



EARLY CHINA SEMINAR
LECTURE SERIES

Divergent Paths: Ritual, Power, and Collective Action in Liangzhu and Shijiahe

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This talk explores how collective action shaped social complexity in two of early China's prominent late Neolithic centers: Liangzhu and Shijiahe. Both sites, dating to around 5500 BP, achieved large-scale urbanism and undertook extensive public works, yet they diverged significantly in political organization, ritual practice, and elite infrastructure. Drawing on recent archaeological findings, I argue that while Liangzhu reflects a model in which elite control and symbolic monopolies were central to power, Shijiahe presents a more decentralized structure characterized by inclusive ritual practices and minimal elite materialization. By analyzing construction methods, labor organization, and ritual distribution, I suggest that collective action could generate contrasting trajectories of governance and social cohesion. These two cases demonstrate the multilineal nature of social development and highlight how ritual and labor mobilization functioned both as instruments of elite authority and as expressions of communal agency.

February 27th, 2026, 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

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