Panel Overview

Panel 4.1: Music Bridging Cultures? Towards an Acoustic Geography of Contemporary Asia

Musical sounds are crossing national and cultural boundaries at an ever-increasing pace. Whole musical products travel easily, via CDs, satellite broadcast, digital downloads and streaming. As they are introduced and become meaningful for people who may live thousands of miles from the source of production and culturally distant from the musicians who created them, they inevitably undergo transformations in meanings and in listening and performance contexts in these new settings and may induce reinterpretations in the source culture as well. Musicians everywhere are exposed to these traveling sounds and often take inspiration from them, sometimes attempting to reproduce the original in its entirety, but in other cases extracting particular sonic aspects—a melody, a rhythmic pattern, the sound quality of a particular instrument—incorporating these into their own practice. In some cases this kind of borrowing is intended to symbolize or even encourage cross-cultural understanding; in others the impetus may simply arise from an attraction to the novelty—“a fresh new sound”—or be motivated by commercial considerations of the music industry. In the realm of popular music, it may be the visual dimension more than the acoustic one that is primary. The presenters on this panel address different aspects of the changing acoustic geography of Asia, identifying particular cases of music traveling and establishing itself in new geographical and cultural surroundings.