



EARLY CHINA SEMINAR
LECTURE SERIES

Cheap Substitutes or Fashionable Luxuries? The Use of Iron Mirrors in the Eastern Han

Yanlong Guo · Smith College

In Winter 2009, the Xigaoxue Tomb no. 2 in Anyang, Henan province, the alleged burial site of Cao Cao (d. 220 CE), yielded an iron mirror along with other funerary goods. To date, dozens of iron mirrors, some inlaid with gold and silver, have been unearthed from Eastern Han tombs (25-220 CE). In contrast to the well-studied bronze mirrors, their counterparts cast in iron have received scant scholarly attention. Why were iron mirrors produced and used in the Han? Who had owned these now rusty discs? Were they understood as inferior substitutes for mirrors made of bronze, a semi-precious metal at the time? Or did they represent a new fashion in the mirror industry? This talk explores these interrelated questions through an examination of written records concerning iron production and iron mirrors, as well as a survey of archaeological evidence of iron mirrors scattered through recently published reports. It employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the socio-economic status of the mirror owners, while foregrounding the tensions between mass production of iron as a common raw material and the luxurious consumption of iron mirrors as treasured toilette articles.



**February 21, 2020
4:30–6:30pm**

**Faculty House, 64 Morningside Drive,
Columbia University**

*please check the announcement board in the first floor lobby for room information

Seminar Co-Chairs:

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

Co-sponsored by The Tang Center for Early China, Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, and The Columbia University Seminars, Columbia University