

CHRP Research Seminar Series 文史宗哲研究講座系列

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Xu Xiake 徐霞客 (1587-1641) and the Cultural Discourse on Rock Shelters and Caves in Late Imperial China

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Date: 5 December 2025 (Fri)

Time: 2:30 pm

Venue: WLB208

In the modern Chinese language, the character yan (巖/岩), is usually understood to mean a rock, crag, or cliff. A reading of the travel diaries of Xu Xiake, alongside earlier writings by other authors, however, reveals the frequency with which this word was traditionally used in another sense, that of rock shelters. Understanding the distinction between rock shelters and caves enables us to see how Xu Xiake's observations during the late Ming period relate to the larger picture of Chinese attitudes to the natural environment. In this way, we can reach a fuller appreciation of Xu's cave aesthetics.