

# Friday Seminar

## Commodifying Blackness in Twentieth Century China



In 1933, the then Shanghai-based manufacturer Hawley & Hazel launched *Darkie*, a minty toothpaste that remained popular for the rest of the century in China and Southeast Asia. Translated as “Black Man Toothpaste” in Chinese, the brand played on the imagery of American blackface performers such as Al Jolson in their logos to portray the effectiveness of their commodity in improving dental health and personal hygiene that were rooted in a Western model of hygienic modernity. The alleged African origin of their ingredients also portrayed Africa as an exotic and resource-rich land, which engaged with Western colonial fantasies of Africa and reflected Chinese heightened racial and national anxieties both domestically and internationally.



Drawing from archival research, this talk traces three commodities between 1910s-1980s to explore the shifting meaning of blackness in the Chinese commodity world. By using blackness as an analytical category, I highlight the racial knowledge production in commodity culture and reflect on how Euro-American racial ideas and aesthetics on blackness/whiteness were incorporated into Chinese lives through quotidian consumptions.

**Feb 27**  
1:00 - 2:30PM  
NAH 213

**Lanya Feng** is a Ph.D. Candidate in History with a Collaborative Specialization in Women and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto. Funded by the Vanier Canada Scholarship, Lanya's dissertation explores the conceptualization and formation of blackness in China through everyday social interactions and the transnational circulations of racialized commodity aesthetics since the First Opium War.