

Coffee Time Talks on Chinese Thought



# Hypothesis of “Episode Text” and the Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts

Tae Hyun Kim, Ph.D

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Zoom ID: 984 9500 6071; <https://slu.zoom.us/j/98495006071>

With an increasing number of excavations and discoveries of hitherto unknown early written materials, such as oracle-bone and bronze inscriptions, or bamboo-slip and silk manuscripts, today’s scholars in Chinese History and Religion have cast grave doubts upon traditional assumptions and arguments about early cultural ideas and practices in the formative stages of Chinese civilization. In his talk, examining some recently discovered bamboo-slip manuscripts in comparison to their counterparts in received texts, Dr. Kim first hypothesizes the existence of discrete and self-contained textual units, termed as “Episode Text,” and argues that textual lineages in Early China were much less coherent and much more variegated than has been assumed in the common constructs of intellectual history, and a received text, especially one that bears the surname of a “master,” was an outcome of long-term and various editorial processes that spanned multi-generations of editors whose identities or orientations are no longer confirmable. Using the case of the transmitted Zhuangzi text, Dr. Kim challenges the traditional framework of early Chinese intellectual history that is constructed on three pillars, master (author), text, and school.



**Tae Hyun Kim** is a Visiting Lecturer in Pre-modern Chinese Literature and East Asian Religions at Washington University in St. Louis. He received his Ph.D. in Chinese from UC Berkeley in 2019. He is now working on his first book manuscript, tentatively entitled “Memory and Story of the Past: The Formation of the Idea of History in Early China.”

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