

International workshop

“New Religious Trends and Eschatology in the Inner Asia World”

International workshop organised by the Centre de recherches sur les civilisations de l'Asie orientale (CRCAO UMR 8155, CNRS, Collège de France, EPHE-PSL, Université Paris Cité)

Date: Thursday 15 October 2026

Location: Collège de France – Institut des civilisations Adresse : 52 rue du Cardinal Lemoine, 75005 Paris, salle, Françoise Héritier

Language: English

Organisers: Aurore Dumont (Université Paris Cité, CRCAO) & Isabelle Charleux (CNRS, CRCAO).

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Schedule

Format: 30-minute presentation + 10-minute discussion per paper

Morning Session

9:45-10:15—Welcome and coffee

10:15-10:40 — Opening : Isabelle CHARLEUX (CNRS/CRCAO) & Aurore DUMONT (Université Paris Cité/CRCAO)

Panel 1

Chair/Discussant: Florence GALMICHE (Université Paris Cité / Centre Chine, Corée, Japon)

10:40-11:20: Saskia ABRAHMS-KAVUNENKO (Kyoto University): “Mongolian Connections: Visionary Science, Mysticism and the Dispersed Birthing of the New Age”

11:20-12:00: Isabelle CHARLEUX (CNRS/CRCAO): “No More Gods? The Cult of Natural Elements in Contemporary Mongolian Pilgrimage”

12:00-14:00—Lunch break

Afternoon Session

Panel 2

Chair/Discussant: Nicolas SIHLÉ (CESAH)

14:00-14:40: Valeria GAZIZOVA (Heidelberg University): “Textual (Under)Grounds: Revelatory Practices and Neo-Nomadic Spirituality”

14:40-15:20: Valentina PUNZI (EPHE/CRCAO): “From the Bottom of the Ocean to the Top of a Thousand Mountains: The Reinvention of Zhang Zhung Civilization in Contemporary Chinese Pop Culture”

15:20-15:45 — Coffee break

Panel 3

Chair/Discussant: Vincent GOOSSAERT (EPHE/GSRL)

15:45-16:25: Alevtina SOLOVYEVA (University of Tartu, Estonia; visiting Prof. in MINPAKU, Japan): “Resilient Eschatology and Cosmological Sovereignty in Contemporary Inner Asia”

16:25-17:05: MA Xin (EPHE): “From Anonymous Forces to Ancestral Voices: Naming, Placing, and Calling Spirits in Barga Shamanism”

17:05-17:30 — General discussion

19:00 — Dinner for participants, « La Petite Périgourdine », 39 rue des Écoles, 75005 Paris

Arguments

Following the collapse of the communist regimes in 1990, a wide range of new religious trends have emerged and gained increasing popularity across Inner Asia – especially the Mongol cultural areas (Mongolia, Mongol-populated regions of China and Russia), as well as Tibetan cultural regions, Kazakhstan, and the Altai. These new trends involve both transformations within “traditional” religions – Buddhism, Islam and shamanism – and the rise of religious movements such as neo-shamanism, prosperity-oriented cults and New Age currents influenced by Russian esotericism (e.g. Agni Yoga). Often grounded in imagined archaic spiritual traditions, these emerging religious movements position themselves in contrast to established “world religions.” They introduce new terminologies, frequently drawing on metaphors of electricity, and promote ritual practices centred harnessing “energy” (*energi*) from natural elements, often combined with eschatological motifs. Their evolving ritual practices, narratives, and doctrinal frameworks (when they are made explicit) draw on a broad array of sources, including Buddhism and its Shambhalist eschatology, early twentieth-century religious movements such as Ak jang (“Burkhanism”) in the Altai, shamanism, local folklore, and other religious motifs. These new religious forms are frequently intertwined with ethno-national agendas and also generate at the same time dynamics of interethnic exchange and transnational convergence.

This international workshop seeks to examine how these new movements reflect local and global transformations, social anxieties, and geopolitical challenges in the contemporary contexts of Inner Asia marked by urbanization, glocal and ethnic dynamics, the expansion of the market economy, as well as heightened uncertainty linked to warfare, environmental degradation and climate change. It also aims to analyse these emerging trends in relation to the opposition they may encounter from institutional Buddhism and some authoritarian states’ prohibitive measures.

This workshop inaugurates the program “Religions et savoirs en mutation en Asie intérieure” (Religions and Changing Knowledge Inner Asia) of the new “Pôle Études mongoles” (Mongol studies Team) founded in January 2026 at the Centre de recherches sur les civilisations de l’Asie orientale (CRCAO). Three discussants from three other cultural areas (China, Korea, Tibet) will provide a comparative perspective on these issues.