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Department of Government and Public Administration, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities



Reliving the Silk Road

--- Uyghur textile traders in China and Beyond

Speaker: Ayxem Eli

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Ayxem Eli is of Uyghur origin from Xinjiang, China. After finishing her PhD studies at Melbourne University in Australia, she worked as a postdoctoral research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Germany, before returning to Australia and taking up a lecturing position at the University of Tasmania in 2009. She is currently a senior lecturer at the School of International Studies, the University of New South Wales. Her areas of interest cover gender studies, economic anthropology, identity politics, visual arts and post-Socialism, with specific regional focus on China and Central Asia.

Abstract: Textiles have been one of the most enduring commodities through time and space in human history. China's significant role in both textile production and distribution has continued into the 21st century by being the biggest exporter in the world. One third of China's textile transactions take place in Keqiao, 180 km southwest of Shanghai in Zhejiang province. Amongst its diverse business communities, Keqiao hosts a sizeable population of Muslim Uyghur traders, manufacturers and brokers from Kashgar region in the troubled north western province of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. This research observes the ways in which Uyghur economic elite interface actively with the Chinese state in a political and economic environment that is typically perceived as unfavourable. It also seeks to examine the process of de/reterritorialization that has helped construct this particular cohort of Uyghurs' sense of identities in order to renegotiate their ethnic image, business ethics and socio-political status in both their homeland and in a Chinese city.

