



EARLY CHINA SEMINAR  
LECTURE SERIES

**Fields, Markets and Tress:  
Contending Paradigms of Growth in Early China**

**Romain Graziani** · École Normale Supérieure de Lyon



The words “Fields,” “Markets” and “Trees” encapsulate three economic orientations, three distinct political agendas, and three rival visions of the natural world in early China. The first paradigm I shall examine, whose emblem is the field (arable land and battlefield) determines one major strand of economic thought. I will question its rationale and its assumptions according to which exclusive agricultural development is the only avenue to the reinforcement of the state. The second paradigm, which centers on the image of the market (with its complex semantic gradient from the village fair to the locus where state-wide forces of supply and demand converge), makes way for an alternative model of economic growth based on the promotion and/or partial rehabilitation of merchants and traders, in a more sophisticated view of wealth. The third paradigm, symbolized by wild untrimmed trees, reflects a powerful reaction of certain pre-imperial thinkers against the coercive domestication and selection of plants, animals and humans by a centralized and increasingly bureaucratized state. After describing how these rival paradigms of human and social development took shape during the pre-imperial period and exploring their dialectical interactions in major written sources of the preimperial an early imperial periods (*Shangjunshu*, *Guanzi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Yantielun*), I will question their rationale, their goals, their strengths and limitations, their ideological underpinnings, and the kind of human activities they tend to promote or proscribe in the elite as well as among commoners.

**April 24, 2020, 4:30–6:30pm**

**Kent 403, 1140 Amsterdam Avenue, Columbia University**

**Seminar Co-Chairs:**

Jue Guo, Barnard College, Columbia University

Glenda Chao, Ursinus College

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