



EARLY CHINA SEMINAR LECTURE SERIES

The Han River as the Central Axis and the Predominance of Water: Questioning the Claim of “No Chu-related Traits” in the View of Terrestrial Space in the *Rong Cheng shi* Manuscript (4th c. BCE)

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Map of China, Sino-Korean Atlas (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München)

The description of the “Nine Provinces” (*Jiu zhou* 九州) found in the *Rong Cheng shi* 容成氏 (Mister Rong Cheng?, late 4th century BCE) manuscript from the Shanghai Museum Bamboo Slips Collection is the only manuscript version of it known to date. Its discovery immediately raised the question of its relation to the cluster of descriptions on the “Nine Provinces” transmitted from the late Warring States to the early Western Han periods. There is general consensus that the manuscript description of the “Nine Provinces” has close affinity with the transmitted descriptions, as well as with a wide spectrum of transmitted early Chinese texts in general. It is distinguished by the eclectic combining of known spatial concepts, rather than manifesting any radically new or specifically Chu traits. In this study I reassess this impression with respect to the reference to the Han River in the manuscript, which up to now has been noted only in passing as an unsolved puzzle. I argue that the Han River is referred to here as the central axis that divides

terrestrial space into southern and northern halves, something that implies a shifting of the mapped area to the South and thus conveys a Chu view of space. Together with philological analysis of the descriptions of terrestrial space, I apply an innovative method of investigation of them through landmarks, using as a visual aid traditional Chinese historical maps. In addition, I explore the predominance of waters as the distinguishing feature of the representation of terrestrial space in the *Rong Cheng shi* manuscript and demonstrate its difference from the structuring of terrestrial space proceeding from mountains to waterways to be seen in the majority of transmitted early Chinese texts.

December 10, 2021, 12:00–2:00pm EST (Virtual)

For attendance information, please visit www.tangcenter-columbia.org

Seminar Co-Chairs:

Glenda Chao, Ursinus College

Ethan Harkness, New York University

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