



EARLY CHINA SEMINAR
LECTURE SERIES

Tracing the Origins and Evolution of the Signature System in Early Imperial China

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In Juyan Han manuscripts, distinct handwriting styles for personal names can be discerned within official documents. Through a review of prior research, I will argue that these represent signatures, and at least during the mid-Western Han period (around 50 BCE), the signature system was prevalent across the Empire. Moreover, drawing upon newly excavated manuscripts, it can be grasped that from Western Han, through Eastern Han, to the Three Kingdoms era, the types of official documents requiring signatures continued to increase, and the signers expanded from senior officials to basic-level junior officials, indicating that the use of signatures in administrative culture became more widespread. This presentation aims to demonstrate that it can be attributed to the growing recognition of handwriting's validity, which became no less significant than that of a seal. Additionally, an observation will be made regarding how the transition of writing materials from wood and bamboo to paper affected the usage of stamps and signatures.



February 2, 2024, 4:30–6:30 pm

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