



EARLY CHINA SEMINAR
LECTURE SERIES

Engineering and Defense in the Later Mohist Military Chapters: The Organization of People, Objects, and Landscapes

Erica Brindley · Pennsylvania State University

In this talk, I examine how the Later Mohists articulated an infrastructure of power and authority in their military writings, and how they hoped to mobilize both human labor and material goods through an efficacious blend of rituals and hierarchical command. First, I lay out some key aspects of their multifaceted approach to defending cities against siege warfare. I emphasize the comprehensive nature of Later Mohist efforts to control the natural and social environment of the city and its surroundings. I then focus on a few



scenarios that shed light on Later Mohist strategic planning and thought, demonstrating their careful and meticulous approach to engineering—not merely in terms of designing machines and weapons but in terms of designing sets or stages for the effective and interactive application of human effort and technology. I employ the metaphor of the Later Mohist engineer as “stagehand” to underscore this aspect of their contributions. This analysis provides an opportunity for scholars to re-examine the seemingly mundane, nuts-and-bolts writings of the Later Mohist military chapters and uncover important insights into the intersections between the physical and mental topographies of ancient China.

May 6, 2022, 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:

Glenda Chao, Ursinus College

Ethan Harkness, New York University