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Department of Asian
and North African Studies

Ph.D. Program in Asian
and African Studies



Ancient Literature: China in the World

Martin Kern, Princeton University

November 15, 2018, h. 17:15 - San Basilio, Aula OE
Repertoires and Composite Texts: What is a Poem?

We know ancient Chinese poetry as fixed, discrete, self-contained units ("poems") distinct from other such units; this is how it survived over two millennia. But what exactly is "ancient Chinese poetry," how did it come into being, and how did it circulate in the ancient performance tradition? Rather than thinking of individual poems, we can think of them as composite texts instantiated in various ways from larger repertoires of poetic material.

December 13, 2018, h. 17:15 - San Basilio, Aula OE
**Manuscripts on Silk and Bamboo:
Opportunities and Questions**

Large numbers of ancient Chinese manuscripts on bamboo, wood, and silk have been discovered in recent decades. Many of these were stolen from unknown sites in mainland China and then sold on the Hong Kong antiquities market. While the manuscripts offer entirely new insights into the world of Chinese antiquity and allow us to reconsider many traditional ideas, they also raise enormous methodological, ethical, and legal challenges.

February 12, 2019, h. 17:00 - Palazzo Vendramin, Sala A
"Li sao" and the Making of China's First Poet

The "Li sao" (Encountering Sorrow), the greatest poem of ancient China and the epitome of its elegiac tradition, is regarded as Qu Yuan's (trad. ca. 340-278 BCE) personal lament while in exile. Yet close analysis offers a different conclusion: the poem is not the origin but the culmination of the "Qu Yuan tradition"; it is not his creation but, instead, is composed of the diverse poetic forms in which his story was remembered and told a century after his death.

March 14, 2019, h. 17:00 - Palazzo Vendramin, Sala A
**The King's Speech and the Performance
of Sovereignty**

The *Classic of Documents* preserves a series of speeches attributed to the Chinese kings of high antiquity, utterances assigned to the most critical moments in the founding, crisis, and fall of successive dynasties. While canonized as

historical documents after the founding of the empire in 221 BCE, they reflect a dynamic ancient tradition of memory and performance in which the culture heroes of old were staged as actors, speakers, and singers.

April 18, 2019, h. 17:00 - Palazzo Vendramin, Sala A
**Beyond Nativism: Ethics and Method
in the Study of Ancient China**

New manuscript finds, methodological approaches, and "big data" offer exciting perspectives for the study of ancient China that did not exist a generation ago. Yet within the Chinese academy, a monolingual, monocultural nativism in defense of cultural and national identity remains an influential force. The answer to it lies in rigorous comparative work that recognizes the significance of early China as part of the global ancient world.

May 8, 2019, h. 17:00 - Palazzo Vendramin, Sala A
World Literature or Global Literature?

The "global literature" of our time erases the idea of Goethe's "world literature": where world literature thrives on intra- and intercultural alterity, global literature conforms to the universal market. Examples from Chinese poetry show how world literature is still possible but only if we recognize, with Adorno as our guide, its radical stance of difference both at home and abroad. To preserve this dual alterity is the ultimate task of the translator.

About the Speaker:

Professor Martin Kern is the Chair of the Department of East Asian Studies at Princeton University. He has published extensively across the fields of literature, philology, history, religion, and art in ancient and medieval China. His current book project is titled *Performance, Memory, and Authorship in Ancient China: The Formation of the Poetic Tradition*. At Princeton, Kern leads the new university-wide initiative "Comparative Antiquity"; at Renmin University of China (Beijing), he directs the "International Center for the Study of Ancient Text Cultures."