

# Dr Saskia Abrahms-Kavunenko

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## POSITIONS

**University of  
Copenhagen  
2022 -present**

**Research Fellow, Centre for Contemporary Buddhist Studies, Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies**

Research project: 'Impermanent – Imperishable: Plastic and Praxis Amongst Buddhists in Oceania'.

**University of  
Copenhagen  
2020-2022**

**Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow, Centre for Contemporary Buddhist Studies, Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies**

Research project: 'Residue: Mongolian Buddhist Waste and the Recalcitrant Materiality of Blessings.'

**The University of  
Edinburgh  
2020**

**Research Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities**

Research project: 'Materializing Prosperity: Doubt, Potency and Economic Prosperity in Ulaanbaatar.'

**Max Weber Center  
for Advanced  
Cultural and Social  
Studies  
2019-2020**

**Research Fellow**

Research project: 'Intangible Causes, Ambiguous Materials: Constellated Cosmologies of Urban Inequality'. Working within the research cluster *Religion and Urbanity: Reciprocal Transformations*.

**New York  
University  
Shanghai  
2017-2019**

**Global Perspectives on Society Teaching Fellow**

Research project: 'Shrouded Fortunes: Materiality, Religion and Doubt'. Teaching on the Global Perspectives on Society course.

**Max Planck  
Institute for  
Social  
Anthropology  
2014-2017**

**Postdoctoral Research Fellow**

Research Project: 'New Buddhist Economies in Mongolia: Accrual, Dispersal and the Vicissitudes of Wealth'. Working within the group *Buddhist Temple Economies in Urban Asia*.

**American Center  
for Mongolian  
Studies  
2016**

**Research Fellow**

Working on the project 'New Buddhist Economies in Mongolia: Accrual, Dispersal and the Vicissitudes of Wealth'.

**Antioch University  
Abroad  
2013**

**Adjunct Professor, Buddhist Studies Abroad**

Teaching Contemporary Buddhist Cultures, Independent Study, and Meditation Traditions.

## EDUCATION

- The University of Western Australia 2007-2012** **Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Anthropology**  
Improvising Tradition: Lay Buddhist Experiences in Cosmopolitan Ulaanbaatar.
- The University of Melbourne 2005** **Postgraduate Diploma, History and Philosophy of Science**  
Judgements, Goose Strings and Visceral Stirrings : Combining Objects and Feelings in Theories of Emotions.
- The University of Western Australia 1998-2002** **Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours in Anthropology**  
Thesis: Depression and the Narratives of Suffering: A Look at Pathways of Dysphoria. Anthropology, Philosophy and Political Science.

## RECENT AWARDS

- 2022- present** **Asian Dynamics Initiative and the Velux Fonden**  
Funding for Impermanent – Imperishable: Plastic and Praxis Amongst Buddhists in Oceania.
- 2020-2022** **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship, EU Horizons 2020**  
Residue: Mongolian Buddhist Waste and the Recalcitrant Materiality of Blessings.

## FIELDWORK

- 2022** **University of Copenhagen**  
Seven months of fieldwork in Western Australia.
- 2021** **University of Copenhagen**  
Three months of fieldwork in Western Australia.
- 2015 and 2016** **Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology**  
Ten months of fieldwork in Ulaanbaatar.
- 2009-2010** **The University of Western Australia**  
Thirteen months of fieldwork in Ulaanbaatar.

## MONOGRAPH

- 2019** *Enlightenment and the Gasping City: Mongolian Buddhism at a Time of Environmental Disarray.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

## ARTICLES

- 2022** Reichhardt, B. and S. Abrahms-Kavunenko. 2022. 'Plastic Purity and Sacred Dairy: Microbes, Vitality and Standardisation in Mongolian Dairying.' *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*. 40, 1.
- 2022** Abrahms-Kavunenko, S. and T. Brox. 'Plastic Asia: Material Ambiguities and Cultural Imaginaries.' *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*. 4, 1.
- 2022** Abrahms-Kavunenko, S. 'Buddhism in the Life of Ulaanbaatar: Nucleus, Trace and Bustling Urbanite.' *Religion and Urbanity Online*.
- 2022** Abrahms-Kavunenko, S. 'Mongolian Buddhism, Science and Healing: A Modernist Legacy'. *Central Asian Survey*. 41, 1: 41-57.
- 2021** Abrahms-Kavunenko, S. 'Toward an Anthropology of Plastics.' *Journal of Material Culture* (epub ahead of print).

- 2021** Abrahms-Kavunenko, S & M. Milligan. 'The Wheel Turing King and the Lucky Lottery: Perspectives New and Old on Wealth and Merriment within Buddhism' *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. 36, 2: 265-286.
- 2020** 'Tenuous Blessings: The Materiality of Doubt in a Mongolian Buddhist Wealth Calling Ceremony'. *Journal of Material Culture*. 25, 2: 153-166.
- 2019** 'Mustering Fortune: Attraction and Multiplication in the Echoes of the Boom'. *Ethnos*. 84, 5: 891-909.
- 2019** 'Mongolian Buddhism in the Democratic Period.' *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*.
- 2016** 'Spiritually Enmeshed, Socially Enmeshed: Shamanism and Belonging in Ulaanbaatar.' *Social Analysis*. 60, 3: 1-16.
- 2015** 'The Blossoming of Ignorance: Uncertainty, Power and Syncretism amongst Mongolian Buddhists.' *Ethnos*. 80, 3: 346-363.
- 2015** 'Paying for Prayers: Perspectives on Giving in Postsocialist Ulaanbaatar'. *Religion, State and Society*. 43, 4: 327-341.
- 2012** 'Religious "Revival" after Socialism? Eclecticism and Globalisation amongst Lay Buddhists in Ulaanbaatar'. *Inner Asia*. 14, 2: 279-297.

#### EDITED VOLUMES AND SPECIAL ISSUES

- 2022** Brox, T. and S. Abrahms-Kavunenko. *Special Issue: Plastic Asia*. The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies. 40, 1.
- 2021** Brumann, C., Abrahms-Kavunenko, S. and B. Świtek. *Monks, Money, and Morality: The Balancing Act of Contemporary Buddhism*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

#### BOOK CHAPTERS

- 2022** Abrahms-Kavunenko, S. 'Zombie Waste, Mummy Materiality: The Undead and the Fate of Mongolian Buddhist Waste.' In *Buddhism and Waste: The Excess, Discard, and Afterlife of Buddhist Consumption*. Eds T. Brox and E. Williams-Oerberg. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing: 145-166.
- 2021** Abrahms-Kavunenko, S., Brumann, C. and B. Świtek. 'Introduction'. *Monks, Money, and Morality*. Eds. C. Brumann, S. Abrahms-Kavunenko and B. Świtek. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- 2021** Abrahms-Kavunenko, S. 'Regeneration and the Age of Decline: Purification and Rebirth in Mongolian Buddhist Economies.' *Monks, Money, and Morality*. Eds. C. Brumann, S. Abrahms-Kavunenko and B. Świtek. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing: 179-194.

#### BOOK REVIEWS

- 2019** Abrahms-Kavunenko, S. 'The Monastery Rules: Buddhist Monastic Organization in Pre-Modern Tibet.' Berthe Jansen. *Inner Asia*. 21: 283-284.
- 2016** Abrahms-Kavunenko, S. 'Buddhism in Mongolian History, Culture and Society'. Edited by Vesna Wallace. *Inner Asia*. 18, 2: 336-338.

2015 Abrahms-Kavunenko, S. 'A Monastery in Time: The Making of Mongolian Buddhism, Caroline Humphrey and Hürelbaatar Ujeed'. *American Anthropologist*. 117, 4: 837-838.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**University of Copenhagen 2019-present** **Course Coordinator and Guest Lecturer**  
Guest lecturing in Copenhagen and internationally in Anthropology, Asian Studies, Buddhist Studies, and Environmental Humanities.

**New York University Shanghai, China 2017-2019** **Global Perspectives on Society Teaching Fellow**  
Teaching on the 'Global Perspectives on Society' course. Course development, teaching in small groups, marking, pedagogy development sessions.

**Antioch University Abroad, India 2013** **Adjunct Professor, Buddhist Studies Abroad**  
Teaching 'Contemporary Buddhist Cultures', 'Independent Study', and 'Meditation Traditions'. Writing a course, teaching in small groups, marking. Supervising ethnographic projects in India, Nepal and Myanmar. Running an ethnographic methods workshop.

**The University of Western Australia 2013 and 2008** **Guest Lecturer and Tutor, Department of Anthropology**  
Teaching on the 'Religion', 'Being Human', and 'Development of Social Thought' courses. Guest lecturing, tutoring, marking and course development.

**National University of Mongolia 2009** **Tutor for Masters Students, Department of Anthropology**

## INVITED LECTURES & PRESENTATIONS

**California, United States 2021 (online)** 'Breathing Sunlight and Smog: On the Praxis of Wind, Light and Mind in Urban Mongolia.' Inaugural Lecture for the *Environment, Religion and Culture in Asia's Heartland* lecture series, University of California, Riverside.

**Canberra, Australia 2021** 'Enlightenment, Breath and the Anthropocene: Mongolian Buddhism in a Time of Environmental Disarray' Keynote lecture for the *Mongolia Update* hosted by the Mongolia Institute at the Australian National University.

**Cologne, Germany (online) 2021** 'Breathing the Anthropocene: Air Pollution and Buddhist Practice in Urban Mongolia' For the *After Lunch Series* hosted by the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Cologne.

**Lund, Sweden (online) 2021** 'The Dimming and the Light: Pollution and Purification among Mongolian Buddhists' lecture as part of the *Religion and Society in East and Southeast Asia* course for Lund University.

**Arizona, USA (online) 2021** 'Enlightenment and the Gasping City: Pollution, Purification and Buddhism in Postsocialist Mongolia' lecture as part of the Asian Studies Development Program, hosted by the East-West Center, The University of Hawai'i, Honolulu.

**Copenhagen, Denmark 2021** 'Monstrous Waste in the Anthropocene' lecture for Crisis and Transition: Environmental Humanities in a Global World Summer School, The University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

<b>(online) 2021</b>	‘Body of Light, Body of Energy: Buddhism, Science and Healing, a Modernist Legacy.’ As part of <i>The Medical and Medicinal Margins</i> workshop.
<b>Texas, USA (online) 2020</b>	‘Enlightenment and the Gasping City’ lecture for Buddhist Ecology course at Trinity College, San Antonio, Texas.
<b>Vienna, Austria 2020</b>	‘Obscure Purity: Smoke, Smog and the Quasi-Material in Urban Ritual’ International Mongolian Studies Vienna Symposium, The University of Vienna.
<b>Copenhagen, Denmark 2019</b>	‘Museums and the Power of Ritual Objects’ lecture for the Cultural Encounters and Power class University of Copenhagen, Denmark.
<b>Copenhagen, Denmark 2019</b>	‘The Hidden Force of Things: Potency, Objects and Waste in Urban Mongolia’ Buddhist Consumption: Excess and Waste workshop, The Centre for Contemporary Buddhist Studies, University of Copenhagen.
<b>Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia 2015</b>	‘Contemporary Buddhism and New Forms of Religiosity in Ulaanbaatar’, Zhuun Khuree, Past and Present, Dashchoilin Khiid.
<b>Paris, France 2015</b>	‘Enlightenment and Purification: Spirituality, Education and Lay Buddhist Religiosity in Mongolia’, Anthropologie Comparée du Bouddhisme, Dynamiques Asiatiques, hosted by the Centre Asie du Sud-Est et Centre D’Etudes Himalayennes.

## **SELECTED PRESENTATIONS**

<b>Belfast, Northern Ireland 2022</b>	‘Work as the Wilding: Buddhist Praxis and Ecological Receptivity in the Regeneration of an Australian Hillside’ European Association of Social Anthropologists Conference.
<b>Halle (Saale) Germany 2022</b>	‘Shown By the Marron’s Claw: Ecological Receptivity as Mindful Praxis’ Buddhism in the Anthropocene workshop, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology.
<b>Prague, Czechia, 2022</b>	‘Polyester Prayer Scarves and/as the Proliferation of Blessings.’ 16 <sup>th</sup> International Association of Tibetan Studies Seminar.
<b>Vilnius, Lithuania 2022</b>	‘Shown By the Marron’s Claw: Ecological Receptivity as Mindful Praxis.’ Society for the Anthropological Sciences conference at Vilnius University.
<b>Athens, Greece 2022</b>	‘Re/cognizing Humanity in a Plastic Mirror: Shifting Ontologies, Epistemologies and Politics After the Dawning of the Plasticene’. Divergent Temporalities: Capitalism and the Conquest of Space-Time conference at Panteion University.
<b>Vienna, Austria 2022</b>	‘Human Exceptionalism and the Sound of Awakening: Countercurrents in Buddhist Soteriology.’ Mantras, Sound, Materiality, and the Body workshop at the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, University of Vienna.
<b>Copenhagen, Denmark 2021</b>	‘Plastic Purity and Sacred Dairy: Microbes, Life and Purification in Mongolian Dairying.’ Plastic Asia workshop hosted by the Center for Contemporary Buddhist Studies, The University of Copenhagen.
<b>Copenhagen, Denmark 2021</b>	‘On the Sanctity of (Some)Things: Mongolian Buddhist Perspectives on Mutual Obligation with Animate Materials.’ Buddhism, Economy and Value(s) workshop hosted by the Center for Contemporary Buddhist Studies, the University of Copenhagen.
<b>Toronto, Canada (online) 2021</b>	‘Troubled Breath: Windhorse, Smog and the Stagnation of Vital Energies’ presentation as part of the Buddhism and Breath Summit, The University of Toronto

<b>Gothenburg, Sweden (online) 2021</b>	'Monstrous Waste in the Anthropocene: Tracing the Contours of Disconcerting Materialities' <i>Re-opening the Bin</i> . Workshop hosted by the School of Business Economics and Law, University of Gothenburg.
<b>Copenhagen, Denmark (online) 2021</b>	'Zombie Trash, Mummy Materiality: Rethinking Monster Waste in the Anthropocene.' The Materiality of Blessings in the Anthropocene: Fusion and Rupture in Transecological and Transdimensional Relatedness in Asian Highland Ecosystems. Workshop hosted by the Center for Contemporary Buddhist Studies.
<b>Lisbon, Portugal (online) 2020</b>	'Zombie Trash, Mummy Materiality: Rethinking Buddhist Waste in the Plasticene.' European Association of Social Anthropologists Conference.
<b>Vancouver, Canada 2019</b>	'Choking Light and Breath: Air Pollution and Purification in Urban Mongolia,' American Anthropological Association/ Canadian Anthropological Society Annual Meeting.
<b>Helsinki, Finland 2019</b>	'Cosmologies Fast and Slow: Karma, Fortune and Corruption in Mongolia's Capital' Biennial Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society.
<b>Lisbon, Portugal 2019</b>	'Understanding Religion on a Heating Planet: Smoke as Purification in Mongolia', 7 <sup>th</sup> Congress of the Portuguese Anthropological Association.
<b>Stockholm, Sweden 2018</b>	'The Social Life of Difficult Things: Navigating Air Pollution in Mongolia's Capital', European Association for Social Anthropologists Conference.
<b>Washington DC. USA 2018</b>	'Tenuous Blessings: Wealth and Ignorance in Mongolian Prosperity Ceremonies', Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting.
<b>Shanghai, China 2018</b>	'Calling Money: Mongolian Religion in Ulaanbaatar', Center for Global Asia and Global Perspectives on Society Young Scholars Colloquium on Asia and the World, New York University Shanghai.
<b>Shanghai, China 2018</b>	'Enlightenment and the Gasping City: Mongolian Religion in Ulaanbaatar', Faculty Lunch Speaker Series, New York University Shanghai.
<b>Halle, Germany 2017</b>	'Regeneration and the Age of Decline: Understanding the Influence of Transregional Buddhist Economies in Mongolia', Sangha Economies Workshop, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology.
<b>Copenhagen, Denmark 2017</b>	'Materializing Wealth: Mongolian Buddhist Objects and Prosperity Ceremonies', Trade and Translation of Buddhist Material Culture across Asia Panel, Asian Dynamics Initiative Conference, The University of Copenhagen.
<b>Budapest, Hungary 2017</b>	'Returning Lamas: Life After the Monastery', Mongolian Buddhism in Practice Conference, Eötvös Loránd University.
<b>London, UK 2017</b>	'Calling Wealth: Attraction, Multiplication and the Fickleness of Money', Emerging Subjects of the New Economy Research Group, University College London.
<b>Copenhagen, Denmark 2016</b>	'Money as Seed, Money as Fruit: Karma, Poverty and Wealth in Ulaanbaatar', Buddhism, Business and Believers Conference, The University of Copenhagen.
<b>Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia 2016</b>	'Light, Enlightenment, and Purification: Contemporary Mongolian Buddhism in Ulaanbaatar', The American Center for Mongolian Studies.

- Heidelberg, Germany 2015** 'Aspiring to Enlightenment: Practicing Purification in Postsocialist Mongolia', Religious Revivals and Artistic Renaissance in Central Asia and the Himalayan Region, Fourth International SEECHAC Colloquium.
- Helsinki, Finland 2015** 'Pollution and Purification: Metaphors of Spiritual Danger and Social Inequality in Ulaanbaatar', Geographies of Capitalism and Landscapes of Globalization Panel, Biennial Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society.
- Budapest, Hungary 2015** 'Contemporary Mongolian Buddhism: Meditation, Ritual and New Forms of Religiosity', Mongolia Buddhism – Past, Future and Present, Eötvös Loránd University.
- London, UK 2015** 'Karma and the Permeability of Personhood: Perspectives from Mongolian Buddhists', Emerging Subjects of the New Economy, University College London.

### **SUPERVISION EXPERIENCE**

- Doctoral Students 2014 - 2020** As part of the research group *Buddhist Temple Economies in Urban Asia* at the Max Planck Institute I helped to supervise two anthropology doctoral students, Hannah Klepeis and Kristina Jonutyte, working in a Tibetan borderland region in China and Buryatia, a Mongolian cultural region in Russia, respectively.
- Undergraduate Independent Study 2013** As part of my work on the Buddhist Studies Abroad program I supervised six undergraduate ethnographic projects in India, Nepal and Myanmar.

### **PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

- Editorial Board 2022-2026** *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*
- Peer reviewer 2013 - present** *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology, Ethos: Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology, American Ethnologist, Central Asian Survey, Swiss National Science Foundation, Études Mongoles & Sibériennes, Centrasiatiques & Tibétaines, Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology, Social Analysis, Cambridge Journal of Anthropology, Anthropological Quarterly, Prace Etnograficzne, MAVCOR Journal, Arcadia: Explorations in Environmental History, Religions, Inner Asia, International Journal of Asian Studies, American Anthropologist.*
- Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology 2022** Co-organising the 'Buddhism in the Anthropocene' workshop with Jovan Maud (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology).
- Vilnius University 2022** Co-organising the 'Ecologies of the Six Realms: Buddhism, Soteriology and the More-Than-Human' panel with Kristina Jonutyte (Vilnius University) at the Society for the Anthropological Sciences conference.
- Copenhagen University 2022** Organising and facilitating the 'When the Eternal Meets the Imperishable: Plastics and Religion in Contemporary Asia' workshop hosted by the Center for Contemporary Buddhist Studies, University of Copenhagen.
- Copenhagen University 2021** Co-organising the 'Plastic Asia' workshop hosted by the Center for Contemporary Buddhist Studies, University of Copenhagen with Trine Brox.
- Copenhagen University 2021** Co-organising the 'Buddhism, Economy and Value(s)' workshop hosted by the Center for Contemporary Buddhist Studies, University of Copenhagen with Trine Brox.

- Copenhagen University (online) 2021** Co-organising a workshop titled: *'The Materiality of Blessings in the Anthropocene: Fusion and Rupture in Transecological and Transdimensional Relatedness in Asian Highland Ecosystems* with Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia (University of California)
- Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference 2018** Co-convening a panel titled: 'Jewels from the Mouth of a Mongoose: Buddhist Conceptions of Value, Prosperity and Fortune in East and Inner Asia and the Himalayas' with Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia (Occidental College).
- Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology 2017** Co-organising a workshop 'Sangha Economies: Temple Organisation and Exchanges in Contemporary Buddhism' with Christoph Brumann (MPI) and Beata Świtek (MPI).

## SELECTED AFFILIATIONS

- 2020-present** Research Coordinator: Center for Contemporary Buddhist Studies, University of Copenhagen
- 2014-2021** Associate: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology
- 2018-present** Member: European Association of Social Anthropologists
- 2009-present** Member: The American Center for Mongolian Studies
- 2014-2015** Research Associate: Culture, History and Languages, Australian National University

## ARTIST/ACADEMIC RESIDENCIES

- Vila Nova de Poaires, Portugal 2019** **Cenote**  
Running and participating in an dance/academic residency program. Academic writer in residence.
- Catalonia, Spain 2014** **Centre de Recerca i Creació Casamarlès**  
Academic writer in residence.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Copenhagen 2019 and 2021** **European Research Council Grant Writing Workshop Marie Curie Fellow Master Class**
- Göttingen, Germany 2015** **Max Planck Institute**  
Teaching Voice and Body Coaching: Communicating with Confidence and Accuracy.
- Perth, Australia 2008** **Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, University of Western Australia**  
Postgraduate Teaching Intern.

## LANGUAGES

English: Native. French: Upper intermediate. Mongolian: Upper intermediate. Portuguese: Intermediate. German: Lower intermediate.

## REFERENCES

- Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology** **Professor Christoph Brumann**  
Telephone: +49 (0) 345 29 27 204. Email: brumann@eth.mpg.de
- Occidental College** **Associate Professor Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa**  
Telephone: +1 (323) 259 1354. Email: tagchung@oxy.edu