In 1906, Lu Xun (1881-1936) began research on the history and philosophy of science, modern European thought, and comparative literature. The longest among the essays that he produced at this time is Moluo shi li shuo (On the Power of Mára Poetry), which focuses on literature, East and West, and, in particular, the Byronic poets and their international legacy. This talk will focus on issues that arise in the translation and interpretation of this essay, in particular on the question of determining the source text, and what bearing that has on scholarly translation. It will demonstrate how the study of textual issues can shed light not only on texts but also on literary and intellectual history during the late-Qing and early Republican eras.
19 September 2013, 4:00pm - 5:30pm (Thur)
Lecture Theatre 1.02 (ground floor), Sir Roland Wilson Building, McCoy Circuit, ANU

Jon Eugene von Kowallis

Interpreting Lu Xun’s Early Thought from the Japan Years

Not long after he withdrew from medical studies at Sendai and returned to Tokyo in 1906, Lu Xun (1881-1936) began research on the history and philosophy of science, modern European thought, and comparative literature. This produced five treatises of considerable length, which he eventually published in Henan, a Chinese expatriate journal of the Tongmeng Hui, in an archaistic classical prose style influenced by that of Zhang Taiyan. Central to, and the longest among these essays, is Moluo shi li shuo (On the Power of Mara Poetry), which focuses on literature, East and West and, in particular, the Byronic poets and their international legacy. In reading, translating, annotating and analyzing this essay, one meets with a number of quotations and terms derived originally from Western sources, sometimes through a secondary Japanese, German, or English translation. This talk will focus on issues that arise in the translation and interpretation of that essay, in particular on the question of determining the source text, and what bearing that has or should have on scholarly translation. It will demonstrate how the study of textual issues in what my colleagues at the ANU have termed the “new sinology” can shed light not only on texts but also on literary and intellectual history during the late-Qing and early Republican eras.

JON EUGENE VON KOWALLIS received his PhD in Chinese Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, and has taught at UCLA, the University of Oregon, Williams College, Charles University (Prague), Melbourne University and the University of New South Wales. He has published two monographs: The Lyrical Lu Xun: a Study of his Classical-style Verse (University of Hawaii Press, 1996) and The Subtle Revolution: Poets of the ‘Old Schools’ during Late Qing and Early Republican China (University of California, Berkeley, IEAS Monographs 2006); and translations of pre-modern Chinese jokes, published and reprinted under various titles including Wit and Humour from Old Cathay (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1986). He also writes in Chinese and has published articles and reviews in Lu Xun Yanjiu Yuekan and other journals in China, the US and Taiwan.

The ANU China Seminar Series is a fortnightly seminar at which invited guests present their latest research on China and the Sinophone world. It aims at a broad audience. Speakers come from across the full range of disciplines and include senior scholars from within and outside ANU, younger academics, post-doctoral research fellows, and advanced graduate students. The seminar series provides an arena in which to discuss China in its widest sense, to acquaint people with a range of China-related research that might otherwise lie outside their scope of contact, and to offer a social setting for discussion of matters of mutual interest. Graduate and Honours students are encouraged to attend in order to familiarise themselves with advanced academic debate and to meet ANU’s academic community.

Seminars will be held on alternate Thursdays during the semester, from 16.00 to 17.30. There will be post-presentation drinks and dinner to allow for informal discussion.

The China Seminar Series is sponsored by the China Institute, with the Australian Centre on China in the World and the College of Asia & the Pacific.

Convenors: Mark Strange (mark.strange@anu.edu.au), Elisa Nesossi (elisa.nesossi@anu.edu.au), and Ying Qian (ying.qian@anu.edu.au).

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