
Introducing Guest-Edited Section

Islam in Asia

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In this Spring 2009 issue of the new journal of ASIANetwork, *ASIANetwork Exchange*, the editors sought both an exceptional guest editor and a subject of broad interest to the membership. I am pleased that we were able to find both in Professor Barbara Metcalf (University of Michigan) and the subject of Islam in Asia.

Aside from having served as a past President of the Association for Asian Studies and her recent election as President-elect of the American Historical Association, Barbara Metcalf is known internationally as one of the leading scholars of modern Islam. Over the course of thirty years, Metcalf's scholarly focus has been on a subject and population that most Asianists, particularly at liberal arts colleges, have little training. Indeed, given the concentration of our membership in East Asia Studies, Muslim societies in Asia receive little focus in most of our courses. Yet as she persuasively demonstrates here, Asianists need to know more about the large and diverse Muslim communities that populate Asia. This is even more so the case in the post-9/11 era when our students need to be able to distinguish between the beliefs and cultures of Islamic communities in Asia and those taken up by groups who cloak their actions in religious idiom.

At the recent ASIANetwork annual conference, Catherine Asher (University of Minnesota) delivered a wonderful keynote address on the Taj Mahal as a contested site of communal identity in India. This special section of the journal provides an excellent follow-up in its design to showcase Muslim societies across Asia—from Central and West Asia to South, Southeast, and East Asia. Its contributors have training in anthropology, history, philosophy, and religious studies. While the special section does not attempt to be comprehensive, it has nevertheless been

conceived to highlight the diversity of scholarly and pedagogical issues taken up by specialists of Islamic societies across the region. It is our hope that the section will prompt those of us who do not generally address Muslim societies in Asia in our courses to make use of the scholarly and teaching materials that these scholars offer our field. In other words, we hope to open a conversation both in ASIANetwork and in the liberal arts Asian Studies curricula about Muslims and Islamic society.

Metcalf's piece challenges us to look beyond the comfortable, familiar ideas we have about Muslim society, and to see Muslims in Asia as we wish them to see us—as people with complex identities. In a similar vein, Frankel's work elucidates the complicated relationship followers of Chinese Islam have experienced with various Chinese governments, whereby official guarantees for their protection and security have arisen only after their submission to governmental authority has been acknowledged. Anwar's piece sheds light on the growing status of Islamist politics in Indonesia, helping us to understand how colonial and neo-colonial power as well as the U.S.'s War on Terror has empowered Islamist political parties in Indonesia, even as most Indonesians favor democratic government and reject the imposition of Sharia Law. Keller's article offers us as teachers valuable tools for teaching about Central Asia, including maps, mini lectures, time-lines—all available as of May 2009 through a website funded by the Social Science Research Council. Devji's contribution forces us to confront our misconceptions about Al Qaeda and its ideological goals. Devji challenges us to recognize that most of Al Qaeda's rhetoric, far from being overwhelmingly focused on anti-Americanism, is oriented at achieving humanitarian parity with the West, even if that can only come about through the shedding of blood. In short, the articles in this special section provide us with useful information and perceptive insights that can help us and our students better comprehend the reality of Islam in Asia. We are grateful to Professor Metcalf and the other authors for making this first guest-edited section of the journal a meaningful resource for our readers.