Once a Daughter, Always a Daughter:
Women’s Natal Family Relationships in Late Imperial China

The patrilineal and virilocal nature of the traditional Chinese family places great emphasis on the affinal bond a woman has and, thus, very little attention is paid to a woman’s natal family relationships. However, it is clear through the writings of many women and men that this is an ideological over-simplification of the true nature of a woman’s natal family relationships; there is evidence in many writings that a woman has emotional, economic, and even legal ties with her natal family, even after marriage. This paper is a close analysis of three primary texts from Late Imperial China, ranging from the Late Ming Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty: three poems by Xi Peilan (1762 – 1820), a legal case about the murder of Ms. Ma (1795), and “A Biography of My Youngest Daughter Qiongzhang” written by Shen Yixiu (1590 – 1635). Each of these texts can serve as a genre-specific example of the complex daughter-natal family relationship dynamics, both before and after marriage.

Author
Sheng-Ning Annie Wang

Advisor
Professor
Sarah Schneewind

Major
History
General Biology

Picture on title slide: Du Jin 杜堇 (painted late 15th to early 16th centuries):
http://hua.umf.maine.edu/China/SMpainting/pages/10543wFemaleFigures.html