For many Muslims around the world, the term *waqf* stands for the institution of the pious endowment in and of itself: *waqf* is a legal institution, wherein a revenue-generating property is donated, with its principal remaining inalienable. Its revenues are disbursed to sustain a pious purpose and in order to seek God’s favor. *Waqf* is a complex institution which has been employed by Muslims for over 1000 years to sustain various projects, ranging from private homes, cemeteries, libraries, mosques, schools, to agricultural farms, medical dispensaries, hospitals and commercial businesses. *Waqf* has been shown to be a mobile and flexible institution that has manifested itself in a great many guises and been situated in various historical contexts. It is a living tradition such that studies on *waqf* could become a lens through which to explore human history and its transformation.¹ At the same time, *waqf* has also been regarded critically, seen as having created legally inflexible property entities in the past.

that limit possibilities for societal change in the present, in the name of maintaining waqf endowments in perpetuity. Furthermore, J. Dedieu has argued in favor of an integration of these approaches to the waqf via a comparative perspective on different religious mortmains around the world.

Against this backdrop, N. Moumtaz recently identified a “third wave” of waqf studies beginning in the early twenty-first century which has emerged in cross-disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and even transdisciplinary debates. The first wave of studies was mainly based on waqf documents, to clarify legal and historical aspects, and these studies continue to be produced. On the eve of the twenty-first century Hoexter pointed to a number of studies that had gone beyond legal and historical concerns to explore waqf through cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary debates, such as in the fields of politics, economics and gender studies. Two decades later, Hoexter’s take has been refined by Moumtaz, who points out that the second and third waves not only engaged different methodological approaches and had different scholarly aims, but also emerged from different areas of studies: scholars who work within the more familiar field of Islamic studies may be surprised to find waqf the subject of financial modelling and the quantitative calculation analyses of economists. Waqf studies are flourishing in Muslim majority countries, not only in the Middle East – the “traditional” area of Islamic studies within the Muslim world – but also in what were once perceived as peripheral areas. South and Southeast Asia have become a new centers, both with respect to the subject of research and the locus of scholars conducting new research on waqf. These waqf studies, growing in number, have engaged with the revival movement of waqf and other philanthropic forms. Their research is supported by governments, development agencies, and academic institutions, appearing in new

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This special issue includes a diversity of discussions that offer examples of the three waves of *w*aqf studies mentioned above. The contributions portray and analyze Muslim endowments in a range of historical and political settings, with a specific focus on Asia as an interconnected zone of empirical and analytical investigation. The issue is the outcome of a workshop on Muslim endowments in Asia conducted at the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore in October 2016. A main aim of the workshop was to bring together scholars focusing on different parts of Asia and its diverse Muslim societies in colonial, post-colonial, socialist and post-socialist contexts. To facilitate a discussion of Muslim endowments across Asia, and of charitable practices adjacent to them, we asked our contributors to address the theme of “circulation,” including different forms of connectivity and mobility in their work.

The articles in this issue span the vast geographical and historical spaces of Central Asia and East Asia (Eric Schluessel), South Asia (Eric Lewis Beverley, Carter Hawthorne Higgins), Southeast Asia (Amelia Fauzia) and West Asia (Nada Moumtaz). The empirical contributions are followed by Amy Singer's conceptual article discussing Muslim endowments in Asia through a comparative perspective. There are two main themes that frame the volume: first the role of transregional and spatially transgressive thinking in overcoming the limitations of area studies with respect to *w*aqf, and second, the value of circulatory processes as a prism through which to analyze the multiple religious, social, political and economic dimensions of Muslim endowments in Asia.

I. Pinning Down and Moving On: Tensions of Inter-Asian Geographies

There is a limited number of studies of “inter-Asian” connections and transregional circulations that focus on Islam, and even fewer on *w*aqf. However, the past two de-

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decades have produced an abundance of studies on the historical and contemporary transgression of political and geographical boundaries across Asia and beyond. These studies have – implicitly and explicitly – reinforced the agenda of historicizing colonial and Cold-War fragmentations that long informed the production of knowledge in area studies. While few authors have articulated this agenda as provocatively, Kuan-Hsing Chen’s call to de-colonize, “de-Cold War,” and de-imperialize academic knowledge production through the framework of “Asia as a method” resonates in many recent works. By bringing together scholars of various parts of Asia, this special issue adopts this framework in the context of examining waqf.

Making Asia the starting point of reasoning about Muslim endowments allows us to look beyond reified regional and cultural frontiers. More than this, the articles collected in this issue seek to go beyond assumptions that have dominated the study of “inter-Asian” connections: a majority of works in the field have focused on the emergence of “societies” through the lens of mobile people, diasporas and their moving artifacts. For instance, in his classic study of diasporic Hadhramis across the Indian Ocean, Engseng Ho investigates the role of genealogy in community formation across vast spatial and temporal territories. More recently, Magnus Marsden focused on the maintenance of truly inter-continental human relationships among Afghan traders who navigate their connections far beyond mere economic transactions. At the same time, less emphasis has been placed on looking at transregional circulations through the lens of social and material places and infrastructures – such as the waqf – that are often associated with ideas of stability and immobility.

Historically Muslim endowments have taken many different shapes across time and space, varying tremendously in scale, at times traversing political, economic, and territorial boundaries. They have often created or converged with infrastructure

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14 Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*.
15 Marsden, *Trading Worlds*.
networks through connectivity to places far beyond the locus of the endowment's core institution, and they have provided circuits of mobility among different social, political and geographical spaces. Against this backdrop and based on fine-grained historical and ethnographic accounts, the contributions to this special issue suggest a variety of analytical approaches to a range of circulation types found in Muslim endowments. The cases focus on different types of “connected places”\(^{16}\) that are embedded in various scales of circulations.

II. Contributions to this issue

This special issue is structured by chronological and spatial concerns. It thus takes the reader on a journey to different Muslim endowments in Asia across time and space. The first contribution, by Nada Moumtaz, focuses on *waqfs* in Mount Lebanon in the second half of the nineteenth century. Discussing property and debt in relation to Muslim endowments in the late Ottoman Empire, Moumtaz shows how the remaking of the legal subject of that time served to question the interpretation of specific *waqfs* as charitable acts. These new regimes, she emphasizes, were linked to different circulations. Legal reforms penetrated different parts of the Ottoman Empire; at the same time, French bankers and silk industrialists integrated Mount Lebanon into the global capitalist economy, which in turn, transformed the meaning of the *waqf*, which was “anchored in a different moral universe.”

The second article takes the reader to Xinjiang in Northwestern China in the late Qing and early Republican era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Eric Schluessel presents the multi-dimensional case of *waqf* in the region, which is marked by a “bifurcation” between Chinese and Islamic historical records. Together they tell a complex hide-and-seek story of domination, resistance and collusion. The institution of *waqf* thus provides insight into struggles over resources between non-Muslim Chinese and Muslims, into collaboration between wealth and state power, and into interrupted circuits of knowledge in contexts of linguistic difference which require literal and conceptual translation work.

The third contribution, by Eric Beverley, shows how *waqfs* have been a subject of complex property claims that continued across decades, connecting various places in the Indian Ocean. The advantages of *waqf* and the disputes it provoked involved not only Islamic family law, and Hindu and British legal regimes, but also matters of political sovereignty and economic interest. By discussing three case studies based in Hyderabad – an Islamic state that had never been fully colonized by the British – Beverley explores the connectivity established through *waqfs*, specifically their expansive power to bind individuals and institutions subject to different legal jurisdictions and political regimes.

\(^{16}\) Tagliacozzo, Siu, Perdue (eds), *Asia Inside Out.*
In the fourth contribution, Carter Higgins presents the case of the Gogameri mausoleum in contemporary, “neoliberal” Rajasthan in India. As Higgins shows, Gogameri has been a historically diverse place that is embedded in a pilgrimage economy which includes Muslim priests as well as Hindu and Sikh worshippers. However, with the emergence of a large Hindu middle class in the 2000s that could afford to make pilgrimage trips to faraway places, Gogameri has increasingly become a site of contestation for state institutions, new and more numerous pilgrims, and the shrine’s priests. As a shared space that has been constituted by the circulation of shared concepts, narratives and capital across religious boundaries, Gogameri challenges the very notion of the distinct “Muslim” endowment.

In the fifth and final empirical contribution, Amelia Fauzia takes the reader to contemporary Indonesia where waqf cemeteries-cum-memorial gardens have recently emerged to constitute new business models. Islamic charitable organizations – those who are often the developers of these luxurious properties for the dead – draw on a range of elements that have grown in importance in Asia and beyond: a neoliberal economic environment, new financial technologies, ideas of an Islamically inspired urban life-style, and funeral rites conforming to Salafi norms. As such these new forms of waqf are truly part of the global Islamic circuits that connect the living and the deceased to land, religious organizations, the ulama, and, in this case, to the Indonesian state.

Finally, Amy Singer concludes this special issue with a contribution that situates the volume’s articles within broader debates on Muslim endowments. She thereby provides an outlook on future research directions and makes evident how the waqf has not only survived up until the present but has even flourished in the early twenty-first century. This special issue hopes to illuminate some of these processes by providing a decentered perspective onto Asia at large. Taking this approach further and looking at historical, sociological and legal connections beyond Asia promises a rich field investigation for future research on the waqf.