

GUEST LECTURE

Common Elements of an Axial Age?

Comparative Perspectives on Ancient China and Ancient Egypt

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In this lecture Prof. Poo re-examines the theory of the Axial Age by first investigating the case of China, situating the findings in the context of the on-going scholarly discussions on the idea of the Axial Age as proposed by Jaspers and expounded by subsequent generations of scholars. A comparison with the case of ancient Egypt will then follow, examining burial custom of ancient Egypt and the associated funerary texts. This lecture essentially holds that the concept of the Axial Age, a philosophical interpretation of certain historical phenomena found in a number of early civilizations, should not be seen as a "historical rule" or "evolutionary rule" in the development of the history of mankind. The concept might be a useful starting point to engage in the comparative study of civilizations, but it also has the problem of favoring certain cultural traits in selected civilizations, and ignoring some other parts and aspects of human history if we wish to see humanity as really a united one.

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