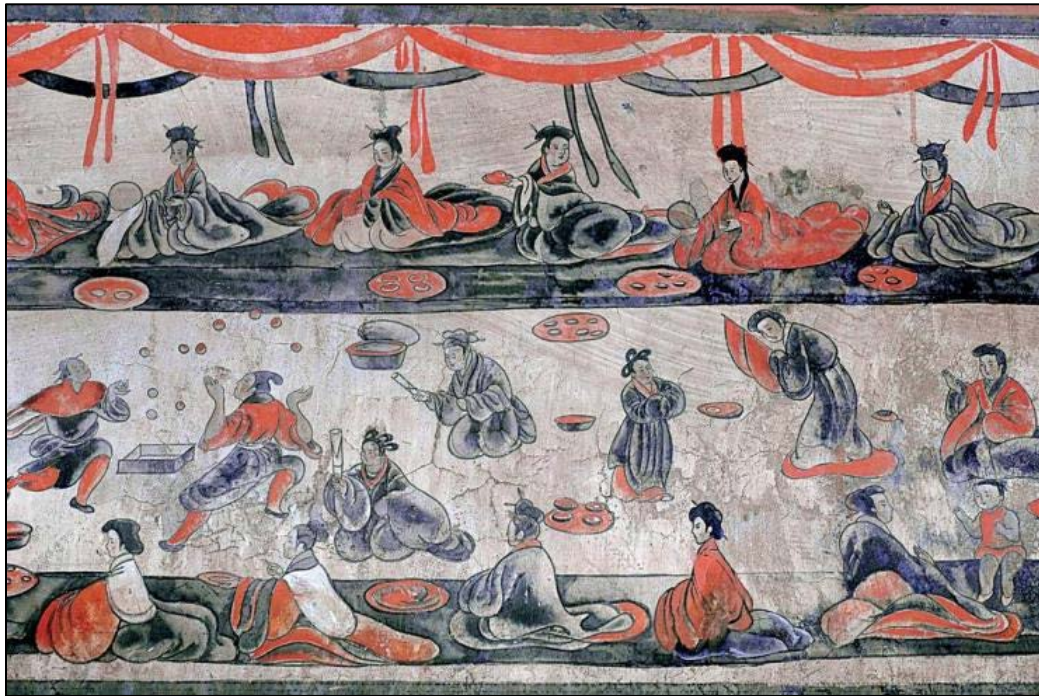




## EARLY CHINA SEMINAR LECTURE SERIES

### Good Wives? Jealousy and Domestic Violence in Marriages in Early China

Olivia Milburn · Seoul National University



Throughout Chinese history, jealousy (*du 妒*) has been a characteristic attributed exclusively to women. However, while in the pre-unification era, jealousy was regarded as binary and some women were believed to not be jealous; by the late Han dynasty this emotion was considered as a spectrum and all women were considered jealous to a greater or lesser extent. Jealousy was also problematized as the prime motivation of domestic violence by women. Excavated legal documents provide important information about how violent women were dealt with by the law, which in turn throw new light upon reported incidents of domestic violence in ancient texts. Social hierarchy and patriarchy interacted in a complex way to direct violence largely away from spouses, and towards concubines.

Prescriptive texts that discuss the behavior of married women in Early China stress they should be modest, restrained, and submissive. Similar ideas can be found both in transmitted texts and in excavated material, and are reasserted in a wide variety of ritual and philosophical writings. However, at the same time, some texts report an alternative perspective, which would become the dominant understanding of interpersonal relationships between married couples from the late Han dynasty onwards. This saw men as feckless creatures, incapable of controlling their sexual urges, who needed strong wives to monitor their activities and stop them getting into trouble. As this idea gained in popularity, jealousy and even outright violence by married women became increasingly socially acceptable, as it was seen as safeguarding the family.

**November 6, 2020  
7:00-9:00pm EST**

#### **Seminar Co-Chairs:**

Jue Guo, Barnard College, Columbia University  
Glenda Chao, Ursinus College

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