

The Environmental History of the Yangzi River Valley Wetlands



Dr Brian Lander
(Brown University)

2pm, 13 Oct (Thursday), 2022 (in-person seminar)

Room 4, Lecture Block, Sidgwick Site (note venue change)

Abstract

The southward shift of Chinese civilization over the past two millennia has traditionally been described as a triumph achieved through the laborious transformation of the Yangzi valley's miserable swamps into luxuriant rice paddies. But the swamps were not miserable to the many types of animals that called them home, and it is worth considering that history from their perspective. This talk will discuss how the highly biodiverse seasonal wetlands of the Yangzi River valley were replaced by farmland, and the difficulties historians face in trying to reconstruct and narrate this history. Key themes are agriculture, demographics, politics, and how these affect the building of water control infrastructure.

Speaker

Dr Brian Lander is a historian of early China and the author of *The King's Harvest: A Political Ecology of China from the First Farmers to the First Empire* and various articles on China's environmental history. He is assistant professor of history at Brown University, and a fellow of the Institute at Brown for Environment and Society. He will be at the Needham Research Institute during the Michaelmas Term of 2022.

