
3-009 - Time Passing By: Gender, Temporality, and Writing of Age in Middle and Late Imperial China

 Friday, March 14, 2025

 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM

 Fairfield (2nd Floor, Hyatt)

How did concepts of age change throughout history, and how can we use age as a category of analysis? Echoing Joan Scott's seminal thesis regarding gender as a useful category of analysis, this panel reconsiders age as a category in conducting historical research on middle and late imperial China. It elucidates the complex interplay between age, gender, and societal roles, enhancing our understanding of age dynamics in legal, medical, social, and religious history.

Chen's analysis focuses on legal statutes concerning both adult and minor females, revealing that the statutes largely exempt female children from legal liabilities, reflecting an underlying assumption about their incapacity for criminal action. Guo's research delves into Ming Dynasty's medical texts, exploring how medical theories pathologize the social identities of young females. Shi's study addresses the funerary practices for minor females, showing how strategies like age concealment and the emphasis on personal capabilities lead to the construction of an independent social identity for these females, unattached to adult male figures. Exceptionally elaborate funerals further enhance this independence. Lastly, Luo investigates the portrayal of age among deities in medieval China, noting the diminishing relevance of gender-specific age norms post-deification. She points out that the specific ages of female deities, much like that of their male counterparts, are often unspecified, with a focus instead on significant cyclical time concepts from a religious perspective.

Overall, this panel suggests that reconsidering the age category facilitates a critical understanding of gender and other histories.

Organizers



Chun Chen
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities



Tianyu Shi
University of Hamburg

Chair



Cong Ellen Zhang
University of Virginia

Discussant



Ann Waltner
University of Minnesota

Presentations

Where the Girls Belong: Girls in the Voices of the Song State

Chun Chen, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

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The Politics of Age and Medicalization of In-Chamber Girls' Bodies in Late Imperial China

Jingya Guo, Cornell University

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Vanishing Fragrance, Shattered Jade: Defining Social Identity through the Death Rituals of Young Women

Tianyu Shi, University of Hamburg

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Dear Immortal, How Old Are You?: The Concept of Age in an Ageless Realm of Middle Period China

Yuqing Luo, Columbia University

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