



## **Talk: The Development and Preservation of Tibetan Medicine in India**

Speaker:  
Dr. Stephen Kloos

Date / Time:  
February 10, 2014 - 11:00am - 1:00pm

Venue:  
Room No 616, Pixel A, Azim Premji University

### Abstract:

For centuries, Tibetan medicine constituted not only a vibrant field of scholarship and the prime health resource in Tibet, but also – together with Tibetan Buddhism – an important hegemonic tool to expand and consolidate Tibetan cultural and political influence far beyond the borders of Central Tibet. In the 20th century, however, two connected developments presented a serious rupture for Tibetan medical knowledge: the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the Tibetan government's move into exile on the one hand, and the subsequent encounters with modern biomedicine and capitalism in Tibet and the exile on the other. Like Tibetan society as a whole, Tibetan medicine was thus faced with an unprecedented crisis, and became re-inscribed in a register of cultural loss and preservation. This paper will examine this transformation of Tibetan medicine in the particular context of the Indian exile. What happens when a previously hegemonic knowledge becomes fugitive and turns, faced with the risk of loss and a fundamental uncertainty regarding its future, into both the object and means of cultural preservation?

The first part of the paper will address these questions by historically exploring the processes of loss, preservation and transformation of Tibetan medical knowledge since 1959. I will argue that while the loss of knowledge constitutes a genuine concern for Tibetan medical practitioners, its preservation needs to be understood as an ethico-political process that produces and reconfigures the very knowledge it seeks to preserve. The second part of the paper will explore the politics of Tibetan medical knowledge and its preservation/ production in the present context. Here, I will argue that Tibetan medicine serves as an important field for cultural and economic ties with the wider Tibetan cultural area (Mongolia, Buryatia, Bhutan, Ladakh and other Himalayan regions), through which Tibetans seek to maintain/reconstruct their old cultural influence beyond the Tibetan nation. Despite the crisis and rupture of exile and modernization, Tibetan medicine thus constitutes an emerging knowledge industry with considerable hegemonic power in Tibet's cultural contact zones.

A Note on the Speaker:

Stephan Kloos received his PhD in medical anthropology from UC San Francisco and Berkeley in 2010, and has since worked at ISA in Vienna. He has worked on Tibetan medicine for over 12 years, funded among others by Fulbright, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the FWF, and a EU Marie Curie Fellowship. Stephan has published a book and over ten journal articles and book chapters. For more information as well as open access to most of his publications, see [www.stephankloos.org](http://www.stephankloos.org)