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In Memoriam:
Michael Hee Ium, A Fearless Friend

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In Memoriam: Michael Hee Ium, A Fearless Friend

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Abstract

Michael Hee Ium was a promising and brilliant scholar, dedicated to the history of the Geluk tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, a one-time professional poker player, a scrappy Canadian kid from Scarborough, the devoted and loving second son of immigrants from South Korea, a playful brother, a fiercely loyal and supportive friend and colleague, a lover of justice and fairness, and above all, a *kalyāṇa-mitra*. Though he is deeply missed and his presence can never be substituted, his all-too-brief life and career is celebrated in this memoriam, while his words, work and vision still resonate splendidly amongst his friends and colleagues today.

Epigraph

In this world, one who can speak helpfully is rare;
A connection with the Buddha Dharma is difficult to make.
You should understand that friends who direct us
To the ways of the Dharma
Are the best friends of all
And the ones most sensitive to our need.
*The Prince Who Became a Cuckoo*¹



Michael Hee Ium, 1984-2025

¹ Lama Lo-dro of Drepung, *The Prince Who Became a Cuckoo: A Tale of Liberation*, trans. Lama Geshe Wangyal (Theatre Arts Books, 1982), 71.

Michael's Final Deadline

It has been a year since Michael Hee Ium passed away, and in his wake, he left devastated family members, friends, and colleagues. Yet to no surprise to those who knew and cherished him, this void has been filled by a community touched by his kindness and friendship, people who rallied around his family and still celebrate his scholarly legacy. Over the past year, there have been several memorials in his honour, including prayers led by Yangsi Rinpoche at his alma mater, Maitripa College, immediately upon his passing. This was followed by a funeral service designed by Michael's mother, Young Hee Ium, at the Heritage Funeral Home in Toronto that reflected their family traditions and honoured Michael's scholarship and spiritual aspirations: it combined a Christian service, "Holding onto Hope in the Midst of Suffering," led by Reverend Kyung Sik Ryoo, and a Buddhist "rejoicing" service led by Venerable Jamyang Khedrup (Rory Tasker). In August 2025, there was a memorial at the XXth Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, University of Leipzig, after a panel Michael had co-organized with Catherine Hartmann. There was a further memorial at the 2025 American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Boston in November of that year, and lastly, a "Remembering Michael" celebration marking one year since his passing at the University of Toronto's Multi-Faith Centre in April 2026, organized by Rory Lyndsay.

In the summer of 2026, a beautiful headstone was installed at the Beechwood Cemetery, with an inscription memorializing Michael's scholarly achievements crowned by a dove specially selected by Michael's mother and his older brother, William Dae Ium, to symbolize the Holy Spirit, capture their everlasting love for him, and forever broadcast their heartfelt blessings for their beloved son and brother. These events and many informal moments provided space for Michael's family, colleagues, and friends to gather and remember his impact on their lives, scholarship, and careers. As a sign of the generosity and goodwill that he so readily

showed others, this community came together to donate \$42,154 to Michael's family to support the funeral and other expenses incurred by his passing.²



Michael Ium's headstone was installed at the Beechwood Cemetery. The monument was designed by Michael's mother and older brother, who chose a dove motif to crown the headstone. The dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit in Christianity and compassion in Buddhism, beautifully reflecting the spiritual traditions that inspired and guided Michael's life. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Young Hee Ium

² Suzanne Fernando and Lynn Zhu, "Urgent Support for Michael Ium's Mom," Go Fund Me, last accessed April 4, 2026, <https://www.gofundme.com/f/michael-ium>.

Michael's passing was sudden and shocking: on the cusp of a brilliant career in our field, and after starting a new fellowship at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, he suffered a medical emergency while giving a presentation in Vienna, his new professional home. After undergoing emergency surgery, Michael initially seemed to be recovering, yet after a catastrophic setback, he lost consciousness. He survived six more days with his beloved mother, Mrs. Young Hee Ium, and his friend Erika by his side, finally passing on Tuesday, April 9th, 2025, at the age of 41. Michael was predeceased by his father, Mr. Dug Nam Ium, in 2019, who would have no doubt been immensely proud of all that Michael accomplished in his short life.

Many of his friends and colleagues around the world were unaware of Michael's struggle to survive in that hospital bed, including the editorial team and board of the *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies*. Michael became co-editor of the CJBS with his friend Tony Scott in April 2023, after the previous editorial team was in the process of stepping down. Back in Canada after completing his master's and doctoral work in the United States, Michael was intent on supporting the Buddhist studies community in his home country; he was, fittingly, the first Robert H.N. Ho Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Toronto's Department for the Study of Religion, where he had studied as an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto-Scarborough campus, graduating with an Honours Bachelor of Science in Psychology.

While Michael was battling for his life, the first full issue he and Tony put together was about to be published on the CJBS website. It was no small feat for the two and came after a year of working together and supporting each other through an editorial process new to both. The email announcing Michael's medical emergency arrived just as he was about to realize a major milestone as co-editor. Tony and the CJBS board decided to delay the next issue, announced his condition on the CJBS's

social media accounts, and set about sending prayers and thoughts of *mettā* to his family and him. When he finally passed, the irony was cruel: the scheduled release of his first full issue as co-editor was the very day of his passing. As time has healed some wounds since then and we have had a chance to mourn his loss as a community, we cannot help but think Michael would have smiled a little at this irony: such is the fate of an editor, a difficult task at the best of times. As a scholar, Michael was constantly chasing—or being chased by—deadlines, but tragically, and at great loss to the world of Buddhist studies, this would be his last.



Michael with his PhD Supervisor, José Cabezón, Dalai Lama Professor Emeritus, University of California, Santa Barbara, at his graduation

Michael as Scholar

As a working-class kid from Scarborough born to parents who emigrated from South Korea to Canada, Michael's career in Buddhist studies was a

bit of an accident, as he was fond of telling friends and colleagues. During his undergraduate days at the University of Toronto-Scarborough, Michael's keen memory, fierce sense of competition, and intellectual gifts led him to becoming not only a master-league rank in video games, but a professional poker player travelling the international poker circuit and amassing an impressive collection of prize wins in the process. According to his brother, Mr. William Dae Ium, Michael nearly purchased a condominium in Toronto with his winnings (the funds were later used to supplement costs during his graduate studies), took pride in taking his parents travelling, and was relatively financially independent compared to fellow recent graduates, but as he later told his friends, a sense of discomfort and dis-ease gnawed at this initial façade of contentment. While on a backpacking trip to Nepal, he describes having a "quarter-life crisis," enrolled in a ten-day "Discovering Buddhism" retreat at Kopan Monastery in 2011 as a result, and decided then and there to dedicate his professional and personal life to the study of Tibetan Buddhism.

His first destination was Maitripa College under the tutelage of Yangsi Rinpoche, who founded the institution. There "he focused on a 15th-century Tibetan polemic concerning the doctrine of emptiness," approaching his research as a philosopher.³ Michael quickly became a cherished member of the Maitripa community, making friends, according to the obituary written for him by his colleagues there, "with his warmth, humor, integrity, and keen intellectual curiosity."⁴ During the service held at Maitripa to facilitate his transition from this life to the next and ensure success in the subsequent stage of his career as a bodhisattva, Yangsi Rinpoche remarked, laughing to himself, that Michael turned out to be more "orthodox of a Geluk practitioner" than the Rinpoche himself.

³ José Cabezón, Email to author, February 27, 2026.

⁴ "Dr. Michael Ium (1984-2025)," Maitripa College, accessed January 5, 2026, <https://maitripa.org/dr-michael-ium-1984-2025/>.

It was there at Maitripa that Michael first met his future PhD advisor, José Cabezón, who was so impressed by Michael that he encouraged him to apply to the PhD program at the University of California-Santa Barbara.⁵ In a document shared by Dr. Cabezón with the author, the former describes Michael as

a superb student. His critical understanding of readings was excellent, and his comments in class discussion often provided a fresh perspective on the material. Michael's written work was well organized and his theses interesting and provocative. He wrote in clear, jargon-free prose. His knowledge of classical Tibetan was outstanding. He was a careful reader of texts, paying close attention to the nuances of the grammar, and always insisting on understanding the broader context of a work and the forces that influenced it.⁶

While he initially chose philosophy as his disciplinary vehicle, Michael soon devoted himself to the texts and history of the Geluk tradition of Tibet, which became the focus of his professional life as a historian and philologist. Dr. Cabezón explains that

Michael's dissertation focused on the early history of Ganden Monastery (founded 1419), the seat of Tsongkhapa, founder of the Geluk tradition. Apart from some passing comments in biographical studies of Tsongkhapa, no significant scholarly work had been done on Ganden until Michael began his research. Drawing on various genres of texts—histories, biographies, monastic rule books, ritual texts, etc.—Michael's dissertation analyzed how Ganden was founded, how it garnered the support of both powerful patrons and ordinary people, and how it became an important pilgrimage

⁵ José Cabezón, Email to author, February 27, 2026.

⁶ José Cabezón, Email to author, February 27, 2026.

site. Innovative in its approach to Tibetan history, and incredibly well researched, Michael Ium's dissertation is an important contribution to the fields of Tibetan History and Buddhist Studies.⁷

Showcasing the unique promise that his academic trajectory held, Michael published part of his dissertation in the flagship forum of the field, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*. Titled, "Tsongkhapa as a *mahāsiddha*: A Reevaluation of the Patronage of the Gelukpa in Tibet,"⁸ this work is an innovative and potentially groundbreaking approach to a seminal figure in the Geluk tradition, "provid[ing] a glimpse of what his colleagues in Vienna call "his intellectual brilliance and his nuanced approach to Tibetan religious history."⁹ Long viewed in the "dichotomous formulations" of historians as a dry, scholastic tradition founded by the erudite Tsongkhapa, Michael instead emphasizes the charisma and magical potency of this figure, in a sense rescuing him from the modernist biases of scholars and fleshing out a more contextualized, holistic perspective not only on Tsongkhapa, but of the tradition he set forth.¹⁰ This paper stands as a shining testament to the profile of Michael as a "bright, creative, theoretically sophisticated, and hardworking scholar," in the words of Dr. Cabezón, one sure to have had "a distinguished career in the study of Buddhism had his scholarly trajectory not been cut short by his untimely death."¹¹

On what must have seemed like the best of luck to Michael and owing to the immense promise of his work and his innate ability to create

⁷ José Cabezón, Email to author, February 27, 2026.

⁸ Michael Ium, "Tsongkhapa as a *mahāsiddha*: A Reevaluation of the Patronage of the Gelukpa in Tibet," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 45 (2022): 73-117.

⁹ "Obituary Michael Ium (1984-2025)," Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia, accessed March 9, 2026, <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/ikga/obituary-michael-ium-1984-2025>.

¹⁰ Ium, "Tsongkhapa as a *mahāsiddha*," 73.

¹¹ José Cabezón, email to author, February 27, 2026.

community, Michael became the inaugural Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation Centre for Buddhist Studies Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Toronto's Department for the Study of Religion. Coming full circle to his natal home, Michael was thrilled to join the Ho Centre for Buddhist Studies, teaching classes, organizing events, and focusing on his research. As Dr. Rory Lindsay explains, due to his "warmth, enthusiasm, and scholarly dedication," Michael "quickly became a vibrant and deeply valued presence,"¹² not only among his colleagues, not only among his students, but for the larger Buddhist community in the Greater Toronto Area. This legacy will resonate in Toronto for years to come and in this way, he was the ideal person to take up this position in its initial iteration.

One sterling example of how Michael could create and champion community, and perhaps the achievement he was most proud of during his tenure in Toronto, was the great success of Michael's organized event, "An Evening with Tsering Yangzom Lama," in March 2023. Organized with the Ho Centre for Buddhist Studies, the University of Toronto's Multi-Faith Centre, the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre, and the Tibetan Women's Association of Ontario, this event was a celebration of the debut novel of Canadian author, Tsering Yangzom Lama, whose book, *We Measure the Earth with our Bodies*, follows two sisters as they navigate life as refugees after the occupation of Tibet by the People's Liberation Army, eventually settling in Parkdale, Toronto.¹³ Without a single seat empty in the house, and with a bounty of momos and butter tea to nourish everyone, the event was a chance for the community to come together outside of academia, to celebrate one of its own, and to speak about the many challenges it still faces in Toronto. As the only male on the panel, Michael was most proud that he could provide a platform

¹² "In Memoriam: Dr. Michael Ium," Department for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto, accessed February 23, 2026, <https://www.religion.utoronto.ca/news/ium-announcement>.

¹³ Tsering Yangzom Lama, *We Measure the Earth with Our Bodies* (Bloomsbury, 2022).

for the work and voices of Asian Canadian women—his sisters in the struggle—something he fiercely championed throughout his life and career.

In January 2025, Michael began his new role at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia (IKGA). It had been a difficult several months on the job market for Michael, but this was his chance to join a community of likeminded scholars who shared his passions and would give him all the support he needed to realize his potential. Michael was able to bring his burgeoning skills as a textualist and historian of religion to the project, “TibSchol: The dawn of Tibetan Buddhist scholasticism (11th–13th c.),” building on his work “on the early history of Ganden Monastery and the construction of the Geluk tradition in Tibet.”¹⁴ Just like at Maitripa, UCSB, and Toronto before, Michael was embraced by the IKGA community for “his insightful scholarship, deep intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm, but also for his warm and gentle nature, his humility and compassion.”¹⁵ This sentiment perhaps best sums up Michael’s life as a scholar, a life he imbued with warmth and humanity wherever he was welcomed.

Co-editor Extraordinaire

It was at Michael’s beckoning that I joined him as editor of the CJBS in the spring of 2023, at a time when the journal was facing structural changes. I would never have undertaken this role alone, and at the time, felt myself to be particularly unsuited for such a task, but somehow, with Michael by my side, the challenge was not so daunting. We had only known each other for about a year at that point, but found that our personalities,

¹⁴ “Obituary Michael Ium (1984–2025),” Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia, accessed March 9, 2026, <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/ikga/obituary-michael-ium-1984-2025>.

¹⁵ “Obituary Michael Ium (1984–2025),” Austrian Academy of Sciences.

diametric in many ways, complemented each other's strengths and covered for each other's weaknesses. With the gracious support of the CJBS Editorial Board, we embarked on this journey together, new to both of us, green to the roots, but excited to have our chance to contribute to Buddhist studies in Canada.

Indeed, this was Michael's singular goal. Having spent his graduate years entirely south of the border, he approached this position with a fervour that inspired me. He wanted to make sure the journal continued to act as a support for scholars across the country and had many initiatives in mind on how to enact his vision. One of his first orders of business was to ensure we had institutional support and stable funding. In his role as a postdoctoral fellow there, he reached out to the Robert H.N. Ho Centre for Buddhist Studies at the University of Toronto and secured several years of funding support, enough for us to run the journal, pay the journal manager, offer honorariums for writers and blog posts, and even have enough to provide ourselves with a modest honorarium for the work we do. This funding support from Toronto's HCBS has put the CJBS on a sure footing for the foreseeable future, one of Michael's foundational legacies.

Buoyed by this initial success, our next goal was to seek support to offer awards for early career scholars with Canadian connections. Having both struggled financially during our graduate years (like so many of us), and with the recognition that the same reality faced most of our peers, we wanted to use the journal as a platform to both recognize and support the work of those in our wake. Michael reached out to the President of the Buddhist Education Foundation of Canada (BEFC), Chris Ng, to set up a meeting. The result was a commitment by the BEFC to fund two new initiatives at the CJBS, the Buddhist Education Foundation of Canada Conference Grants and the Buddhist Education Foundation of Canada Annual Article Award. Both now in their second year, these awards are meant to celebrate the excellence of scholars located in Canada or with Canadian

connections, broadly construed. The article award also gave Michael and me a chance to work closely with early career authors on their manuscripts and expand the community of the CJBS in the process. These two initiatives also bear the imprint of Michael's legacy, a symbol of his commitment to Buddhist studies in his home country.

One of the most cherished memories Michael and I created was a tandem presentation we gave at the Workshop on Buddhist Studies in Canada, May 11th to 12th, 2024, at McMaster University, on the activities of the journal. Sponsored by the Numata Foundation and with professors from across Canada in attendance, we were admittedly nervous beforehand. Yet excited by this opportunity, we practiced together beforehand, bounced ideas off each other, and took solace in each other's strengths. In this presentation, we had the chance to share our vision for the journal with those assembled and received both excellent feedback and sincere support from our senior colleagues. Michael was thrilled at having this chance to join the Buddhist studies community as peers, junior as we were. Most importantly, this presentation was a model for us on how we might collaborate, platform each other's profiles, and work towards the mutual success of both of our careers. Instead of the subtle, constant rivalry built into the life of an academic, we were finding a way to support each other, something Michael had long practiced in his professional life. Even though his tenure at the helm of the CJBS was far too short, his imprint will live on in the awards he helped establish, in the support he gave our new co-editor, Dr. Lan Li, and in the community of Buddhist studies in Canada to which he was so dedicated.



Michael and the author presenting at the Workshop on Buddhist Studies in Canada, McMaster University, May 2024. Photo courtesy of Lan Li

Structural Barriers in Buddhist Studies

Michael was not only a brilliant colleague and loyal friend, but he also recognized the need to make structural changes to Buddhist studies within Canadian society. His brother explains that while they were not rich growing up, Michael's parents strove to provide as many advantages as possible, making sure their sons went camping, learned how to ice skate, spent time at the Scarborough Bluffs, and played basketball. Michael's gregariousness and warm personality were no doubt the result of the unconditional love and support he received from his parents and brother, a love that he so freely gave friends and colleagues. Yet Michael was not immune to the problems that plagued Toronto when he was growing up and still do. His childhood and undergraduate friends, Suzanne Fernando and Lynn

Zhu, described in his eulogy how they bonded over this shared experience of identifying as minorities in Canada, and Michael himself would sometimes tell of the discrimination he faced growing up in Scarborough. Michael's experiences are not unique for many new Canadians.

After graduating from UCSB and coming to the University of Toronto, Michael confided in his friends that despite his doctorate from a prestigious school and a growing list of accomplishments, he had not escaped certain structural barriers in his chosen field. Michael described to his friends after one job interview how he felt he was passed over by a less qualified candidate, or at least a less well-suited candidate, because of his race and the race of those on the hiring committee of the small liberal arts college at which he was interviewed. This devastated Michael. On a different occasion, no doubt taking great courage for a junior colleague without tenure, Michael voiced concerns at faculty meetings over the lack of representation amongst the faculty at the University of Toronto's Department for the Study of Religion. He spoke out for the hiring of faculty members that better reflected the diversity of the student body in Canada's most multicultural city. Michael knew that speaking out in such a way carried some risk, yet he did so anyways, seeking out allies and raising awareness amongst his peers and senior colleagues. He wanted nothing more than for students to see in him their own background and heritage, and to realize that they too could accomplish everything he had, despite the extra challenges he and they faced. He also tirelessly supported junior colleagues facing the same challenges in their own careers, becoming their advocate and champion. In this, Michael helped many of us recognize the structural barriers that still exist in Buddhist studies. With Michael's passing, the burden now falls on all of us to continue his advocacy, especially those of us who benefit from the status quo.

“one who can speak helpfully is rare”

Those who knew Michael remark that one of his best qualities was his ability to speak difficult truths in a way that was both direct but caring. He said what many feared saying, even if it was not politically expedient to do so or even detrimental to his career. In this way, Michael was what Sharon Suh might call “a Buddhist studies killjoy.”¹⁶ But at the same time, he would speak these truths in a manner that did not hurt or undercut the other person(s). Michael’s interventions, though appearing wrathful at times, were motivated by compassion and directed by wisdom. In this way, like the quote from *The Prince Who Became a Cuckoo*, Michael was someone who spoke helpfully while being sensitive to the needs of others. This quality indeed is a rare gift, one from which many of us benefited.

In this spirit, I wish to add one more point of reflection, my own personal view for which I take complete onus. It is perhaps a bit uncomfortable, but given Michael’s unique ability to speak uncomfortable truths in a direct yet compassionate way, I feel it necessary to write the following words. Due to all the factors listed above and his dedication to Buddhist studies, Michael suffered acutely from the unequal precarity of the field in its present form. Alone in India during the pandemic and in the throes of dissertating, he decried letting his health slip. When in Toronto starting his postdoc and trying to finish his dissertation, he spent all day in front of the computer, lovingly served his favourite dishes by his mother. Often, for those who were close to him, we knew it was not uncommon for him to have minor health episodes before big moments in his career, like a presentation or job interview. These include spells of dizziness, near fainting, shortness of breath, and other signs that Michael was not in an ideal

¹⁶ Sharon Suh, “‘We Interrupt Your Regularly Scheduled Programming to Bring You This Very Important Public Service Announcement . . .’ aka Buddhism as Usual in the Academy,” in *Buddhism and Whiteness: Critical Reflections*, edited by George Yancy, and Emily McRae (Lexington Books, 2019).

position to focus on his health, part of the hustle of trying to find a secure livelihood to take care of himself and his loved ones.

The pressure Michael put on himself, and the subsequent risk this posed to his health, became most apparent in the second year of his fellowship at the University of Toronto. Looking for jobs, meeting with rejections, making it to the interview stage, allowing himself to dream of his life as a faculty member—only to have this come crashing down time after time—this all took its toll on Michael. Through these rejections, Michael learned to be an unfailing advocate for his friends and colleagues undergoing the same tribulations. He was the first one you would call at the slightest bit of success, and the first one who would call you at the moment of your biggest disappointments. But this cycle of hope and rejection baked into the system cut especially hard for Michael, not just because of his ambitions and big heart, but because of the structural barriers and class prejudices that he was beginning to recognize in the institutions he so esteemed.

This cycle, I believe, came to a head in the medical emergency that took his life. It is impossible for us to know what happened to him that day in April, and anything as tragic as that surely has many causes and conditions that accrue over years and intersect at a tragic moment. But to be sure, this was the biggest presentation of his life, so close to his dream of a full-time academic career yet still so far away. I must say unequivocally that I am not seeking to blame any individual. His new mentors and colleagues in Vienna cared for Michael immensely, as he did them. The problem, rather, is structural. Have we not experienced the same nerves, the lack of sleep, the headaches, the panic even, that comes before a presentation or deadline, especially without the security of long-term employment and the threat of failing in our long-cherished aspirations? It manifests in different ways, in how we treat our loved ones, in how we treat ourselves, and in how we treat our bodies. Perhaps—and I try to follow in

Michael's footsteps by writing these words motivated by compassion—it manifested in a lethal way for Michael.

One might respond that Michael was not cut out for the rigours of academia, but do we not all want a colleague like Michael to succeed? Do we not want colleagues who will support us in our trying times, reach out when we feel small and insecure, celebrate our triumphs like they are their own, and colleagues who will bravely point out injustices and inequities, even when doing so is a sacrifice to oneself? That is what made Michael so special, the way he was able to create a caring and expansive community that made the field better, despite its warts and all. Whenever we felt isolated, when we felt like alienated economic units forced to brand ourselves and compete with our friends, Michael offered us humanity and solidarity. There is certainly no comfort to be found in such a tragic and untimely death, but there is something precious in Michael's legacy. If you have a colleague like Michael, or recognize yourself in Michael, please take care of yourself. No presentation, deadline, or job is more precious than your community, your self-worth, and your health. Conceptually we all know this to be true, but perhaps it took Michael's passing to help some of us understand the painful truth of these words ourselves.

Yamantaka Puja and the King of Prayers

After we learned of his passing, the CJBS wanted to memorialize Michael in a way that seemed appropriate for him. At that time, our board member, Martin Adam from the University of Victoria, was in Nepal conducting research. He suggested we make a puja offering for Michael at Kopan Monastery. With the generous support of several members of the board, Martin was able to sponsor a *Yamantaka Puja* for Michael and the *King of Prayers*. Since Kopan Monastery was where Michael began his Buddhist journey, it is thus fitting to give the final word to them. This is not the

final word for Michael, as he is no doubt continuing his bodhisattva journey, as he would have surely considered the matter; no, it is the last word for our relationship with him in this life, though his legacy will continue to live on in his family and friends, in his work and students, and in this very journal. With any luck, some of us will have the chance to befriend and learn from him in the next life, to share in his future joys, shoulder his burdens, and receive his blessings at the moment of our own deaths. Our sincere wish, therefore, one that he would have unhesitatingly reciprocated, is that as Michael

Circles in the various realms of existence,
May [he] amass inexhaustible goodness and wisdom,
And may [Michael] become an unending treasure of qualities.
Such as methods, wisdom, samadhi, and the experience of a bodhisattva.

*King of Prayer*¹⁷

¹⁷ Adapted from *The King of Prayers: The Noble King of Vows of the Conduct of Samantabhadra* (Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, n.d.), 6.



Michael with friends during a Buddhist studies writing retreat in Muskoka, Ontario, July 2024. Picture courtesy of Yang-Yang Chen

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Notes on the Contributor

Tony Scott was co-editor of the CJBS with Michael from 2023 to Michael’s passing in 2025. He first met Michael when the latter began his fellowship in Toronto. In many ways, their lives and interests overlapped: they both were scrappy Canadian kids born to working-class families, were the first in their families to attend graduate school, loved hockey, and were devoted to Buddhist studies in Canada. Yet Tony was born to a white, colonial settler family in Alberta while Michael grew up in Scarborough as the second son of parents from South Korea; Michael was a fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs while Tony is a devotee of their archrivals, the Montreal Canadiens; Michael was committed to the Vajrayana, Tony, to Theravada. Yet this mixture of shared experiences and profound differences made them fast friends, close colleagues, and inalienable allies, and Michael’s impact on Tony will never be forgotten, but hopefully, one day, in one life, repaid.

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Special thanks are due to Lan Li for the care and compassion she exercised in sharing drafts of this in memoriam with Michael's mother and friends, communicating the feedback to the author, and for her constant support during the writing. Finally, the CJBS board has been a source of comfort and support for the editorial team during this difficult time.

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