

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

1:15 pm - 2:30 pm Eastern Time

Online event: [Register for Zoom link](#)

Sangsaraima Ujeed

Assistant Professor of Tibetan Buddhism
University of Michigan



Reincarnations of Power Amongst the Mongols: From *Möngke Tengri* to the *Śīditü Lama*

Mongolian rulers starting with Chingghis Khan have been respectful verging on reverent towards foreign religious traditions and their adepts based on their abilities for communing with the Mongol's highest source of divine power, *Möngke Tengri*, "the eternal sky". The Mongol's cosmological paradigm of power started a metamorphosis when they became entangled with the Tibetan Buddhist world. The tantric Buddhist teachings that uniquely marked Buddhism on the Tibetan plateau offered a path for humans to transcend the divine. This ensnared the Mongols into relationships that would influence religion and politics from the Himalayas, China, and Inner Asia from there on. By the 17th century, Mongolian Buddhist monks practicing the secret mantra occupied positions of worldly and supramundane power throughout the reaches of the Qing Empire.

To date, the historical Tibeto-Mongolian symbiosis has been analyzed from the perspective of Tibeto-centric or China-centric political histories. The religious position and input of the Mongols for the wider Buddhist ecosystem has mostly been disregarded as those of the recipient, sometimes referred to as "the bastard stepchild" of Tibetan Buddhism. In this talk, I reexamine the religio-cultural developments of Buddhism and Buddhist identity amongst the Mongols from the Mongol Empire through to the Qing period. As well as revisiting well-known religio-historical works, my main case studies are extracted from newly obtained Mongolian and Tibetan language Buddhist biographies, religious histories, and records of received teachings from the early modern period. Collectively, these case studies will demonstrate how the Mongols engagement with Tibetan Buddhism was fundamental for the dissemination and development of the wider Tibetan Buddhist tradition far beyond the realms on the steppe.