To understand China is, in many ways, to be mindful of how its self-proclaimed political and opinion leaders have tried to stretch—in the words of the late Benedict Anderson (1936–2015)—"the short, tight, skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire." While "China" as a political and cultural entity has certainly been an object of imagination, how such imaginations have been manifested have changed over time. This talk will draw on three distinct research projects (that range, in terms of temporal scope, from the Song dynasty to the present) and will explain how the particular case studies could, individually as well as collectively, shed light on the trouble with various claims of "Chineseness".

Leo K. Shin is Associate Professor of History and Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. A former reporter for The Hong Kong Standard, he is the author of The Making of the Chinese State: Ethnicity and Expansion on the Ming Borderlands (Cambridge, 2006) and an editor of the Dang dai xi fang Han xue yan jiu ji cui [Selected contemporary Western scholarship on Chinese studies] 當代西方漢學研究集萃 series (Shanghai, 2012). He is now writing a book about the (after) lives of the Song-dynasty general Yue Fei. For more on his research interests, please see: http://www.history.ubc.ca/faculty/lshin/research/index.htm.