

Ryan Richard Overbey

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Education

2010 PHD in the Study of Religion, Harvard University
Dissertation: “Memory, rhetoric, and education in the *Great Lamp of the Dharma Dhāraṇī Scripture*.
Committee: Janet Gyatso, Robert Gimello, James Robson

2001 AB in Classics & Sanskrit and Religious Studies, Brown University

Areas of specialization & interests

Buddhist studies • Esoteric Buddhism and Tantra • East Asian religions • South Asian religions • Theories and methods in the study of religion

Work experience

2024-present Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Asian Studies, Skidmore College

2017-2024 Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Assistant Professor in Buddhist Studies, Skidmore College

2015-2017 Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion, Wesleyan University

2013-2015 Shinjō Itō Postdoctoral Fellow in Buddhist Studies, University of California, Berkeley

2011-2012 Visiting Assistant Professor in Religious Studies, College of the Holy Cross

2010-2011 Postdoctoral Fellow, The Pluralism Project at Harvard University

2009-2011 Academic Researcher, Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften

2006-2017 Web Developer, The Pluralism Project at Harvard University

2006-2009 Presidential Instructional Technology Fellow, Harvard University

Publications, talks & works in progress

WORKS IN PROGRESS

In production *The Vaults of Buddhas: Prototantric Preachers and Rituals of Represencing in the Great Lamp of the Dharma Dhāraṇī Scripture*. Final MS in production with SUNY Press, expected publication in 2026.

In progress “The *Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents* in the Shandong steles.” In *Buddhist stone sutras in China*, Shandong Province 5. Harrassowitz.

In progress *The Consecration Scripture*. Complete translation and study of a seminal fifth-century Chinese Buddhist grimoire.

ARTICLES

2020 “Why don’t we translate spells in the scriptures?: Medieval Chinese exegesis on the meaning and function of *dhāraṇī* language.” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 42: 493–514.

CHAPTERS

2023 “A Gandhāran among the Turks: Buddhist texts and travels in the biography of *Dhyānagupta (528–605).” In Ryan Richard Overbey and Michelle Wang, eds. *Beyond the Silk and Book roads: rethinking networks of exchange and material culture*, 126–150. Studies on East Asian Religions 11. Brill.

2019 “*The Consecration Scripture Spoken by the Buddha on Being Reborn in Whichever of the Pure Lands of the Ten Directions You Wish*.” In Georgios Halkias and Richard K. Payne, eds. *Pure Lands in Asian texts and contexts: An anthology*, 33–55. Pure Land Buddhist Studies Series. University of Hawai‘i Press.

2018 “The *Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents*.” In Martin Baumann and Sun Hua, eds. *Buddhist stone sutras in China*, Sichuan Province 4, 119–121. Harrassowitz.

2016 “The *Perfection of Wisdom in the Sutras*.” In Claudia Wenzel and Sun Hua, eds. *Buddhist stone sutras in China*, Sichuan Province 3, 123–127. Harrassowitz.

2016 “Vicissitudes of text and rite in the *Great Peahen Queen of Spells*.” In David B. Gray and Ryan Overbey, eds. *Tantric traditions in transmission and translation*, 257–283. Oxford University Press.

2015 “Scrolls 12 and 11 of the *Consecration Sutra*.” In Tsai Suey-Ling and Sun Hua, eds. *Buddhist stone sutras in China*, Sichuan Province 2, 24–34. Harrassowitz.

2012 “On the appearance of *siddhis* in Chinese Buddhist texts.” In Knut Axel Jacobsen, ed. *Yoga powers: extraordinary capacities attained through meditation and concentration*, 127–144. Brill.

EDITED VOLUMES

2023 *Beyond the Silk and Book Roads: rethinking networks of exchange and material culture*. Co-edited with Michelle Wang. Studies on East Asian Religions 11. Brill.

2016 *Tantric traditions in transmission and translation*. Co-edited with David B. Gray. Oxford University Press.

COLLABORATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS

2014 Lothar Ledderose, ed. *Buddhist stone sutras in China*, Shandong Province 1. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
———For this project I participated in a large team that translated into English the complete corpus of Chinese Buddhist scriptures carved into stone in Shandong province. Members of the translation team included Lothar Ledderose, Paul Copp, Funayama Tōru, Claudia Wenzel, Tsai Sueyling, and several graduate students working under Prof. Dr. Ledderose.

INVITED ARTICLES

2019 “Yun-Fei Ji, *Bon Voyage*, 2002.” *Accelerate: Access & Inclusion at the Tang Museum* 3: 80–81.

BOOK REVIEWS

2025 Review of Lukas K. Pokorny and Franz Winter, eds. *Appropriating the Dao: The Euro-American Esoteric Reception of China*. *Nova Religio* 29.2: 110–112.

2024 Review of Nayanjot Lahiri, *Searching for Ashoka: Questing for a Buddhist king from India to Thailand*. *H-Asia*, July 2024.

2016 Review of Stuart H. Young, *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist patriarchs in China*. *Journal of Chinese Religions* 44.2: 206–208.

2016 Review of Koichi Shinohara, *Spells, images, and mandalas: tracing the evolution of esoteric Buddhist rituals*. *Journal of Asian Studies* 75.2: 313–315.

2016 Review of John Kieschnick and Meir Shahar, eds. *India in the Chinese imagination: myth, religion, and thought*. *International Journal of Asian Studies* 13.1: 113–115.

2015 Review of Sarah F. Haynes and Michelle J. Sorensen, eds. *Wading into the stream of wisdom: essays in honor of Leslie Kawamura*. H-Buddhism, H-Net Reviews. May 2015.

2013 Review of Christoph Baumer, *China's Holy Mountain: An Illustrated Journey into the Heart of Buddhism*. *Religious Studies Review* 39.3: 194–195.

2012 Review of James D. Frankel, *Rectifying God's Name: Liu Zhi's Confucian Translation of Monotheism and Islamic Law*. *Religious Studies Review* 38.3: 194.

2012 Review of Michael J. Walsh, *Sacred Economies: Buddhist Monasticism and Territoriality in Medieval China*. *Religious Studies Review* 38.3: 195.

2011 Review of Donald R. Davis, Jr., *The Spirit of Hindu Law*. *Numen* 58.2–3: 424–428.

2009 Review of James Benn, *Burning for Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism*. H-Buddhism, H-Net Reviews. 12 November 2009.

2008 Review of Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China*. H-Buddhism, H-Net Reviews. 2 July 2008.

2007 Review of Mahinda Deegalle, *Popularizing Buddhism: Preaching as Performance in Sri Lanka*. *Journal of Asian Studies* 66.4: 1192.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

2025 “Searching for Huijiān 慧簡: Using TACL to Identify a Unique Editorial Voice in the *Consecration Scripture* (*Guàndìng jīng* 灌頂經).” Presentation given at the XXth Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies. Leipzig, Germany. 13 August 2025.

2023 “Theorizing Buddhist revelation in the *Great Lamp of the Dharma Dhāraṇī Scripture*.” Lecture given for the Fourth Series of the Treasure Seminar, Tibetan and Himalayan Studies Centre, Oxford University. 6 February 2023.

2023 “An anxious grimoire: new research on the *Consecration Scripture*.” Graduate workshop given at the Buddhist Forum, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. 21 January 2023.

2023 “Treasures from the deep: text and materiality in the *Consecration Scripture*.” Lecture given at the Buddhist Forum, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. 19 January 2023.

2022 “Making Buddhist ethics matter: Notes on the *Consecration Spell Scripture Concerning the Three Refuges and Five Precepts Worn as an Amulet to Protect the Body*.” Presentation given at the XIXth Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies. Seoul, Korea. 15 August 2022.

2022 “Transformations of the peacock: the *Great Peahen Queen of Spells* in art and ritual.” Presentation given at University of Bonn. 27 June 2022.

2022 “An anxious grimoire: new research on the *Consecration Scripture* (*Guàndìng jīng* 灌頂經).” Presentation given at Heidelberg University. 31 May 2022.

2019 “Manufacturing wonder: the theory and practice of awe in Buddhist scriptures.” Presentation given at the Center for Humanistic Inquiry Symposium, Skidmore College. 30 March 2019.

2019 “Dunkerley Dialogue with Yun-Fei Ji.” Dialogue with the artist Yun-Fei Ji at the Tang Teaching Museum, Skidmore College. 20 February 2019.

2018 “Embodying Buddhas, quelling demons: theorizing presence in Buddhist Studies.” Lecture given at the Numata Program in Buddhist Studies, McMaster University. Hamilton, Ontario. 2 November 2018.

2018 “The protatantric preacher.” Workshop given at the Numata Program in Buddhist Studies, University of Toronto. 1 November 2018.

2018 “A Gandhāran among the Turks: Buddhist texts and travels in the biography of Jñānagupta (528–605).” Presentation given at the international conference “From the Silk to the Book Road(s): Networks of Commerce, Artifacts, and Books Between Central and East Asia.” University of California, Berkeley. 23 September 2018.

2018 “The ABCs of emptiness: The magic of letters in Buddhist ritual.” Lecture given at the Department of Religious Studies, Skidmore College. 9 April 2018.

2018 "Imaginaires, repertoires, hyperobjects: Rethinking intellectual history and reading Buddhist texts." Presentation given at the Center for Humanistic Inquiry Symposium, Skidmore College. 24 March 2018.

2018 "On some uses of the Buddhist abecedary in the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*." Presentation given at the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society. Pittsburgh. 17 March 2018.

2017 "Envisioning the Buddhist abecedary in the *Amoghapāśakalparāja*." Presentation given at the xviiith Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies. Toronto, Canada. 25 August 2017.

2015 "On the matter of material in Chinese Buddhist philology: the *Consecration Scriptures* in paper, wood, and stone." Presentation given at the 2015 Toshihide Numata Bookprize Presentation and Symposium, University of California, Berkeley. 30 October 2015.

2015 "Entering the Vault of Buddhas: preaching and presence in the *Great Lamp of the Dharma Dhāraṇī Scripture*." Presentation given at the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society. New Orleans. 13 March 2015.

2014 "When words mean too much: on the untranslatability of Buddhist spells." Presentation given in the Buddhist Studies Section at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. San Diego. 23 November 2014.

2014 "Whither λόγος? On the rhetorical advice for preachers in the *Great Lamp of the Dharma Dhāraṇī Scripture*." Presentation given at the xviith Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies. Wien. 20 August 2014.

2014 "The ABCs of emptiness: the Buddhist abecedary in the *Great Lamp of the Dharma Dhāraṇī Scripture*." Presentation given at the Group in Buddhist Studies, University of California, Berkeley. 6 February 2014.

2013 "Until blood flows from their mouths: Shifting cosmologies in the ritual manuals of the *Great Peahen Queen of Spells*." Paper given to the Chinese Religions Group at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Baltimore, Maryland. 25 November 2013.

2013 Participant in panel "Translating the Dharma in Buddhist Asia." Humanities Center, California State University Chico. 16 October 2013.

2010 "In search of the *dharma* master in early medieval China." Presentation given at the Harvard Buddhist Studies Forum. 6 December 2010.

2010 "A tale of two monks." Presentation for the conference "Wechselwirkungen zwischen Natur- und Geisteswissenschaften." Bad Honnef, Germany. 23 March 2010.

2010 "Inscribing and prescribing meditation at Reclining Buddha Monastery in Ānyuè, Sichuān." Presentation given at the Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Heidelberg, Germany. 22 February 2010.

2008 "Why don't we translate spells in our scriptures? Chinese commentary on the untranslatable *dhāraṇī* of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*." Paper given at the xvth Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies. Atlanta, Georgia. 28 June 2008.

2006 "Comparative religion in medieval India and China; or, How I learned to stop worrying and love Leopold von Ranke." Presentation to the Harvard Religion Colloquium. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 27 April 2006.

2006 "The *Great Lamp of the Dharma Dhāraṇī Scripture*." Presentation to the Harvard Asian Religions Colloquium. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 21 February 2006.

ONLINE PROJECTS

2016 Implemented a complete infrastructure renovation, database migration, and site redesign for the website of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University. Work included server renovations on Amazon Web Services, MySQL database migration, Wordpress plugin and theme development, and HTML/CSS frontend design. <http://pluralism.org>.

2013 *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*, a web resource by the Pluralism Project at Har-

vard University. <http://pluralism.org/ocg>.

—For this project I developed the database and web infrastructure, and edited the sections on Buddhism and East Asian religions.

Teaching & advising at Skidmore College

2025–2026	Asian Studies 101 “Introduction to Asian Studies” Asian Studies 251 “Asian Ecologies & Cosmologies” Honors Forum 200 “Dreams and Nightmares: Imagining AI Futures” Religious Studies 321 “Buddhism and the Body” Religious Studies 375 “Research seminar” Scribner Seminar: “Buddhism, travel, and trade on the Silk Road”
2024–2025	Asian Studies 101 “Introduction to Asian Studies” Honors Forum 200 “The costs of generative AI” Religious Studies 103P “Understanding religions” Religious Studies 221 “Buddhism: an introduction” Religious Studies 375 “Research seminar”
2023–2024	Asian Studies 101 “Introduction to Asian Studies” Honors Forum 200 “Scarcity and justice” Religious Studies 103 “Understanding religions” Religious Studies 221 “Buddhism: an introduction” Religious Studies 222 “Mindfully white: Race and power in American Buddhism” Religious Studies 371 Independent Study: “Tolkien and Religion”
2022–2023	Advised a Periclean Award-winning thesis entitled “The scenes shift and change: reading the novel as magic in William S. Burroughs’ <i>Cities of the red night</i> .” Asian Studies 101 “Introduction to Asian Studies” Asian Studies 251C: “Asian ecologies and cosmologies” Religious Studies 103 “Understanding religions” Religious Studies 321 “Buddhism and the body” Religious Studies 375 “Magic and the study of religion (Senior seminar)” Honors Forum 200-08 “Shifts in perception”
2020–2021	Asian Studies 101 “Introduction to Asian Studies” (2 sections) Religious Studies 103 “Understanding religions” Religious Studies 221 “Buddhism: an introduction” Religious Studies 230C “Religions of China”
2019–2020	Asian Studies 101 “Introduction to Asian Studies” Religious Studies 330D: “Tantric traditions in Asia and beyond” Scribner Seminar: “Buddhism, travel, and trade on the Silk Road” Religious Studies 221: “Buddhism: an introduction” Asian Studies 251C: “Asian ecologies and cosmologies” Honors Forum 200: “Uncertain nature”
2018–2019	Asian Studies 101 “Introduction to Asian Studies” Religious Studies 103 “Understanding religions” Religious Studies 241 “Theorizing the sacred” Religious Studies 230C “Buddhism: an introduction” Honors Forum 200 “What’s for dinner?”
2017–2018	Asian Studies 101 “Introduction to Asian Studies” (2 sections) Religious Studies 230C “Buddhism: an introduction” Religious Studies 330D “Buddhism and the body”

Honors Forum 200 “Mapping space”

Other teaching & advising

2016–2017 Religion 214 “Buddhism and the body: desire, disgust, and transcendence”, Wesleyan University.
Religion 242 “Buddhism: an introduction”, Wesleyan University.

2015–2016 Religion 315 “Ethics and action in the Buddhist cosmos”, Wesleyan University
Religion 214 “Buddhism and the body: desire, disgust, and transcendence”, Wesleyan University.
Religion 242 “Buddhism: an introduction”, Wesleyan University.
Religion 232 “Religions of China: The Ways and their power”, Wesleyan University.
Religion 348 “Magic, sex, and scholasticism: Tantric traditions in Asia and beyond”, Wesleyan University.

2014–2015 Buddhist Studies C-116 “Buddhism in China”, UC Berkeley.
Buddhist Studies C-220 “Early Buddhist ritual”, graduate seminar, UC Berkeley.

2013–2014 Buddhist Studies C-140 “Readings in Chinese Buddhist texts”, UC Berkeley.

2011–2012 Buddhist Studies 190 “Reading Mahāyāna Buddhism”, UC Berkeley.
RELS 206 “Introduction to Buddhism”, College of the Holy Cross.
RELS 199 “Introduction to Chinese religions”, College of the Holy Cross.

2007–2008 Course grader for RELI E-1015/W “Comparative religious ethics” (Professor Anne Monius).
Head TF for FC 79, “Historical and musical paths on the Silk Road” (Professors Mark C. Elliott and Richard K. Wolf).
Course grader for RELI E-1710/W “Introduction to the Hindu traditions of India” (Professor Anne Monius).

2006–2007 Course TF for HDS 3689, “African religions” (Professor Jacob K. Olupona).
Course TF for FC 79, “Historical and musical paths on the Silk Road” (Professors Mark C. Elliott and Richard K. Wolf).
Advised a senior thesis entitled “Facing the Empress: representations of women, power, and ideology in pre-modern China.”

2005–2006 Advised a senior thesis entitled “*Rilbu, rinchen rilbu, and jinden*: the spiritual elements of Tibetan medical pharmacology.”
Course grader for RELI E-1015/W “Comparative religious ethics” (Professor Anne Monius).
Designed and taught a junior tutorial entitled “Ritual in religious studies: theories and exempla.”
Course grader for RELI E-1710/W “Introduction to the Hindu traditions of India” (Professor Anne Monius).

2004–2005 Designed and taught a junior tutorial entitled “Ritual and medicine in Buddhism and Hinduism.”
Advised a senior thesis entitled “A celestial technology: cabalistic angel summoning, John Dee, and the importance of magic within academic discourse.”

Grants, honors & awards

2021–2022 ACLS / Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation Grant for Critical Editions and Scholarly Translations: funding for full year of pre-tenure research leave to prepare translation of the *Consecration Scripture*

2021–2022 Tang Studies Society Research Grant (co-grantee with Michelle Wang): \$3,000 for copyediting and indexing of edited volume

2013–2015 Shinjō Itō Postdoctoral Fellowship in Buddhist Studies

2008–2009 Harvard Graduate Society Dissertation Completion Fellowship

2008 Harvard University Certificate of Distinction in Teaching

2008 Harvard Graduate Student Council Summer Conference Grant

2008 Harvard Extension School commendation for distinguished teaching performance

2007	Harvard Presidential Instructional Technology Fellowship Award for Achievement in Instructional Technology
2001–2005	Jacob K. Javits Fellowship
2001	Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship in Humanistic Studies
2000	Phi Beta Kappa, Brown University
1999	Undergraduate Teaching and Research Assistantship, Brown University

Service

2025–present	Committee on Educational Policy and Planning, Skidmore College
2023–present	Faculty parliamentarian, Skidmore College
2023–present	Department chair for Religious Studies, Skidmore College
2022–2024	Member of steering committee for Asian Studies Program, Skidmore College
2021–2024	Faculty Advisory Board, Skidmore College (Chair 2023–2024)
2020–2021	Member of steering committee for Asian Studies Program, Skidmore College
2019–2020	Summer advising for Skidmore College
2015–2016	Faculty advisor to Buddhist House, Wesleyan University
2006–2008	Graduate Student Council Representative for the Committee on the Study of Religion, Harvard University
2006–2008	Associate Director of the Harvard Buddhist Studies Forum
2006	Conference organizer for Buddhist Studies Graduate Student Conference, University of the West
2005–2007	Student Liaison for Harvard University to the American Academy of Religion
2004	Conference organizer for Buddhist Studies Graduate Student Conference, Harvard University

Professional associations

American Academy of Religion, American Society for Premodern Asia, Association of Asian Studies, International Association of Buddhist Studies

Languages

Native: English

Classical written: Chinese, Greek, Latin, Pāli, Sanskrit, Tibetan

Modern written: Chinese, French, German, Japanese