>79</sup> Even if this kind of life is not historical or applicable at all, the spread of the *Oeconomicus* must still be positive for the improvement of women's image and status.

Of course, in a male-dominated Athenian society, the major function of the *Oeconomicus* is still to change the common contempt of men for domestic management and to advocate for the life of hard-working in the private sphere. Xenophon points out that property would be useless if people do not know how to manage it at all.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, a wise house owner can easily make his life richer and happier. The *Oeconomicus* does not ask people to preserve wealth only, but encourage them to keep their property in the best condition and make the greatest increase of it by just and honourable means.<sup>81</sup> A bad master cannot stop his slaves from fleeing even if he keeps all of them in chains; while another expert in household management can easily make his servants hard-working without force.<sup>82</sup> Such wise house-owners are not rustic farmers in the traditional Greek concept, but someone sharing the

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<sup>69</sup> Pseudo-Aristotle, *Oeconomica*, 1345b13-1346a13.

<sup>70</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, 1253a18-20.

<sup>71</sup> Sophocles, *Ajax*, 293; Euripides, *Medea*, 230-245.

<sup>72</sup> Gomme (1925), 8.

<sup>73</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 4.2-3.

<sup>74</sup> Pomeroy (1994), 217.

<sup>75</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 7.22.

<sup>76</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 7.29-31.

<sup>77</sup> Wiemer (2005), 427.

<sup>78</sup> Wiemer (2005), 432.

<sup>79</sup> Scaife (1995), 232.

<sup>80</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 1.12.

<sup>81</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 7.15.

<sup>82</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 3.4.

nobility of good kings. They are ‘gentlemen (καλός κάγαθός)’ like Ischomachus.<sup>83</sup> Due to the lack of relevant historical documents, we have no idea whether Xenophon’s theory was valued or applied with any success in Athens or beyond. But the creation and dissemination of the *Oeconomicus* already proves Xenophon’s talent and the wide acceptance of the work in the Greek world.

Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* created a new genre in Greek literature.<sup>84</sup> This tradition was followed in history by Pseudo-Aristotle (maybe Theophrastus) and Philodemus,<sup>85</sup> and also inspired later agricultural works and made great influence in Greek and Roman scholarship. According to Varro, there were more than fifty works on agriculture in his time.<sup>86</sup> Cicero translated Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* into Latin in his youth and made it famous among Roman intellectuals.<sup>87</sup> Xenophon’s tradition of connecting private and public spheres seems to illuminate some later writers. Cato the elder argues in his *On Agriculture* that agricultural works are valuable because they offer exercise for the training of good soldiers;<sup>88</sup> Aristotle also starts his *Politics* from discussing the roles of family members.<sup>89</sup> These writing styles may be influenced by Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*.

Of course, the *Oeconomicus* does have its weakness if we take it as one piece of historical material on Athenian domestic life (as Pomeroy does in her commentary on the *Oeconomicus*) or even the record of Xenophon’s own experience in family life (as J.K. Anderson believes in his monumental work on Xenophon’s life<sup>90</sup>, and the argument of L.R. Shero mentioned above). The major problem is that it is a work constructed by Xenophon through the application of experiences in the public spheres into the domestic sphere, whose real nature might be quite alien to the author himself. Nothing can ensure it is historical or even applicable in contemporary practice. From the view of social gender, the ‘good housewife’ in *Oeconomicus* is a typical construction from men’s viewpoint,<sup>91</sup> and seems to be unreal and unconvincing. In fact, most of the later writers on house hold management discard Xenophon’s method. The *Oeconomica* by pseudo-Aristotle negates Xenophon’s basic approach in the opening part and argues that the difference between politics and household management is ever larger than that between polis and house; furthermore, the constitutions of democracy and oligarchy do not exist in contemporary domestic life at all,<sup>92</sup> as a result the experience in public affairs is not

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<sup>83</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 10.1.

<sup>84</sup> Waterfield (2004), 81.

<sup>85</sup> Pomeroy (1994), 68.

<sup>86</sup> Varro, *On Agriculture*, 1.7-8.

<sup>87</sup> Cicero, *De Officiis*, 2.87; Columella, *On Agriculture*, 12, Preface 7; 12.2.6.

<sup>88</sup> Cato, *On Agriculture*, Preface 4.

<sup>89</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, 1253b1-3.

<sup>90</sup> Anderson (1974), 175.

<sup>91</sup> Wiemer (2005), 424.

<sup>92</sup> Pseudo-Aristotle, *Oeconomica*, 1343a1-5.

totally applicable in domestic sphere. Therefore, the analysis of the particular features of the *Oeconomicus* and the avoidance of over-interpretation of the materials on social history contained in this work are also necessary for us to study and utilize Xenophon's text properly.

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