

## COLLOQUIUM: A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE PLEASURES AND POSSIBILITIES OF COMPARATIVE PERSIAN/IRANIAN STUDIES

**THURSDAY, JULY 3 1.30 PM—3 PM**

**LOCATION: TBD**

### **SPEAKER:**

Wiebke Denecke 魏樓和

S. C. Fang Professor of Chinese Language and Culture  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Visiting Scholar (Summer 2025)  
Georg August Universität Göttingen  
Institute of Iranian Studies, KWZ Raum 2.813

Faculty Lead, MIT Global Humanities Initiative

Founding Editor-in-Chief, The Hsu-Tang Library of Classical Chinese Literature, Oxford University Press

Please join us for a casual conversation with Professor Denecke about

- \*her personal intellectual trajectory between Greco-Roman, East Asian, and Persian cultures
- \*the rich benefits and challenges of studying Iran and Persian culture in a global comparative framework
- \*emerging hot research topics of interest to current students and young scholars

Time permitting, she will also give a sample pitch about one of her current projects on:

### **How Can We Leverage Our Cultural Wiring Around Nature for Human Flourishing? Learning the Grammar of Nature in Persian, Latin, Chinese, and Japanese Poetries**

#### **ABSTRACT:**

Although nature has been part of literary cultures since the beginning of time, their relationship entered a new stage with modernization and industrialization, catalysts of widespread environmental degradation. 19<sup>th</sup>-century European Romanticism emerged alongside movements that aimed to reclaim nature across sectors as different as literature and the arts, youth activism, and tourism. 21<sup>st</sup>-century ecocriticism leverages cultural and literary analysis for environmental activism in the age of the looming climate crisis.

This lecture shows how deeper understanding of the ways imagery of nature—the grammar of nature—worked in classical literary cultures from around the globe can help us enhance cognitive empathy for nature. Through an understanding of how these literary traditions hard-wired the grammar of nature in culturally diverse ways we can imagine ways to hard-wire environmental awareness and planetary stewardship for our times. Case studies will be drawn, in chronological and regional order, from the Chinese (e.g. *Classic of Poetry*, *Encountering Sorrow*, Tang Poetry), Japanese (e.g. *Kokinshū/Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems* and Japanese court poetry), Latin (Horace's *Odes*), and Persian traditions (Sa'di's *Golestān/The Rose Garden*).

The lecture aims ultimately to diagnose how nature has functioned as a cognitive, emotional, social, aesthetic, religious and political tool across classical premodern textual traditions, how that helps us understand how we “learn” nature, and how we can put that learning to use for human and planetary flourishing.