

## Susan Zakin

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### EDUCATION

#### **University of Chicago**, The Divinity School

PhD in History of Religions, expected June 2017

Areas of Specialization: Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, Theory and Method in the Study of Religions

#### **University of Washington–Seattle**, Comparative Religion Program, MA with Honors

Area of Concentration: Buddhist Studies

#### **Wesleyan University**, Connecticut, Religious Studies, BA

### DISSERTATION

“Buddhism in Transition: The Transformation of a Tibetan Ritual into a Healing Science“

The transmission of religious ritual is inherently unstable and subject to mutation. In the Buddhist tradition, 'healing' is one of the primary metaphors through which both Buddhist doctrine and practice are understood. At the same time the power of Buddhist ritual to be literally efficacious for healing has been an element of Buddhism from its beginnings and Buddhist techniques have, everywhere Buddhism has flourished, been used as a central means for achieving health. The Tibetan ritual of *chöd* (*gcod*), a visualization practice in which the practitioner imagines feeding her own body to demons and other unseen guests, falls at the intersection of these two understandings of healing – the metaphoric and the literal. This ritual, normatively construed by the tradition as serving soteriological goals by fostering nonattachment to the self, also has worldly value for its ability to placate the demons that are causes of disease. This dissertation explores the tensions between these two understandings and the various ways they have been reconciled in Tibetan Buddhist explanations, in the depictions of the Westerners who first encountered the practice, and finally in its adaptations for therapeutic purposes in America today. I offer an account of why *chöd*'s transmission in America is happening primarily within the contexts of self-help and psychotherapy, where it relies on its presumptive translatability into medical and scientific terminology, yet simultaneously on an urge for reenchancement, and argue that the contemporary North American transmission depends on distinctively Modern notions of self, truth, and value found at the intersections of psychology, medicine, and consumerism.

Advisor: Matthew Kapstein

Readers: Wendy Doniger and Christian Wedemeyer

### DOCTORAL EXAMINATIONS

History of Religions: Contemporary Theory (examiner: Bruce Lincoln)

History of Religions: Religions of Tibet (examiner: Matthew Kapstein)

History of Religions: Religions of India (examiner: Wendy Doniger)

Philosophy of Religions: 20th Century Continental Philosophy (examiner: Arnold Davidson)

## **TEACHING AND RESEARCH INTERESTS**

Critical Approaches to the Study of Religion; Buddhism and Modernity; Religion, Science, and Medicine; Ritual Studies; Globalization of Asian Religions; Contemporary Spiritualities; Buddhist Ethics

## **PRESENTATIONS**

"Buddhist Practices and/as Medicine in Contemplative Studies Programs: Mental Labor and the Corporatization of Health and Wellbeing," The American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, November 2015

"Fetishizing Buddhism: Branding and Self-Branding through Buddhist Practices of the Self," The American Academy of Religion, San Diego, November 2014

"The Task of the Translator: Adapting the Wisdom of Chöd for the Modern West," The American Academy of Religion, Baltimore, November 2013

"Introduction to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha," International Team Project course: Bhutan and Thailand, Northwestern University Law School, February 2012

"Visualizing Selflessness: The Habituation of Memory and Imagination," Theory and Practice in South Asia (TAPSA) Workshop, University of Chicago, May 2010

"The Gift of Death: Acts of Imagination in the Ritual of *gCod*," Buddhist Studies Workshop, University of Chicago, June 2008

"Self and Self-Sacrifice in the Tibetan Ritual of *gCod*," graduate student forum at the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Bonn, Germany, August 2006

"Engendering the *gTerma* Tradition: How Two Buddhist Biographies Propagate Treasure Texts," Buddhist Studies Graduate Student Conference, University of Virginia, April 2000

"Tibetan Sacred Biography and Sectarian Identity," South Asia Center Workshop, University of Washington, May 1999

## **PUBLICATIONS**

"Buddhism and Commodity Fetishism," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (forthcoming August 2017)

Review of Scott A. Mitchell and Natalie E. F. Quli, eds., *Buddhism Beyond Borders: New Perspectives on Buddhism in the United States* (2013), in *Nova Religio* (forthcoming, Fall 2016)

Review of Michelle Sorenson, "Making the Old New Again and Again: Legitimation and Innovation in the Tibetan Buddhist Chöd Tradition" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013), in *DissertationReviews.org* (February 2016)

## **FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS**

Center on South Asian Studies (COSAS) Dissertation Writing grant, University of Chicago, Summer 2009, Winter 2010, Fall 2010 – Spring 2011

Martin Marty Center Dissertation Fellowship, University of Chicago, 2009-2010

University of Chicago Divinity School Perrin Fund Travel Grant, Summer 2006  
Wabash Fellow, Wabash Forum on Pedagogy, University of Chicago, 2002-03  
Foreign Language Area Study (FLAS) Fellowship, University of Chicago 2002-03  
University of Chicago Divinity School Fellowship, 1999-2002  
Foreign Language Area Study (FLAS) Fellowship, University of Washington, 1998-99  
Graduate Webb Scholar, Comparative Religion Program, University of Washington, 1997-98  
Chester William Fritz Scholarship in the Humanities, University of Washington, 1997  
Outstanding Graduate Student Paper of 1996/97, Pacific Northwest Region of the American Academy of Religion

### **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

Adjunct Faculty, DePaul University  
*Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy*, Winter 2015

Visiting Assistant Professor, Kathmandu University, Centre for Buddhist Studies, Kathmandu, Nepal  
*Fundamentals of Buddhist Philosophy*, Fall 2013  
*The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Buddhism* (MA Methodology course), Fall 2013  
*Buddhist Ethics and the Ethics of Modern Buddhism*, Spring 2014  
*Buddhist Ritual*, Spring 2014  
*History of Buddhism, part II*, Spring 2014  
*Introduction to Buddhism*, Summer 2014

Adjunct Faculty, School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
*Approaches to the Self* (First Year Humanities Seminar), Fall 2012, Spring 2013  
*Introduction to Asian Philosophies*, Fall 2016

Adjunct Faculty, Loyola University Chicago  
*Introduction to Buddhism*, Spring 2011, Fall 2011, Spring 2012  
*Introduction to Hinduism*, Fall 2008, Spring 2009, Fall 2010, Fall 2011  
*Introduction to the Study of Religion*, Fall 2010  
*Religions of India*, Fall 2007, Spring 2008  
*Religions of Asia*, Spring 2006, Fall 2006

Lecturer, University of Chicago  
*Second Year Classical Tibetan*, Spring 2007, Autumn 2009

Lecturer, University of Wisconsin–Madison  
*Religion in Critical Perspective* (capstone course for Religious Studies majors), Spring 2008

Writing Instructor, Humanities Common Core, College of the University of Chicago  
*Human Being and Citizen* (great books), 2010-11, 2011-12  
*Reading Cultures* (critical theory), 2008-09, 2009-10  
*Readings in World Literature* (literature), 2005-06  
*Philosophical Perspectives* (philosophy), 2004-05

Teaching Assistant, University of Chicago  
*Introduction to Religion and the Human Sciences* (graduate level course), Fall 2001

Teaching Assistant, University of Chicago  
*Psychology of Religion*, Spring 2001

#### **ADDITIONAL ACADEMIC TRAINING AND SERVICE**

Contributed to development of the "Economics and Capitalism in the Study of Buddhism" seminar, approved as a five-year seminar by the AAR, inaugural session held at AAR Atlanta conference in 2015

Pedagogy Workshop, Center for Teaching and Learning, University of Chicago, July 2012

Manuscript evaluation for *Philosophy East & West* (University of Hawai'i), November 2010

Pedagogy Seminar, Theology Department, Loyola University Chicago, Spring 2008

Pedagogies of Writing course (training for Humanities Common Core Writing Interns), University of Chicago Writing Program, Summer 2003

President and Workshop Coordinator, History of Religions group, University of Chicago, 2001-02

Conference Organizer, Fourth Annual Buddhist Studies Graduate Student Conference, held at University of Chicago, March 31 – April 1, 2001

President, Tibetan Studies group, University of Chicago, 2000-01

#### **RELATED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Acquisitions Associate, University of Chicago Press, July 2012 – August 2013; December 2014 – present

Publications Manager and Assistant to Director, Office of Communications, University of Chicago Divinity School, June 2009 – August 2013

Research/ Editorial Assistant to Matthew Kapstein, University of Chicago, Summer 2006

(*Buddhism between Tibet and China*, ed. Matthew Kapstein [Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009]).

Senior Editorial Assistant, *History of Religions* journal, University of Chicago Press, July 2001 – September 2005

#### **OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Seattle City Attorney's Office

Harassment Victim's Advocate, January 1993 – September 1999

Research Coordinator, Northwest Center for Research on Women, University of Washington–Seattle  
September 1991 – August 1992

#### **PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS**

American Academy of Religion

International Association of Tibetan Studies

#### **LANGUAGES**

Tibetan (reading of Classical Tibetan, basic speaking of colloquial Tibetan); Sanskrit (reading); French (reading)

## **REFERENCES**

Matthew Kapstein

Director of Tibetan Studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris and  
Numata Visiting Professor of the Philosophy of Religions and the History of Religions  
The University of Chicago Divinity School  
[m-kapstein@uchicago.edu](mailto:m-kapstein@uchicago.edu); (773) 702-8266

Wendy Doniger

Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions  
The University of Chicago Divinity School  
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Christian Wedemeyer

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