Chinese Pilgrims, Indian Pirs

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Thursday, November 9, 4:30 p.m.
Withers Hall Room 140

In the standard telling of Chinese and Indian histories, the two societies were closely connected in the first millennium AD, when Chinese pilgrims traveled to India in search of authoritative Buddhist texts. But this connection, which fundamentally reoriented Chinese culture, is supposed to have withered in the centuries after the first millennium. In this lecture, Rian Thum argues instead that Islamic networks played an important role in maintaining ties between China and India from the 16th century to the present. The surprising reemergence of Sino-Indian connection via Islamic networks demonstrates the potential for a history of Islamic China that gives due attention to the numerous cosmopolitan Persian, Turkic, and Arabic texts that have been fundamental to Chinese Islamic practice.

A Rian Thum is Associate Professor of History at Loyola University of New Orleans, and a Fellow at the National Humanities Center. His book, The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History (Harvard University Press, 2014), won the American Historical Association’s Fairbank Prize and the Hsu Prize for East Asian Anthropology. His current work focuses on the history of Chinese Islams, particularly as they have been shaped by connections to South Asia, and on the Turkistani community in Saudi Arabia.