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ACADEMICS

Book by GWU Assistant Professor Dr. Aihua Zhang will be Released on Nov. 20

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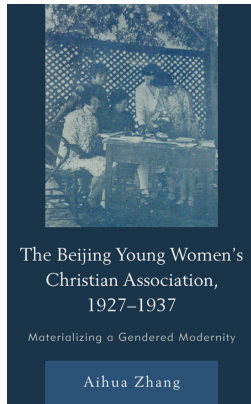


▲ Photo by Ely Thompson / GWU Photo Team

Topic Focuses on Role of the Beijing Young Women's Christian Association

A new book by Dr. Aihua Zhang, assistant professor of history at Gardner-Webb University, will be released on Nov. 20. "Materializing a Gendered Modernity: The Beijing Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) (1927-1937)," can be pre-ordered at [Amazon \(https://www.amazon.com/Beijing-Womens-Christian-Association-1927-1937/dp/1793608148\)](https://www.amazon.com/Beijing-Womens-Christian-Association-1927-1937/dp/1793608148).

By exploring the interplay among gender, religion, and modernity, Zhang's book explains the part Chinese Christian women played in the country's quest for a strong nation in general and in Republican Beijing's modern transformation in particular. "With a focus on the Beijing YWCA, I examine how the Association, guided by their Christian beliefs, tailored its Western models and devised new programs to meet the city's demands," Zhang shared. "Its programs ranged from providing women- and child-oriented facilities to promoting constructive recreational activities, and from reforming home and family to improving public health, some of which turned out to be pioneering work in social and community service in China."



In her childhood, Zhang was fascinated by Chinese and East Asian cartoons, stories and books. As she grew older, these interests led her to a deeper study of cultures and histories. Then, in college, she began exploring the relationships among East Asian countries and their interactions with the rest of the world. She also focused on women's roles in history and their contribution to China's modern transformation.

Since arriving at Gardner-Webb in 2019, she has taught Western Civilization I, Modern Chinese History and Western Civilization II. She came to Gardner-Webb from New Jersey, where she taught at Stockton University. Her desire was to teach at a university where she could combine her faith with her academic interests. "I have my wish fulfilled at Gardner-Webb," she observed. "I like the collegiality among the faculty members and their cooperative interactions. Students are humble, understanding, smart, and promising. The whole community is like a big family: sharing, supportive, and caring about each other."

Because Chinese women's history was not studied in China, Zhang came to the United States to pursue her Master of Arts in history at Bowling Green State University in Ohio in 2005. She earned her Ph.D. at State University of New York at Stony Brook in 2015. "The United States takes the lead in the study of women and gender," Zhang affirmed. "Also, I was curious how the Chinese history was approached in the U.S. I wanted to make a comparison between the Chinese and Western perspectives, which I believed would open my eyes and deepen my historical understanding."

The Gardner-Webb faculty recognized her at the beginning of the 2021 Fall Semester with The Scholarship Award for her excellence in research and scholarly contribution to a field. Zhang has published works that can be found both nationally and internationally and she has presented papers at regional, national and international conferences. One of her most significant contributions is collaboration with other scholars to create a public database on women and social movements since 1820.

Most recently, her research, "Reinventing Tradition and Indigenizing Modernity: the Beijing New Women and Their Leisure in the Early Decades of the 20th Century" (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09612025.2019.1695358?journalCode=rwhr20>), was published in Women's History Review.

The article focuses on Beijing, because Zhang said most other scholarly works on the New Woman in Republican China tend to discuss Shanghai and present them as an icon of the country's modernity. "In response to this scholarly imbalance, my paper examines the generally neglected Beijing New Women with a concentration on their leisure-time activities such as skating, appreciating Beijing opera, and hosting salons (venues for intellectual exchange, socials and friendship)," Zhang described.

Zhang added that the New Woman distinguished herself from traditional women in her Western-style education, her modern look, and her social and political awareness. She argues that their activities transcended entrenched gender boundaries and demonstrated their power. These pastimes also went beyond self-recreation and turned out to be instrumental in sustaining the city's modern enterprises through the hard times of 1928 to 1937.

Gardner-Webb University is North Carolina's recognized leader in private, Christian higher education. A Carnegie-Classified Doctoral/Professional University, GWU is home to six professional schools, 14 academic departments, more than 80 undergraduate and graduate majors, and a world-class faculty. Located on a beautiful 225-acre campus in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb prepares graduates to impact their chosen professions, equips them with the skills to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and inspires them to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of others. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.