

2017 Research Seminar

Dr. Yang Chongrui's birth control clinic in Beijing: Eugenics in practice in 1930's China



This paper investigates how eugenics, hygiene and birth control activism converged in the work of Dr. Yang Chongrui whose interest in protecting maternal health and women's bodies led her to open a birth control clinic in Beijing in the early 1930s. The slogan of the "The Peiping Committee on Maternal Health" where Yang was also a founding member underscores the eugenic aspect of population control: "Limit the number of children" to improve mothers' health. Yang viewed women as "reproducers and caretakers of the next generation." Yang's work shows that Chinese women did have a voice regarding women's reproduction. As part of her vision for a national hygiene program, Yang helped found and run the First National Midwifery School in China in 1927. Yang also advocated birth control, which she incorporated in the midwives' curriculum. Yang's interest in promoting birth control was spurred by her clinical findings in regard to high incidence of infant mortality rates. Yang's analysis of the population problem rested on two main coordinates: the social and the individual domain, based on which she advocated the urgent implementation of birth control measures. Yang attempted to reach working class women both in her clinic as well as by publishing plain articles promoting birth control awareness in the Beiping Daily. Yang abstracted the uplifting, utopic and progressive aspects of eugenics suitable for large national projects without getting caught up in the dehumanizing aspect of it. Yang's commitment to public hygiene and midwifery education is a prime example of how she integrated the small scale of birth control work into her work for the Hygiene Department and at the First National Midwifery School.

A Talk by Dr. Mirela Violeta David

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