



CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND
TRANSCULTURAL STUDIES

SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE
Department of Cultural and
Religious History of South Asia



**UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG**
ZUKUNFT
SEIT 1386

COLLOQUIUM (WiSe 2021-22)

**‘Secret lamas’ of the Soviet era and their female ‘lineage holders’:
Gender dynamics in Kalmyk Buddhism since late socialism**

Dr. Valeria GAZIZOVA (DAAD PRIME Fellow)

Tuesday, 26th October
16.15-17.45 hrs
CATS, Building 4010,
Room no. 06
(010.00.06)



The talk explores the construction of public memories and proliferating deification of underground Buddhists who secretly conducted rituals, gave initiations into Tantric practices and healed by means of Tibetan Buddhist medicine during the Soviet period in Kalmykia. Situated to the northwest of the Caspian Sea, Kalmykia is one of the three ‘autonomous republics’ of Russia where the Tibetan variant of Buddhism is historically practised by its titular population, the westernmost branch of Mongolian peoples. The Stalinist purges of the 1930s erased the Kalmyk Buddhist establishment from the public scene, and until the late 1980s, Buddhism and indigenous forms of popular worship and folk healing remained illegal in Kalmykia. Rather than eradicating religion among the Kalmyks altogether, the repression and prohibition created special conditions of its functioning. Officially ‘illegal’, it became a covert activity, with underground reference points of religious activity having been formed around returnee ex-monks who had received a Buddhist education before the anti-religious campaigns and survived corrective labour camps. In this state-imposed mode of secrecy, it is women that became important carriers of Kalmyk ritual and healing practices, for they began (and more so than men) receiving texts and initiations from returnee monastics and undertook ritual activities that used to be conducted exclusively by monks.