In this presentation, Dr Chen will analyse the content of the Mengxue bao 蒙學報 (The Children’s Educator, 1897–1902), the first children’s magazine established by Chinese editors. The talk will highlight how the editors of the Mengxue bao respected child readers by using colloquial language that was easier to understand, providing numerous illustrations to make the content more visually appealing, injecting humour into stories, and introducing them to children’s texts from other countries.
Shih-Wen Sue Chen

Strengthening the Mind and Nation: Chinese Reformers, Protestant Missionaries and the Mengxue bao (The Children’s Educator, 1897–1902)

Although Protestant missionaries had been publishing Chinese language periodicals for children since the 1870s, the Mengxue bao 蒙學報 (The Children’s Educator, 1897-1902) was the first magazine established by Chinese editors. The periodical was modelled on an American missionary publication, the Xiaohai yuebao (The Child’s Paper, 1875-1915), and launched by the Mengxue gonghui (Society for Enlightenment Education) in Shanghai. The Mengxue bao not only reflects changing concepts of childhood in China in the early twentieth century, it is also a rich site for uncovering educational debates and anxieties about China’s youth and China’s future in the late Qing and early Republican era.

The Mengxue bao editors were eager to promote Liang Qichao’s ideas of educational reform, criticising the existing Chinese system of education for stifling the minds of the young by requiring too much time to be devoted to rote memorisation. In this presentation, I compare the content of the journal with the articles published in the Xiaohai yuebao and delineate the influence of missionary publications on this Chinese magazine. The talk will highlight how the editors of the Mengxue bao respected child readers by using colloquial language that was easier to understand, providing numerous illustrations to make the content more visually appealing, injecting humour into stories, and introducing them to children’s texts from other countries.

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