



ANU

China

Seminar

Series

**31**  
**MAY**  
**2017**

Wednesday, 4:00pm–5:30pm

SEMINAR ROOM A, CIW BUILDING

Australian Centre on China in the World,  
Building 188, Fellows Lane  
(between Law School and South Oval)

Jennifer W. Jay



*is professor of History and Classics at the  
University of Alberta, Canada*

## *Eunuchs from the Ming Dynasty to Qing's Ethno-Dynastic Order, 1500–1800*

Eunuchs were castrated male palace servants who wielded a fluctuating level of political and military powers from the Shang to the Qing. Under the Qing, their number and power reduced significantly. This paper argues that their diminished roles and functions can be explained not only by the process of sinicization but also by the Manchu Altaic system, which shared residual tribal traditions with other conquest dynasties. In particular, the paper will re-examine the place of eunuchs in the Qing ethno-dynastic order on the basis of their representation in two paintings in the University of Alberta's Mactaggart Art Collection.

ANU CHINA INSTITUTE



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31 May 2017, 4:00pm–5:30pm (WEDNESDAY)

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## *Eunuchs from the Ming Dynasty to Qing's Ethno-Dynastic Order, 1500–1800*

Eunuchs were castrated male palace servants who wielded a fluctuating level of political and military powers from the Shang (1766–1045 BCE) to the Qing (1644–1911). The Qing retained the imperial bodyguard and bondservant traditions that put all the eunuchs under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Household. As personal and menial servants of the emperor, eunuchs were expected to accompany him on hunts and imperial tours. Yet the number of eunuchs hired was reduced from 100,000 in the Ming to 2,000–3,000 in the Qing, and no Qing eunuch acquired the economic, political, or military powers of the Ming eunuchs who threatened the survival of the state.

The ANU China Seminar Series is the pre-eminent forum for discussion of China and the Sinophone world at the Australian National University, where over fifty senior academics as well as many post-doctoral fellows and graduate students conduct research on the region. Invited speakers come from across the full range of disciplines. They include senior scholars from in and outside the ANU, younger academics, post-doctoral research fellows, and advanced graduate students. The Seminar Series provides an arena in which to examine China in its widest sense, to acquaint people with a range of China-related research that might otherwise lie outside their scope of contact, and to offer a social setting for discussion of matters of mutual interest. It aims at a broad audience: members of academic staff from many fields; undergraduate and graduate students; policy-makers; and interested members of the public. With the consent of speakers, seminars are recorded and made publicly available through the Seminar Series' website to build an archive of research on the Sinophone world. The seminar runs on alternate Thursdays during the ANU's teaching terms.

### AFTER THE SEMINAR

To allow for informal discussion, the seminar will be followed by a dinner with the guest speaker at 6.15 pm. All are welcome, though those who attend will need to pay for their own food and drinks. As a reservation must be made, please RSVP by noon of the day before the seminar to [jasmine.lin@anu.edu.au](mailto:jasmine.lin@anu.edu.au).

The China Seminar Series is sponsored by the China Institute, the Research School of Asia and the Pacific, and the Australian Centre on China in the World at The Australian National University.

Convenors: Amy King ([amy.king@anu.edu.au](mailto:amy.king@anu.edu.au)), Elisa Nesossi ([elisa.nesossi@anu.edu.au](mailto:elisa.nesossi@anu.edu.au)), and Mark Strange ([mark.strange@anu.edu.au](mailto:mark.strange@anu.edu.au)).

**For further details of the series:**  
<http://chinainstitute.anu.edu.au>

This paper will examine the presence and representation of eunuchs from 1500 to 1800. It will argue that the process of sinicization does not adequately explain the practice of employing eunuchs in the Qing court. The diminished roles and functions of Qing eunuchs are better explained by the Manchu Altaic system, which shared residual tribal traditions with other conquest dynasties—the Khitan Liao, the Jurchan Jin, and the Mongol Yuan. In particular, the paper will re-examine the place of eunuchs in the Qing ethno-dynastic order on the basis of their representation in two paintings in the University of Alberta's Mactaggart Art Collection—Kangxi's Southern Inspection Tour Scroll 7 and Qianlong's Southern Inspection Tour Scroll 2.

JENNIFER W. JAY is professor of History and Classics at the University of Alberta, where her teaching fields have led her to do research on the history and politics of other dynasties, women's studies, and the history of drama. She is completing a manuscript on the social history of eunuchs in Imperial China.



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