Natasha L. Mikles
Texas State University, Comal 102
601 University Drive
San Marcos, TX 78666
484-832-6303
n.mikles@txstate.edu

Education

Ph.D., University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 2017
Department of Religious Studies—History of Religions
Competencies: Tibetan Religions
Chinese Religions
Nationalism and Oral Poetics

Title of Dissertation: The Taming of the King: Nyingma Ethical Revitalization and the Gesar Epic in Non-Sectarian Tibet

M. A., University of Chicago, Chicago, IL 2010
Divinity School—History of Religion

B.A., College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA 2008
Department of Religious Studies, High Honors
Title of Thesis: "I'm Not a Monk, but I'm a Bodhisattva: Green Gulch Farm and the Expression of American Zen Buddhism."
Study Abroad Experiences:
Kyoto, Japan Fall 2006
Antioch Buddhist Studies in Japan Program
Goa, India Summer 2006

Non-Degree Seeking Education

Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, PRC Summer 2012
Part of the Critical Language Scholarship Program

Tibet University, Lhasa, Tibet, PRC 2010 – 2011
International Student, Non-degree Seeking

Professional Appointments

Texas State University, Assistant Professor 2021 – Pr.
Department of Philosophy
Associate Department Chair 2023 – Pr.

Texas State University, Lecturer 2017 – 2021
Department of Philosophy

Texas State University, Adjunct Instructor 2016 – 2017
Department of Philosophy

Publications

Scholarly Monographs

Shattered Grief: How the Pandemic Transformed the Spirituality of Death in America. 2024
New York: Columbia University Press. 2024.

Edited Volumes

Religion, Culture, and the Monstrous: Of Gods and Monsters. 2021
Lexington: Lexington Books, 2021.

Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

"**Imagining Hell and Hellish Imagination: Teaching Buddhist Hells as Imaginative Acts."** 2025
Imagined Worlds In Buddhism. Forthcoming

"The Dymal gling rdzogs pa chen po, Social Kinds, and the Boundaries of Buddhism In Tibet." 2025
Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines.

"Between Two Apocalypses: Catastrophic Millenialism and Narrative Modeling in the Gesar Epic" 2025
Cahiers d'Extreme-Asie. Forthcoming.

"Three Spirit Mediums: A Case Study on Grief, Death, and Alternative Religious Traditions during the COVID-19 Pandemic." 2023
Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions 27.2 (2023): 86-100.

"Narrative Lifeworlds, the *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* and Gter ma's Social Function." 2024
Journal of Tibetology 26 (2022): 230-248.

"Interpreting Intercultural Encounters with 90 Day Fiancé in the World Religions' Classroom." 2020
Teaching Theology & Religion 23.3 (2020): 163-174.

"The Monstrous and the Moral: King Yama's Representation in Returner Literature." 2020
Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines 55 (2020): 385-408.

"When is a Hat a Mountain?: The Material Religion of Gesar Bard's Hats." 2020
Material Religion 16.2 (2020): 187-212.

"The Power of Genres and the Project of Secularization: Publishing the Gesar Epic in Contemporary China" 2019
Culture and Religion. 20.3 (2019): 322-350.

"Forum on Teaching Asian Religions in the American South." 2019
Co-authored with Brett J. Esaki and Lisa Battaglia.
Teaching Theology & Religion 22.3 (2019): 208-222.

"Tears Like Fluttering Leaves: Karmic Resentment and the Senses in Gesar's Trip to Hell." 2019
Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines 50 (2019): 212-234.

"Buddhicizing the Warrior-King Gesar in the *dMyal gling rDzogs pa Chen po*." 2016
Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines 37 (2016). 231-246.

"Tracking the *Tulpa?:* Exploring the 'Tibetan' Origins of a Contemporary Paranormal Idea." 2015
Co-authored with Joseph Laycock.
*Nova Religio.*19.1 (2015): 87-97.

"Is Nessie a Naga?: The Changing Face of Buddhism in the West." 2014
The Bulletin for the Study of Religion 43.4 (2014): 35-40.

"Buddhism and American Consumerism." 2013
Claremont Journal of Religion 1.2 (2013): 85-99.

Book Chapters

"Taking Seriously Lived Tibetan Buddhism and the Performative Tradition of the Gesar Epic." 2026
Proceedings Honoring the 60th Anniversary of the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts.
Forthcoming, anticipated Fall 2026.

"Whose Epic is it Anyway? Gesar and the Myth of the National Epic." 2023
The Epic World. New York: Routledge Press. pp. 285-298.

Textbooks

***Religion Matters*, 2nd Edition, Instructor Materials.** Co-authored with Joseph P. Laycock. 2024
New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.: 2024.

The Religion Matters Reader. Co-authored with Joseph P. Laycock. 2021
New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.: 2021.

***Religion Matters* Instructor Materials.** Co-authored with Joseph P. Laycock. 2020
New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.: 2020.

Non-Peer Reviewed and Popular Publications

China's Commodification of Minorities 2024
The Diplomat, November 14.

Ritual and Resiliency in the Unprecedented Times of the COVID Pandemic 2024
Dharma World, Autumn 2024, 18-21.

I Asked Texans how COVID Changed Funerals. 2022
Houston Chronicle, January 30th

"Name it and Disclaim It: A Tool for Better Discussion in Religious Studies." 2018
The Bulletin for the Study of Religion 47.3-4 (2018): 18-21.

"A Field Note from the 2014 NEH Summer Institute 'Problems in the Study of Religion,' July 7th – July 25th, 2014. 2014

The Bulletin for the Study of Religion 43.4 (2014): 37-49.

Peer-Reviewed Article in Submission

"Global Ties and Local Divides: How an Austin Buddhist Temple Responded to COVID-19 and its Implications for Transnational Buddhist Communities." 2025
Transnational Asia

"'Your Ancestors were Woke as F': Gender, the Politics of Myth, and the Neo-Pagan Search for a Usable Past." 2025
Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies

Selected Book Reviews

William M. Gorvine. *Envisioning a Tibetan Luminary*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) 2021
Nova Religio. 24.4 (2021): 119-121.

David A. Palmer and Elijah Siegler. *Dream Trippers: Global Daoism and the Predicament of Modern Spirituality.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017) 2019
*Nova Religio.*22.4 (2019): 131-133.

Jacqueline I. Stone. *Right Thoughts at the Last Moment*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2017) 2017
Reading Religion. American Academy of Religion.

John K. Nelson. *Experimental Buddhism.* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013) 2015
Nova Religio. 19.1 (2015): 109-111.

Jinah Kim. *Receptacle of the Sacred: the Buddhist Book Cult in South Asia.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 2014
East Asian Publishing and Society. 4.2 (2014): 194-196.

Reference Materials

"Storytelling and Possession." 2015
Spirit Possession Around the World. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO. 328-331.

"Miko (Japanese Female Mediums)." 2015
Spirit Possession Around the World. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO. 236-237.

"Kagura (Japanese Dance of Possession)." 2015
Spirit Possession Around the World. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO. 197-198.

Internet Publications

"What a Biannual Gathering of 1967 Impalas Reveals about the Blurry Line Between Fandom and Religion." 2023
The Conversation. November 30.

"The Pandemic Changed Death Rituals and Left Grieving Families without a Sense of Closure." 2022
The Conversation. January 26.

"Lack of Burial Space is Changing Age-old Funeral Practices, and in Japan 'tree burials' are gaining popularity." 2021
The Conversation. June 9.

"Indians are Forced to Change Rituals for their Dead as Covid-19 Rages through Cities and Villages." 2021
The Conversation. May 3.

"The Many Stories of Diwali Share a Common Theme of Triumph of Justice." 2020
The Conversation. November 12.

"Name it and Disclaim it: A Tool for Better Discussion in Religious Studies." 2018
The Bulletin for the Study of Religion. May 24.

"In the Weeds with David S. Pumpkins." 2017
The Bulletin for the Study of Religion. October 26.

"What's on Your Syllabus: Natasha L. Mikles." 2017
The Bulletin for the Study of Religion. April 4.

"So You're Not a Priest: Scholars Explain what They do to Outsiders." 2016
The Bulletin for the Study of Religion. July 14.

"Why are Chinese Grandmothers Giving Offerings to Video Game Characters? And Why does the Internet Think it's Funny?" 2016
The Bulletin for the Study of Religion. April 11.

"A Report from the 2014 NEH Summer Institute "Problems in the Study of Religion." 2014
The Bulletin for the Study of Religion. August 20.

"Offerings for the Loch Ness Monster—a Sign of Buddhism's Arrival in the West." 2014
Co-authored with Joseph P. Laycock.
The Bulletin for the Study of Religion. May 15.

"Speaking to Outsiders: Can Our Theory Make a Bigger Bang?" 2014
The Bulletin for the Study of Religion. January 8.

"Considering Orgasmic Meditation: It's not 'Diddling' when it's Ritual." 2013
The Bulletin for the Study of Religion. November 4.

Published Translations

"Nechung's Dream, from the *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.*" 2024
Longing to Awaken: Exploring Buddhist Devotion in Tibetan Poetry and Song.
University of Virginia Press. In press.

Selected Research Grants, Fellowships, and Awards

ACLS Project Development Grant ($5,000) 2022

Critical Language Scholarship Alumni Development Fund ($550) 2017

Charlotte W. Newcombe Dissertation Fellowship ($25,000) 2016 – 2017

Fulbright Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (Alternate) 2014
Buckner W. Clay Grant ($4,262) 2014
Jefferson Trust Grant ($24,040) 2014
Skinner Fellow ($12,500) 2013 – 2014
Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellow, Chinese ($35,000) 2013 – 2014
Rare Book School Fellow ($1,500) Summer 2013
Battestin Fellow ($3,500) Summer 2013
Department of State Critical Language Scholarship ($15,000) Summer 2012
University of Virginia Bibliographic Society Book Collecting Contest ($75) 2012
Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellow, Tibetan ($35,000) 2009 – 2010
Foreign Language and Area Studies Summer Fellow, Tibetan ($10,000) Summer 2009

Conference Activity

Symposia and Conferences Organized

Of Gods and Monsters: the Redux 2026
Texas State University, March 26-29

International Seminar of Young Tibetologists 2022
University of Virginia, August 9-13

Of Gods and Monsters 2019
Texas State University, April 4-6

Symposium on the Tibetan Book 2014
University of Virginia, November 7-9
Secured $28,000 in competitive university funding

Graduate Buddhist Studies Conference 2014
University of Virginia, February 28-March 2

North American Graduate Student Conference in Buddhist Studies 2012
University of Virginia, September 14-16
In conjunction with University of Virginia Buddhist Studies Group

Panels Organized

Privilege and Positionality in Tibetan and Himalayan Fieldwork Settings 2025
American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, November 21-25

Emotional States and Buddhist History, Literature, and Practice 2025
International Association of Buddhist Studies, University of Leipzig, August 10-15

Buddhist Literature Outside the Monastery 2022
U.K. Association of Buddhist Studies, St. Andrews Scotland, June 20-24.

Religion and Violence in the Himalayas 2018
American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 17-20

Exploratory Session: Monster Theory and Religion 2018
American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 17-20

Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Tibetan Protector Deities 2016
American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 19-22

Invited Talks

"Shattered Grief: How the Pandemic Transformed the Spirituality of Death in America" 2025
Morbid Anatomy Library, January 27

"Twelve Quotes for Understanding Religion during the Pandemic" 2024
University of Arkansas Annual Religious Studies Lecture, April 17.

"Teaching Buddhism Through Virtual Media" 2023
Buddhist Pedagogy Seminar, American Academy of Religion, November 17

"Responding to *God's Monsters*" 2023
Society for Biblical Literature, November 20

"The Academy and the Impossible" 2022
Opening the Archives of the Impossible, Rice University, March 3-7

National Consortium for Teaching About Asia—"Teaching Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism," University of Central Arkansas 2022
Appreciating and Complicating Multi-Ethnic China, February 25
Awkafina Teaches the Analects, February 26

Oral Histories of Covid-19: Spirituality, Anger, and Grief. 2021
Texas State University History Club, November 10

Grief, Spirituality, and Anger after a Covid-19 Loss 2021
Texas State University, Dialogue Series, October 20

When Publishing Overshadows Performance: The Gesar Epic, Performance, and the Designation of "Religion" 2019
International Conference of Tibetan Performing Arts, October 29-31

Gesar, Masculinity, and Devotion in Tibetan Songs 2018
Lotsawa Translation Workshop, University of Colorado—Boulder, October 7.

Saving our Mothers from Hell: Gesar, Mulian, and the "Good Buddhist" Son 2017
Bates University Public Lecture Series, October 26.

To Hell and Back: Eyewitness Accounts of the Tibetan Underworld 2015
Texas State University, Dialogue Series, April 1.

Buddhism: A Short and Fast History 2013
NEH Symposium: Strengthening Global Humanities at Virginia's Community Colleges August 6.

Papers Presented

Gesar's Tibet in the Twentieth-century Theosophical Works of Nicholas Roerich and Alexandra David-Neel 2026

Epic Geography Symposium, Indiana University Bloomington, March 20-21

Teaching Buddhism in 2025 Roundtable 2025
American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, November 21-25

Privilege and Positionality in Tibetan and Himalayan Fieldwork Settings 2025
American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, November 21-25

King Gesar as Contested and Commodified Symbol in Contemporary China 2025
The Heroes Conference, Concordia University, Montreal, October 20-23

Hell Beyond Fear: Ethnographic Interventions in Studying Buddhist Hell Literature 2025
International Association of Buddhist Studies, University of Leipzig, August 10-15

A Bridge of Stories: Gesar's Journey to Hell as Tibetan Cultural Ambassador 2024
International Seminar of Young Tibetologists, Oxford University, September 1-6

The Dharma of Warrior-Kings and Talking Horses: Treasuring Buddhist Popular Literature 2023
U.K. Association of Buddhist Studies, St. Andrews Scotland, June 20-24.

Between Two Apocalypses: Catastrophic Millennialism and Narrative Modeling in the Gesar Epic 2022
American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 18-22.

The Buddhist Cultural Tool-kit and COVID 19: A Case Study of the Fo Guang Shan Xiang Yun Community 2022
American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 18-22.

Buddhist, not Buddhicized: The Gesar Epic, Popular Literature, and Overlooking the Lived Experience of Buddhist Literature 2022
International Association of Buddhist Studies, Seoul National University, August 14-20

Can a Buddhist Text be Buddhicized? 2022
International Seminar of Young Tibetologists, University of Virginia, August 1-5

Recommitment, Rejection, and Innovation: American Responses to COVID-19 Grief and Religious Identity 2021
American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 19-22

Toppling Max Müller's Library and Other Strategies for Complicating our Imagined Students 2020
New Paths in Teaching Buddhist Studies, University of Toronto, February 21-23

Fire from the Mouth of the Great Garuda: Apocalypse, Taboo, and Reverse Ostension in the Gesar Epic 2019
International Association for Tibetan Studies, July 7-13

Sharing King Gesar's Battle-Cry: The Abundant Event of Religious Violence in Tibet 2018
American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 17-20

Returning Terror to Buddhist Hell: King Yama as a "Deified Monster" 2018
American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 17-20

The Monstrous and the Moral: King Yama's Representation in Returner Literature 2018
International Seminar of Young Tibetologists, St. Petersburg, Russia, September 3-7

The Buddhas at Night, are Big and Bright: Teaching Asian Religions in Central 2018

Texas
Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion, March 2-4

When is a Hat a Mountain?: Ritual's Role in Constructing the Object of Vision 2017
American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 17-21

The Butcher, the Baker, and the Hell-Being Maker: How the Embodied Experience of Samsara Makes Buddhist Hell 2017
American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 17-21

Karmic Reservations and Resolutions: Narrative Imagination and Ethical Formation in Gesar's Descent through Hell 2016
American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 19-22

Ideological Narratives: A Rimé Challenge to Geluk Power through King Gesar in Hell 2016
American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 19-22

A Most Unexpected Teacher: King Gesar, Dzogchen, and the Rimé Movement 2016
International Association of Tibetan Studies, Bergen, Norway, June 19-25

The Dalai Lama as King Gesar, the Karmapa as his Warrior: Mythic History to Bind the Dis-Membered Body of Tibet 2016
Association of Asian Studies Annual Conference, March 31-April 2

Salvation and its Implications: King Gesar's Descent to Hell and the Construction of a Tantric Deity 2015
International Seminar of Young Tibetologists, Leipzig, Germany, September 7-12

Death Challenges even the King: the Buddhist Triumph over King Gesar's Conquest of Hell 2015
University of Texas at Austin Graduate Student Conference, April 10-12

Epic Kings, Chinese Monks, and the Walking Dead: Forming a Buddhist Savior 2015
Central Texas Colloquium on Religion, February 21

The Mind of an Editor: Assessing the Structure of *gsung 'bum* Formation 2015
Southeast Regional Association for Asian Studies Conference, January 16-17

An American Hero: Gesar of Ling and the Work of Douglas J. Penick 2012
Mid-Atlantic Regional Association for Asian Studies Conference, November 2-4

I'm Only Buddhist Because I Hate America: Religious Identity as Protest 2012
2012 Claremont National Student Conference, April 19-21

Harry Potter and the Intrepid Interpretant: Translating Fantastical Creatures Across Cultures 2012
University of Virginia Department of English Graduate Student Conference, March 16-18

A *Tantrika* in the Modern World 2009
Florida State University Gradate Research Symposium, February 20-22

Competitive Workshops Attended

Lotsawa Tibetan Translation Workshop 2022
Northwestern University, Evanston, October 13-16

The Imagined and Imaginal Worlds in the Mirror of Buddhism 2022

Mangalam Research Center, June 12-24

New Paths in Teaching Buddhist Studies 2020
University of Toronto, February 21-23

Lotsawa Tibetan Translation Workshop 2018
University of Colorado, Boulder, October 5-8

History and Culture of the Book in Tibet 2018
Rare Book School, July 23-27

Printed Books to 1800 2013
Rare Book School, July 8-12

Teaching Experience, Development, and Awards

Teaching Awards and Recognition

Alpha Chi Favorite Professor Spring 2019

Consultation on Stephen Prothero, *Religion Matters* 2018 – 2020
W.W. Norton & Company

Selected Teaching Experience, most recent semester taught

Texas State University

Death and Dying	Spring 2024
Chinese Religions	Spring 2023
Buddhism	Fall 2022
Introduction to World Religions	Spring 2023
Myth and Cosmology: Hell	Fall 2023
Taught as Honors Course	Spring 2022

University of Virginia

Chinese Religions	Summer 2016

Pedagogical Development

Participant in Course Design Institute 2014
Developed Buddhist Masculinities Syllabus, June 2-6.

Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Seminar Fall 2013
Offered through the UVa Teaching Resource Center

Tomorrow's Professor Today 2011 – 2013
Selected Speaker at the Final Reception, May 2. 2013

Pedagogical Instruction

Facilitator for FOSTER Teaching Seminar Fall 2013
Component of UVa's Tomorrow's Professor Today program

Invited Presenter at the August Teaching Workshop 2013
Organized by University of Virginia's Teaching Resource Center, August 22.

Media Appearances

National

WORT Media, Madison, WI, "COVID-19 and Funerary Rituals" 2022
January 31

Local

KVUE Austin, "Diwali in Central Texas"
November 14 2020

Professional Activities and Service

Service to Profession

International Association of Tibetan Studies
Member of Anti-Harassment Working Group 2020—Pr.

Journal of Gods and Monsters 2019—Pr.
Editor and Founder

New Directions in the Study of Religion, Monsters and the Monstrous
Chair 2020—Pr.
Steering Committee Member 2018 – 2019

International Seminar of Young Tibetologists
Secretary-General of Organization 2018—Pr.
Advisory Board Member 2015 – 2018

NEH Summer Institute 2014
The Problem of the Study of Religion: An Introduction to Histories, Discourses, and Pedagogies
Kurtis Schaeffer and Charles Mathewes, University of Virginia
On-Site Manager 2013 – 2014
Grant Editor Spring 2013

Peer Review for the Following Journals and Publishers:
W.W. Norton & Company
Palgrave Macmillan
Nova Religio
Himalaya

University Service

Organized Speaker (Dr. Jenna Reinbold) Fall 2022
Recipient of University Lecture Series Grant ($3,000)

Religious Studies Advisor 2022 – Pr.

Organized Speaker (Dr. Courtney Bruntz) Spring 2018
Recipient of University Lecture Series Grant ($1,000)
Recipient of Critical Language Scholarship Alumni Grant ($550)

Committee Member
Committee on Religious Studies Major 2017 – 2020
Committee on Research 2017 – 2020

Book Series Editorial Assistant 2016 – 2017
Book Series: Traditions and Transformations in Tibetan Buddhism
University of Virginia Press
Book Series: Contemplative Sciences
University of Virginia Press

Student Participant on Teaching Resource Center's Search Committee 2013

University of Virginia Buddhist Studies Group
Coordinator and Moderator 2013
University of Virginia Tibet Day, February 27.
Leadership Coordinator 2012 – 2014

University of Virginia History of Religions Women's Group 2012 – 2014
Leadership Coordinator

Languages

Tibetan: Advanced speaking and reading
Participant at UVa Summer Language Institute 2008
Participant at University of Wisconsin South Asia Summer Language Institute 2009
International Student at Tibet University, Lhasa, PRC 2010 – 2011

Chinese: Advanced speaking and reading (OPI Score: Advanced Low)
Participant at UVa Summer Language Institute 2010
International Student at Tibet University, Lhasa, PRC 2010 – 2011
Participant in Critical Language Scholarship Program, Beijing 2012
French: Reading ability
Spanish: Intermediate speaking and reading

Related Professional Experience

Tibetan Content Specialist Spring 2017 – 2019
Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library, University of Virginia

Course Manager 2015 – 2016
University of Virginia Buddhist Meditation MOOC, hosted on Coursera

Research Assistant and Promotional Writer 2013 – 2015
Contemplative Sciences Center

Affiliations

American Academy of Religion
Association for Asian Studies
International Seminar for Young Tibetologists
International Association for Tibetan Studies

References

Rebecca Raphael
Texas State University
601 University Drive
San Marcos, TX 78666
512-245-2282
Raphael@txstate.edu

Brandon Dotson, Professor
Georgetown University
Department of Theology and Religious Studies
37th and O Streets NW
Washington, DC 20057
202-687-0100
Brandon.dotson@georgetown.edu

Candi Cann, Associate Professor
Baylor University
Baylor Interdisciplinary Core
One Bear Place #97350
Waco, TX 76798
254-710-3981
Candi_Cann@baylor.edu