



EARLY CHINA SEMINAR
LECTURE SERIES

**The Cult of the Yellow Emperor in China: Heritage, Identity,
and Local Placemaking**
Shu-Li Wang · Academia Sinica



China's ancient history and the myths of common ancestors have played a crucial role in shaping contemporary Chinese national identity. This talk examines the revival of ancestral cults—particularly the veneration of the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi)—in distinctly new forms in today's China. It explores key themes such as intangible cultural heritage, religious revival, history-making, the construction of locality, and national identity. Drawing on case studies and fieldwork in Henan, the talk analyzes how local governments and cultural actors strategically brand “Yellow Emperor culture” to engage in interregional heritage competition and craft distinctive local identities. It argues that the resurgence of Yellow Emperor worship—a legendary ancestral figure—has been driven by the forces of nationalism, a grassroots search for tradition, and religious revitalization. This revival also entails the active search for and reinterpretation of historical narratives, contributing to the ongoing construction of history in the present. Ultimately, the talk contends that global heritage discourses offer legitimizing frameworks that enable diverse localities in China to assert their cultural distinctiveness. In doing so, they foster new forms of cultural and religious expression that actively contribute to the construction of national identity in contemporary China.

December 5th, 2025, 4:30–6:30 pm
Kent Hall 403, 1140 Amsterdam Ave., Columbia University

Seminar Co-Chairs:
Glenda Chao, Ursinus College
Ethan Harkness, New York University

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