

游鑑明,《運動場內外:近代華東地區的女子體育(1895-1937)》  
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Over the last fifteen years, Dr. Yu Chien-ming 游鑑明 has emerged as likely the most important historian of early twentieth-century Chinese and Taiwanese women's physical culture and physical education (體育). This 431-page tome focusing on women's physical culture in Eastern China during the late Qing and Republican eras confirms Yu's status and represents an impressive amount of research into this topic. Yu cites a very wide array of primary sources, including newspapers, magazines, memoirs and school publications; it is clear that she left very few stones unturned in her research for this volume.

The book begins by citing the narrative of Taiwan's national "humiliation" at the 2008 Olympic Games, formed by repeated apologies to the nation made by disappointed male athletes. Yu then contrasts this with the comments made by the Taiwanese female taekwondo competitor Su Liwen 蘇麗文, who, following her loss in the bronze medal round that year, stated only that she had let down her family (pp. 1-2). This contrast between the national orientation, even obsession, of Chinese men's physical culture ever since the early twentieth century and the relative lack of this factor in the world of Chinese women's physical culture is one of the main themes

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of Yu's work. She states clearly (pp. 5-6, 20) that she wants to move away from the idea of the nation as the guiding force in the modern history of women's physical education and sport. Instead of nationalism, Yu chooses instead to focus on other elements of modern physical culture that came from the West: new ideas, new behaviors, and complicated new ideologies that were produced by the intersections of popular culture, visual culture, sport, and physical education (p. 20).

Yu organizes this history into two main parts: (1) the understandings, goals, and desires of female athletes, and women in general, in their participation in modern physical culture, and (2) the views and ideologies about this women's physical culture cultivated by intellectuals, physical culture experts, reporters, students, feminist activists, artists, and advertisers. The book covers topics ranging from ideological proscriptions and policy-making to consumption and lived experiences.

This volume's concentration on Eastern China allows Yu to offer a thorough analysis of the region that was the center of modern physical culture during the late Qing and Republican eras. It is tantalizing to wonder how this history may have looked from other areas of China, while the timeframe of this work begs two questions. First, how was this picture of women's physical culture was changed by the coming of total war with Japan in 1937? Or even by the Communist revolution of 1949? (Obviously, though, as this book is 431 pages already, it would be far too much to expect Yu to cover these later periods as well.) The second question is, does not this timeframe inevitably suggest that, even if we move the focus away from the nation as a guiding force, women's modern physical culture was constructed within a larger framework of nation-building? In spite of Yu's repeated promises to "escape the old stereotype (窠臼)" (p. 20) of nationally-oriented histories of women's physical culture, the great majority of the primary sources she cites are from the period 1927-1937. Yet it was the relative political stability of Nationalist rule that made this

increasingly visible and important culture possible in the first place.

Yu guides the reader through a very wide range of sources, ideas, desires, critiques, and experiences of this world of women's physical culture. Chapter 1, on the general ideologies that defined this realm, suggests how constraining this world could be. If women were not being defined simply as "mothers of citizens" (國民之母) (p. 27), they were expected to conform to ideals of "healthy beauty" (健康美), which, as Yu points out, was very Western-centered and so restrictive that it could really only be achieved by the most specialized of women athletes (pp. 51-57). Women involved in physical culture also had to navigate the discourse of essential biological difference and its implications for what forms of exercise and sport would be socially acceptable. After some 18 pages of explaining these ideologies, Yu finally describes as "absurd" (荒謬) those men who opposed women's participation in more vigorous forms of exercise (p. 75). The reader certainly sympathizes with this judgment, but it would be more fulfilling if Yu had explained just what these conservative men, writing in influential newspapers like *Shenbao* (申報), were afraid of. What did new notions of female beauty and biology represent to them? What seemed to these conservatives to be both so crucial and so endangered that it could be destroyed by 18-year-old women taking up swimming?

Chapters 2 and 3 take us into the world of women's physical education in schools, from the question of mandatory P.E. uniforms (pp. 106-107), to students' sarcastic complaints about bad physical education instructors (p. 114), to the annoying boys who, in the name of "gender equality," insisted on being allowed to ogle at their female classmates in the swimming pool (p. 152), to those young women who protested and resisted having to take part in physical education classes (pp. 176-180). These experiences are all related through a wide range of rich sources, ranging from school publications to a piece written by the great writer Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (p.

178). Yu wraps up all of these anecdotes by reminding the reader of her point that women's physical culture was not all about the nation, but about "individual life" (p. 185). The evidence is on her side with regard to physical education in schools, but one wishes that Yu had gone farther in explaining what exactly made this culture so compelling to young women of the 1920s-30s. What other ideologies, fashions, desires, and fears did this culture resonate with that made so many young women all over Eastern China turn so overwhelmingly to participation in sport?

Chapters 4 through 6 provide the perspective of the news media, crowds, advertisers, and artists on the burgeoning public realm of women's sport. By the early 1930s, women athletes were bona fide stars, known on campus by catchy nicknames and, if they were successful or beautiful enough, covered extensively in the news media. Yu provides four brief examples of women athletes who became national stars: Harbin sprinter Sun Guiyun 孫桂雲, Shanghai sprinter-hurdler Qian Xingsu 錢行素, Shanghai sprinter-long jumper Li Sen 李森, and Hong Kong swimmer Yang Xiuqiong 楊秀瓊 (pp. 229-237). These women represented the most famous and public face of women's sports; the reader wishes that these short biographies had been more fully developed and integrated with the larger historical narrative that Yu has provided here.

The news media's role here was very complicated. Some publications seemed content merely to publish sensational and revealing photographs of female athletes' bodies, while others took the high road and chastised those ignorant fans who were obsessed with the bare flesh they could peep at during basketball games and swim meets (pp. 248-250, 282). This volume includes 95 illustrations, 44 in Chapter 5 alone, and the publisher's generosity is valuable as these rich images help further our understanding of this topic. Advertisers used images of female athletes to sell the idea of good health (p. 258), a commodity by the 1930s, and the upper-middle class

life (p. 264) that was so thoroughly associated with women's physical culture. But it is hard to ignore the ways that the nation still figured in all of this. It was not just in the soaring athletic meet anthems written by nationally-minded intellectuals such as Hu Shi 胡適 and Zhao Yuanren 趙元任 (p. 305). When cartoonists wondered about the possibly abnormal future "evolution" of female athletes (p. 275), or when Shanghai movie theaters promoted the cynical and exploitative 1934 American film "Search for Beauty" as relating to a "strong nation ... strong race ... strong bodies" (p. 295), they were engaging what many regarded as simple common sense about the relationship between modern physical culture and the needs of the modern nation-state. The histories that Yu provides in this volume are rich and evocative, although the reader may feel that they are not accompanied by sufficient analysis to prove that the question of the nation in modern Chinese physical culture is only an "old stereotype." Still, Yu has provided what is by far the definitive work on this topic. Future scholars of Chinese physical culture will be grateful for the immense amount of research that this work represents.