



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE FOR CHINESE STUDIES

ICS presents the "Re-Imagining China's Past and Present" Lecture Series

Revolutionizing Evolution: The Politics of Suicide Bombing in Late Qing China

Thursday, November 9, 2017

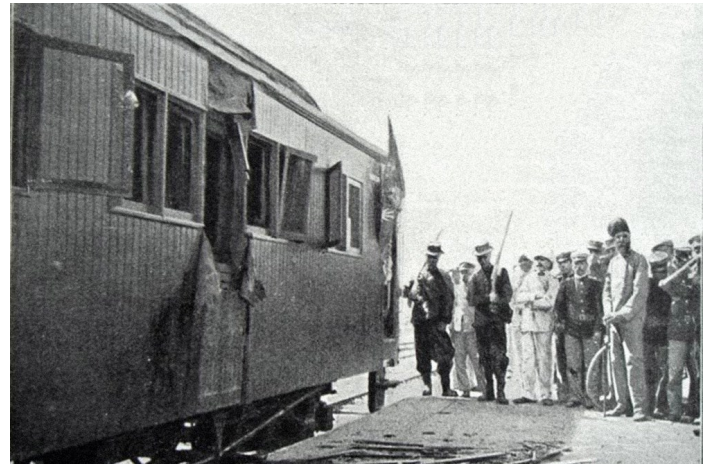
4:00-5:30 pm

Psychology Building 0010

1835 Neil Ave

Keren He

Visiting Assistant Professor in Chinese
Language, Culture, and Society
Oberlin College



Scene of Wu Yue's bombing of Qing diplomatic mission

Abstract: The last decade of the Qing Dynasty witnessed China's uneasy transition from an empire to a modern republic, a transition marked by an upswing in assassination activities conducted by anti-Qing revolutionaries. So pervasive were these individual acts of violence that one contemporary dubbed his time as "the age of assassination." This presentation will explore the spiritual motivations of political radicalism by examining the case of Wu Yue (1878-1905), the first Chinese suicide bomber who attempted to assassinate members of a Qing diplomatic mission. In contrast to existing studies that view late Qing assassinations as political acts driven by anti-Manchu sentiments, I argue that Wu was motivated by a desire to rewrite the dominant discourse of social evolution. Ideologically opposed to the Spencerian model, which casts individual self-assertion as the evolutionary engine of the nation, Wu imagined an alternative evolution fueled by the spiritual power of self-destruction.

His legacy proved to be a double-edged sword for the Chinese revolution in the long twentieth century: as figures across the political spectrum were possessed by the spiritual power championed by Wu, the goal of spiritual evolution was used to both legitimize and challenge the agenda of state-building.

Bio: Keren He is a Visiting Assistant Professor in Chinese Language, Culture, and Society at Oberlin College. Her research focuses on the registers of spirituality in Chinese political and intellectual life. She is currently working on a book manuscript, "Death on a Pedestal: Political Suicide in China, 1898-1937," which examines voluntary death as a symptom of spiritual crisis in China's transformation toward a modern secular society.

**Free and Open
to the Public**

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Contact: Nathan Lancaster | East Asian Studies Center | lanaster.102@osu.edu | <http://easc.osu.edu>