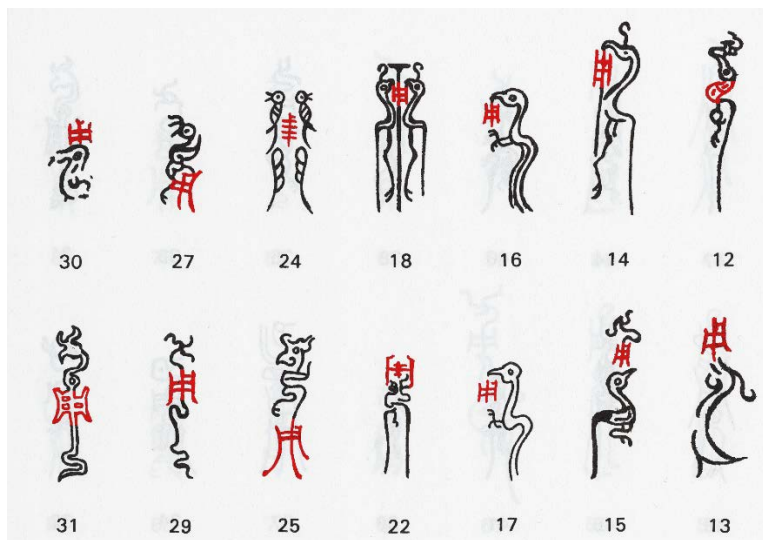




**‘Classical Chinese’ and its Discontents:  
What, if anything, was yǎyán 雅言 (‘refined language’)?**

**Wolfgang Behr** · University of Zürich



The language of pre-imperial China is usually presented as if it was an entity isolated from external influences, isolating in its morphological structure, monolithic in its geographical spread and petrified in its diachronic characteristics. Through the reductive lens of Early Imperial exegetes and lexicographers, idealized linguistic norms have been retroactively imposed onto the dim and distant past, more often than not tacitly serving the various ideological preferences of the present. While it is difficult to steer clear of the omnipresent “normative” pressure of Warring States and Western Han sociopolitical discourse, the talk will provide a few glimpses at linguistic variation in Early China. Looking both at transmitted and excavated texts, I will attempt to complicate narratives of unification, centralization and purity, which have quietly crept into the few available linguistic descriptions, and introduce some linguistic tools which may ultimately help us dig beyond the rhetoric and editorial tampering of the competing Han classicist guardians of the textual canon.

**November 2, 2018, 4:30–6:30pm**

**Faculty House, 64 Morningside Drive, Columbia University**

\*please check the announcement board in the first floor lobby for room information

**Seminar Co-Chairs:**

Jue Guo, Barnard College, Columbia University

Glenda Chao, Ursinus College

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