

THE EAST ASIA CENTER PRESENTS

A TALK BY

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***THE TRANSFORMATION OF  
BURIAL SPACE IN EARLY  
CHINA***

THIS TALK DISCUSSES THE TRANSFORMATION IN THE SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT OF EARLY CHINESE BURIALS FROM A PREDOMINATELY VERTICAL PIT-STYLE TOMB IN THE SHANG-ZHOU DYNASTIES TO A HORIZONTAL CHAMBER-STYLE TOMB OF THE QIN AND HAN PERIODS BY EXPLORING THE RICH ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIALS EXCAVATED IN SOUTH CHINA IN RECENT DECADES. IT ARGUES THAT SUCH A CHANGE, ON THE ONE HAND, REFLECTS THE CULTURAL CONTACT AMONG THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN STATES AND BETWEEN THE CENTRAL KINGDOMS AND THE PERIPHERAL REGIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT IS THE RESULT OF THE MATERIALIZATION OF A CHANGED IMAGINATION OF THE AFTERLIFE, IN WHICH THE DECEASED NEED A PLACE (“SHISHI,” “SHITANG” OR “CITANG”) WITHIN THE BURIAL SO THAT THEY COULD CONTINUE TO SACRIFICE TO THEIR ANCESTORS IN THE AFTERLIFE AND ALSO TO RECEIVE SACRIFICES FROM THEIR OFFSPRING. THE STRUCTURE OF THE TOMB IS CONSEQUENTLY NOT ONLY AN ARCHITECTURAL SPACE BUT ALSO A SITE OF IMAGINATION IN WHICH PEOPLE’S BELIEFS OF THE AFTERLIFE DEVELOPED. THE TOMB CONSTRUCTION DEVELOPED DURING THE WARRING STATES PERIOD IS MODELED ON THE CHANGING COSMOLOGIES IN EARLY CHINA, AND THE BURIAL IS A PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION OF THE CONCEPTIONS OF THE UNIVERSE AND THE AFTERLIFE.

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