

Asian Languages and Cultures Lecture Series

The Great Wall as a Climate Frontier: Towards an Integrated Study of the Ordos Region

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In Chinese history the Great Wall has been regarded primarily as a political boundary, a military frontier, and an economic divide between agriculturalists and pastoralists. A climatic and environmental approach to the northern regions of China where the Great Wall was erected (in various forms and different periods) shows a high degree of variability primarily dependent on the East Asian Monsoons. These are responsible for the amount of yearly precipitation, thus causing droughts or above average rainfalls that changed the local ecology. This talk focuses on the Ordos region, located in the upper part of the loop of the Yellow River, where the earliest walls were built in the Warring States period (5th-3rd century BCE), and remained a sensitive political, economic and climatic zone until the early modern period. Climate studies show how this region was subject to drastic environmental changes that may have affected political decisions involving defensive structures and military occupation, or economic decisions such as opening up land to settlers. The relationship between Chinese dynasties and nomadic peoples may also have been subject to climatic variability. An integrated historical and climatic study of the Ordos region will show interdependencies and correspondences between natural and human dynamics.

Friday, November 8, 2024
3:00pm - 4:30pm

Academic Building-West
Room 3100