

Princeton University

Honors Faculty Members
Receiving Emeritus Status



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The biographical sketches were written by
colleagues in the departments of those honored.

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Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status

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Eugene Perry Link Jr.



Eugene Perry Link Jr., professor of East Asian studies, is famous both as an innovative scholar of modern Chinese literature and as an authority on contemporary Chinese politics and intellectual life. His major publications include *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System* (Princeton, 2000) and *Evening Chats in Beijing: Probing China's Predicament* (Norton, 1992), the latter named a "Notable Book of the Year" by the *New York Times*. Perry is leaving Princeton to take up a position at the University of California–Riverside. Sorry though we are to see him go, we wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

Perry received his A.B. from Harvard in 1966 and his Ph.D. from the same institution in 1976. While still a graduate student, he joined Princeton's faculty as a lecturer in 1973, and was promoted to assistant professor in 1976. In 1977, Perry moved to the University of California–Los Angeles, where he rose to the rank of full professor and served as department chair. He returned to Princeton's Department of East Asian Studies in 1989.

Perry is a leading authority on modern and contemporary Chinese literature and culture. His first book, *Mandarin Duck and the Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (University of California Press, 1981), was an unconventional and pioneering work on modern China's popular fiction. He turned our attention away from famous elites and toward little-noticed detective stories and tragic romances. Believing that literature and history are not separable, Perry situated these vernacular works within a diverse social and political context. His coedited 2002 conference volume on *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society* brought this same concern with the lively world of vernacular writing forward into the more politically volatile present. Perry's interest in popular genres

extended into the performance arts, and his exceptional mastery of not only spoken Mandarin but the Beijing dialect enabled him to become a superb performer of the comedic dialogues called “Crosstalks.” He is one of very few non-Chinese who can keep up the rapid-fire extemporaneous puns and plays on words that this very funny genre demands.

Luckily for Princeton, Perry put these remarkable linguistic talents to use for two decades as a dedicated and inspirational teacher of first-year Chinese. In a 1999 *Princeton Weekly Bulletin* article, “Why I Teach Chinese,” he explained his deep satisfaction in teaching a usable skill, in seeing students progress across the academic year, and in communicating the pleasure he took in explaining the intricacies of Chinese sounds and grammar. Perry also has published essays in Chinese, and coauthored Chinese language textbooks with his colleague Chih-p’ing Chou. C. P. and Perry founded and together manage Princeton-in-Beijing, our intensive, total-immersion, and very successful summer program for teaching American students in an authentic language environment.

In the 1980s, as China reopened to the Western world, Perry began to meet and translate the works of post-Mao intellectuals. He edited and published many important works of recent Chinese literature. *People or Monster? And Other Stories and Reportage by Liu Binyan* (1983), *Stubborn Weeds: Popular and Controversial Chinese Literature after the Cultural Revolution* (1983), and *Roses and Thorns: The Second Blooming of the Hundred Flowers in Chinese Fiction, 1970–1980* (1984) were published immediately in paperback, became staples on syllabi of modern Chinese literature, and have found a wide readership.

In 1988–89, Perry served as the director of the Beijing office of the National Academy of Science’s Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People’s Republic of China. Language skills, personal interest, and time in China had given him a sensitive understanding of Chinese politics and society, and he became involved in the human rights movement. During the tumultuous weeks of the Tiananmen protests in 1989, he was instrumental in helping a respected and outspoken

scientist, Fang Lizhi, escape to the U.S. For this, Perry was—and still is—banned from China. After June 1989, Perry helped other dissident intellectuals come to Princeton, and he built a well-deserved reputation as an incisive critic of the Chinese government. His essays in the *New York Review of Books* are widely read and respected. A 2002 piece in which he likened the intimidating censorial authority of the Chinese state to a giant anaconda, coiled in an overhead chandelier, used memorable black humor and was typically astute: “Normally the great snake doesn’t move,” Perry explained. “It doesn’t have to.”

In 2001, together with Andrew Nathan, Perry obtained an important set of secret government documents, and undertook to translate and coedit them as *The Tiananmen Papers: The Chinese Leadership’s Decision to Use Force against Their Own People—In Their Own Words* (2001). Like his many other shorter and longer translations of the writings of Chinese intellectuals, this fearless work has provided both vivid material for teaching and invaluable sources for scholars.

Perry Link has thus been a master teacher of the Chinese language and a highly capable administrator, a scholar of modern Chinese literature who has expanded that field in original ways, a person of principle, a funny and lively colleague, and an invaluable member of our East Asian studies community.