Mecca is often conceptualized as a destination for the hajj or a source of leverage for imperial states, Saudi national foreign policy, and Islamist movements. For studies of Islam in China, the pilgrimage to Mecca has been identified as a significant factor in initiating new waves of religious movements upon pilgrim-scholars’ returns. While building on such transnational angles, the talk proposes to view Mecca as a convergence point for diaspora populations from across Asia, an intermediary site that has hosted and redirected mobilities of sojourners, refugees, and exiles throughout the manifold turnovers of the twentieth century. Specifically, I will focus on an eclectic community of first to third-generation Chinese Muslim settlers in the Hejaz (western coasts of the Arabian Peninsula) who themselves or whose predecessors arrived in the region at different points in time between the 1930s and 2010s — as pilgrims, exiles, and students. The talk shows that the variegated routes between Mecca and China, coupled with imaginaries of the city as a distant home place of origin, served as a rare constant orienting force that sustained two-directional mobilities of Chinese Muslim diasporas through the wars and revolutions of the modern times.

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Zoom registration is available via: https://uni-regensburg.zoom.us/meeting/register/u5cuf-yor7luH9PDfKgVL92PZS21ugndDCL2. In order to register for the mailing list, please write to timothy.nunan@geschichte.uni-regensburg.de.