Episode 02: Dr. Matthew King On Decolonizing the Classroom

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SPEAKERS
Matt King
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FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

[00:00:00.00] Matt King: What I found with my teaching in Buddhist studies and elsewhere, is that you can teach any topic from many perspectives, but the best teaching will come from the perspective that you're most excited about.

[00:00:19.15] Sarah Richardson: Welcome to this episode of The Circled Square the podcast where we talk about teaching Buddhism in higher education. My name is Sarah Richardson from the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Toronto. In this episode we sat down with Matt King. Matt King is an associate professor in transnational Buddhism at UC California Riverside and also presently the chair of Asian Studies. He was just our second guest ever on this podcast. So we were still learning how to do things and it's a little long. But this was also because Matt's really interesting. **[00:00:50.25]** Matt's a friend, he did his PhD here in Toronto back in 2014 and at the time when we were speaking, he had just published his first book about Mongolian counter modern Buddhist responses in the ruins of the Qing Empire. Our interview with Matt was him really speaking between theory and practice and often thinking about ways to support and grow his students especially in disciplines like religion. He's asking, why do we teach what we teach? How can we actually help people with these subjects? And what should we be doing as Buddhist studies scholars to better engage in public discourse? So enjoy our interview with Matt King about engaging students in the big picture.

[00:01:34.20] Matt King: So I teach in a department for the Study of Religion at UC Riverside. I'm also affiliated in the comp lit and foreign languages program and I'm also now the chair of the Asian Studies Program. So that's a way of talking about where our students come from. At least on my side of religious studies we get students from those different programs as well. So at an undergrad level in terms of Buddhism classes, we get students from everywhere to be honest. **[00:02:07.15]** In our institution they're usually taught at the upper undergraduate level like the third- or fourth-year level. And at that point students and other colleges are still doing breadth requirements. So my Buddhism classes have religious studies majors, some history kids, comp lit students, neurology students, mechanical engineering students. That's a way of saying that maybe the prerequisite requirements are not always honored in the rush to get students to degree but that's one of the best parts about teaching actually. Some of the best undergrads I've had have been from cognitive science who've taken courses in Buddhism. So in terms of preparation the usual Buddhist Studies classes where some students have done Vipassanā retreat lived at a dharma center in Nepal. But more commonly for me at UC Riverside is that people grew up in a Buddhist household or they went to visit Grandma and Grandpa and

had to go to the Vietnamese temple or the Thai temple or something and it was just part of growing up but they never had any education in Buddhism. **[00:03:12.05]** So everyone in the way is starting from the same place. some general interest whether it's to theories of mind that are outside of Western medical models or wanting to understand more about like well what was I doing at Temple, or setting what I learned at the dharma center into some historical context. And then at the graduate level of course we have students who have a lot more preparation both in terms of social theory and in terms of the tradition they want to explore.

[00:03:42.01] Sarah Richardson: Yeah okay great. It must be a rich space then for teaching in that like.

[00:03:45.21] Matt King: Yeah

[00:03:47:08] Sarah Richardson: So can you take us back a little bit to how you began your own journey in this in this field. How did you get interested in the study of Buddhism and where does that path start for you?

[00:04:00:18] Matt King: Well, I got very interested in Buddhism when I was about like 14 or 15 and...

[00:04:10:18] Sarah Richardson: Growing up in Canada?

[00:04:11:16] Matt King: Growing up in Canada a few hours outside of Toronto. And what I started coming down to the city and going to Dharma Centers and going into specifically Tibetan Buddhist traditions and so on. So I had a kind of a personal interest in Buddhism before even starting a B.A. In fact I wanted to be a monk. I was obsessed. I went to live at a monastery when I was 17 for white monks in France. And I wasn't even going to finish high school. So my parents were like really "don't throw your life away". Neither of them went through college and I'm a first-generation college student so they're just like "Please, please just do one year of university we've saved our whole lives so you can just do one year." In any case when I was an undergrad, I didn't want to do any religious studies classes and I didn't. I just did linguistic anthropology, historical anthropology all this other stuff and art, painting and drawing. So I never did anything until later on with no real ambitions for grad school. I took one class in Tibetan language that you were in... twelve years ago, am I right?

[00:05:19:21] Sarah Richardson: Or something like that...like that maybe longer. We'll say twelve.

[00:05:25:13] Matt King: That was great. And then I left. And eventually I went to Mongolia, I went to India, I was an attendant for a lama teaching in the Gobi Desert. And then I was also like digging holes on construction sites and thinking "Oh maybe I want to try a bit more school." And thankfully Frances Garrett who became my supervisor, encouraged me to think about doing an M.A. in Religious Studies that opened up a whole new pathway.

[00:05:49:28] Sarah Richardson: Great. So you mentioned Frances, but who were the teachers who made the biggest impact on you and why?

[00:05:59:13] Matt King: Yeah well so here's a way maybe I could say that. Sali Tagliamonte who's in linguistics here at the University of Toronto is, I mean Frances Garrett sets a very high bar, but Sali also was one of them, more one of those teachers that just opens up entire worlds of the imagination. Not just in terms of what she was teaching but the way that she taught. And she was someone that went way out of her way to create research opportunities for undergraduates that I took part in and got me out of the crowd as a sort of reclusive younger person. And showed me that hey maybe there's a pathway forward and I love research and I got to do a bunch of stuff in a linguistic anthropology lab. And so that opened up a whole sense that maybe I could pursue research and pursue graduate work not in linguistic anthropology but in the humanities more generally. And that still really informs the way that I'm thinking today about trying to create spaces for undergraduate research because I know the kind of opportunities it can create.

[00:07:06:13] Sarah Richardson: What kind of, can you give us an example of what she had you do in the class?

[00:07:10:07] Matt King: Yeah, so she had a big multi-year project called inTObation with the 'TO" being T.O. for Toronto. And what it was doing was a multi-year project to identify and document old line English in Toronto. Old line meaning that someone had grown up here in the Greater Toronto Area and was still living here. Whatever else was going on that was different that was the requirement. And so what that meant for me was I, myself and somebody, another student researcher, were given some money to not have to go work in a terrible job in the summer and a microphone and we just went knocking on doors for six months or something all over Toronto and tried to not scare people and convince them that we just wanted to talk for this project. **[00:07:58:00]** And so I ended up speaking to guys that were riding the streetcar in Toronto when there were coal fires here still and that rode a horse to where the Eaton Centre is now and so on. And then be part of transcribing and watching the actual trained linguists' kind of come to conclusions about what the nature of English is say in the last two or three generations and how it's evolved and changed. Which, I hear, is still a project that's ongoing here at UofT still I guess like 15 years later or something.

[00:08:28:26] Sarah Richardson: Interesting.

[00:08:29.27] Matt King: So it was it was an opportunity to actually do research and we even got to go and present a poster at a big conference as like an undergrad which for me was just like unheard of. It's not something I could've done on my own so.

[00:08:40:18] Sarah Richardson: Very cool. And then you've said that you think about this now in your classroom so how has that inspired you?

[00:08:47:01] Matt King: Yeah. Well where I teach now have excellent students and sort of a high bar for admissions, but a lot of our students are first generation. Majority of our students I think, are first generation.

[00:09:02:05] Sarah Richardson: First generation to university you mean? Yeah.

[00:09:03.05] Matt King: So it's an incredible place to teach because, they are there on the backs of one or two generations in many cases, and they're there to work and to learn. And even though they often have very exceptionally kind of busy lives, they still work very hard. And they're chomping at the bit to make this work for them. Very pragmatic way of being in an undergraduate classroom and which I think is really useful. So you just have to open the door I've found and they're lining up to be a research assistant. But more than that what's been more useful is tapping into resources at the university to support them in doing their original research. Not having them help me with mine because to be honest, they can't really help right. But if they're really excited about a term paper that they did for your class, because I teach classes like religion and science, problems with religion, religion and violence, social theory, I teach outside of Buddhist studies as well. **[00:10:06:07]** So whatever their term paper was that they're excited about to just really tap them on the shoulder and say, "hey I will continue working with you on this". And why not submit it to our undergraduate Journal? Why not submit it to be considered for our undergraduate research conference? Why not submit it to be it as an application as part of becoming a fellow for our chancellor as a research fellowship? And these are just UCR examples. **[00:10:32:12]** But they are willing to work so hard and I've got four or five of those students now, two of them did Buddhism, they're off doing graduate work now. Two went to Harvard, one went to Michigan, and we have one that's at Chicago, in Islamic Studies. They were, they've really put themselves there. So anyways, just creating spaces for excellence in undergraduate research I feel like it's a responsibility. Also like knowing how much in debt these students are, how inadequate say religious studies department is in communicating to undergraduates why they're major actually matters, let alone Buddhist studies.

[00:11:12.05] Sarah Richardson: Yeah.

[00:11:13:01] Matt King: We do such terrible jobs at that. And so helping them professionalize and get experience that will help. Whether they go to graduate school or go to law school or do anything.

[00:11:23.05] Sarah Richardson: Yeah. Yeah but it's a hard sell, surely right? Like that pragmatism, what is the practical application for a lot of students of our types of courses and research? And it's, how do you how do you work with that and explain that to them? And also, I was wondering as you were talking, how I mean I guess some of the really gifted ones go to graduate work further on but the only work of this is not also going on in this field.

[00:11:49.19] Matt King: God no, no.

[00:11:51.17] Sarah Richardson: So how did yeah. What's that. What is the kind of what is this sell that we make?

[00:11:56.18] Matt King: Well my pitch is that and it's always changing right. For me I think what I have said most recently is like, look, whatever you do after this degree, whether you're starting your internship at a local office, whatever, you're going to be called on to take account of a bunch of information, to synthesize it together, to present it to others in a compelling persuasive way that will then drive forward the conversation or projects in your community. I'm saying? That's what we're training you to do with essay writing, Whether you ever think again about a 13th century Tibetan biography, you are surely going to need to articulate a unique interpretation of our complex messy world or the complex and messy data points that are part of your business and so on right. **[00:12:48:45]** So and it's in the humanities we organize our thinking primarily through writing and this is the project. But clear writing is clear thinking. And so take this seriously, this is a skill. But then more broadly I think you also need to have... We're not teaching writing they can go to you learn writing in better ways for more qualified people in some ways like writing...

[00:13:11.19] Sarah Richardson: What? we're not the best writers? What, you don't have to say that just because your book is out!

[00:13:18.00] Matt King: I know I am not at least! But I think there is a real pitch for the humanities and the social sciences as well for why it matters. I don't follow the sort of the humanities creates morals citizens or that professors are somehow moral leaders for students you hear people say that. God help us. But for me learning to think critically about difference and to denaturalize the way we are in place and time and embodiment is not just an exercise of the mind. That is the most political needed exercise that any of us can go through. There is an otherwise to how we are in the world and what seems natural and unmovable. Climate change. What I might say, the experience of structural inequalities, right? I mean it's that these all have histories and the second we start thinking about those histories other things become possible. **[00:14:18:05]** The humanities and social sciences uniquely do that. And that's why big industries and in California Silicon Valley all these people are like "send us your gender studies graduates, send us your religious studies graduates, we'll teach them the algorithms, but we want people that can think and evaluate and draw unique new connections." And yet colleges and humanists and social scientists very rarely echo those calls in effective ways to draw in majors. It's terrible, terrible branding. But there's a pitch there. And those courses are live, and I need to, I should say, I'm always chasing after trying to make my Buddhist studies classes as alive as my courses are in like thinking about ethnonationalism and or the Orientalist histories and colonial histories of anthropology and social sciences or teaching about Freud or Marx for example. Because those classes which are great pitches for the Humanities and Social Sciences do really connect with students, even if they never think about it again. And Buddhism can become that way.

[00:15:22:03] Sarah Richardson: Yeah, absolutely. So can you give us some tangible examples of times and or little exercises you use with students or are topics you've used with students to

open up to use Buddhism in that way or use something from the Buddhist Studies from going deep in into some example they probably haven't heard of before that it then allows this kind of broader engagement.

[00:15:43.10] Matt King: So... what is necessary in my opinion at least for where I am in the teaching I like to do and who my students are right now requires at the outset, centering the history of why there is such a thing as Buddhist Studies, Buddhism and/or Asia as objects of academic inquiry. That's kind of how usually start those classes like "why do you guys open a course calendar and see Buddhism listed next to something called Judaism and Christianity and Islam. Or also say Daoism or Confucianism or something. Why does that seem natural, right? Why does it seem natural that we can jump on a spaceship or a time machine and jump out anywhere and say "oh that, that's religion." And maybe that's something like science or form. In other words, why do we organize our knowledge about the world in these ways? And which of course, with Buddhism which has the wonderful potential of teaching and writing and thinking about Buddhism but which I think is a little untapped still is that Buddhism is the product of, it's the classic product of colonial scholarship. It is forged in the space of Orientalism. It is inexorable from the founding of academic disciplines about the non-West. And because of that it's in the most wonderful position for kind of the most critical revisionist teachings both in terms of bringing students into the complex, sometimes very different beautiful worlds of social and religious imagination or whatever, of the communities we, we want to explore elsewhere in the world outside of the sort of Euro-North-American tradition. But also to use a Buddhist metaphor the mirror can turn around on itself. **[00:17:26:19]** And so a course of study in Buddhism should be about decolonizing and revising the humanities and social sciences in the same breath of learning about the 12 deeds of the Buddha and who Milarepa was and what the difference between Zen and Vipassana meditation is and so on. The problem with teaching in Buddhism is you have to do so much legwork for them just to get a bunch of kind of the basic roadmap of like who, what, when, where, why, what are some key terms, and sort of orientations to like these existential questions about the human. And also how is the human constructed in these various ways. What are shared alignments that can organize for the purposes of teaching undergraduates. But I still do think that, you can kind of set into history the very space of that teaching right from the outset and at the very end as well.

[00:18:23:09] Sarah Richardson: Do you find that you have to work against a lot of their baggage too. I mean they don't, maybe don't have a lot of knowledge of the twelve deeds or who, what, when but, they also have a perception often. I mean there's a kind of a shared cultural perception now of Buddhism being this other good thing, that it’s a philosophy not a religion. A thing that can be mined for secular need and the needs of capitalism. And right. So well, how do you work with that and not only...?

[**00:18:52.06] Matt King:** In my experience that narrative comes from Buddhist studies scholars not from students. Actually, in my experience. I've never had students want to save Buddhism. Their version of Buddhism that they find in Tricycle, at the health food store when they're checking out or whatever. In other words the Buddhism that white people teach in its sort of therapeutic model. But our students at least are kind of very ripe or thinking through the

racialized, classed, construction of the kinds of Buddhism that your average undergraduate student might have encountered. By average I mean students that didn't grow up with it in the household but probably have encountered it in the yoga studio or when they were traveling to Goa or when their friend took them to his Zen center or something like that. I've never heard anyone pushback on “that's not my version of Buddhism.” **[00:19:44:35]** Including students who are very dedicated and seasoned sort of people that have been in Dharma communities for a long time. It's always Buddhist studies scholars, in my opinion, that have this idea because of the scholar practitioner ambiguities in Buddhist studies that I think is a problem. Not that there shouldn’t be scholar practitioners but just that there needs to be disambiguated. About what we're trying to accomplish in this sort of the teaching of Buddhist Studies. **[00:20:15:08]** Is this essentially theology or some critical constructivist project? Is this social history? Is this political history? Is this gender history? Is this a decolonial? I feel like that stuff is so ambiguous when it comes to talking about teaching about Buddhism. Just about the whatever the professional field of Buddhist Studies is. I'm not even sure. So anyways, do always foreground those things and I think it's a huge in. That it's a way for students to lean in! Even if they did learn, even if that, they want to just understand like what "who is offering an orange to when I went to the Wat with grandma?” Or even if it is like, “oh that's what this guy was teaching he was calling it like moral comfort.” But actually it's śīla or whatever. Then there’s lots of inroads to the material that way, I feel like, for them getting some skin in the game. Because why not? Why can't Buddhism be a part of a broader course of like critical thinking and engagement or revisionist scholarship that is part of teaching undergrads.

00:21:26:05] Sarah Richardson: So decolonizing Buddhist studies. How? How could we do it with them in the classroom?

[00:21:32:05] Matt King: Because Buddhist studies, like the way we think and teach about Buddhism and know Buddhism in relationship to modernity in the academy is, is fundamental to constructing the non-West as an intellectual project. Buddhism comes out of the ether of paganist, non-Western traditions first. Buddhism still, still seems exceptional in popular discourse compared with like Islam or something like that. Why is that? For whom? And what does it reflect? So we all kind of know that. I mean, it's kind of method and theory of religious studies 101. Especially if you're doing Asian traditions. And yet we know the histories and yet the implications are never enacted or are very rarely enacted. I think that sometimes, like, feminist queer scholars in there are doing work in Buddhism do, do these things. There's like a post-colonial strand that maybe picks up some of this stuff, but I think just in general thinking about Buddhism allows you to come up to historicize the particular ethnography philology and other early 19th century disciplines that were made to know the non-West and in particular made to know and manage a colony in Asia that, are really productive. **[00:22:55:08]** And this becomes, what a teachable moment. Now that we know the sort of Protestant European inflected histories and the Orientalist sort of strategies that Buddhist Studies continues to reproduce in some ways, what would the otherwise of that be? What if we didn't think about Buddhism alongside Christianity. Now that you kids have learned that we've been having this conversation over 20 meetings in 10 weeks. What is what is, what would be better categories we're thinking about Buddhism? You don't have to have the answers, but the revisionists kind

of project is about I think inviting more voices to the table and pluralizing our analytical models. And students have lots to say about that. In fact they have a lot more to say about that than the four noble truths, I'll tell you that. You can do both. Yeah.

[00:23:47:19] Sarah Richardson: Wonderful. So what do you think is some of the public work of humanities which you've already been talking about a bit right? Of course this classroom teaching is in aiming at getting people also out in the world. But what is then the potential you think for the public work of humanities and the public academic?

[00:24:15:09] Matt King: The thing that comes to my mind honestly is how many regional traditions of Buddhism that we align ourselves with. Tibetan Buddhism, Burmese Buddhism, whatever, were on the receiving end of profound state violence in the 19th and 20th centuries. How many of us work on histories of violence and call it Buddhist studies? At least our scholarship on Buddhism is deeply implicated not just with historical kind of enactments of state violence, but ongoing state violence that we all deal with, but we don't necessarily talk about a lot collectively or at least we don't talk about in terms of like a critical response a collective critical response. **[00:25:08:05]** So a lot of the people who are representative of the traditions we study of course can also be scholars, but they are refugees and diasporas. They are casualties of the modern formation of Asia in some cases which is also the same way as saying they are casualties of like American and European intervention. And in Asia right or inter-Asian intervention and suppression. So when I think about the public place. I've got other answers for the public face of the humanities and social sciences. When it comes to public place of Buddhist Studies, I feel like there's an absolute silence in terms of talking about Buddhism in the same breath as power and violence and the construction of the modern, that is reprehensible in some ways, is irresponsible for those of us that get to have this sort of aristocratic life of an academic. So, I'm not saying that there should be a politic, but I always did what I talked about with these students and I think about if you're a scholar Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao in the 60s or 70s the CIA was using the work of anthropologists working on those areas in their bombing campaigns. What's your responsibility? Right? **[00:26:35:05]** My book that just came out ends with 40,000 people getting shot in the back of the head. And not to be dramatic but that's how, when Mongols hear about what I'm working on and my friends and colleagues in Mongolia, that's the frame that they're receiving this in. So how can our teaching on something as rarefied as say Buddhist scholasticism, or the Kalachakra or the abhidharma or something like that, in the same breath, not just be about sort of exposing histories of the humanities and social sciences and thinking to collectively with students about what better ways of thinking difference that don't reproduce those sorts of colonial histories. But how do what are the what are the ethics of scholarship of, on, say Buddhist traditions, or Asian societies, that are bound up so intricately with the experience of state violence. Right? **[00:27:29:24]** I'm not saying go start an NGO or go take your suits to go protest. I just finished teaching in a class on, on Tibetan Buddhism that ended with self-immolation. So what do we do from there? I feel like Buddhists studies has no sense of a public intellectual. I think Buddhist traditions do. Asian societies with a lot of public intellectuals that are doing things. But the public intellectual role of Buddhism Studies, and the public, who are the publics Buddhism anyways? Of Buddhist Studies? I mean maybe that's the first question right.

[00:28:05:29] Sarah Richardson: Yeah.

[00:28:06:16] Matt King: So I don't know.

[00:28:07:03] Sarah Richardson: Why do you think what that is. What do you think is at the root of that silence? No I agree completely. Now that you say it makes total sense yeah. What. But why? Yeah why, why? What is that the root of that that deafening silence from Buddhist Studies, academics about ongoing real violence.

[00:28:26:08] Matt King: I mean to be honest like that what comes to my mind. I don't think the people individually do not have those commitments or are immoral or they aren't profoundly active in other ways in their lives. But I do think that Buddhism continues to, as much as there is something called Buddhist studies that we could point to, I do think that the classical, the textual, the philological, reigns supreme. Right? And so something called like the anthropology of Buddhism... I mean there's incredible scholars doing that kind of thing but it's, it's nascent compared to say the anthropology of Christianity, the anthropology the Islam. Which if I'm not mistaken, were sort of emerging as really wonderfully critical, revisionist fields in what like the 90s or something like that. I might be wrong about that, but already I think of like this Saba Mahmood's. The Pamela Klassen's here at UCR [UofT?]. I mean there's many, Simon Coleman's, all these other wonderful, Ruth Marshall, people were incredible, Kevin O'Neill, scholars of Christianity. I mean in Buddhist studies I think Charlene Mackley, the Martin Mills and others. The way they talk and think and implicate themselves in their field sites. Maybe that's the thing, It's not just about who are the publics but also what is the field site? In Buddhism, that is the question I had with my graduate students. Where is the Buddhism? Where is Buddhism located in this round of readings? Of course it's often in texts and it's often in texts that are extricated from a particular social contexts. And we all know those histories right. That this is like the history of kind of the construction of original pure Buddhism owned by the Orientalist in Europe, that sort of claims that history and marginalizes lived traditions, and colonized Asia. That's fine. But I do think that the classical textual orientation of something called Buddhist Studies reigns supreme still. And that who the publics of Buddhist studies are is ambiguous because, what is the field of Buddhist Studies? I mean is it anthropologists? Philologists? Textualists? It's like a collision course of Cold War area studies with Orientalist scholarship, professional historians who embed their work on something called Buddhism within economic and social and political contexts. It's a very opaque, a lot of white noise when it comes but everyone seems to think there's something called Buddhist Studies, and something called Buddhism but I'm not so sure.

[00:31:22:00] Sarah Richardson: Yeah and I mean I feel one of the tensions I see around me a lot is also a real reluctance to embrace anything that's going on really right now. We're comfortable with the historical objects, but the contemporary gets too messy too fast. So I at least feel like what I perceived in the few environments that I've been in, is a real reluctance to embrace a living, breathing, faith community as part of the same discourse as our 5th century texts.

[00:31:55:06] Matt King: Absolutely. Yeah. And only and also the teaching of Buddhism itself could be like this profound expression of the interdisciplinary spirit of like the liberal arts or something like that. In the sense of like you can teach Buddhism as medicine, you can teach Buddhism in the history of law, you can teach Buddhism as the history of politics, you can do the gender history of Buddhism. I mean you can do all these things by religion this 19th century Protestant category. That's kind of a universalized into this language of pluralism. The classical, philological, textualist kind of orientation of the field, which I do think is important, and that's actually what the way I work by the way. But with say ethnographic approaches or anthropological approaches or historical approaches that are deeply embedded in broader conversations about social theory and revisionist narratives and so on. Buddhist studies could be, could be contributing to changing broad humanist and social scientific conversations like say the anthropology of Islam has. That's I think a Saba Mahmood and all these people, Amira Mittermaier, here in this department right, who are just challenging like the kind of liberal humanist presuppositions that are at the root of so many humanities and social science models. By just looking at other ways of being in the world. So Buddhism could do that so well. It's forged in that space. And that makes for exciting teaching. I think, it can do.

[00:33:20:27] Sarah Richardson: So can you tell us a little bit. I mean because it's so topical and it just came out. Can you tell us a little bit about the book project? And how your teaching may be changed in the process of thinking through the material that you've studied for the book because I'm sure it has. Right?

[00:33:34:04] Matt King: Yeah, yeah.

[00:33:34:29] Sarah Richardson: So maybe you want to tell us a little bit about the book, *Ocean of Milk, Ocean of Blood: A Mongolian Monk in the Ruins of the Qing Empire.* The elevator synopsis first for people who haven't yet met the book, but also then with the view of like how did your how did your teaching either inflect what happens in the book or how is your teaching changed as a result of this?

[00:33:56:13] Matt King: Sure. Yeah. Well I guess it's an attempt at doing all the stuff I was just rambling on about. Which is, I didn't want to write a book that was a Buddhist Studies book. And I didn't want the word Buddhism in the title of my book.

[00:34:11:00] Sarah Richardson: Did you have to fight for that by the way?

[00:34:12.05] Matt King: I didn't. I thought it might have to. They insisted I have the word Mongolian in the book. Because that's the other thing I don't want to really don't want to be pigeonholed in these different area studies sub fields, that in fact the project itself is challenging. But anyway so that was a concession which is fine. But the book in a nutshell is about Buddhism in Asia's first experiment with socialism, which is in Mongolia. Rooted in what is now Ulaanbaatar, the capital of the country Mongolia today, but which was known as Urga and Khuree , and all these other things over time. **[00:34:51:06]** And the book is exploring the

contents of social and religious imagination amongst monks who did not join the revolutionary party. Who were not part of the revolutionary program, and how they set the collapse of the Qing and the rise of nationalism and socialism into time and place outside of what the revolutionary leaders were doing. And various progressive monks. Like inventing the national subject, inventing a national history, starting to use concepts like religion, ethnicity and race, unilineal history, through their kind of adoption of all these narratives of modernity, right. So the book is trying, as best as I can, to do two things which is to sort of illuminate based on the sources I considered the surviving sources which really come from one figures Zawa Damdin. Who was, came to prominence as an abbot, but also as a pilgrim, an intellectual, he was also part of the founding of the Mongolian Academy of Science or what we know what, becomes the Mongolian Academy of Science. He was talking to Russian Buddhologists and he was talking to people in the Bakhtin Circle. He was in global conversations like many of the Asian Buddhist leaders who we have kind of grouped together under this Buddhist modernist label. But unlike Gendün Chöphel or unlike Sayadaw or unlike Suzuki, Zawa Damdin deeply engaged those enlightenment notions but then rejected them completely. **[00:36:49:10]** And what he does is he sets the project of nation building, of socialism, of the modern, and of the ways in which we know Asia like the founding moments of of say Orientalism and Buddhist studies, into completely other histories that were neither, I argue in the book, neither of the Qing nor of the nation. And that's a short lived 20-30-year history that ends in an act of profound state violence, in some ways. But it also informs, I tried to show, an entire sense of deep history that the Mongols bring into the broader say Tibetan diaspora after 1959. And if you read contemporary works by Mongol or Tibetan lamas on like the Silk Road, Fa-xian, the Turks, and all that stuff. I mean they're Mongols, and it tells a very particular history that has sort of been central to place making for refugee and diaspora communities. So the interest in the book was like, Okay if not the nation then what? And if not modernism then what? And if a post-imperial or post-colonial moment can proceed in Asia without being only defined as coming from contact with Europe, then what? **[00:38:09.12]** So this became in, as best as I could, a project about well look it's called alternative modernity's, but I don't like that term. Because why privilege modernity if it's not what's there. And so I ended up kind of developing this big argument about Zawa Damdin's use of autobiographical writing or biographical writing, historiography and so on, forged in this very synthetic frontier Tibetan-Mongolian-Chinese-Buryat kind of ecology over the course of the Qing that he uses to make sense of the modern. In the sense of he needed to do very deeply engage these ideas in order to reject them It wasn't just about ignoring. and, and I tried to tell the way that he talks about his life and about the global history and in particular about what others were beginning to call a progressive revolution, in his very specific terms, and how that represents an erased kind of way of place and time making. So it's a micro history. It's a biographically driven history, sort of, of the obscure corners of the transformation of Eurasia. Obscure from the point of view of like how we normally divide scholarship on these, on Russia or China for example. But I want to argue that this should be, there should be more comparative analysis of what I call counter-modern Buddhisms. That, I think were actually like, the silent majority in say Japan or Myanmar or in Sri Lanka or Thailand. Not just the guys the monks that were studying Hegel and starting to talk about nationalism and showing up at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893. Like, what were the other... because those guys were not that popular in Asia. What were the

conservative Abbots saying when the 13th Dalai Lama tried to have a modern army or a secular school? We don't know, because well I mean I can't, I haven't tried to study that, but we don't know because in some ways it fits a particular template about how we talk about the modernizing in Asia. Which is fits and starts adopting capitalism, socialism, unilineal history and the national subject, secular knowledge, science, industry, progress, and all these more subtle narratives that kind of are these myths of modernity. Like individualism, individualization, agency, self-foreign ownership. In other words all the stuff that has been, it was for 200 years sided with Europe, versus tradition, stasis, religion, Asia. If we ignore the guys in Asia that were just inverting Orientalism to make it work for their own revisionist projects, reformist projects, what else was going on? So that's what the book's trying to do. It's not an elevator version.

[00:40:57.12] Sarah Richardson: It's a little long for an elevator version but it's good! But counter-modernism! So I love this. So if Zawa Damdin and his project is using biography as you're kind of suggesting this radical resistance to…

[00:41:13:23] Matt King: Autobiography, historiography, polemics, letter writing. There's, There's a few different genres.

[00:41:17.26] Sarah Richardson: So like the…he's actually kind of proposing like a radical historical situatedness rather than a project that launches one out of it?

[00:41:26.00] Matt King: Yeah. So his project is essentially to counter a lot of things we associate with modernity like social mobility, the invention of public cultures, the rationalization of public space, like a kind of modernity theory. That's kind of going back to what like Weber and Durkheim and so on. Right. I mean these are kind of like ideas of progress and in global historical kind of developments that we sometimes use un-self-consciously in the study of Asia. So I'm saying that, look he, he never uses the word socialism or communism. He never names a single revolutionary leader, yet he writes about, I say, he writes about the revolution over 9000 pages in 20-30 years. And nothing else survives by any other of that scope or length by any other thinker before the state violence. So it's idiosyncratic, but he is in broad conversation. But what I'm saying is that he's adopting all these Qing paradigms. Orientations to history, social reproduction, authority, the march of history, how one cultivates oneself in one's community and so on, **[00:42:35.21]** to critique a lot of the stuff that we kind of associate with modernization as I said social mobility, the invention of public cultures. This is unacceptable to him. But other elements of this sort of, invention of Asia like he uses all this scholarship on Silk Road excavations, he uses French historical fiction to buttress his interpretations of like third century prophecy. He's talking to people in the Bakhtin Circle and he's exchanging texts with some of the early Buddhologists like Shcherbatsky and all these guys from Russia to essentially extend Qing era scholastic orientations to place and time, to make sense of what others were calling modernization. **[00:43:24.05]** And he knows what he's against, but he ultimately. There is no answer for him and his late writing before he dies which is right when the purges happen. I sort of show that both when he's narrating his personal story, as well as global history, it's done. There is no repairing tradition, there is no answer. An ocean of milk has become an ocean of blood, that's where the title of the books come. That's

his recurring metaphor for what he was seeing. So it's very tragic, it's coming at the end of like a 30 year, 20-30-year engagement with the very architects of the production of the "modern" in Asia's heartland during this first experiment with socialism. And he just comes to very different terms. And it's very different than how he's remembered in contemporary Mongolia by the way, which I'm curious to see how this book will be received there.

[00:44:14.15] Sarah Richardson: What do you think. What's your feeling on how it will be?

[00:44:17.20] Matt King: I don't think it will be. Well I shouldn't say that I'm... I'm curious. Yeah, I'll say that I'm curious, because Zawa Damdin is, I talk about this in the book a little. He's remembered in all these ambiguous ways. Essentially, as Mongolia's first modernist, he's called a scientist, as well as being like the last feudalist kind of Qing-era sort of Qing-centric figure. But largely he's been sort of imagined as a national hero and there's statues for him around and so on. But the story I tell is that he's really trying to extend the Qing, not politically necessarily, but in terms of its orientation to authority, power, social hierarchy, and just ways of knowing place and time. I mean it's kind of a different story. So I'm curious if it's noticed or what narratives it complicates. If there's pushback.

[00:45:06.02] Sarah Richardson: Yeah. How does this work, that now you've been really invested in for enough year to get this book out, how does it change your teaching and what you want to do with it? What do you think the value will be. Surely even if your students know something about Buddhism they're not going to know much about Zawa Damdin until they meet you, or read the book. So what's what is where's the value in this project to them?

[00:45:31.07] Matt King: So there's two ways, that come to mind and there's also kind of two ways that it dovetails with the ways I'm approaching teaching about Buddhism, which was part of your earlier question. One is that, it's important for students to know how global the world was prior to our kind of late capitalist moment. And the way that our students themselves may have walked into our classrooms from everywhere and their own kind of personal stories or the ways that we construct difference and mobility in our particular moment. You know, I live in Southern California and it's a very alive conversation, of course. So, to know and to learn about what the Silk Road was, how late imperial Eurasia was profoundly interconnected, and how monks in the Gobi Desert were reading French historical fiction, and how Hagel was being received in a Zen monastery for example. Or how, more importantly for maybe this conversation, how Orientalist scholarship was being repurposed in the frontiers of empire and Colony and that's for me. I'm really excited by work like Walter Mignolo and others who have done this stuff like this in Latin America. How was Renaissance culture repurposed in say, like the quote/unquote "dark" frontiers of Latin, of a lot of the Spanish colonies for example. Well that's happening in all the Buddhist societies we explore as well. So in two, it's globalizing the humanities and social sciences. It's setting it into a particular power context. It's showing that the Buddhism we're studying is not a bunch of Asian men in robes on a mountain, but people that are profoundly implicated in, not only in the production of a legal, political, medical, whatever, orders in the societies in which they lived, but more recently, they're also implicated in the way we teach and think about Asia. **[00:47:28.02]** Like they were talking to people that

founded the disciplines that house the course catalogs that our students teach. As I say in the books our primary sources, our secondary sources are in our primary sources. There are lots of implications for that, I think. So talking about premodern in the sense of like not of this moment, but premodern globalisms and the way the Buddhism was deeply connected with that, is important. In a kind of inter-Asian frame is important. And then, first person perspectives on the bloody making of the modern world is always revelatory. And whether it's people who are the architects of such making or the victims of such making. And we ought to know those stories as well as we can, and we ought to be led into those stories so that our presumptions are troubled. And that we need to work across a gap to get into the space of say a Gobi monk born in 1867 who watches the Qing fall, all of the lamas that he's studied with be lined up and shot during show trials, all of his students lined up and in prison and die without even a sense of, that there is, that history exists still in a way that he had known it. So that's like an obscure or tragic story of one man and his immediate community but, it's the work to get to know that story and to trouble our own presumptions, is the work.

[00:49:00.24] Sarah Richardson: So specifically I wanted to change tacks a little bit, but, classroom assignments, writing....

[00:49:11.03] Matt King: Oh right, right.

[00:49:11.15] Sarah Richardson: ...E-books. What do you do? How do you do it? Give us some tools.

[00:49:15.06] Matt King: Yeah. OK. So I always struggle with, and that's something I'm keen to listen to these podcasts later, the other folks you talk to you, because I think we all in Buddhist Studies struggle with how much primary source material can you introduce. I think a lot of people I mean I think probably everyone is like, if nothing else I love my students to read, whatever, Machig Labdron's biography, or a ritual text, or some geography, or pilgrimage tale from a completely other time of place. And through this medium of like literature and language or art historical material or whatever they might encounter, an otherwise way of being human. So anyways that's great, It sounds good on paper. But it's very complicated to do that when our students have at best uneven background in Indic traditions or references, Asian religions generally. Especially all the technical jargon that is usually in the sorts of Buddhism that was written down in the premodern world right. So that's a constant ongoing thing that I struggle with. But you can remedy that by also including new media and so on as primary sources. **[00:50:32.06]** I mean I often direct students to read, develop your project on whatever, Milarepa's biography by finding some recent YouTube clips by some Lama who's explaining what it means to a contemporary audience, and think about the medium, the competing mediums and, the competing kind of presentations of Milarepa's life and, competing presentations about what these different viewers or readers are supposed to be doing in relationship to themselves according to these different messages. You can kind of like incorporate that stuff. **[00:51:07.27]** But I've really been trying to work on is about addressing the sorry fate of most undergraduate writing. Which is that it moves quickly across the desk of a T.A. or a professor and ends up in the recycle bin. And yet we're constantly asking students to

be inspired in their writing and for it to be a big exploration. And yet, it's just, the outcome is the paper mill. And so, I have this hypothesis that I think is true now which is that the more audiences you can get for undergraduate writing at each stage of the process the better they'll do in the sense that they will really try to push themselves to develop their voice and communicate their ideas at a level where they [are] pushing themselves beyond their comfort zone and beyond just the 4 a.m. the night before it's due. That we all did. So I'm trying to do, I've done that in several ways. I've asked them, instead of just having 40 individual research papers, I've tried a few times having the entire class and me write a collective volume together and actually publish it as an e-book. Where I'll write the introduction and I make them write chapters or sections together. So they each take it a 10 pages or 7 pages of this chapter and then they need to co-write introduction and conclusion to that section together and then I write the introduction and we try to publish it. So then they technically have a publication. Whatever that's worth, it's a publication of a kind. But it's a publication. As they say, it's somebody to go tell Mom about when they go home at Christmas.

[00:53:01.00] Sarah Richardson: And on topics like what, what have you done that with? I'm just curious.

[00:53:03.28] Matt King: Mostly not in my Buddhism classes. But it's been in our class I teach called problem, the Problem of Religion which is essentially about the construction of secular spaces and the problematic ways that things that are called religion occupy our public spaces. So for example, those two I always try to teach these classes from a very stubbornly global perspective because in American institutions the orientation is usually so Americanist. And so I'll assign them like Uganda you five students are doing Uganda. What are current debates in Uganda about the space of Religion and Public Life? There's lots going on… Or in Myanmar today. Or China or whatever. And so I give them unless they choose and that's good because then it's a lot of ways for them to lean in. **[00:53:54.23]** Like, "Oh, I'm a business major but I want to go do business in China" or whatever " my dad's from Turkey, so I want to do the Turkey." There's a way for them to make some choices and then just have to help them get to podcasts or English language news or get into some primary sources about what's available to them about these debates. And then they need to each choose subsections and study the same set of primary sources from different disciplinary perspectives. So it's a bit heavy handed. So like one of them is going to be a Marxist analyst one of them is a Freudian, one of them is doing a gender theory analysis, one of them is doing like a post-colonial analysis, for example. **[00:54:34.21]** And so then the chapter becomes looking at the same set of primary sources that they've all helped themselves find, with me. And then they see how different analytical perspectives produce different sorts of insights and stories. And then they need to as a group to co-write just a couple of pages to introduce what they accomplish together and then to conclude what they accomplish together. So that's an example.

[00:54:58.19] Sarah Richardson: That's so cool.

[00:54:59.17] Matt King: It's yeah, it's, it's cool. It's a lot of work and it gets quite jumbly. But I think it's cool overall. And then so another, I also use Twitter; I use blogging. I use as many

other things as I can to just sort of have public writing. And I also make them peer review their work, read each other's work and offer anonymous suggestions. And some of their tweets have even been picked up by some, one of their tweets was picked up by someone at the British Library and that freaked them out. We were reading about Islam … yeah, we reading about Freud, and someone was doing a your presentation the British Library and retweeted a couple of my student's tweets that were just responding to "Totem and Taboo" or something like that and like, "Oh my god! A real like scholar of Islam at the British Library just retweeted my tweet in Riverside!" So that was cool. When it works it works really well.

[00:55:48:00] Sarah Richardson: Yeah, yeah. And the readings. So you talked about the difficulty of assigning like I think too much primary source or too much translation. So what was the answer that you've come to you are not that there is one, but what do you do there? Like what's how much is the right stuff and what alternatives to those readings are there too.

[00:56:10.00] Matt King: Yeah, it's a good question. OK. So again with Buddhist Studies classes I'm at a real crossroads. I think what I need to do is to like, maybe, many of us to not try to cover as much ground as we try to cover in the teaching of Asian history and Asian religions, we're trying to go cover 2500 years. And maybe to slow down and choose particular moments so that students can work through over more than one or two classes a primary source so that you can be checking in as they're reading the primary source working on difficult language that can actually be part of the teaching right where they're bringing lists of concepts or references that they don't understand you can collectively work through them which is another part of the public writing side of that I do in my these classes I have them write encyclopedia entries that we try to post on maps across different iterations of the class so that they're writing for example about I don't know, like, the Diamond Sutra or about **[00:57:16.07]** whatever or Bodh Gaya something like that. And they're and their article will be going to a website that is also populated by the entries on important people, place, things or ideas in the history Buddhism that previous generations of students have done. So there's sort of like their writing is being posted for posterity in a kind of wiki way to a map. So it's visualized and it's this aggregation of multi of student work over multiple years. So that kind of thing works in the sense that they can study a primary source and then just answer the basic who, what, where, why of that source in their writing. But I do think that the scope of what we call Buddhism is so vast, culturally, linguistically, politically that it's so dizzying and I think the dizziness comes from the fact that we call this vast history a thing that you would teach in a class called Intro to Buddhism, which is ridiculous. So I think primary sources are really good, but they have to be exemplary and partial, and you have to work with students in person and at home.

[00:58:29.19] Sarah Richardson: Why do you ask students to read articles or books that have won awards and learn from learned societies like the AAR? How do you use readings like that like journal articles newer ones? Why do you use them? What's the strategy there?

[00:58:43.21] Matt King: OK. So this is coming from the first method and theory class I've taught for doctoral students in Buddhist studies which I just finished two days ago. And so that so my task there was to say I need these students to have something on their transcripts that

says Buddhism in it. And in terms of the seminar and my students at this point are not focused exclusively in 20th century Mongolia or something like that they're working on various traditions.

[00:59:12.00] Sarah Richardson**:** Not yet. Dream big.

[00:59:12.28] Matt King: They're doing amazing, amazing stuff. But it's the idea of focusing in an area or on a particular genre made no sense, or even a particular method some of them are working historically some of them work in kind of ethnographically. I like to kind of carry the middle with the thinking from the point of view of historical anthropology. So here's my task: What does the method in theory class look like for Buddhist studies students? That was a really fun part of the last 10 weeks for me was thinking about that with these great students and luckily for them, I didn't go with my first inclination which was like let's actually read Müller, let's actually read Rhys-Davids, let's plow through all the 19th century stuff that we are either going to extend in our scholarship or that we are going to reject. But we will know it, we will be professionally conversant and not just sort of rehashing the idea that Orientalist era scholarship is bad. We're going to actually read it**.** That's what I tied in my other class. So let's read Marx, let's read Freud, let's read Durkheim. But then thankfully for them, I didn't do that. I decided what would be more useful is like, why not do the opposite? And read 20 books in Buddhist studies that have been published in the last 10 or 15 years that have been conversation changing and more importantly have been read by people outside of Buddhist Studies. And not only that. Forget Buddhist Studies. Have been read outside of Tibetan studies, the Study of Classical India, Zen Studies or something like that. Or American Buddhism. What books on Buddhist Asia, or not even just Buddhist Asia, what books about Buddhism have won awards at the American Historical Association, have won awards at the AAR but not in Buddhist Studies for their analysis of religion writ large. **[01:01:19.15]** In other words what books on Buddhist studies that have been published in last 10-15 years have been most legible to scholars outside of Buddhist Studies. And let's look at the anatomy of those books and how they situate themselves in relationship to the sort of 19th century, again, colonial-Orientalist constructions of the non-West. And how did they frame their departures and interventions. And I think the students are very thankful that we read really great recent writing, genre changing, and conversation leading work, that is the sort of thing they want to do. Which is to be taken seriously by their colleagues in gender and sexuality studies or the folks working on secularism or transnational religions or all these other broader conversations that I'm trying to help them be a part of, in addition to being very good scholars of Buddhism.

[01:02:13.02] Sarah Richardson: Any specific stand outs to, that worked well that your students responded to or that were…

[01:02:18.08] Matt King: Yeah, they loved Johan *Elverskog's Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*, which just did that incredible thing but that seems so intuitive when you see someone else do it. Which is just like, why don't we think Buddhism and Islam together? These traditions have formed one another for centuries and centuries and centuries. And what is that change when we think about them together and what is that critique in our own topographies of

knowledge. They loved that. They loved Charlene Makley's work on Movements and the construction of gender and ethnic boundaries in contemporary Labrang. So her work on Labrang and Khor-wa or circumambulation. **[01:03:07.12]** Gregory Schopen, and not just his books, but I assigned his lectures. He has two lectures, one to graduate students in Buddhist Studies at UVA a few years ago, and one that he gave some keynote he gave at UCLA that's online called, *The Buddha as Businessman.* And in both of those in a way that only Gregory Schopen can do, he challenges all these presumptions that we regularly reproduce in the study of Buddhism. For example, that we know what the Buddha said, what he thought what he meant to say and what he really meant to say, and also more importantly he says radical things like, "hey if you want to actually do histories of Buddhism, you should get some training from professional historians. For one, you should look at works about Buddha societies made by professional historians where Buddhism might not even be an entry in the index and yet they're saying profound things about Buddhist traditions". For example, because they're looking at economy looking at political and legal realities, land owning laws and things like that that actually formed what we call Buddhism. And also, he doesn't incredible thing where he says, "if you want social history find out where women are." Which is what he's done. And it's like, that's so revelatory. And it says something about Buddhist studies that it is revelatory, right? You know: "The nuns." You know, let's find out what women are doing and then we'll find out what might have been actually going on. From a historian's point of view.

[01:04:42.08] Sarah Richardson: We also have to also stop saying they're absent. Because they weren't. They're all along there all along and actually we just don't often that this. Sorry it's so related to our topic with Vanessa at our first podcast that in fact they are there all along even actually in the really, the texts where we always just say they're absent, but how many times have we reproduced the narrative that they're absent when we just haven't done the work to locate them.

[01:05:08.08] Matt King: Absolutely. Yeah absolutely. And something I talk about in my book as well actually is that even when women, as such, are neither the authors nor the topic of the writing, gender is still important. What is masculinism in our sources? I mean that's central to the story I try to tell.

[01:05:28.07] Sarah Richardson: How do you develop your skills as an educator. We're always developing, I guess on all fronts so it's unfair to pigeonhole the idea of your teaching in some senses but what are specific ways that you wrestle with developing as a teacher. Do you do workshops or read or listen or what do you do? Recommendations you could share maybe with other people who are in the same battlefield sometimes of making this work.

[01:05:52.28] Matt King: Yeah. Well I mean I try to go to some teaching workshops here and there when you can but it's hard to get the time to go as we all know. What I found with my teaching in Buddhist Studies and elsewhere is that you can teach any topic from many perspectives, but the best teaching will come from the perspective that you're most excited about. So I try to always choose now things that relate to what I'm thinking about in my own work, that I'm most excited about. So that I can do the thing which is good teaching. Which is

performing inspired learning. Being the clown up there. Scream talking about how exciting it is to think about embodiment in another time or place or the boundaries between people and environment or whatever. So for me good teaching is all about performing inspired learning and that relates to everything. And so, in terms of actual technical learning related to teaching I would just say that something that any professor in the humanities or social sciences will grumble about as they get a coffee is that students don't read, they can't read, and they can't write. And I've been learning about and trying to learn more about, work about what literacy is and also how we become literate. **[01:07:31:01]** Which of course isn't just recognizing black marks on a page, but it has to do with like a general education. And so when we see students that come in and struggle with reading. They are technically literate, but the students have such a diversity of experiences in general education. Particularly where I teach diversity of like quality of high schools, family experiences, and with education, spread between many kinds of countries, and many contexts and so on. And so you have to be very intentional about what reading and writing is and teach it. **[01:08:10:24]** And I would say, it's not the fault of the students it's that we don't have very much clarity about it. We were never taught how to teach. We were never taught how to write. And yet all we do is read and write as academics. So I do think that thinking about literacy and also there's stuff that I share with the students about cognitive science, scientific research about the effects of flicking on phones with different sorts of attention that we that we have and how that kind of attention taps into certain cognitive kind of processes and erodes sustained deeper attention. Anyways, stuff that is kind of relevant because it challenges the students to be intentional about looking and reading 20 pages that might at first seem opaque but which through some work can become alive for them. And is about flexing and developing skills that they didn't know they didn't have. **[01:09:11:10]** So kind of like situating them and what we're doing. I also talk a lot about student evaluations and the way that those are so gendered in class and races which is revelatory. I mean for me, but also for them. So I think inviting making the space the space a workshop in all these ways is what's most central.

[01:09:33.00] Sarah Richardson: Thank you so much Matt for talking to us today.

[01:09:35:01] Matt King: It's my pleasure.

[01:09:35:26] Sarah Richardson: Is there anything else you wanted to us to add before we missed. I had I had a secret hope we were going to get to talk about the rap you once used in your class. You used rap.

[01:09:45.18] Matt King: I used Wu-Tang Clan.

[01:09:46.21] Sarah Richardson: How? Tell me how! Where did it come in? I love it. I want to do it so bad and I just don't know how.

[**01:09:52.03] Matt King:** OK. Well so there is a book out there and this was years ago so it's not at the front of my mind...I think you could find it. And it's I think it's the RZA, the Wu-Tang Clan. He draws a lot on Taoism. So I think it's a book called like the Tao of the Wu or something like

that. It's really interesting. There's this whole like ideology behind what some of those guys were doing, it had to do with like black liberation. It had to do with sort of streams of Asian religious traditions. As well as like martial disciplines, like with the martial arts connected with sort of like revolutionary black politics. As well as currents from Islam and Christianity and other kinds of African religions. It's like really interesting at the back of like these guys from the 90s and anyway someone put a book together which is like sayings of like the RZA, and the GZA the Ghostface Killah all these guys been in the mode of like a Taoist text. And I just used that in a Introduction to Asian Religions class or something. But the joke was, I'm so old, so those guys didn't even know who the Wu-Tang were. So it's like a total failure because it was like so dated. Right.

[01:11:02.28] Sarah Richardson: I had that experience with Pulp Fiction where I thought I was being so cool. I was like" remember that part of Pulp Fiction..." and everybody was like " That was the year I was born." Yeah.

[01:11:10.27] Matt King: Oh yeah. I taught Religion and Violence. I'm like opening the class with 9/11 and these kids aren't even born then. Like what I would assume is like the founding moment.

[**01:11:22.00] Sarah Richardson:** Okay. Thank you so much Matt for talking to us today.

[01:11:29.23] Sarah Richardson: Thanks to Matt for sharing so much with us that day and for speaking so honestly and openly about your teaching practice and your own thoughts. Thank you, listeners, for being here and for being with us through this conversation. For reference to the resources that we discussed in this episode please be sure to check our show notes and if you like what you heard, please make sure you subscribe to our podcast, The Circled Square. This has been a really rich conversation and we would love to hear from you about ways that you think this field matters. Ways that we can make it make sense for our students and ways that we could all be better public intellectuals. So we'd love to hear from you. Please get in touch through our website to share with us ideas. Drop us a line, send us an email, let us know your questions or your tools for teaching in Buddhist Studies. A very big special thanks to our creative director Dr. Betsy Moss who's in charge of making these podcasts here in Toronto. Thank you for listening. Be well.