

Politics of Female Sanitary Products: a gaze upon sexual bodies

Jiaqi Wang

Department of Gender Studies

Menstruation has long been considered an entrenched social taboo, and menstrual bleeding is inevitably associated with embarrassment and stigma, both of which have been given particular social meanings. As another menstrual correlative, politics of sanitary products connotes the image of menstruation constructed in social discourses. Applying a Foucauldian dominant discourses of menstruation in contemporary Chinese society based on the advertising of several brands of sanitary products, and subsequently examined the ways in which public discourses shape and construct personal perceptions of and practices in relation to menstruation.

It was observed that discourses of menstruation mainly encompass those of negativity and passivity of women's (sexual) bodies, of uncleanness and impurity, of shame and privacy as well as needs for concealment and invisibility, of illness and

pathology, and of sexuality. Moreover, female hygienic brands tend to construct their self-image as women's protector, their health carer, or their freedom giver, and they attempt to build a conceptual companionship with women. They are inclined to foreground menstruation and menstrual experiences, all of these indicating a kind of ideological output to female consumers.

In reality, female hygienic brands sell and promote both products and certain perceptions and practices, where bio-power is operated and circulates through the interactions of its different technologies. Individuals would contribute to constructing the "norms" (such as cleanliness and healthiness) the other way round, as responses to certain social ideologies such as the idealised femininity.