



EARLY CHINA SEMINAR
LECTURE SERIES

How Classical Chinese Grammar Looked to Its First Native Students



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Yáng Shùdá 楊樹達 (1885–1956) produced some of the fullest and most carefully documented native grammar studies of Classical Chinese on modern principles, during the first three decades of the Republic of China. He read and critiqued the work of Mǎ Jiànzhōng 馬建忠 (1845–1900), Chén Chéngzé 陳承澤 (1885–1922), and Zhāng Shìzhāo 章士釗 (1881–1973) with great care and revised their ideas to produce what he considered a more consistent overall grammatical system. But it is strange that Yáng, with his vast traditional knowledge of Classical Chinese, did not see some of the simplifications that Structuralist systematic thinking permitted people like George A. Kennedy (1901–60) and Peter Boodberg (1903–72) in the 1940s and 50s. In some cases Yáng and the others considered and rejected ideas that made sense to later scholars, such as treating adjectives and verbs as a single part of speech.

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4:30-6:30pm 403 Kent Hall,
1140 Amsterdam Avenue
Columbia University

Seminar Co-Chairs:

Jue Guo, Barnard College, Columbia
University
Roderick Campbell, Institute for the
Study of Ancient World, New York
University

Why they did so is easy to take as proof of the direct influence of European grammar books as models for the early decades of native Chinese grammar — the brothers Mǎ had been educated in Latin as boys, and Yáng had studied English. I argue that this view is too simple to fit the facts. Perhaps the resistance of Yáng and the others to greater simplification also reveals what as natively literate scholars they thought were irreducible semantic distinctions in Classical Chinese.

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