



EARLY CHINA SEMINAR  
LECTURE SERIES

## Subtle Politics: The Case of Ritual Music in the Northern Zhou

Noa Hegesh · Tel Aviv University



Musical culture serves as a lens through which we can view the vast demographic, religious, social, and political transformations that took place during the Period of Division (220-589 CE). Over these nearly four centuries, diverse musical pieces, theories, instruments, and customs flourished, influenced both by internal non-Han cultures and external channels such as the Silk Road. These changes reshaped musical ensembles, sonority, iconography, and

philosophies. At the same time, traditional debates, rooted in the intellectual traditions of dynastic solidification through the cultural pillars of music and ritual, continued in the vein of their Han predecessors. These debates now bore the burden of signaling stability amidst a precarious environment. This lecture will argue that debates over court music extended beyond a mere selection of pieces or ensembles; experts employed music theory to reflect the political ideologies they supported. I will focus on a significant dispute within the Northern Zhou (557-581 CE) regarding the number and arrangement of ritual bells. This debate marked a moment of transformation where the old became new, and the new became old. This discussion is particularly intriguing given the current lack of archaeological evidence of large bells from the Period of Division.

**April 11, 2025, 4:30–6:30 pm (Virtual)**

*Registration required. Please RSVP at [www.tangcenter-columbia.org](http://www.tangcenter-columbia.org) by April 6*

### Seminar Co-Chairs:

Glenda Chao, Ursinus College

Ethan Harkness, New York University

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