

APRIL D. HUGHES
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ACADEMIC POSITIONS

Boston University, 2016 – present.

Associate Professor, Department of Religion, 2022 – present.

East Asia Career Development Professorship, 2018 – 2021.

Assistant Professor, Department of Religion, 2016 – 2022.

Courses taught: “Religions of Asia,” “Chinese Religion,” “Sex, Death, and the Buddha,” “Art, Media, and Buddhism,” “Health and Medicine in Asian Religions,” “Gender, Sexuality, and Buddhism,” “Professional Development Seminar for Doctoral Students in Religion,” and Core Curriculum’s “The Way: Antiquity and the Medieval World.”

Gonzaga University, 2014 – 2016.

Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies.

Courses taught: “Buddhism and Gender,” “Religions of China,” and “Visions of the Buddha: From Ancient India to Modern America [Buddhist Visual Culture].”

EDUCATION

Princeton University, Ph.D. Department of Religion, 2008 – 2014.

University of California, Berkeley, M.A. Asian Studies, 2006 – 2008.

University of California, Los Angeles, M.A. East Asian Studies, 2001 – 2004.

California State University, Northridge, B.A. Religious Studies, 1997 – 2000.

PUBLICATIONS – MONOGRAPH

Worldly Saviors and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism. University of Hawai'i Press (2021).

- 2022 Finalist, Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion, Historical Studies, American Academy of Religion.
- Interviewed by Natasha Heller (UVA) for New Books in Buddhist Studies podcast:
https://newbooksnetwork.com/worldly-saviors-and-imperial-authority-in-medieval-chinese-buddhism?fbclid=IwAR1peISiHkgw9FIrL1q_rt8mvRjGCmc2MuyzhBT0QRAbDpi8otMT_OO2MkkM.
- Reviewed in: *Journal of Chinese Religions*, *Journal of Chinese Studies*, *Journal of Church and State*, *Reading Religion (AAR)*, and *Religious Studies Review*.

PUBLICATIONS – ARTICLES

“Text, Materiality, and Practice: Evidence from the Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts of *Cause and Effects*.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 144.2 (2024): 285-301.

“Envisioning Paradise: The Terrestrial Utopia of Maitreya Buddha in the Medieval Murals at Dunhuang.” *Archives of Asian Art*, 71.2 (2021): 171-190.

“Re-examining the *Zhengming jing*: The Social and Political Life of an Apocryphal Maitreya Scripture.” *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 45.1 (2017): 1-18.

REVIEWS

“Review of *Disciplinary Rituals in Dunhuang Buddhism*, by Ru ZHAN, translated by Matthew Orsborn, Robban Toleno, Weiyu Lin, and Michael Cavayero, *H-Buddhism* (February 2025). <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=60213>

“Review of *Agents of World Renewal: The Rise of Yonaoshi Gods in Japan*, by Takashi Miura,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 47.2 (2020): 365-368.

“Dunhuang at the Bibliothèque nationale (Richelieu): A Review of the Oriental Manuscripts Reading Room of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France.” *Dissertation Reviews*. 2013.

LANGUAGES

Classical Chinese, Modern Chinese, Japanese, French

HONORS AND RECOGNITIONS

Finalist, Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion, Historical Studies, American Academy of Religion for *Worldly Saviors and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism*. 2022.

Publication Subvention for *Worldly Saviors and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* monograph. Boston University Center for the Humanities. 2020.

Individual Research Grant Award for “Proscribing Practice: Local Rituals and Buddhist Practice in Medieval Dunhuang,” American Academy of Religion (AAR). 2019.

Junior Faculty Fellowship (one semester research leave), Boston University Center for the Humanities. Spring 2019.

East Asia Career Development Professorship, Boston University. 2018 – 2021

Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowship. 2013 – 2014.

Graduate Fellow, Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies. 2013 – 2014.

Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies (CHIBS) Fellowship for Graduate Students. 2013.

Teaching Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, Princeton University Department of Religion. 2012.

Graduate Fellow, Princeton University Center for the Study of Religion. 2011 – 2012.

Visiting Research Associate, Dunhuang Academy, Gansu Province, China. January – June 2011.

INVITED LECTURES AND PANELS

World Salon, “Timeless Harmony: The Philosophy and Legacy of Chinese Art” Panel. September 4, 2025.

Brown University China Summit, “Sacred Spaces; Religion and the Chinese State” Panel. March 8, 2025.

North Carolina State University, “Paradise on Earth: Medieval Paintings from the Buddhist Silk Road.” April 9, 2024.

American Oriental Society, Chicago. “Plenary Session: End of the World, East Asia.” March 24, 2024.

McMaster University, “Text, Materiality, and Practice: Evidence from the Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts of *Cause and Effects*.” April 14, 2023.

University of Toronto, “Worldly Saviors, Terrestrial Utopias, and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism.” April 13, 2023.

Princeton University, Islamic Studies Colloquium, “Surviving and Thriving as a PhD Student” [professionalization for graduate students]. September 29, 2021.

John Hopkins University, “Text, Materiality, and Practice in Silk Road Buddhist Manuscripts.” October 13, 2020.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. “Buddhas, Emperors, and Apocalyptic Saviors in Medieval China.” April 20, 2020. *Canceled due to Covid-19*

Yale University, “Buddhist Apocalyptic Saviors and Imperial Authority during the Reign of Empress Wu Zetian (690-705CE).” February 27, 2020.

Harvard University, China Humanities Seminar. “Apocalyptic Saviors, Terrestrial Utopias, and Imperial Authority: The Reign of Empress Wu Zetian (690-705CE).” November 4, 2019.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND RESPONSES

American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Boston. “The Buddha of Alternative Futures: Crafting Maitreya in Indic and Chinese Sources,” Panel in the Buddhism Group. Respondent. November 25, 2025.

Harvard University, “Art of Journeys: From Ape Tales to the Monkey King Wukong.” Respondent. April 11, 2025

The Medieval Academy of America Annual Meeting, Boston. “An Introduction to Teaching the Global Medieval Ages: Religious Communities” [pedagogical workshop]. March 19, 2025.

Harvard University, “Under the Reign of Empress Wu: A Workshop on the History and Culture of the Wu Zhou Dynasty (690–705).” “Worldly Savior: Empress Wu, Buddhism, and Kingship.” April 26, 2024.

Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Boston. “Conveying Meaning through Material Forms and Visual Format in Pre-Modern East Asian Texts” Panel. “Medieval Chinese Reading Practices: Examining the Line Breaks in the Dunhuang Manuscripts of the *Shan’è yinguo jing*.” March 16-19, 2023.

The University of Virginia, “Critical Terms for the Study of Chinese Religious Studies Conference Part II.” “The Dao.” June 6-10, 2022. *Postponed from August 17-21, 2020 and then canceled January 2022 due to Covid-19*

Elling Eide Center, “Ritual and Contemplative Practices in Chinese Religions (500 to 1500 CE)” Conference. “Recitation Practices from Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts.” March 4-5, 2022.

Modern Language Association, Washington, D.C. “Medieval Textual Materialities” Panel. “Medieval Chinese Reading Practices: Evidence from Silk Road Buddhist Manuscripts.” January 9, 2022.
Online due to Covid-19

Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Seattle. “Unfurled and Unfolded: East Asian Buddhist Manuscript Cultures” Panel. “Depravities and Atonement: The Function of a Dunhuang Manuscript Booklet.” March 24, 2021 *Online due to Covid-19*

Harvard University, “End Times: Eschatology in Chinese Religions.” “Buddhist Eschatology in Medieval China.” April 10, 2020. *Postponed due to Covid-19*

Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Boston. “Empowering Rulership: Politics of Legitimation in Asian Religions” Panel. “Rebels, Rulers, and Buddhas: Worldly Saviors and Political Legitimation in Medieval China.” March 20, 2020. *Canceled due to Covid-19*

American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Diego. “The Ambivalence of Buddhist Kingship,” Panel in the Buddhism Group. “Wu Zhao (r. 690-705): Buddha, Emperor, Earthly Savior.” November 24, 2019.

American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Diego. “Disaster and Calamity in Chinese Religions from the Medieval to the Modern Era,” Panel in the Chinese Religions Group. “Disaster and Calamity in Medieval China.” November 23, 2019.

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, “Critical Terms for the Study of Chinese Religious Studies Conference.” “The Dao.” June 21, 2019.

Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Denver. “De-Centering Buddhist Kingship” Panel. “Ideal Ruler: The Wheel-Turning King in the Maitreya Buddha Murals at Dunhuang.” March 23, 2019.

Harvard University, “Mediating Religion: Text and Object in Chinese Religion.” “Envisioning Paradise: Maitreya’s Utopia in Medieval Mural Paintings at Dunhuang.” December 8, 2017.

American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Antonio. “Envisioning Salvation: Eschatology and Utopias in Medieval China,” Panel in the Chinese Religions Group. “Imagining Utopia in the Canonical and Apocryphal Maitreya Scriptures.” November 19, 2016.

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and University of California, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, “International Conference on Empires and Religions in Comparison: The Graeco-Roman World and Early China.” “Mother, Savior, Ruler: Apocalyptic Scriptures and Empress Wu.” September 15, 2016.

The Dunhuang Academy, the China Academy of Culture, and the Wooden Fish Foundation, Dunhuang, China, “Dunhuang Conference on Sutra Transmission and Translation.” “Maitreya and Prince Moonlight Scriptures Discovered at Dunhuang.” June 16, 2016.

American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Atlanta. “Politics, Imperial Institutions, and Religion in Imperial China,” Panel in the Chinese Religions Group. “Shifting Conceptions of Kingship in Medieval China: A Reexamination of the Canonical and Apocryphal Maitreya Scriptures.” November 22, 2015.

University of California, Los Angeles, “Empire and Media of Religion: A Workshop on Comparative Approaches to the Study of Religion in the Greco-Roman Imperial Era and Early China.” “The Role of Apocalyptic Concepts in Imperial Legitimation in Medieval China.” May 22, 2015.

International Liaison Committee for Dunhuang Studies, Princeton University, “Prospects for the Study of Dunhuang Manuscripts: The Next 20 Years.” “Chinese Visions of the End: An Examination of Three Dunhuang Scriptures.” September 7, 2014.

The University of Chicago, “Refiguring East Asian Religious Art: Buddhist Devotion and Funerary Practice.” “Visions of Earthly Paradise: Maitreya Mural Paintings at Dunhuang.” May 25, 2014.

American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Baltimore, “Millennialism, Eschatology, and the Latter Day of the Dharma,” Panel in the Buddhism Group. “Saviors from Chaos and Destruction: Maitreya Buddha and Prince Moonlight in Dunhuang Manuscripts.” November 24, 2013.

LECTURES AND PANELS AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Boston University, Core Curriculum, Lecture on the *Daodejing*. 2017 – 2022. 2024 – 2025.

Boston University, Research on Tap: China and the World. “Religion and Politics in Medieval China.” February 27, 2023.

Boston University, Core Curriculum, Lecture on the *Analects*. February 2, 2021.

Boston University “Tertulia” Junior Faculty Colloquium Series, “Maitreya’s Paradise: Terrestrial Buddhist Utopias in Scriptures and Paintings in Medieval China.” November 8, 2017.

Boston University Institute for Philosophy and Religion, “Apocalypticism and Messianism in China.” March 15, 2017.

Boston University Graduate Division of Religious Studies, Teaching Fellow Seminar “Composing A Statement of Teaching Philosophy.” February 23, 2017.

Boston University Center for the Study of Asia, East Asian Archeology Forum, “Maitreya’s Terrestrial Paradise: Medieval Mural Paintings at Dunhuang.” October 20, 2016.

Boston University Pardee School of Global Studies, Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs, and the Center for the Study of Asia, “Chinese Buddhist Charity in Comparative Perspective.” Panelist. September 9, 2016.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND ACADEMIC SERVICE TO THE FIELD

Steering Committee Member, Chinese Religions Unit, American Academy of Religion, 2025 – present.

Member, Board of Directors. Early Medieval China Group. May 2023 – present.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND ACADEMIC SERVICE AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Member, Stephen Prothero Award committee 2025.

Member, Faculty Annual Review Evaluation Committee. Religion Department, Boston University. 2017, 2025.

Member, Center for the Humanities Executive Board. College of Arts and Sciences, Boston University. July 2024 – June 2027.

Faculty Director, Trustee Scholars Program. Office of the Provost, Boston University. August 2023 – present.

Chair, Search Committee for Assistant Professor Position in Modern East Asian Buddhism. Department of Religion, Boston University. Fall 2023 – Spring 2024.

Director of Undergraduate Studies. Department of Religion, Boston University. Fall 2020 – Fall 2022.

Organizer, Graduate Teaching Fellow Seminar. Department of Religion, Boston University. Fall 2020 – Spring 2022.

Member, Humanities Curriculum Committee. College of Arts and Sciences, Boston University. Fall 2017 – Spring 2018; Fall 2019 – Spring 2021.

Member, Search Committee for Assistant Professor Position in Chinese Art and Architecture. Department of History of Art and Architecture, Boston University. Fall 2017 – Spring 2018.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND ACADEMIC SERVICE AT GONZAGA UNIVERSITY

Member, Global Studies Taskforce. College of Arts and Sciences, Gonzaga University. Fall 2015 – May 2016.

Member, Speaker's Series Committee. Gonzaga University. Fall 2015 – May 2016.

Member, Search Committee for Assistant Professor Position in Islam. Religious Studies Department, Gonzaga University. Fall 2015 – Spring 2016.

Committee Chair, World or Comparative Religions Core Curriculum Committee. Gonzaga University. Spring 2015 – May 2016.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

American Academy of Religion

American Oriental Society

Association of Asian Studies

Early Medieval China Group

International Association of Buddhist Studies

Society for the Study of Chinese Religions

T'ang Studies Society