



The Department of Anthropology
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

presents a seminar

by

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on

Empire of Sound: Islam and the End of An Alternative Cosmopolitanism in Modern China

Friday, 23 February 2018

1:00 – 2:30 pm

Room 115 Humanities Building

New Asia College, CUHK

A light lunch will be served at 12:30 pm. First come first served.

Abstract:

This talk argues that in the first half of the twentieth century a critical transition occurred among the Sinophone Hui Muslims. This transition has to do with sound, and contributes to the almost irrevocable rise among the Hui of a new linguistic ideology: namely, that languages must remain discrete entities, each of them defined by its phonetic particularity. Transcription is replaced by transliteration; rigid inter-textual relations that regulate a linear correspondence between clearly demarcated words supplant the recording of sounds using whatever orthographic system (sometimes more than one) at hand. What used to be the norm – the circulation of sounds across innumerable languages and dialects (Arabic, Persian, Middle and Modern Chinese, Tibetan, Turkic, and so forth) – is now decried as the cause of the “substandard” pronunciations that continue to sound the holy Islamic texts. Transliterations have to be standardised; devious sounds purged. A rich and mesmerising history of Islam that is every bit an acoustic history has to be silenced. The Hui are set to read; eyes are to replace ears. From an acoustic cosmopolitanism – one that had not been so considered before its unfortunate purge – the Hui enter an age of “standardised” sounds mediated by equally standardised texts. This talk examines this transition, and argues that this examination can provide a refreshing perspective for the anthropological study of Islam as well as of other religious traditions.

Bio:

Guangtian Ha is a research associate at the School of Arts, SOAS, University of London. Previously he was a postdoctoral research fellow in the SOAS Music Department, contributing to its research project "Sounding Islam in China." He has recently finished a book manuscript titled *Sound of Salvation: Voice, Gender, and the Sufi Mediascape in China*, which is now under anonymous review.

ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME