

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Research Highlights 'Interview'



Self-Introduction

- Briefly introduce yourself, the department and school that you are in.

My name is Zhang Yun and I joined the School of Humanities as a postdoctoral fellow in 2019.

Elaboration

- Share with us what is your research project.

The research project that I am currently working on is entitled “The Vernacular Science of Feminine Hygiene: Meanings of Women’s Reproductive Health and Bodies in Modern China.” It explores the meanings of women’s reproductive health and bodies in Republican China (1920s-1940s) through the lens of the vernacular science of feminine hygiene, a newly emergent regime of knowledge that was built on a mixture of terminologies and views from Western biomedicine, traditional Chinese medical principles, and indigenous customs and practices. This project aims to reveal the significant and yet unrecognized role that indigenized efforts played in improving women’s reproductive health in modern China, challenging the conventional view that the modern Chinese obstetrical reform was spearheaded by foreign-sponsored or state-initiated projects.

- What inspired you to embark on this research project?

My interest in this topic grew out of my doctoral research (forthcoming as a book) on women’s writing and print culture in early twentieth-century China. I found that a considerable number of writing women, most of whom were not medical professionals, were keen to combine the knowledge of scientific biomedicine and Chinese medicine, as well as their own experiences, to offer technical know-how to attend to women’s health and reproductive matters. These writings attested to the emerging field of the vernacular science of feminine hygiene, but it was beyond the scope of my doctoral project to explore this topic on a broader scale. Building on findings from my doctoral project, I aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of a variety of actors’ role in the production of this vernacular science of feminine hygiene, including men and women, experts and the general public, and merchants and advertising agents.

- **What is/are the most interesting finding(s) of this project?**

I am rather struck and fascinated by the candid and bold discussions about women's reproductive health and bodies. A variety of actors, including medical professionals, reformist intellectuals, merchants and advertising agents, and even the general public broached various aspects of the topic of female reproductive health, offering technical know-how on matters ranging from menstrual bleeding and cramps to fertility treatment, prenatal and postpartum care, regulation of sexual activities, and the choice of sanitary products.

- **How do you think your research can impact society?**

My exploration of the history of women's reproductive health and bodies in modern China is of significant contemporary relevance. More than a century after the well-being of the female reproductive body was first linked to the prosperity of the Chinese national body, modern reproduction remains a political and nationalist imperative, and the state of women's reproductive health continues to serve as a powerful means to name the condition of the modern Chinese nation-state.

Future Plans

- **Tell us about your future research plans and if you are looking for any research collaborators!**

I am expecting to collaborate with interested medical historians and gender specialists to co-edit a volume on women's reproductive health and bodies in Asia in twentieth and twentieth-first centuries.