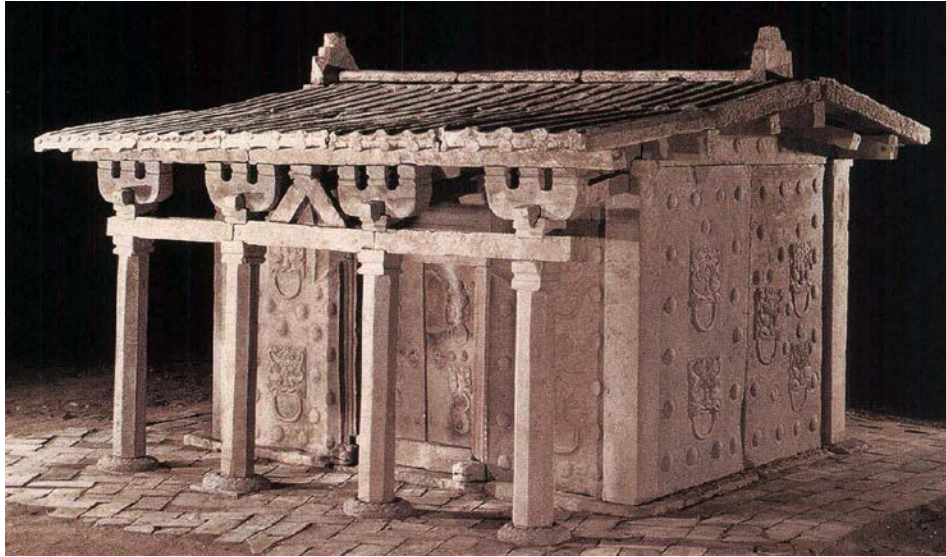




EARLY CHINA SEMINAR  
LECTURE SERIES

## Staging the Corpse: Performativity and Materiality in Northern Wei Mortuary Art

Fan Zhang · Tulane University



This talk, deriving from one chapter of my current book project, examines an innovative mortuary practice developed during the Northern Wei period. Rather than concealing corpses in coffins, which was the predominant way of burying the dead in early China, residents at Northern Wei capital Pingcheng experimented with something unconventional—exposing the body on a funerary bed and placing the bed inside an architectonic chamber. I argue that this new way of burying the dead is a performative enactment of the idealized portraiture of the deceased, functioning as a token of status. I address the issue of materiality in funerary architecture by examining the skeuomorphic transformation from wood to stone as the dominant material to produce the funerary bed-and-chamber set. Lastly, this talk investigates the identities of the tomb occupants. I suggest that this new mortuary practice, which first appeared in a Xianbei woman's tomb, later became widely adopted by Pingcheng residents of different ethnicities, contributing to forming a shared identity in the capital.

**February 7, 2025, 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

*Registration required. Please RSVP at [www.tangcenter-columbia.org](http://www.tangcenter-columbia.org) by February 2*

**Seminar Co-Chairs:**

Glenda Chao, Ursinus College

Ethan Harkness, New York University

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