Buddhism Crossing Boundaries: Crossing Textual, Linguistic, Geographical, and Even Religious Boundaries in the Study of Buddhism

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PAPER ABSTRACT
What are the parameters for studying Buddhism? When I first began travelling to Thailand as an undergraduate, I believed these parameters were relatively straightforward: I was studying an Indian religion in a Southeast Asian country (Thailand) that uses an Indian language (Pali), and in any case, what I was studying was Buddhism. As I quickly noticed, much of Thai Buddhism is intensely local; articulated in a uniquely Thai idiom; and, conversely, when it does derive from Indian models, is as often Hindu as it is Buddhist. In this talk, I will give an overview of the research that has been inspired by these observations in Thailand— including research on a Buddhist cult to the Hindu god Brahmā in Thailand, the influence of early Buddhist thought on Hindu conceptions of Brahmā, the formation of early Buddhist and Brahmanical identities in dialectic with one another, and the use of Chinese Buddhist texts to enrich our understanding of early Indian Buddhism.

PROFESSIONAL BIO
Nathan McGovern received his MA (2006) and PhD (2013) in Religious Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara. His publications include “Brahmā: An early and Ultimately Doomed Attempt at a Brahmanical Synthesis” (Journal of Indian Philosophy, 2012) and “A Buddhist Cult of Brahmā: Thick Description and Micro-histories in the Study of Religion” (History of Religions, forthcoming); and he is working on a book based on his dissertation tentatively entitled Buddhists, Brahmans, and Buddhist Brahmans: Negotiating Identities in Indian Antiquity. McGovern currently resides in Taipei and is a Blakemore-Freeman Fellow at National Taiwan University.

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