The Bureaucratization of Islamic Authority in Republican China

In the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese Muslim elites established a series of nation-wide associations to manage the relationship between their constituencies and the emerging modern Chinese state and to mobilize China’s Muslim population for patriotic activism, modern education, and religious reform. In this talk I explore one aspect of this complex process: the bureaucratization of Islamic authority, that is, the organization of ahongs (Chinese Islamic clerics) into a hierarchical institutional structure with clearly defined roles differentiated both from those of other ahongs and from secular officers in the association. I first examine Chinese Muslims’ successive efforts at bureaucratization at the national level in relation to the politics, law, and conflict of the Republican era (1912-1949). I then examine the implications of this process for Islamic reform in China and the production of a standardized and institutionalized Chinese Islam. Finally, I turn to the county and sub-county levels in Henan Province and analyze how the bureaucratization of Islamic authority interacted with local politics and religious rivalries.

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* The presentation will be in English.