

HISTORY AND MODERN ISSUES IN SEX TRANSFORMATION DRUGS IN CHINA

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROJECT

This project focuses on sex selection drugs (SSDs) in China, known by names such as zhuan tai wan 轉胎丸 and zhuan tai yao 轉胎藥. The origins of foetal sex transformation in China can be traced back to medical texts as early as the 2nd century BCE, which has a profound theoretical background and historical trajectory. However, contemporary research into the medical history and social history of SSDs is still an under-researched area.

This project aims to employ a systematic historical analysis, incorporating theories and methodologies from the field of medical sociology, with a primary focus on the 20th century. Utilising source materials such as newspapers, medical journals, medical treatises, and archives, this study will trace the trajectory of the sex transformation drugs on the black market, and investigate how the theory and practice of prenatal sex transformation, gradually losing acceptance within the traditional Chinese medical community, were embraced by Taoist priests, diviners, and semi-secretive family practitioners without formal certification. It will explore the close connections between these practitioners and folk religion and how these practices spread and evolved into specialized medicinal traditions, particularly in rural China.

The research questions anticipated for this project are as follows: How did these concepts evolve from magico-religious practices in early medieval China, culminating in their transformation into specific medicinal applications in the early twentieth century? Moreover, what role did folk religions play during this transitional process within the realm of medical discourse and practice?

SCOPE OF WORK FOR SELECTED PHD STUDENT

The PhD student should possess foundational knowledge and research capability concerning the TCM theories and socio-medical history background involved in this project, along with the capacity to frame research results within the context of ongoing critical debates about gender, autonomy, reproduction and traditional versus modern biotechnologies. Proficiency in reading ancient Chinese texts, differentiating editions of pre-modern texts, and faithfully translating key passages will be part of the historical work. Furthermore, the student will also perform a literature review of methodological approaches and content-based studies surrounding SSDs and relevant modern biotechnologies. The student will prepare for ethics review board, determine relevant populations for interview and survey, generate surveys and conduct interviews.

The specific objectives of this project are to complete a doctoral dissertation within the defined timeframe and to publish a minimum of two original journal articles.

This project aims to redirect academic attention towards medical treatment domains outside the official narratives of TCM, where the boundaries are blurred and operated as the 'other,' yet holds a substantial audience base. Moreover, as a sociological study, this project seeks to raise broader social awareness of the prevalent SSDs in rural China, with the goal of minimizing the likelihood of further victims. Therefore, the student will also provide pilot online information/education deliverables, and an assessment of target audiences for such a campaign, and make proposals to public health organisations, whether state or NGO, within China.