

# William A. McGrath

Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies  
New York University, Department of Religious Studies

## Education

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA  
Ph.D. in the History of Religions, May 2017  
M.A. in the History of Religions, May 2015  
B.Sc. in Biochemistry, May 2007

## Addresses

726 Broadway, Suite 554  
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**Specializations:** Tibetan and Chinese languages, religions, medicines, and histories

## Employment

New York University: Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies (2021–present)  
Manhattan College: Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies (2018–2021)  
Coe College: Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religion (2017–2018)

## Peer-reviewed Articles and Book Chapters

“The Princess and the Plague: Explaining Epidemics in Imperial Tibet, Khotan, and Central Asia.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 141, no. 3 (2021): Forthcoming.  
“The Surgical Instruments of Medieval Tibet: Animal-headed Forceps, Piercing Lancets, and Searing Cauteries.” In *A Cultural History of Technology: The Medieval Period (600–1450)*, edited by Roberta J. Magnusson. New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2021. Forthcoming.  
“Tantric Divination and Empirical Diagnosis: A Genealogy of Channel *Prasenā* Rituals in the Tibetan Medical Tradition.” In *Knowledge and Context in Tibetan Medicine*, edited by William A. McGrath, 261–308. Leiden: Brill, 2019.

## Edited Volumes and Journal Issues

(sole editor): *Knowledge and Context in Tibetan Medicine*. Brill’s Tibetan Studies Library, vol. 43. Leiden: Brill, 2019.  
(with C. Pierce Salguero): *Asian Medicine: Journal of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Asian Medicine* 12, nos. 1–2 (2017). Special issue on Buddhism and medicine.

## Published Translations

“The Vase of Ambrosia: A Scriptural Cycle about the Black Death in Tibet.” *Asian Medicine* 16, no. 1 (2021): Forthcoming.  
“Reconciling Scripture and Surgery in Tibet: Khyenrap Norbu, *Arranging the Tree Trunks of Healing* (1952).” In *Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Sources*, edited by C. Pierce Salguero, 94–99. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019.  
“Origin Narratives of the Tibetan Medical Tradition: History, Legend, and Myth.” *Asian Medicine* 12, nos. 1–2 (2017): 295–316.  
“Vessel Examination in the *Medicine of the Moon King*.” In *Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Premodern Sources*, C. Pierce Salguero, 501–13. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

## Published Forums

- with Joseph S. Alter, Judith Farquhar, Volker Scheid, Nathan Sivin, et al. "Editorial Forum: Why Study Asian Medicine?" *Asian Medicine* 15, no. 2 (2020): 301–14.
- "Quarantine and Expulsion in Early Tibet: Reflections on the Padmasambhava Legend in the Age of the Coronavirus." *Cultural Anthropology: Fieldsights* (2020).  
<<https://culanth.org/fieldsights/quarantine-and-expulsion-in-early-tibet-reflections-on-the-padmasambhava-legend-in-the-age-of-the-coronavirus>>.
- with Amy Langenberg and Janet Gyatso. "Book Review Forum: Janet Gyatso, *Being Human in a Buddhist World* (2015)." *Asian Medicine* 13, nos. 1–2 (2018): 335–44.

## Book Reviews

- "Sam van Schaik, *Buddhist Magic: Divination, Healing, and Enchantment Through the Ages* (2020)." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 141, no. 4 (2021): Forthcoming.
- "Reiko Shinno, *The Politics of Chinese Medicine under Mongol Rule* (2017)." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 93, no. 3 (2019): 455–56.
- "Theresia Hofer, *Medicine and Memory in Tibet: Amchi Physicians in an Age of Reform* (2018)." *Asian Medicine* 14, no. 1 (2019): 202–204.

## Dissertation

- Buddhism and Medicine in Tibet: Origins, Ethics, and Tradition*. Charlottesville, VA: Doctoral Dissertation at the University of Virginia, 2017. <<https://doi.org/10.18130/V39H1N>>.

## Invited Lectures

- "Tibetan Buddhism and Contagious Disease." Penn State University's Abington College. April 8, 2020. Invited by C. Pierce Salguero (delivered online due to the coronavirus).
- "Dangling Threads to Examine the Channels: Tales of Pulse Diagnosis in Tibetan and Chinese Literature." Inner Asian and Altaic Studies Lecture Series. Harvard University. November 6, 2019. Invited by Leonard van der Kuijp.
- "The Birth of the Sakya Medical House: Buddhism and Medicine in Tibet." University of Pennsylvania. February 1, 2019. Invited by the Philadelphia Area Buddhist Studies Group.
- "The Black Pox in Tibet: From Fear to Faith." Penn State University's Abington College. September 28, 2018. Invited by C. Pierce Salguero.

## Select Conference Presentations

- "Responding to COVID-19: A Comparative Religion and Healing Perspective." American Academy of Religion. Online. December 1, 2020.
- "Recovering a Lost Medical Tradition: The Zhang School and the Tibetan Assimilation of Indian Medicine." Joint Atlantic Seminar for the History of East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine. Johns Hopkins University (canceled).
- "Empowering Tibetan Medical Texts: The Early Schools and Scriptures of Tibetan Medicine." Materiality, Agency and Power Workshop. University of Vienna (canceled).
- "Surgical Instruments and External Therapies: Technology and Instruction in the Tibetan Medical Tradition." International Association of Tibetan Studies XIV. Paris, July 7–13, 2019.

### Select Conference Presentations (cont.)

- “Pulsating Across the Boundaries of Eurasia.” Summer Institute for Chinese Studies: Seminar on Science, Technology, and Medicine. University of Pittsburgh, May 30, 2019.
- “Buddhist Medicine in Tibet: Reconciling Religion and Nation at the Sakya Medical House.” American Academy of Religion. Denver, CO, November 19, 2018.
- “Explaining Epidemics in a Degenerate Age: Contagious Disease in *The Vase of Deathless Ambrosia*.” Association for Asian Studies. Washington, DC, March 23, 2018.
- “The Creases on an Old Man’s Fingers: Tradition and Transformation in the Writings of Khyenrap Norbu (1882–1962).” International Congress on Traditional Asian Medicines IX. Kiel, August 11, 2017.
- “*Prasenā* and the Channels: Divination and Diagnosis in Tibetan Tantric Medicine.” Society for Tantric Studies. Flagstaff, AZ, September 25, 2016.
- “Diagnosis and Divination in the Instructional Literature of Tibetan Medicine.” International Association of Tibetan Studies XIV. Bergen, June 20, 2016.
- “Early Developments in Tibetan Sphygmology.” International Association of Tibetan Studies XIII. Ulaanbaatar, July 22, 2013.

### Chaired Panels

- “Cosmopolitan Medicine under the Mongols: The Medical Materials, Theories, and Institutions of the Yuan Dynasty.” Panel accepted by the Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference. Boston, 2020 (canceled).
- “Knowledge and Context in the History of Tibetan Medicine.” Convened at the XIVth Seminar for the International Association of Tibetan Studies. Bergen, June 20, 2016.

### Languages

Classical: Chinese (proficient) and Tibetan (fluent)

Modern: Mandarin Chinese (fluent), Lhasa Tibetan (fluent), and Amdo Tibetan (fluent)

Reading: Japanese (proficient) and French (proficient)

### Fellowships and Grants

Manhattan College Student Engagement Diversity Fund, 2020 (\$1,250)

Robert H. N. Ho Program in Buddhist Studies Dissertation Fellowship, 2016–2017 (\$30,000)

Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (FHDDRA) Award, 2015–2016 (\$26,300)

Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) for the Chinese Language, 2014–2015 (\$15,000)

Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) Summer Research Award, 2013 (\$5,000)

Blakemore Freeman Fellowship, 2012–2013 (\$41,000)

Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) for the Tibetan Language, 2011–2012 (\$15,000)

Institute of International Education (IIE), Freeman-ASIA Award, 2005 (\$3,000)

### Teaching Experience

Manhattan College: Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies (2018–2021)

Spring (4 sections): The Nature and Experience of Religion (x2 sections) and Buddhism (x2)

Fall (3 sections): The Nature and Experience of Religion (x2), and Religions of China (x1)

## Teaching Experience (cont.)

Coe College: Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religion (2017–2018)

Spring (3): Eastern Religions, Buddhism, and Religion and Medicine in Asia

Fall (2): Eastern Religions, and Hinduism

Teaching Assistant at the University of Virginia (2010–2015): Buddhism; Tibetan Buddhism (x3)

## Academic Service

Steering Committee Member: The Religions, Medicines, and Healing Unit of the American Academy of Religion (2019–2024).

Editor, Central Asia and Himalayan Region: *Asian Medicine: Journal of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Asian Medicine* (2019–present).

Assistant Editor: *Asian Medicine* (2017–2018).

Peer Review: Columbia University Press (2020), *Religions* (2019), *Proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists* (2019), *Sustainability* (2019), *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* (2018).

## Popular Publications

“Masks, Mantras, and the Black-9 Pill: Thubten Phuntsok and Tibetan Netizens on Coronavirus and Tibetan Medicine.” *High Peaks Pure Earth*. February 4, 2020. <<https://highpeakspureearth.com/2020/masks-mantras-and-the-black-9-pill-thubten-phuntsok-and-tibetan-netizens-on-coronavirus-and-tibetan-medicine/>>.

“Tibet’s Most Popular Song Is by a Hip-Hop Duo Whose Name Means ‘Youthism.’” *SupChina*. December 6, 2019. <<https://supchina.com/2019/12/06/tibets-most-popular-song-is-by-a-hip-hip-duo-whose-name-means-youthism/>>.

## Fieldwork, Research, Workshops, and Language Programs

Summer Institute for Chinese Studies: Seminar on Science, Technology, and Medicine. University of Pittsburgh, May 26–June 1, 2019 (1 week)

Nationalities of Northern China Translation Institute, Dalian University for Nationalities: Consultant for the “Epics of Chinese Ethnic Groups” book series, 2017–2019 (4 months total)

Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad: Xining, 2015–2016 (6 months)

Semester at Sea (SAS): Teaching Assistant for the spring semester of 2014 (4 months)

Inter-University Program (IUP) for Chinese: Beijing, 2012–2013 (1 year)

Tibetan and Himalayan Library (THL): Chengdu and Beijing, 2007–2010 (3 years)

UVa-Columbia-Tibet University Summer Program: Lhasa, Summer 2005 (2 months)

Total time spent in China: 5 years

## Scholarly Memberships

The American Academy of Religion

The Association for Asian Studies

The International Association of Tibetan Studies

The International Association for the Study of Traditional Asian Medicine