



LOVE AND THE SENTIMENTAL FAMILY IN QING CHINA

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For much of the twentieth century, scholars have looked at the traditional Chinese family as a place of emotional repression that was hostile to intimacy and the expression of authentic feelings. The culture of filial piety, because of the way it reverses the biological logic that parents should sacrifice themselves for the survival of the next generation, has been dismissed as an unnatural form of ritualized duty imposed by feudal society. My paper argues for the need to reconceptualize how we talk about the culture of filial piety in late imperial China, and that we start considering it an expression of love that was core to many people's understanding of themselves as ethical and feeling subjects. I suggest that rather than follow the European tradition that positions romantic love at the center of histories of emotion and construction of self, that we use a China-centered approach and recognize filial piety as a, if not the, core emotion around which people constructed their affective self. Filial piety became especially important to some women in providing them an ethical basis from which to resist the cultural norms that saw girls as temporary sojourners in their natal families.

This talk comes out of a decade of research on filial piety in late imperial China following the publication of *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late-Imperial Chinese Fiction* (2001).

All are welcome. No registration is required. For enquiries, please contact Ms. Lucilla Cheng at luci@hku.hk.