

TITLE

Gender Passing and Official Panic in Qing Dynasty China

ABSTRACT

This talk presents three case studies from eighteenth and nineteenth century China of anatomical males who lived as women, while carefully concealing their assigned sex from others. One presented herself as a widow and had a successful career as a midwife for thirty years. Two others made a living as spirit mediums, and enjoyed long-term relationships with male partners whom they served as wives. All three were eventually exposed, with disastrous consequences. What were the circumstances of these individuals' lives, and how did Qing officials interpret their violation of normative gender boundaries?