



Beyond Death:

Imperishable Monks and Buddhist Heritage Practices Among Mongols of Russia

Talk by

Dr. Valeria Gazizova (SAI, Heidelberg/GSRL, Paris)

Thursday, 13.07.2023 | 2:15-3:45 pm

Join via Zoom : <https://zoom.us/j/91701306234?pwd=elRzS0JBREQ5L0s3eWMxYThrbDEwZz09>

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The talk will examine how the framework of Tibetan Buddhist ideas concerning saintly dying and bodily relics can be deployed for reconstituting the endangered religious heritage and stigmatized ethnic identity after at least half a century of state suppression of religion. The Stalinist purges largely erased the Buddhist establishment in the 1930s, with Buddhism in the Soviet Union and Mongolia going underground until around 1990. Based on archival materials and ethnographic data collected throughout the 2010s among Kalmyk and Buryat Mongols living in Russia, the talk is concerned with developing popular worship and oral hagiographies of pre-revolutionary Buddhist monks who are believed to have attained certain physical states at death deemed to signify high spiritual realization. Central to my discussion is the site of a destroyed Kalmyk monastery perceived as particularly powerful, dangerous and endowed with miraculous and healing properties precisely because it is said to have housed the allegedly imperishable body of its deceased abbot for almost a century until its abolishment in the late 1920s. I demonstrate how the ideas and diverse functions of the “miraculous” associated with bodily relics can be transmitted, located in people and things, and used for legitimizing new religious forms and pilgrimage sites.

Valeria Gazizova is a scholar of Mongol and Tibetan religions, specialising in the history and anthropology of Buddhism and forms of popular worship among the Mongols of Russia in late modern and contemporary times. She has conducted extensive ethnographic research on religious transformations, new vernacular spiritualities and ritual healers in postsocialist Kalmykia, southwest Russia. She has MPhil in Tibetan Studies and PhD in History of religions from the University of Oslo, the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages. She held postdoctoral positions at the University of Cambridge and, most recently, at Heidelberg University.



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