

# Transnational Asia

## Speaker Series



RICE

Chao Center  
for Asian Studies

## “Fantastic Skills but no Knowledge?”

“Authenticity” and the practice of “Western Classical Music” in China - a Transcultural Perspective



A recent novel by French author Etienne Barilier entitled *Piano chinois* features two French music critics debating the performance of a Chinese pianist (clearly, the avatar of Yuja Wang). While one of them declares her the “greatest pianist of all days,” the other denounces her play as “lacking in spirit,” calling it “artificial and imitative.” Their “blog exchange” offers important reflections on the question of universality in art and culture more generally and—more specifically—the meaning of “Western Classical Music” in a transcultural context: why does this music, the emblematic product “of the West” play such an important role “in the East”? In this discussion, we will consider debates over “authenticity” and “creativity” in Chinese music which champion essentialisms about China’s loss of her “own” musical traditions and “Chineseness” as well as China’s inability to fully grasp those musical traditions “originating” with “others.” The paper will question why, in this rhetoric, even the best Chinese musicians “must still depend on Western mentors,” and why, in spite of the enormous success of China’s music students, people should continue to have doubts that “the spirit of ‘Western Classical Music’ has sunk deep roots into China’s society.”

**Faculty Host: Shih-Hui Chen**

**Monday, October 2, 2017 @ 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM**

**Mechanical Laboratory 209**

Free and open to the public.

## BARBARA MITTLER

UNIVERSITY OF HEIDELBERG  
INSTITUTE OF CHINESE STUDIES

Barbara Mittler holds a Chair in Chinese Studies at the Institute of Chinese Studies, University of Heidelberg and is Co-Director at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context”). She began her studies of Sinology at the University of Oxford (MA Oxon 1990), and has spent research periods in Taiwan, the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong and at Harvard and Stanford Universities. Her PhD (1994) and her habilitation (post-doctoral thesis, 1998) are both from Heidelberg. Her recent study, *A Continuous Revolution: Rethinking Cultural Revolution Culture* (Harvard 2012) won the John King Fairbank Prize 2013.

*This event is part of programming supported by a grant from the US Department of Education, Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Languages (UISFL) program <Grant ID # P016A 160003>.*

