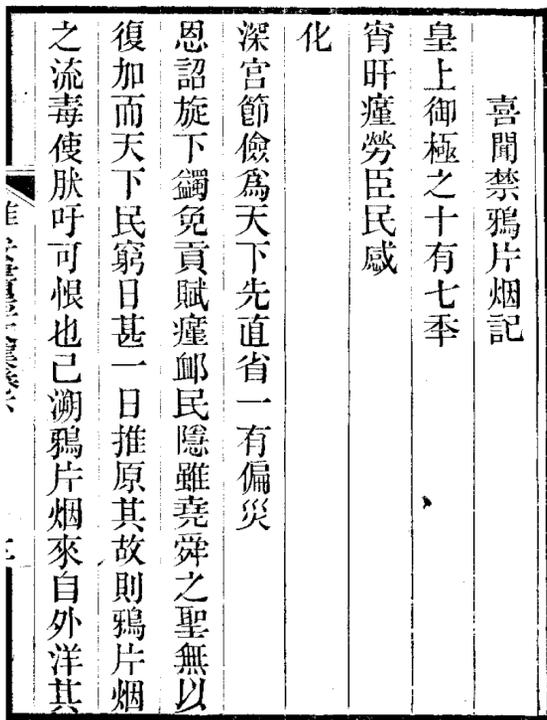


Welcome to the **Winter 2017 Speaker Series** of the **Indian Ocean World Centre**

Speaker: Prof. Grace S. Fong
Department of East Asian Studies, McGill University
16 February 2017
5:45 pm, Peterson Hall, Room 116

Lost in Private Writings: Women's Responses to Opium and the Opium Wars in Qing China



Recent decades have witnessed the remarkable discovery of the emergence and flourishing of a women's literary culture in China's last two imperial dynasties, the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911). Numerous women from literati families engaged in the pursuit of education and writing. The poetry they wrote were often printed as individual collections and circulated among family and friends. These private collections were not systematically preserved. Many perished in the vicissitudes of war and neglect; those that survived have ended up in rare book archives in China and are difficult to access. Launched in 2005 with 90 collections from the Harvard-Yenching Library, the Ming Qing Women's Writings digital archive and database has been designed to make such texts freely accessible online for research. With the collaboration of several Chinese university libraries and the National Library of China, the digital archive now contains close to 300 collections.

This unique digital resource enables research into women's lives and experiences that are articulated in their own words, offering insight into dimensions that have been obscured or overlooked because women were excluded from public life in pre-twentieth century China. By the time of the first Opium War (1839-1842), elite women had long established their literary presence, though not uncontested, in the world of letters; their upsurge from the late Ming incidentally parallels the steady spread of opium smoking in Chinese society leading up to the two Opium Wars. Because opium would be an uncommon topic for women to take up, this paper exploits the digital potentials afforded by the Ming Qing Women's Writings database to seek out their views on opium smoking and their experience of, and reaction to the Opium Wars recorded in their personal writings.



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