

ISA International Guest Lectures

Restoring Indigenous Relations of Land

Tibetan Yaks and the Making of Land-Based Community Restoration in Eastern Tibet

Huatse Gyal

Department of Anthropology, Rice University

This talk draws on extensive fieldwork I began a decade ago and my active involvement in community-led efforts to revitalize land, language, and community in eastern Tibet. It explores innovative forms of land restoration that focus on community building as a vital step in environmental protection in this region. The research is informed by scholars in Critical Indigenous Studies, who highlight the importance of reviving Indigenous relationships with land and language to empower Indigenous communities meaningfully. I specifically emphasize how a prominent Tibetan community leader and conservationist utilized traditional Indigenous knowledge by using yaks and their dung as natural fertilizers for land restoration. This discussion argues that understanding Indigeneity as a rich, intergenerational tapestry of place-based connections among diverse beings provides an empowering analytical framework. This perspective not only respects but also celebrates the Indigenous relationships that Tibetans have with their ancestral land.

© Credits: Drukmo Khar



Huatse Gyal is an environmental anthropologist and an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Rice University. He received his MA and Ph.D. in Sociocultural Anthropology from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Dr. Gyal has contributed peer-reviewed articles to international journals such as *Critical Asian Studies*, *Nomadic Peoples*, and *Ateliers d'anthropologie*. He is the co-editor of the first English volume titled, *Resettlement among Tibetan Nomads in China* (2015) and recently co-edited a special issue entitled, *Translating Across the Bardo: Centering the Richness of Tibetan Language in Tibetan Studies* (2024). Dr. Gyal released his first feature length documentary film titled „Khata: Poison or

ORGANIZER

Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA)

CONTACT

sozialanthropologie@oeaw.ac.at

OEAW.AC.AT/ISA

REGISTRATION

No registration required.

Photo: © Evan Ip

24 September, 2026
16:00–17:30

Meeting Room 5, 4th Floor
Georg-Coch-Platz 2
1010 Wien

Photo: © Evan Ip