**Comparative Global Antiquity**

A Workshop at Yale-NUS

August 2-4 2019

In this gathering, we’ll be thinking about three conceptual and methodological keywords: “comparative,” “global,” and “antiquity.” The disciplines of comparative literature, linguistics, history, politics, religion (which is different from comparative theology) are long established fields. Almost all written cultures of the world have a period that they designate “antiquity,” along with a canon of received or discovered texts that are called “classics.” (Or do they?) Traditional scholarship largely studies the various national and historical languages within circumscribed disciplinary boundaries. In recent decades, however, particularly in the field of classical reception, scholars have begun to scholars have begun to integrate comparative approaches in the construction of antiquity and the understanding of “classics” or the “classical.”

We are foregrounding comparison as an activity, methodology, mode of thinking, a way of dealing with differences and similarities in the ancient world. Indeed, our terminology of “classics” or “ancient” or “antique” already presupposes a dialectical opposing term, whether it be “medieval,” “modern,” “vernacular,” or even “baroque” or “romantic” (and these are periods styles from European literary history. Other fields will have their own). For example, does the use of “classical” in itself denote the kind of value judgement about certain periods of the past that is more overt in the term “ancient”? In what way does global comparisons elide or ignore those traditions that are primary oral or non-textual? What are the promises and perils of a global study of antiquity?

In short, what is the common denominator, or commensurability of comparison? The term commensurable has its historical roots in mathematics. For the ancient Greeks, who had not recognized irrational numbers, the dimensions of certain mathematical objects were found to lack a common unit of measurement. Are there artifacts and concepts and phenomena from antiquity that are simply incommensurable to us, to each other, and therefore irrational, or beyond our categories of cognition? How do we account for diversity or even universals?

This workshop builds on the momentum of several projects: the [Postclassicisms](https://www.postclassicisms.org/) network, headed by Brooke Holmes, the [Comparative Antiquity](https://humanities.princeton.edu/funding-opportunities/comparative-antiquity-a-humanities-council-global-initiative/) initiative headed by Martin Kern, and the global study of ancient worlds at Yale-NUS (Andrew Hui and Mira Seo). Taken together, we aim to transform the research and study of comparative antiquity, broadly conceived at Yale-NUS and Princeton, in hopes of providing a model for similar changes elsewhere.

For now, in addition to the four organizers – Martin, Brooke, Mira Seo and me—our confirmed participants are Gavin Flood (Hindu studies, comparative religion), Matthew Walker (Greek philosophy), Liu Chen (Chinese literature), Lisa Raphals (Greek and Chinese cultures), Liu Jinyu (Roman history and translation), Johannes Haubold (Greek and Near Eastern literatures); Federico Marcon (Japanese history); Dan-el Padilla Peralta (Roman history and reception); Marina Rustow (Jewish studies), along with undergraduates at Yale-NUS—Nicholas Lua (History), Vincent Lee (Philosophy), Thu Truong—and graduate students from Princeton—Kathleen Cruz (Classics), Thomas Davies (Classics), Zhuming Yao (East Asian Studies).

At this time we invite you to indicate whether you would like to either to write a paper or give a response. The paper is intended to be short (ca. 2500 – 3000 words) “position statements” for pre-circulation via a closed platform (Dropbox): they can be theoretical, methodological, or grounded in case studies. Papers will not be read at the workshop. Instead, all participants are expected to read them carefully in advance. Sessions will begin with a ten-minute response, followed by a brief (no more than five minute) reply by the author and an open discussion for 45 minutes. The paper should be a provocation to discussion, opportunities to experiment with a line of argument or a new framework. On the last day of our workshop, we will have a roundtable pedagogy discussion with the undergraduates of Yale-NUS and the graduate students of Princeton on how to teach and learn cross-culturally about the ancient worlds.