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Islamic Soundscapes of China

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SOAS, University of London

Programme and Book of Abstracts



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PROGRAMME

9.00am	Registration
9.30 - 11.00am But is it Music? Chair: Martin Stokes	Arienne Dwyer (Department of Linguistics, University of Kansas); <i>May the Pious Sing?</i>
	Ma Qiang (Institute for Western Frontier Region of China, Shaanxi Normal University); <i>Calling Adhan or Knocking Bangzi: Changing interpretation of sonic expression of Jahariyyah groups in contemporary China</i>
	Mukaddas Mijit (University of Paris Nanterre); <i>From spiritual soundscape to musical soundscape: Nurjan Hapiz, a brother who sings his beliefs</i>
11.00 - 11.30am	Coffee
11.30 - 1.00pm Sound and Memory Chair: Jonathan Lipman	Alexandre Papas (CNRS, Paris); <i>Creating a Sufi soundscape: Recitation (dhikr) and spiritual audition (samā') according to Ahmad Kāsānī Dahbidī (d. 1542)</i>
	Mutellip Iqbal (Sociology Department, Istanbul University); <i>Continuity of Musical Tradition: Performance of Islamic Stories among Uyghur</i>
	Maria Jaschok (Oxford University, Centre of Gender Studies); <i>Women's Mosque Education, Female Ignorance and Chants to Save Souls: Chinese Hui Muslim Women Remembering Jingge, Remembering their History</i>
1.00 - 2.00pm	Lunch
2.00 - 4.00pm Sounding Place Chair: Joanne Smith-Finley	Xiao Mei & Wei Yuqun (Shanghai Conservatory: Ritual Music Research Centre); <i>The soundscapes between Hui and Han: a report from Linxia, Gansu province</i>
	Rahile Dawut (Xinjiang University); <i>The Religious Soundscape of the Imam Asim Mazar festival in Khotan, China</i>
	Min Wenjie (Northwest University for Nationalities, Lanzhou); <i>An Investigation on Migrant Muslims & Temporary Prayer Sites in Contemporary Tibet of China</i>
	Aynur Kadir (SFU, Canada); <i>Soundscapes of the Mazar shrines among the Tajiks of Xinjiang</i>
4.00 - 4.30pm	Coffee
4.30 - 6.00pm Digital mediation and transnational flows Chair: Ruard Absaroka	Rachel Harris (Department of Music, SOAS); <i>Internet rumours and the changing Uyghur religious soundscape: the case of the Snake-Monkey Woman</i>
	Mu Qian (Independent scholar, Beijing); <i>Islam and Chinese Popular Music</i>
	Lisa Ross (Independent artist, New York); <i>Presenting a Uyghur Shrine Festival in New York</i>
6.00 - 8.00pm	Dinner
8.00 - 10.00pm	Special viewing: Living Shrines
<p>With Lisa Ross (Independent artist, New York) Drinks and snacks provided. Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, 22 Eastcastle Street, London W1W 8DE</p>	



Islamic Soundscapes of China

Conference abstracts

The Religious Soundscape of the Imam Asim Mazar festival in Khotan, China

Rahile Dawut, Xinjiang University

Until 2012, the Imam Asim mazar festival, which took place in Jiya township, Khotan City, was one of the largest living shrine festivals in Xinjiang. Music was an important part of this festival, and included dastanchi singing epic stories of local or religious heroes; ashiq or muqamchi playing and singing the muqam classical suites; and Sufi faithful performing the sounds of dhikr around the mazar. Through their beautiful hokmat and munajat songs, women pilgrims also expressed their grief and mourning. Imam Asim was thus a cultural space for the demonstration, distribution, and the continuation of local Islamic sounds. The presence of so much musical activity at these tombs of Islamic saints is particularly interesting, because orthodox Islam forbids the performance of music at funerals or near big tombs in addition to forbidding gatherings and entertainment at these places. At the Uyghur shrine festival, however, many musical forms were performed—and, moreover, specifically linked to mourning. This paper analyzes the complex religious sounds and practices centered on the Imam Asim mazar. The paper focuses in particular on how popular entertainment and religious sounds connect to shrine visitation, how the local government policy and “fundamentalism” or “Wahhabism” have affected shrine visitation and the Islamic soundscape of the mazar, and the changes in what constitute “Islamic sounds” through the years.

May the pious sing?

Arienne Dwyer, University of Kansas

Being a pious Muslim is one of the most salient remaining indices of modern Salar identity in northern Tibet. But what, exactly, does being pious mean in the context of Salar oral arts? And how might views of piety have changed over time? This presentation relies on interviews and a narrative and song collection to investigate the relationship between singing, storytelling, and religious and cultural vitality. Audio samples will be played. Through intermarriage and marginalization, the Salars are rapidly being assimilated to Sinophone Muslim (Hui) culture. While the Sinophone Muslims are co-religionists, their verbal arts are historically divergent from those of the Salars. How do the Salars repurpose narratives and songs to reflect their modern views on piety? And what are the historical contexts in which these pious “grace notes” are added? I will show that song is seen as un-Islamic, and thus taboo, despite the fact that some Salar communities belong to Islamic orders practicing the vocal dhikr. Song, then, creates an unsanctioned space for the expression of a historical and Central Asian identity, in opposition to a generic Chinese Muslim identity. Song then offers an outlet and means of temporary departure from a (too) pious life.

Internet rumours and the changing Uyghur religious soundscape: the case of the Snake-Monkey Woman.

Rachel Harris, SOAS

Questions concerning the use of the Internet and other forms of digital media as vehicles for religious and political mobilization have been widely addressed in the literature on Islam in the Middle East and elsewhere. Eickelman and Piscatori (2004) have argued that with the spread of new media technologies there has been an increased fragmentation of authority in Muslim societies, and the “traditional” interpreters of Islam have lost their monopoly. More recently, some scholars have moved away from a focus on discourse to explore how online forms of imagery and vocal performance accessed by Muslims shape new forms of religious sociality and impact upon religious structures of affect (Hirschkind 2012). In recent years, several explicitly Islamic websites have been established, and increasing numbers of religious audio recordings, videos, and images now circulate on a wide range of online chat forums and through other forms of digital media used by Uyghurs within Xinjiang. While the regional religious authorities continue to exercise tight control over the “traditional interpreters”, notably official imam in mosques, a series of government campaigns have targeted the new interpretations of Islam which are disseminated online. State media announced a new campaign in Autumn 2013, targeting “jihadi propaganda” and “religious rumours”. What kinds of religious rumours are circulating, and what do they sound like? What kinds of discussions of religious belief and practice do they provoke, and what is their affective impact?

Continuity of Musical Tradition: Performance of Islamic Stories among Uyghur

Mutellip Iqbal (PhD Student of Sociology Department, Istanbul University)

Uyghur religious narratives are full of heroic stories and magic events. When we examine Islamic experience amongst Uyghurs, it is not hard to find various forms of art which transmit and emphasize Islamic doctrine, among which Islamic stories are prominent. Islamic events shape forms, such as poem, legend and epic narratives. Some of them were created by poets and then adopted musically by dastanchi or Sufis. Uyghur Muslims are members of Sunni branch of Islam and its regulations are rooted deeply in religious practice. However, most of the Islamic stories among Uyghur are derived from Shi'a religious activities, where stories depict Ali as generous, brave and the strongest advocator of Islam. Moreover, stories of the Shi'a twelve imams enjoy popularity among peasants. Uyghurs know more about Ali than other Caliphs. I believe that this phenomenon comes from Sufism's influence on Uyghur's religious experience. Most of those stories were modified and written down by Khoja Ahmat Yasawi who played a critical role in disseminating religious stories in Uyghur society, in the form of poem and epic narratives. Some of those stories are common to all Muslims, for example, the willingness of the prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice Ismail (Qurbanliqname), while some of them possess local features. Evidence shows that places of performing religious stories have been declining in Uyghur society in recent years. Dastanchi and Sufi only perform stories particular places, such as mosques, Mazar and individual homes which are viewed as safe places to talk about Islam. This is due to the fact that the authorities regard them as an illegal form of transmitting Islam. However, continuity of musical narratives are welcomed by the low class who seek to know historical and religious events, and delight themselves.



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Women's Mosques Education, Female Ignorance and Chants to Save Souls: Chinese Hui Muslim Women Remembering Jingge, Remembering their History

Maria Jaschok, Oxford University, Centre of Gender Studies

The evolution from the early beginnings of the institution of women's mosques (qingzhen nusi) 清真女寺, in the 17th century, when it provided informal educational provisions for Muslim women to the culmination of this process, in the course of the 19th century, into more permanent institutions constitutes the historical background to a description of the emergence of women's beliefs and practices. At the heart of these enduring beliefs lies the practice of jingge, 经歌, as an orally transmitted corpus of knowledge, wisdom, values and morality which is still taught and remembered in collective performances of well-loved chants in women's mosques in central China today.

The paper will discuss the origins and local influences of jingge as a creative educational tool for illiterate women and girls. A source of women's deepest religious imagination, these chants give us insights into women's faith and lives in the absence of written records. They form a precious bridge to the precarious memories of still living, older generations of women believers whose faith was sorely tried and in many cases entirely ruptured in the years of religious persecution that followed the consolidation of Communist rule in 1949. But their origin in women's lack of literacy and inferior social standing tainted this beloved tradition with the stains of backwardness and inferiority, prejudicing revival of jingge until recently when women's mosque congregations have begun to reassert their place in the history of Islam in China. This development has opened the path to new research and to creative approaches, helped by the evolving methodology of aural ethnography, probing the many ways by which jingge served as a conduit of transmission of both continuity of collective ethno-religious identity (i.e., Hui Muslim minority identity in a non-Muslim host society, China) as well as of ideas of transformation in both social and gender relations.

Soundscapes of the Mazars among the Tajik People of Xinjiang, China

Aynur Kadir, SFU, Canada

Mazar worship, shrine pilgrimage rituals and beliefs, are among the main Islamic religious practices of the Ismaili Tajik minority living in the extremely harsh geography and climate of northwest Xinjiang, China. Tajik Mazar shrine pilgrimages are not just an opportunity for simple religious activity, but also cultural gatherings where folk literature, philosophy, entertainment and sports all find expression.

My research focuses on the sounds reflected in the Mazar worship rituals and legends among the Ismaili Tajik of China. Based on fieldwork gathering of religious and ritual voices during Mazar shrine pilgrimage such as du'a, quranic chants, funeral weeping, and legends, I investigated how these sounds connect with the religious practices and identity of Tajiks, and the socio-cultural role of these rituals.

According to the vocalizations in Tajik Mazars, I classified Mazar worship into three categories; everyday Mazar worshiping, Mazar rituals during festivals, and large-scale Mazar pilgrimage. In everyday Mazar worshiping, Tajik people make du'a in Farsi, commonly believed to be written by Nasir Khusrau. In rituals during festivals, not only we can hear quranic chants, weeping, legends and recited names of 49 Ismaili Imams, but also beautiful folk songs and voices from a variety of folk games. In the annual large-scale pilgrimage, sheikhs of the two biggest Mazars carry the holy flags and light while visiting every Mazar in the Tashkorgan area. During their travels, they sing beautiful munajat and talqin as people join the crowd and hold religious rituals in Mazars and homes.

Tajik Mazar shrine pilgrimage absorbs and is influenced by sacred concepts from various religions and philosophies; it unifies worship of ancestors, nature, heroes, and Ismaili saints. Despite the increasing vicissitudes of modern life, along with development of Tajik society, these Mazar worship soundscapes still retain much of their original cultural significance.

Calling Adhan or Knocking Bangzi:

Changing interpretation of sonic expression of Jahariyyah groups in contemporary China

Ma Qiang

Bangzi is a kind of watchman's wooden clappers used to notice time in peacetime and announce dangers in wartime. Being maligned as unconventional New Sect in the period of Qianlong emperor in Qing dynasty, Jahariyyah, a renowned Islamic Sufi group began to practice its religious activities secretly, among which knocking Bangzi instead of calling Adhān on Minārah was included. Since PRC carried out Reform and Opening up Policy in 1980s, more freedom has been endowed to religions, many adjustments have been made and most of religious traditions have been recovered by Muslims hereafter. However knocking Bangzi has become a tradition for Jahariyyah people to call prayer, which is difficult to change for the traditions has been recognized as orthodoxy by the adherents. With the update of modern media tools and the transformation of Jahariyyah communities geographically, the concept and practice of using new media tools becomes a controversial issue. From perspective of studying Jahariyyah's conception on their sonic heritage, the writer suggests that interpreting the transformation and expression of Islamic factions in China today, two principle dimensions which are post-Mao era from perspective of the state and post-Shaykh or post-faction era from perspective of inner Chinese Islam should be concerned with.

From spiritual soundscape to musical soundscape: Nurjan Hapiz, a brother who sings his beliefs

Mukaddas Mijit (University of Paris Nanterre)

In the city of Ghulja in the Ili Valley, the Islamic soundscape was entirely Sufi before 1950. In the memory of the very few people who experienced this period, the zikr and mavluts were fundamental for the religious beliefs of the Uyghurs from this region.

Several Khaniqas were the essence of the social structure of Ghulja. People gathered in these holy places at least once a week to pray, prepare and have the holy food: Khaniqa éshi. For more rigorous followers/brothers, the Khaniqas were the places where they gathered every day to listen to beautiful talqin (solo chanting of spiritual poetry), moving their body to the rhythms of zikr which led them into ecstasy.

With the unusual life story of one of the last Sufi brothers of Ghulja, Nurjan Hapiz, we will have an overview of how the spiritual life was in this particular town in the north of the Uyghur region; the function of these Khaniqas, the question of initiation, the practice of talqin, transmission, etc. During the Chinese Cultural Revolution, all Sufi activities were banished, the holy books were burned and Khaniqas were demolished. We will talk about how Nurjan Hapiz's beliefs and knowledge survived these dark moments in the history of Sufism. Also we will analyze how Sufism came through prohibition and how it actively changed its form by being a part of the Uyghur musical landscape. We will question how this forbidden practice became present in Uyghur traditional music and how people talks about it nowadays.



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An Investigation on Migrant Muslim & Temporary Prayer Sites in Contemporary Tibet of China

Min Wenjie, Northwest University for Nationalities, Lanzhou

Muslims entered into Tibet for trading from Kashmir and Ladak across high mountains and vast plateau in the early Yuan Dynasty. Several merchants among them then resided in Xikaz and Lhasa, it was thus the beginning of Tibetan Muslims. In the year of 1978, since China's reform and opening up to the outside world, following the policies of government unfreezing, the trade between Muslim Hui merchants and Tibetans that was suspended for 20 years revived quickly and developed stronger and stronger. Today more and more Muslim merchants are pouring into Tibet engaging in business deals via styles of rushing, touching, observing, circulating, and assisting. At the same time, Uyghur Muslim merchants have also entered into Tibet engaging in business from Kashgar, Yecheng and Zepu of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwest China. Now, Muslim merchants from inland China and Xinjiang are scattered in all parts of Tibet, especially concentrated in Lhasa, Xikaz, Changdu, Shannan, Naqu, Linzhi, Ali etc. According to my investigation, the seasonal Muslim merchants together with their family members are between one hundred thousand (slack season) to three hundred thousand (busy season), among of them, in today's Lhasa, migrant Muslims number between fifty thousand (slack season) to one hundred thousand (busy season). Actually, in the central cities such as Lhasa, Xikaz and Changdu, Muslim merchants and migrant workers are settling there together with their wives and kids, they have become all-weather merchants in Tibet.

Following the rapid increase of Muslim population in Tibet, the original four mosques in Tibet are far from enough to meet more and more Muslim's religious requirement, and the local government at all level are always not allowed to build any new mosques, therefore, more and more Muslim temporary prayer sites emerged as the times require. Muslim temporary prayer sites reflect a kind of religious tension (Muslims must conduct their religious life) as well as embodying a kind of religious embarrassment (being unlawful existence in the eyes of government), being permitted tacitly by local government (be master of the tendency but don't intervene actively). They are also a kind of religious sites which have been accepted by the migrant Muslim (playing all the roles of a mosque except recruiting students). Frankly speaking, the establishment of Muslim temporary prayer sites in all parts of Tibet has greatly met the demands of Muslim prayer, and to a large degree, it has decreased some social unstable factors that will be resulted by such situation.

In this paper, based on the field investigations, the author mainly introduced the amount, distribution, and daily operation of temporary Muslim prayer sites in contemporary Tibet, the oral transmission of Muslim practices and knowledge in different parts of Tibet, and puts forward some policy suggestions on the development of Islam in Tibet in the future.

Islam and Chinese Popular Music

Mu Qian (Independent scholar, Beijing)

A few years ago, Xu Wei, one of China's top pop/rock musicians, aroused controversy because he used a sample of Quranic recitation in his concert. Xu probably just liked the sound and used it from a musical point of view, but many Muslims saw his action as profane. They protested against it, and the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television reacted by putting a ban on Xu. Many non-Muslims, especially Xu's fans, don't agree with the Muslims' views on the issue, and they argue that Xu had no intention to harm Islam, and his action actually helped to promote Islam. Muslims believe that Quran is holy and can't be used in pop music or at a commercial concert.

Religion, especially Islam, is a sensitive issue in China, and it is often related to nationalism among the ethnic minorities. For Muslim minorities, Islam is often a tool to differentiate themselves from the Han Chinese and underline their identities. In recent years, the Chinese government has become stricter with publications and performances with religious contents, being afraid that they lead to ethnic conflicts and oppositional powers. The government's policy and conservative Muslims' attitudes have combined to drive Islam out of music.

Whereas in the traditional folk songs of Muslim ethnic groups there were often references to the religion, in contemporary Chinese music there is almost no mentioning of Islam, even among the works of Muslim musicians. Although there are a few examples of indie music referring to Islam, like IZ's Your Destination... or 8 Eye Spy's The Way to the Western Regions, they are usually limited to a very small circle of people. On Chinese Muslim websites, the music section is dominated by songs from abroad. Compared to Buddhism which finds its way into pop culture, the visibility of Islam is dwindling in Chinese music.

Creating a Sufi soundscape: Recitation (dhikr) and spiritual audition (samā') according to

Ahmad Kāsānī Dahbidī (d. 1542)

Alexandre Papas (CNRS, Paris)

Contrary to what is sometimes written, Ahmad Kāsānī Dahbidī, a famous Naqshbandī Sufi master from Mawarannahr, has never been to Eastern Turkestan. However, his influence on the Islamic practices and thought in the Chinese part of Central Asia has been more than significant as early as the late sixteenth century, when his descendants known as Khojas conducted missionary campaigns in the Tarim basin. Since the Khojas themselves did not introduce much novelty into Sufi teachings – their contribution was mainly a political application of Sufi speculations –, Ahmad Kāsānī appears as the first and foremost theoretician of Sufism for the early modern Eastern Turkestan. Among the thirty or so treatises he wrote, two are of particular interest for understanding Islamic soundscapes. The first work is entitled *Risāla-yi dhikr*, or *Treatise of the recitation*, and describes the devotional repetition of the profession of faith (*shahāda*). The second text is devoted to the practice of spiritual audition (*samā'*). This *Risāla-yi samā'iyya* is basically a defense of Sufi musical performances, based on both scriptural sources and the example of the first generations of mystics. A close reading of the texts shows that the master nourished the ambition to promote an encompassing vision of Sufi practices which would enlarge as much as possible the circles of disciples. Despite the later divisions among the Khoja branches and the heated debates on forms of *dhikr* and *samā'*, Ahmad Kāsānī's teaching was an inaugural act and left a deep legacy in the Sufi soundscape of Xinjiang, perhaps until now.

Presenting a Uyghur Shrine Festival in New York

Lisa Ross, Independent artist, New York

In 2013, I presented two installation audio/video works at The Rubin Museum of Art in New York City. The videos, 11 minutes each, were part of a larger exhibition entitled "Living Shrines of Uyghur China" in which the majority of the works shown were photographic. The videos are made up of the landscapes from Imam Asim Mazar, an esteemed Islamic pilgrimage site for Uyghurs who practice saint veneration as a means for healing the mind, body and spirit.

For most museum visitors, this was an introduction to Uyghur culture and for many it was the first look beyond the limited representation by major news networks of violent uprisings by the "Muslims of Western China." The large projection scale of the videos meant a particular relationship between the body and the landscape. Audio, played through small hidden speakers, is an important element for the full experience of the installation. The predominant sound is the silence of the desert...the wind and flags blowing, as pilgrims enter the frame, placing themselves in front of an important and towering marker. The viewer of the installation is intentionally placed in a similar position to the pilgrim.

What does the silence of the Islamic landscape signify? I will consider this question from the perspective of an artist. As a witness, I recall awakening in the early morning hours before the sun rose and hearing the muezzin, the call to prayer in the village we were staying in.

Hearing the call in the silence and darkness of the night reminded me that I rarely or possibly never heard the call to prayer from the minarets in western China over the 10 years I had visited. How different from my experience of countries in North Africa where the call to prayer was an inseparable aspect of the landscape.

I will also present an interactive video that was created at the museum for the Explore Area. It is an interactive pilgrimage, aimed at a younger audience, a window into the festival in which food, entertainment, shopping and meeting new people go hand in hand with the seriousness of the pilgrimage and prayer.

The soundscapes between Hui and Han: a report from Linxia, Gansu province.

Xiao Mei (Shanghai Conservatory of Music) & Wei Yukun (Yangzhou University)

Linxia(临夏), which lies in the central part of Gansu Province in China, is a multi-ethnic city. Nearly half of its population is Hui(回族), the Han constitutes 47 percent, with the other 3 percent consisting of several other peoples including the Dongxiang(东乡族), the Salar(撒拉族), the Baoan(保安族), and the Tibetan. The Hui in this city also occupy 50% of the entire Chinese Muslim population. Therefore, the city of Linxia is known as "the Mecca of China". However, in this city, unlike in the real Mecca, the Hui Muslims have traditionally been living with the Han as neighbors. Especially in the contemporary era, with the expansion of the city, the original Hui ghetto outside the "Old Town" of Linxia has rapidly developed into a "New Town" where the Hui and the Han live together. Based on fieldwork done in the summer of 2012, this paper is focused on two kinds of soundscapes, "Bang" (the call to prayer) in the mosque and "Silence" in Qubbah, aiming to discuss the conflict between the Hui and the Han caused by different sounds and explore the conception and perception of sound which lie beneath the issue.



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