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Contested Imaginaries of Collective Harmony

The Poetics and Politics of “Silk Road” Nostalgia in China and the West

Harm Langenkamp

We now saw the Silk Road at its lowest ebb, with dormant life and dying trade, the connecting towns and villages in ruins, and the population languishing in a state of permanent insecurity and miserable poverty. Only in our imagination did we see the brilliant, many-colored scenes from the past, the unbroken carnival of caravans and travelers. . . . There echoed . . . a melody which had sounded along that road for more than two thousand years.¹

The Swedish explorer Sven Hedin often lost himself in daydreaming during his 1933–35 motorized reconnaissance expedition of Xinjiang, an enterprise he undertook at the behest of the Guomindang government that sought to strengthen its control of the restive, predominantly Muslim province in the northwestern corner of its realm by restoring the ancient Silk Road connection from Kashgar to Beijing. On reading Hedin’s evocative description, quoted in part above, few will fail to imagine camel-driven caravans trudging through sunset-lit desert landscapes, an iconic imagery that has a history stretching back to at least the times of Marco Polo and that continues to be used today to arouse appetite for the promise of mystery, adventure, historical sensations, and exotica. In more recent times, an additional layer of meaning has come to be inscribed on the Silk Road concept. Construed as the achievement of a past age in which peoples of widely divergent cultures exchanged assets, creeds, arts, and knowledge, purportedly unimpeded by the divisive ideologies of nationalism, ethnocentrism, or religious fundamentalism, the ancient Eurasian web of trade routes is now regularly proposed as a model for present-day processes of globalization and mutually

beneficial exchanges outside narrow national interests. In other words, the myth of yesterday's "lost" multicultural civilization has come to be accepted by many as the utopia of today.²

However uniform and predictable Silk Road narratives and imageries may seem, the motives of those who invoke them are diverse and contradictory. Indeed, once we bear in mind Mikhail Bakhtin's observation that any discourse—from its articulation, the "sound image," to "the furthest reaches of abstract meaning"—is the product of social interactions and contestations, today's wealth of Silk Road sound images discloses divisions in what, on the surface, seems to be a shared discourse of transnational dialogue and collaboration.³ Put differently, if, in its demotic use, the Silk Road concept refers to an idealized world for which many wax nostalgic, each discrepancy between that dream world and the real world may be indicative of the way dreamers relate themselves to what or of whom they "forget" to dream.

The present essay considers ways in which the Silk Road (*sichou zhi lu*) is imagined in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and in its sociopolitical other, the West. This approach is meant not to suggest a tedious Chinese-Western divide but to highlight divergences in the way present-day nation-states relate themselves to the Silk Road metaphor. These divergences, in turn, reflect tensions between state-controlled nationalisms and (neo-)liberal cosmopolitanisms that, of course, are not bound to the geographical "East" and "West." Singled out for discussion are the celebration of the Silk Road at the 2002 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC, and Beijing's investments in promoting the cultural heritages of its ethnic minorities, particularly the Uyghur, the PRC's largest Muslim community, most of which inhabits the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the (contested) Chinese section of Central Asia. First, however, we must consider how the Silk Road concept acquired the high-profile status it enjoys in today's global discourse and mediascape.

FANTASY AND CONTROL: THE "SILK ROAD" AS EXOTIC CONSTRUCT IN THE MODERN IMAGINATION

Most popular introductions to the ancient network of Eurasian trade routes credit Hedin's teacher, the German geologist and geographer baron Ferdinand von Richthofen for coining the term *Silk Road(s)* (*Seidenstrasse[n]*) in his magnum opus about China (1877–1912).⁴ Usually left unmentioned

is that this five-volume work is not a celebration of “cultural exchange,” as we have come to understand that term, but a report of a series of research expeditions that Richthofen conducted between 1868 and 1872 in China, with a view not only of accomplishing “something meaningful in science” but also of furthering “foreign interests in this most important of the as yet unopened countries of the world.”⁵ The few instances Richthofen and several armchair academics after him used the term “Silk Road” to refer to the system of pathways linking the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) to India and the Mediterranean area can hardly be seen as the prelude to the soaring career that the term was to experience. Indeed, the popularization of the luminous word combination only started with a series of competitive and widely publicized research campaigns through “Asia’s heartland” following Richthofen’s expedition, when the Qing dynasty (1644–1911 CE) gradually lost ever more control to Great Britain and czarist Russia.⁶

Motivated by various public, private, and corporate interests to disclose the last undiscovered spots of the world, explorers such as Hedin (Sweden), Ōtani Kōzui (Japan), Albert von Le Coq (Germany), Paul Pelliot (France), Nikolay Przhevsky (Russia), Aurel Stein (Great Britain), and Langdon Warner (United States) published accounts of their own expeditions, ranging from dense scholarly compendiums to thrilling travelogues saturated with descriptions of *terrae incognitae*, archeological treasures, and personal hardships.⁷ Hedin in particular catered successfully to the tastes of different audiences. Often, while he was still on the road, his experiences appeared in print in Stockholm, Leipzig, London, and New York, relating the many ordeals that he and his crew had to endure to give their fellow countrymen a glimpse of the “wild, perilous regions of darkest Asia.”⁸ The language he employed in his popularizing publications (see the opening quotation) echoed the Orient-inspired poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, James Elroy Flecker, John Keats, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and is typical of how the area into which he ventured was imagined by most Westerners at a time when only a privileged few had the chance to see the real, unfiltered East.

As Central Asia caught the limelight of international attention in the late nineteenth century, it also became inextricably identified with musico-theatrical imagery. Félicien David’s secular oratorio *Le désert* (1844)—an imaginative digestion of impressions garnered by the composer on a two-year journey through Egypt, Syria, and Turkey—became the prototypical orientalist composition. The success of David’s musical depiction of Bedouin life was matched, if not surpassed, by Alexander Borodin’s *In [the Steppes*

of] *Central Asia* (1880) and *Prince Igor* (1869–87), today the best-known musical evocations of the area concerned. As Borodin's original program explains, *In Central Asia* conveys the passing of a native caravan (represented by "the melancholic notes of an Oriental melody") crossing the desert "safely and fearlessly" under the protection of the victor's "formidable military power" (the last represented by "the strains of a peaceful Russian song"). As the procession recedes from the listener in an extended diminuendo, "the tranquil songs of conquerors and conquered merge into a single common harmony, echoes of which linger on as the caravan disappears in the distance."⁹ Characteristic of "orientalism" in the postcolonial sense of that word, this "harmony" reflects the relationship between the powerful and powerless as conceived, of course, by the former (see example 1).

In *Central Asia* evinces the modal qualities that Borodin and his colleagues in the group of composers known as "the Five" or *Kuchka* (which also included Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Musorgsky, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov) derived from indigenous folk music and harmonized in a manner they claimed to be fundamentally distinct from Western Europe's common practice harmony. The "Russian" melody (see example 1, upper staff) is brisk, decided, outward-looking, open-ended, and, accordingly, harmonically dynamic, touching on the minor third-related keys of A major (measures 5–12 of the full score), C major (measures 17–24, 91–103 and 123–139) and E-flat major (measures 106–122). In contrast, the "Oriental" melody (see example 1, lower staff) appears melancholic, introverted, lethargic, and—the sinuous, syncopated use of the English horn over a chromatically descending supportive line being a well-established trope of "exotic" sensuality—lascivious.¹⁰ Cast in A minor and following a ternary scheme of organization, the "Oriental" melody (measures 44–71) is confined in its melodic and harmonic development, and incapable of steering its own course. Indeed, rather than completing its cycle at its second appearance (starting at measure 156), the melody shifts to the parallel major as to prepare for its symbiosis with the "Russian" melody (starting at measure 193). That is to say, an unequal symbiosis, since, as the caravan vanishes over the listeners' musical horizon, the "Oriental" melody is drowned out by its "Russian" counterpart.

For those who follow Sergey Dianin, Borodin's Soviet biographer (and Borodin's adopted daughter's son), this "happy synthesis of the two national elements" attests to the composer's resistance to "any national[ist] or imperialist tendencies."¹¹ Perhaps for calculated reasons, Dianin does not take

Example 1: Alexander Borodin, *In Central Asia* (1880), measures 210–18, combined appearance of “Russian” and “Oriental” songs. The chromatically descending line indicated by the stemless notes does not sound here but accompanies the “Oriental” melody when it occurs alone.

into account that *In Central Asia* was part of a series of musical commissions for the silver jubilee celebrations of Czar Alexander II’s reign (which were cancelled following an attempt on the Czar’s life). More specifically, Borodin, Tchaikovsky, and Musorgsky were asked to provide musical accompaniments for a series of *tableaux vivants* that glorified Alexander’s imperial accomplishments in the Caucasus and Central Asia. As Tchaikovsky explained to his brother, none of the composers involved with the project were free to refuse the assignments, let alone to choose how to fulfill them.¹² While Borodin was asked to supply music depicting a “native caravan escorted by a guard of Russian soldiers,” Musorgsky and Tchaikovsky were asked to set two specific moments of Russia’s military history to music: the 1855 capture of the Ottoman fortress of Kars and the 1877 declaration of war on Turkey, respectively. “It goes without saying that I could not write anything but a lot of noise and banging,” Tchaikovsky wrote of his contribution, the whereabouts of which are unknown today.¹³ Musorgsky’s commission survives as the *Capture of Kars*, a march in which a euphoniously arranged Russian *khorovod* melody interspersed with persistent trumpet signals encapsulates a shrill-sounding *alla turca* setting of what Rimsky-Korsakov described as “some Kurdish theme.”¹⁴ Had Borodin also been assigned a moment of fight and subjugation, he might have resorted to “noise and banging” as well. Instead, his task was to translate into music the sense of empire held

by so many empire builders, namely, that of a harmonious whole in which all parties have come to recognize the righteousness of the emperor and his laws of harmony.

Understood in this light, Dianin's anti-imperialist interpretation of Borodin's ode to the czarist empire that the Communists overthrew expresses the Soviet Politburo's conception of socialist federalism as being inherently antihegemonic, egalitarian, and consensual. Indeed, after 1934, when Stalin presented his own vision of Soviet culture and minority integration, Borodin's "harmony" came to serve as the model on which the USSR's artificially constructed non-Russian republics were to modernize their music practices, the results of which were performed at annual festivals held in the center of Soviet power, Moscow.¹⁵ As MAO Zedong's Communist Party (the CCP) consolidated its power over mainland China during the 1950s and adopted most of the Soviet model of multinational state building, non-Han areas were flooded with Han immigrants who imposed economical, administrative, linguistic, and educational reforms on their new neighbors for the sake of socialist-style modernization. Simultaneously, in a move to mark out its ambitions for non-Han minorities from those of its Guomindang predecessor, the CCP sought to create acceptance by recognizing the rights of non-Hans to their own customs, religious beliefs, and performing traditions, at least insofar as they were accepted or remodeled in conformity with the capricious doctrines and aesthetics of Maoist socialism. In August 1956, the first of many annual national music festivals drew around two hundred non-Han performers from across the PRC's domain to Beijing to showcase their musical traditions. Here, they not only experienced the curiosities of Han exoticism but also discovered that their traditions had been appropriated by Han composers for Western-style (which partially means Borodin-style) dances, suites, capriccios, rhapsodies, and fantasies.¹⁶ Today, such state-run exhibitions continue to demonstrate the success of a unified, multiethnic Chinese state (*duo minzu guojia*) in which non-Han minorities (*shaoshu minzu*) constitutionally enjoy economic and political equality even as they remain subjects of Beijing's "civilizing mission."¹⁷

The political dimensions of such artificial demonstrations of collective harmony had and still have little impact on those who are free of alien assimilationist pressures. Those able to live as free consumers continue to enjoy Borodin's depictions of czarist Russia's colonial subjects in *Prince Igor* and *In Central Asia* as pleasant examples of orientalist aesthetics. The success of these depictions appears from the various orientalia they featured

in since their creation. *In Central Asia's* "Oriental" melody, for instance, introduces Rachmaninoff's setting of Pushkin's poem "Ne poy, krasavitsa, pri mne" (1892), and was borrowed both for the musical accompaniment to George Melford's silent movie *The Sheik* (1921) and for the opening song "Sands of Time" in the 1953 Broadway musical *Kismet*.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the legacy of Russia's musical orientalism can still be heard in Peter Breiner's suite for violin and orchestra entitled *Songs and Dances from the Silk Road* (2004), a lushly orchestrated assortment of mostly Uyghur folk songs. It also resonates in TAN Dun's Oscar-winning soundtrack for Ang Lee's widely acclaimed martial arts film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), in which the flashback scene to the deserts of Xinjiang, where the sympathetic tribal chief Luo Xiao Hu captures the heart of the otherwise unswayable Manchu heroine Jen Yu, is introduced by an undulating English horn that anticipates the *Lawrence of Arabia*—echoing passages during the fighting scene to come. Later in the same scene, while Jen chases Luo for the comb he snatched out of her hand, the soundtrack switches from Western to Han Chinese orientalism as it plays an excerpt from *Camel Bells along the Silk Road (Si lu tuo ling)* (1982), a selection of Uyghur songs arranged for *zhongruan* lute and frame drum by the *ruan* master NING Yong that attests to a fascination for cyclic rhythmic patterns and augmented seconds.¹⁸

The continuity of the visual imagery through which *In Central Asia* has been marketed is equally remarkable. When packaging scores and arrangements of *In Central Asia* for amateur consumption, Borodin's German publisher chose desert imagery typical of nineteenth-century adventure literature (see fig. 1a), imagery that goes back as far as the famous illustration of Marco Polo's caravan in Abraham Cresque's *Catalan Atlas* (ca. 1375) and that is synonymous today with all for which the Silk Road stands. In 2002, the same imagery appeared on the cover of an anthology of (mainly Russian) standard compositions inspired by the imaginary Orient, including *In Central Asia* (see fig. 1b). A year later, the British label ARC Music, specializing in world and folk music, used the image to market music from the real Orient, so to speak, conflating traditions from Turkey through the Middle East and Central Asia into China (see fig. 1c).

Thus the Silk Road, historically the major conduit for transmitting commodities across the Eurasian continent, had itself—to the dismay of many a scholar—become a commodity.¹⁹ Indeed, especially since the counter-cultural 1960s and 1970s, the imagined Silk Road has been branded as

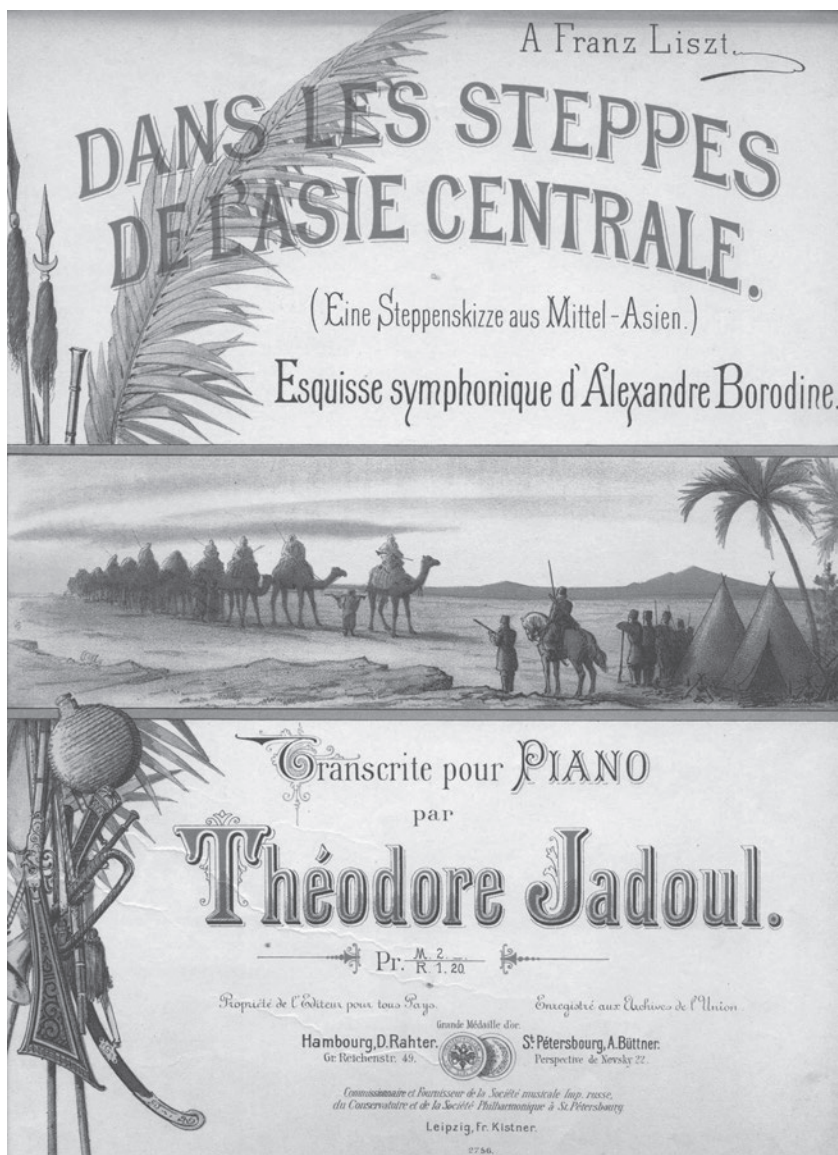


Fig. 1a: Cover of Borodin's *In the Steppes of Central Asia*, piano transcription by Théodore Jadoul (Leipzig: Kistner, 1887).

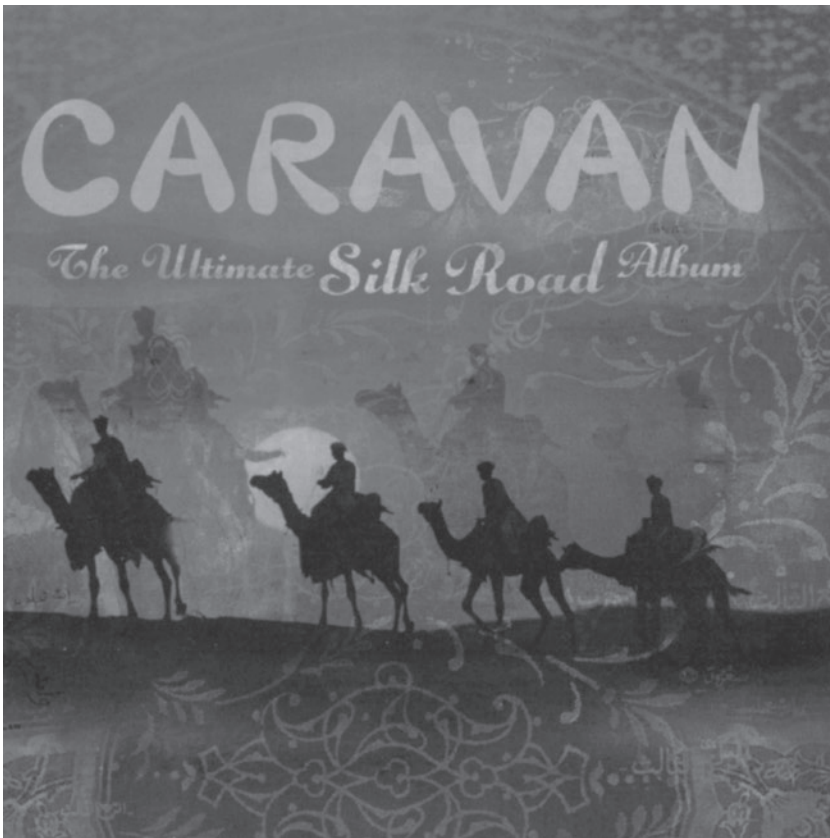


Fig. 1b: Cover of *Caravan: The Ultimate Silk Road Album* (2002). Courtesy of Universal Classics Group.

an oasis for cosmopolitan-minded city dwellers, a place of refuge from the buzz of modern life, whether visited physically or imaginatively.²⁰ Indulging in romantic imagery and phraseology, suppliers of Silk Road products and services as varied as computer games, fashions, lifestyle products, movies, museum exhibitions, tourist attractions, and examples of so-called world music promise to transport consumers back to—as the blurb text of the aforementioned 2002 anthology reads—“the days of Marco Polo’s adventures in the Far East,” a chimerical past that is “fabled,” “exotic,” “mysterious,” and, above all, undisturbed by mundane affairs.

Needless to say, looking at the actual Silk Road region without rose-

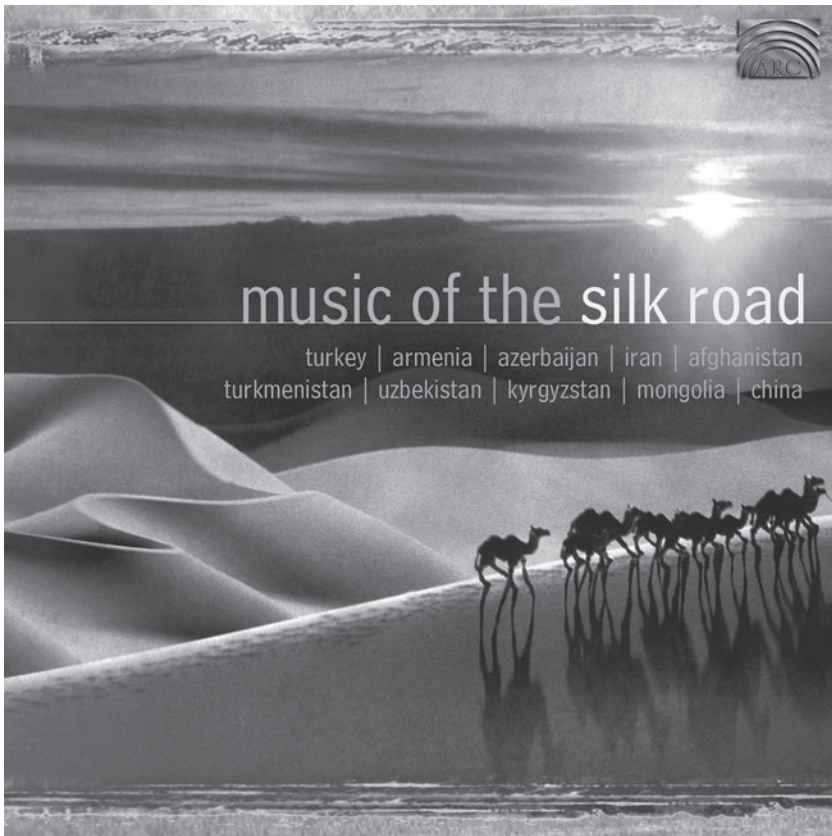


Fig. 1c: Cover of *Music of the Silk Road* (2003). Courtesy of ARC Music.

colored spectacles reveals precisely mundane affairs breaking the charm of the illusion today as they always have. The region remains subject to the political maneuverings of local and global powers vying for hegemony over its markets and resources. In the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, various bi- and multilateral alliances have been established among key players interested in the region, including Russia, China, Japan, the European Union, the United States, Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, the Caucasian and Central Asian republics, and, more recently, post-Taliban Afghanistan. On the surface, these alliances serve to enhance regional stability through joint investments in economic and military infrastructures. Behind these common goals, however, lie self-interests that

conflict in ways reminiscent of the Great Game once played by the British and Russian/Soviet empires. Today, however, the game has become so multifaceted that none of the major contestants can dictate outcomes as imperial powers did a century ago.²¹

INCONGRUOUS HARMONIES: THE “SILK ROAD” AS IDEALIST MODEL FOR THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

As the Cold War defrosted during the 1980s and early 1990s, the Silk Road became a metaphor of cultural rapprochement and mutual exchange, a symbolic alternative to inequitable modes of exchange associated with colonialism and imperialism. In 1988, UNESCO initiated an ambitious research project about the ancient trade routes, a project that, in the words of then director-general Federico Mayor, “forcefully disproved those concepts and visions that today stand as obstacles to the harmonious coexistence of peoples.”²² Needless to say, even though the experiences of UNESCO expedition members at times suggested otherwise, no other conclusion could have been drawn from a project whose ultimate objective was defined as “fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding” (see fig. 2).²³ Underwritten by the belief that study, preservation, and revitalization will make cultural traditions in isolation more resilient in the face of segregating forces, projects such as those undertaken by UNESCO are presented as vital to securing world peace and unity.²⁴

Similar ecumenical aspirations inspire the Silk Road Project, a highly acclaimed East-meets-West enterprise launched in 1998 by the cellist Yo-Yo Ma to familiarize audiences around the globe with the legacy and symbolic power of the ancient trade routes. Turning words into deeds, Ma teamed up with the Smithsonian Institution and the US State Department to transform American’s National Mall, for ten days around Independence Day 2002, into a bazaar where visitors and nearly four hundred artists, actors, cooks, craftsmen, merchants, and musicians hailing from “Silk Road countries” could explore their cultural commonality. The solidarity and interchange that actually arose among participating groups whose relations are politically strained—for example, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Turks; Indians and Pakistanis; and Muslims and Jews—exceeded everyone’s expectations and gave concrete meaning to the festival’s motto, “Connecting Cultures, Creating Trust.”²⁵ As then secretary of state Colin Powell observed at

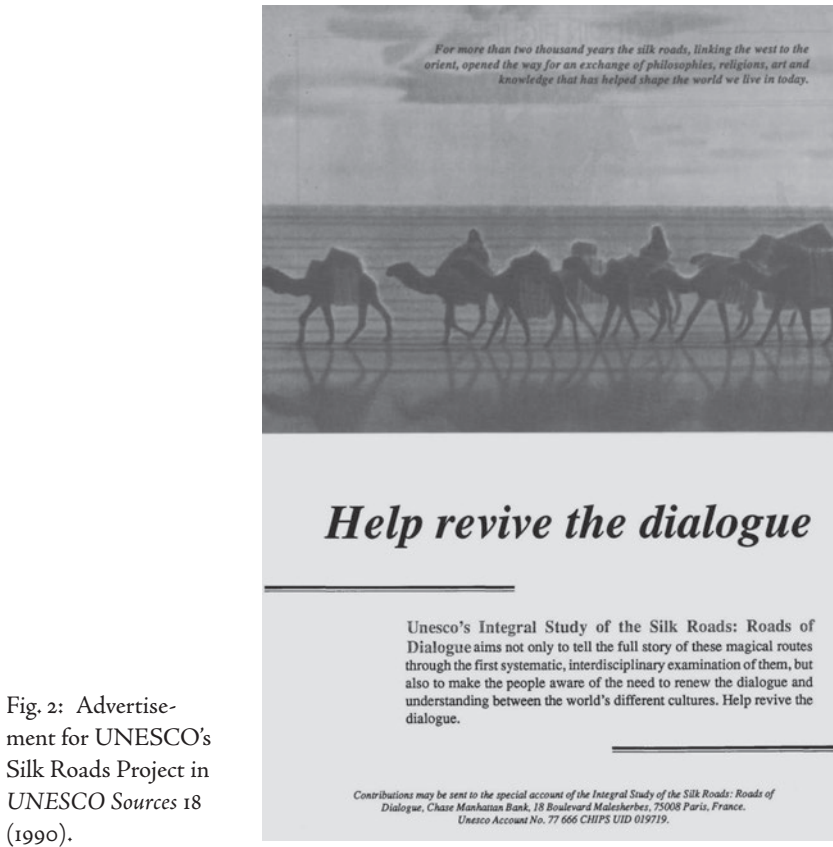


Fig. 2: Advertisement for UNESCO's Silk Roads Project in *UNESCO Sources* 18 (1990).

the festival's opening ceremony to an audience composed of representatives of nations with whom he had just forged "War on Terror" alliances, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Pakistan, "Once again the nations of Central Asia are joining the nations at either end . . . on a path to a better future to all."²⁶

One wonders, however, whether China, for one, would have allowed its citizens to participate in America's Silk Road celebration had its leaders read the festival's political subtext. Whereas Powell was diplomatic enough not to explain who was responsible for breaking East-West connections in the first place, Richard Kennedy, the festival's curator, did not shy away from attributing the prospect of a restored Silk Road to "the modest victories of democracy and capitalism" at the end of the second millennium. "If oil is the new silk, and democracy the new religion," Kennedy commented, the festival

was to demonstrate how “the old cultural traditions of the Silk Road . . . have withstood the onslaught of the Mongols, the seafaring European capitalists, and the more recent Russian and Chinese communists.”²⁷ In this light, images of Tibetan monks in a promotional video accompanying the voice-over’s explanation of the 2002 Smithsonian Folklife Festival as a “rite of cultural democracy” embody a message that must have been at odds with Beijing’s conception of cultural diversity. In what is, until today, China’s most famous staging of the Silk Road myth, the 1979 ballet *Rain of Flowers along the Silk Road* (*Silu Huayu*), non-Han characters express their blind faith in the Han conception of “cultural harmony” (*wenming de hexie*) through sinicized versions of their musical traditions.²⁸

Indeed, as much as the 2002 Smithsonian Folklife Festival enacted post-Cold War dreams of an integrated world based on exchange and trust, the world outside this scene of conviviality demonstrated how far humankind was from achieving this ideal. Less than a year earlier, the festival’s message of intercultural reciprocity was overtaken by al-Qaeda’s attacks on the United States, America’s retaliatory campaign in Afghanistan, and the swelling enthusiasm for an invasion of Iraq. Small wonder, then, that the festival came to bear more political overtones than intended. As if it were an answer to Hedin’s call, expressed sixty-six years earlier, that everything should be done to “bring different peoples together, to connect and unite them . . . at a time when suspicion and envy keep the nations asunder,”²⁹ the festival provided—in the words of the *New York Times*—“the ideal place to find the meaning of America during the nation’s time of trial and terrorist threats.”³⁰

Indeed, the East-West encounter in America’s capital provided an opportunity for the Bush administration to awaken interest in a part of the world with which the United States had become involved despite itself and in which allies had to be sought for the War on Terror.³¹ No opportunity was lost to press on visitors’ minds that after the events of 9/11, “we cannot afford not to know what other people are thinking and feeling, particularly in the vast and strategic regions of Asia that were linked to the Silk Road.”³² Accordingly, generous support from the State Department toward the participation of artists and artisans from Muslim countries (Afghanistan in particular) was intended to demonstrate America’s commitment to protecting the heritage of moderate Muslims against threats from their fundamentalist counterparts. As such, Muslim participants in the festival represented a civilized, peaceful, creative, and human alternative to an uncivilized, violent, destructive, and inhuman Islam, as represented by twenty-foot-tall

images of the Bamiyan Buddhas demolished by the Taliban a year earlier, an act that provoked worldwide condemnation as a crime against humanity.³³

Although the State Department's concern not to discredit Islam in toto was, in itself, commendable, one cannot help but see how the good/bad Islam dichotomy excluded other conceptions of a nonviolent Islam that might be less acceptable to Western secular elites.³⁴ The dubiousness of this bifurcated view of Islam also appears in the ways in which major Eurasian powers, including Russia, India, and China, used the US-led War on Terror to legitimize their intensified repression of separatist sentiments within their own (contested) borders. The American campaign meshed, for instance, with Beijing's attempts to silence the Uyghurs' ever-louder call (since the collapse of the Soviet Empire) for greater autonomy or full independence.³⁵ True, since the post-Mao administration announced its Open Door policy, the PRC's five Autonomous Regions have gained greater autonomy in dealing with investors, trading partners, foreign tourists, and (non)governmental agencies, and the freedoms for cultural and even religious expression have been considerably extended. At the same time, however, attempts to use these liberties for subversive activities have been met with severe measures, including capital punishment. As such, the PRC's leadership, fearful of the scenario that led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, attempts both to relax and reinforce control in order to win the loyalty of its quasi-autonomous subjects and prevent the spark of dissent from igniting.

As part of this attempt to stabilize the situation in China's peripheral areas, the central government has increased its support of minority economies and traditions. Over the years, Beijing has managed to accumulate considerable international funding for the preservation of archeological sites and traditions (i.e., tangible and intangible forms of heritage) deemed important for the history of mankind as a whole. For instance, since UNESCO implemented its Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity program in 2001, the Chinese Ministry of Culture successfully applied for funding on behalf of the Mongolian *urtiin duu*, Tibetan opera, and the Uyghur *muqam* and *māshrāp* traditions. In addition, Beijing joined international efforts to nominate major Silk Road landmarks located in the PRC for UNESCO's World Heritage List.³⁶ However, this enthusiasm for cultural preservation on the part of Chinese authorities goes beyond UNESCO's agenda of sustaining local communities, traditions, and cultural diversity. Critical observers have noted how the UNESCO concept of universal heritage has enabled Chinese

officials to demonstrate an engagement with the pre-1949 past that appears empowering and constructive (rather than disempowering and destructive, as it was most of the time under Mao) while in effect maintaining tight control over the boundaries within which minorities are allowed to define, preserve, and express their identities.³⁷

Today, as in the early 1950s, the PRC's leadership considers the protection of cultural heritage essential for—as one Politburo member put it in 2006—“enhancing cohesion of the nation, boosting the national unity, invigorating the national spirit, and safeguarding the national unification.”³⁸ In practice, this means that Beijing's investment in (in)tangible cultural heritages continues a long-standing strategy of “folklorizing” and sinicizing non-Han traditions, exhibiting and historicizing them as inalienable parts of China itself, and, as a consequence, weakening their potential use on behalf of seditious causes. While minority traditions may only be presented to the international community as part of a program to demonstrate the government's respect for ethnic diversity and commitment to universal harmony (as during the 2008 opening ceremony of the Olympic Games), major cultural sites in Xinjiang and other areas have been hastily transformed into Silk Road tourist venues, supplemented with Han-style facilities and monuments commemorating Chinese presence in the region as long ago as the Han and Tang dynasties.³⁹

At the time the present essay was drafted, Beijing's efforts to shape the national perception of how the PRC's peoples (*minzu*) relate to one another seemed successful. Outbursts of contestation such as the 2008–9 protests in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Mongolia notwithstanding, most members of China's minority communities seemed to have acquiesced in the political reality as it is. During the decade since the 1997 Ghulja/Yining Uprising, for example, the musical preference of the majority of Xinjiang's urban youth—partly due to censorship imposed on the local music industry, partly through official support for musicians promoting politically correct messages—has shifted from songs expressing dissent and resistance (like those performed by rock singer Askar Mamat) to apolitical songs embracing the virtues of modern life (like those performed by pop singer Arken Abdulla). This is not to imply that affirmations of ethnic identity are no longer of concern to young Uyghurs. However, the modes through which such affirmations are expressed have become more closely aligned with China's model of collective harmony than with the militant mood of resistance that dominated much of 1990s Xinjiang.⁴⁰

Han Chinese perceptions of the PRC's minorities, for that matter, seem to have remained constant through the ages. Using the language of colonialism, China's official media represent minorities both as curiosities delighted to be "civilized" by their "Han brothers" and as ungrateful barbarians when they reject such civilizing influences. Evocations of Uyghur culture especially popular among (middle-aged and older) Han men and women include the so-called "Xinjiang folk songs" (*Xinjiang minge*) by Han songwriter WANG Luobin and the state-sponsored Uyghur composer and performer Kelimu (Kerim in Uyghur). Filled with suggestions of smiling belly-dancing Uyghur girls and concocted from sinicized adaptations of Uyghur rhythms and melodies, these songs reflect Han male fantasies of submissive exotic/erotic female others, even as they reflect official utopian visions of a socialist union bound together by loyalty to the Han majority.⁴¹

Less conspicuously, the exoticizing tendencies mentioned above can also be observed in the highly popular *Silk Road* documentary series, a collaborative production of the state television networks of China (CCTV) and Japan (NHK). Conceived after the restoration of Chinese-Japanese diplomatic relations in 1972 and originally broadcast in 1980, the *Silk Road* series was shot in China by NHK and CCTV film crews during a joint expedition in 1979. Both networks edited their own series in terms of what seemed important for their respective nation's history. When viewers in both countries asked for sequels, CCTV responded by presenting more Chinese sites, while NHK made its way westward to Rome. In 2003, CCTV and NHK production crews revisited the sites from the original series, equipped with state-of-the-art film facilities. Both entitled *New Silk Road*, the series produced for Chinese audiences (aired in 2006) again differed significantly from the series produced for Japanese audiences (aired in 2005). The CCTV team concentrated mainly on archeological discoveries and the folkloristic portrayal of local customs, cuisine, and music, whereas the NHK team paid closer attention to ways in which modernization has affected the lives of minority *minzu*. In a separate sequel screened two years later, Japan's network highlighted the political predicaments of peoples in the former Soviet republics and the Arab world, a perspective hard to imagine in a CCTV series.

Although slightly different, the lead-ins for both the NHK *New Silk Road* series and the CCTV one do not initially suggest any significant discrepancy in approach. Both reproduce the same romantic images that have served for a century and more as icons of orientalism: sun-drenched deserts, trudging camels, scenes of premodern village life, monuments of lost civili-



Example 2a: Soundtrack to the NHK series *New Silk Road* (2005), Sandeep Das and Indrajit Dey, arranged by Ljova (Lev Zhurbin), *Mohini (Enchantment)*, reduction.



Example 2b: Soundtrack to the CCTV series *New Silk Road* (2006), Cheng Chi, *Intro*, reduction.

zations, praying Buddhist monks, and, of course, waving veils of silk. The series' music contains the tropes we have come to associate with a timeless and opulent Orient: modal melodies, wordless vocalizations, and lush harmonies articulated by lightly brushed cymbals (see examples 2a and 2b).⁴² Upon closer inspection, however, the lead-ins differ in significant respects. The CCTV version, for example, lacks the footage and sounds associated with Xinjiang that figure in the NHK version. Indeed, the NHK soundtrack as a whole, produced by Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble (a collective of musicians proficient in various musical traditions across the Eurasian continent), evokes the entire Silk Road area. It opens with an excerpt from a *mugham* performance by Azeri singer Alim Qasimov and segues into a circular melody that closes with an augmented second and that is scored for *tabla*, *sarangi*, *shakuhachi*, *pipa*, *ney*, and *duduk*, in addition to a Western string and percussion section. In contrast, the pounding string and brass CCTV soundtrack prepared by CHENG Chi is nearly oblivious to any music from the Arabo-Irano-Turkic area. Cheng's score does contain samples of traditional music he recorded during the NHK/CCTV expedition, including moments of *muqam* performances from Xinjiang. However, these moments, which often disappear into a pentatonic and synthesized wall of sound, emerge as dis-

pensable curiosities rather than as integral elements of the series' score. In sum, both visually and aurally, the lead-ins of the NHK and CCTV series replicate romantic notions about the Silk Road, with that difference that the Chinese lead-in downplays—intentionally or habitually—the Islamic legacy where its Japanese counterpart does not.

CONCLUSION

Behind the iterative Silk Road narratives and sound images circulating in China and the West lie two contrasting visions of collective harmony, one predicated on the (neo)liberal concept of cosmopolitanism, the other on the (post-)Maoist concept of multiethnic nationalism. Actually, it is more appropriate to speak of diverging, rather than contrasting, visions, because the PRC's current policies concerning minority communities as well as its large investments in infrastructural networks that have to tie the whole Eurasian continent together (the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and "Maritime Silk Road") are, in many respects, symptomatic of a nation on the rise, a nation filled with self-confidence and striving to (re)claim a leading position in the global order as Western powers have done before. Accordingly, both visions cannot easily be reconciled with alternative visions that challenge underlying laws of harmony, particularly those alternatives that depart from religious values. Till this very day, both China and the West are inclined, even committed, to overlooking or ignoring Islamic contributions to "common humanity." Instead, they often associate Islam with violence, disorder, and fundamentalism. Whereas China's government continues to privilege Buddhist legacies of China's past over Islamic ones, Western governments actively embrace or, at the very least, condone populist forms of Islamophobia. In the final analysis, contemporary sound images expressing a longing for global harmony embody conflicting discourses of belonging to a community based on Han Chinese, Western, Islamic, or other laws of harmony.

Notes

1. Sven Hedin, *The Silk Road: Ten Thousand Miles through Central Asia* (1936; London: Tauris Parke, 2009), 230.

2. Marie Thorsten, "Silk Road Nostalgia and Imagined Global Community," *Comparative American Studies* 3, no. 3 (2005): 301–17.

3. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259.

4. Ferdinand von Richthofen, *China: Ergebnisse eigener Reisen und darauf gegründeter Studien* (Berlin: Reimer, 1877), 1:495–510.

5. *Ferdinand von Richthofen's Tagebücher aus China*, ed. Ernst Tiessen (Berlin: Reimer, 1907), 1:282. Richthofen's expeditions were financed by the Bank of California and the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce, with the understanding that Richthofen would map China's coal deposits and mineral resources. After his return to Germany, the baron acted as a consultant to the Bismarck government on its China policy. See Jürgen Osterhammel, "Forschungsreise und Kolonialprogramm: Ferdinand von Richthofen und die Erschließung Chinas im 19. Jahrhundert," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 69 (1987): 150–95.

6. The phrase in question refers to the so-called Heartland Theory of British geographer Halford John Mackinder, who, at the height of the Great Game conflict between the British and Russian empires, defined Central Asia as an area of prime geostrategic significance. For more on the etymology of the term *Silk Road*, see Daniel C. Waugh, "Richthofen's 'Silk Roads': Toward the Archaeology of a Concept," *Silk Road* 5, no. 1 (2007): 1–10; Tamara Chin, "The Invention of the Silk Road, 1877," *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 1 (2013): 194–219.

7. For a bibliography of these studies, see Peter Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road: The Search for the Lost Cities and Treasures of Chinese Central Asia* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 243–45.

8. Hedin, *The Silk Road*, 21. During their 1933–35 expedition, for instance, Hedin and his crew got caught up in the civil war following the Soviet invasion of Xinjiang and found themselves detained for several months in Ürümchi by the Guomindang-sponsored Hui warlord MA Zhongying.

9. The original program is quoted in Sergey A. Dianin, *Borodin* (1955), trans. Robert Lord (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 114. Borodin slightly revised the program for a performance of *In Central Asia* two years later, omitting the reference to the "formidable power" of the czarist army and replacing the opposition of "conquerors and conquered" in the last sentence with "Russians" versus "the native population." The revised version circulates today in concert and liner notes. See *ibid.*, 129.

10. For extensive discussions of nationalism and orientalism with respect to Russian music, see Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

11. Dianin, *Borodin*, 228. To substantiate his observation, Dianin cited the orientalist Alexander N. Samoylovich—a key figure in the development and execution of Moscow's policies regarding its Turkic republics, until he himself became a victim

of the 1937–38 wave of purges—who had told Dianin that the leading intelligentsia of 1920s Turkey appreciated *In Central Asia* as a confirmation of Soviet-Turkish friendship.

12. Pyotr Tchaikovsky to Anatoly Tchaikovsky, 28 January/9 February 1880, quoted in Tchaikovsky, *Letters to His Family: An Autobiography*, trans. Galina von Meck (London: Dobson, 1981), 234.

13. Pyotr Tchaikovsky to Anatoly Tchaikovsky, 31 January/12 February 1880, quoted in Tchaikovsky, *Letters*, 234–35.

14. Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life*, trans. Judah A. Joffe (London: Eulenberg, 1974), 215–16.

15. For an account of Soviet music policy with respect to the USSR's Central Asian and Caucasian republics, see Marina Frolova-Walker, "National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51, no. 2 (1998): 331–71. See also Ted Levin, *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God: Musical Travels in Central Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

16. See editorials in *People's China* 8, no. 16 (1956): 37–38 and *Chinese Literature* 7, no. 1 (1957): 194.

17. See, for instance, *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, ed. Stevan Harrell (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); Colin Mackerras, *China's Minority Cultures: Identities and Integration since 1912* (New York: Longman, 1995).

18. For the score of *Si lu tuo ling*, see *Jiaoxiang: Journal of the Xi'an Conservatory of Music* 5, no. 1 (1986): 76–80. Offended at not having been asked for permission to include a two-minute segment of his composition in the blockbuster movie's soundtrack (he merely received two unsolicited checks of two hundred dollars each), Ning took Tan to court. Tan was cleared of the charge after it had been established that the challenged excerpt did not constitute a part of his score but was included as source music by Lee's team in the editing phase. In the end, Ning's Shanghai-based publisher, China Record Corporation, was held responsible for flaws made in the copyright negotiations with Lee's production company.

19. For deliberations on the value of the term *Silk Road* for academic discussion, see Warwick Ball, "Following the Mythical Road," *Geographical* 70, no. 3 (1998): 18–23; Susan Whitfield, "Was There a Silk Road?," *Asian Medicine* 3 (2007): 201–13; Khodadad Rezakhani, "The Road That Never Was: The Silk Road and Trans-Eurasian Exchange," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2010): 420–33.

20. In the West, the term *Silk Road* gained wide usage in the 1960s after the publication of several glossy coffee-table books and travel guides, including Luce Boulnois's *La route de la soie* (Paris: Arthaud, 1963) and Robert J. Collins's *East to Cathay: The Silk Road* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968). At the same time, the term

shiruku rōdo was introduced in Japan through a translation of Hedin's *Silk Road*. In China, the term *sichou zhi lu* obtained currency in the 1970s.

21. For book-length studies on the matter, see Rein Müllerson, *Central Asia: A Chessboard and Player in the New Great Game* (London: Kegan Paul, 2007); Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

22. *Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue, 1988–1997* (Paris: UNESCO, 1997).

23. Andre Gunder Frank, "On the Silk Road: An 'Academic' Travelogue," *Economic and Political Weekly* 25, no. 46 (1990): 2536–39.

24. See, for instance, Eiji Hattori, "The Silk Roads as Routes of Dialogue among Civilizations," in *Cultural Diversity and Transversal Values: East-West Dialogue on Spiritual and Secular Dynamics* (Paris: UNESCO, 2006), 53–57. Hattori was one of the initiators of the UNESCO Silk Roads project.

25. See Richard Kurin, "The Silk Road Festival: Connecting Cultures," *Anthropology News* (September 2002): 47; Mark Slobin, "The Silk Road Wends Its Way to Washington," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 36, no. 2 (2003): 197–98. For documentation on the festival, see <http://www.festival.si.edu/2002/the-silk-road/smithsonian> (accessed 12 October 2012).

26. Colin Powell, "Remarks at the Opening of the Silk Road Festival," 26 June 2002, published in 148 Cong. Rec. S 6,942 (2002).

27. Richard Kennedy, "The Silk Road: Connecting Cultures, Creating Trust," *Talk Story: Culture in Motion* 21 (Spring 2002): 1.

28. For a detailed discussion of *Silu Huayu*, see Harm Langenkamp, "Conflicting Dreams of Global Harmony in US-PRC Silk Road Diplomacy," in *Music and Diplomacy from the Early Modern Era to the Present*, ed. Rebekah Ahrendt, Mark Ferraguto, and Damien Mahiet (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 85–91.

29. Hedin, *The Silk Road*, 234.

30. Steven R. Weisman, "A Global Gathering on the Mall," *New York Times*, 6 July 2002, A12.

31. See "People-to-People Diplomacy Needed More Than Ever, Harrison Says," 5 July 2002, *Washington File: East Asia and the Pacific*, <http://wfile.ait.org.tw/wf-archive/2002/020705/epf505.htm> (accessed 24 October 2012). The source cited is Patricia Harrison, assistant secretary of state for education and cultural affairs.

32. Yo-Yo Ma, "A Journey of Discovery," in the festival program booklet, *The Silk Road: Connecting Cultures, Creating Trust* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2002), 7.

33. For a critical analysis of the discourse surrounding the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, see Finbarr Barry Flood, "Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum," *Art Bulletin* 84, no. 4 (2002): 641–59.

34. For a critical discussion of post-9/11 Middle East arts events, see Jessica Winegar, "The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2008): 651–81.

35. Beijing's attempts to link Uyghur separatist movements with al-Qaeda lack substantial evidence and obscure the fact that Uyghur resistance has—at least until 9/11—primarily been inspired by nationalist, as opposed to religious, motives. James A. Millward, *Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment*, Policy Studies 6 (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2004).

36. See UNESCO, "Tentative Lists: Chinese Section of the Silk Road," <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5335> (accessed 20 October 2012).

37. See Bruce Doar, "Approaching the Past: Preparing an Inventory of Intangible Cultural Properties," *China Heritage Quarterly*, no. 7 (2006), <http://chinaheritagequarterly.org/editorial.php?issue=007> (accessed 20 October 2012); Rachel Harris, *The Making of a Musical Canon in Chinese Central Asia: The Uyghur Twelve Muqam* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 109–36; Millward, "Uyghur Art Music and the Ambiguities of Chinese Silk Roadism in Xinjiang," *Silk Road* 3, no. 1 (2005): 12–14.

38. "Senior Chinese Official Calls for Protecting Intangible Cultural Heritage," *People's Daily Online*, 14 February 2006, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200602/14/eng20060214_242429.html (accessed 12 November 2012).

39. See Bruce Doar, "Mistaken Identities? Focus on Cultural Heritage Protection in Xinjiang," *China Heritage Quarterly*, no. 3 (2005), <http://chinaheritagequarterly.org/editorial.php?issue=003>; Rachel Harris and Rahilä Dawut, "Mazar Festivals of the Uyghurs: Music, Islam, and the Chinese State," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 11, no. 1 (2002): 101–18.

40. See Nimrod Baranovitch, "From Resistance to Adaptation: Uyghur Popular Music and Changing Attitudes among Uyghur Youth," *China Journal*, no. 58 (2007): 59–82.

41. For a classic study of Han exoticism, see Dru C. Gladney, "Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 1 (1994): 92–123. About WANG Luobin, see Harris, "Wang Luobin: Folk Song King of the Northwest or Song Thief? Copyright, Representation, and Chinese Folk Songs," *Modern China* 31, no. 3 (2005): 381–401. Attesting to the popularity of Luobin's songs is a tribute album by the Twelve Girls Band (EMI, 2006), which features arrangements of classics like "Dabancheng Girl," "Lift Your Veil," and "At a Faraway Place." For a discussion of more intricate Uyghur (self-)exoticizations, see Baranovitch, "From the Margins to the Centre: The Uyghur Challenge in Beijing," *China Quarterly*, no. 175 (2003): 726–50.

42. The NHK soundtrack is released on Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble, *Silk Road Journeys: Beyond the Horizon*, Sony Classical, SK 93962, 2005, compact disc, track 1; the CCTV soundtrack on CHENG Chi, *New Music of Silk Road 2006*, China Records Shanghai Corporation, 0094638436928, 2006, compact disc, track 13.