The Update is a bi-weekly roundup of news in the Department of Asian Studies for our Students, Faculty and Staff

Top Stories

Featured Course

ASIA 351: Modern Chinese Fiction in Translation

In this course taught by Dr. Christopher Rea, students will read selected novels and stories written between 1750 and the present.

>> Seats are still available for Term 2!

Asian Studies Office Closed for Winter Break
Our office will close at 4pm on Dec 21st with the University closing from Dec 22nd to January 2nd. We hope everyone has a wonderful holiday and look forward to seeing you all in the new year.

**The 2018 Yip So Man Wat Memorial Lecture Featuring Dr. Rey Chow**

Dr. Rey Chow is Anne Firor Scott Professor of Literature at Duke University, USA. She is an elected fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and serves on the boards of over 55 journals, book series, and research centers around the world. The public lecture, titled "The Guest's View: Some Thoughts on Director Ann Hui's 許鞍華 Work," is accompanied by a research seminar the following day on novelist Leung Ping-kwan 梁秉鈞 (1949-2013).

- **Date:** January 17, 2017
- **Time:** 6:00pm - 9:00pm
- **Venue:** Auditorium, Asian Centre, 1871 West Mall

>> [Register today](#)

**Events**

**Special Korean Studies Lab Seminar: 조선후기 불교사의 지형과 해석**

https://secure.campaigner.com/csb/Public/show/l8md3--e2gze-5l47ul81
With guest speaker Professor Yongtae Kim (Dongguk University). This seminar will be instructed in Korean.

**Date:** December 18 & 19, 2017  
**Time:** 10:00am - 5:00pm  
**Venue:** Room 604, Asian Centre, 1871 West Mall

>> Click here for details

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**The First Master Text: The Classic of Odes**
For over a century, the Warring States Masters (Kongzi, Laozi, Mozi, Mengzi, etc.) and their texts have dominated the modern imagination of early Chinese thought. Students who first encounter ancient China typically experience its philosophy or intellectual history as a parade of quasi-heroic master figures beginning with Kongzi and ending with the Qin empire. Speaker [Michael Hunter](https://secure.campaigner.com/csb/Public/show/l8md3--e2gze-5l47ul81) is an Assistant Professor of East Asian Languages & Literatures at Yale University.

**Date:** January 5, 2017  
**Time:** 5:00pm - 6:00pm  
**Venue:** Room 120, CK Choi Building, 1855 West Mall  

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**Workshop: The Ten Thousand Rooms Project**

Developed at Yale University with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Ten Thousand Rooms ([tenthousandrooms.yale.edu](http://tenthousandrooms.yale.edu)) is an open-access platform that gives users the tools to collaboratively transcribe, translate, and annotate pre-modern sources. Designed primarily as a scholarly workspace, it is also a teaching tool and a venue for showcasing philological work unsuited to traditional publishing formats. Speaker [Michael Hunter](https://secure.campaigner.com/csb/Public/show/l8md3--e2gze-5l47ul81) is an Assistant Professor of East Asian Languages & Literatures at Yale University.

**Date:** January 8, 2017  
**Time:** 12:30pm - 2:00pm
Opportunities

2018 Annual BC Japanese Speech Contest

The Annual British Columbia Japanese Speech Contest is open to British Columbia and Yukon residents who speak Japanese as a foreign or second language. The 2018 Contest will be held on Saturday, March 3, 2018 at the Halpern Centre, Simon Fraser University. The High School Division is tentatively scheduled to start at 10:00 am and the University/Open Division at 1:00 pm. The finalized schedule will be published on Monday, February 19, 2018 on the Consulate General of Japan's website. Register via the online application form. Deadline to apply is Monday, February 5th, 2018 at 5pm.

The 1st UBC Cantonese Singing Contest

The 1st UBC Cantonese Singing Contest will take place on March 9th, 2018 on the Vancouver campus of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver BC. The contest is divided into 3 categories: (1) Solo – Cantonese as first language; (2) Solo – Cantonese as an additional language, and (3) Group. Stay tuned for more information and updates on how to sign up! Deadline to register is January 10, 2018.

Free Round-trip Tickets for Students Travelling to Hong Kong

Are you a Canadian post-secondary student pursuing an exchange, study-abroad or internship in Hong Kong for the January 2018 term? If so, you are eligible to apply for one of six free round-trip tickets courtesy of Hong Kong Airlines through the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada’s (APF Canada’s) Asia Connect program. Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis so be sure to apply soon!

Langara offering Korea and China Field Studies Course

Langara is pleased to once again offer the popular interdisciplinary field study program to Asia in 2018. This time, they are going to Korea and China! The program will be in Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Seoul, and Busan. This is an exciting opportunity to travel there and learn about both their business and cultural aspects.

Chinese Government Scholarship Application

The Chinese Government is offering scholarships for eligible British Columbia (B.C.) students to study abroad. The Chinese Government Scholarship Program is available through an agreement between the National Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China and the Province of B.C. In B.C., the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, administers the recruitment of students and the routine management of the Chinese Government Scholarship Program. The application is February 28, 2018.

Postdoctoral Fellowship: Harvard University, Program on U.S.-Japan Relations

The Program offers postdoctoral fellowships for social scientists in a broad range of fields, including anthropology, economics, education, history, law, political science, public health, public policy, and sociology. Projects that focus on Japan or Japan's international role from a comparative, historical, or global perspective are welcome. A knowledge of the Japanese language is not required. Awards are for the academic year and provide $50,000 over 10 months. The application deadline is January 16.

Off-Campus Event

South Asian Canadian Histories Association Presents: A Vancouver Guldasta
Dec 13 | 8:30pm | Vancity Theatre, 1181 Seymour St, Vancouver

VIFF Presents: Youth
Dec 15 | 8:30pm | Vancity Theatre, 1181 Seymour St, Vancouver
Jeremy David Thompson, BA 2004 Asian Area Studies, Japanese

Jeremy David Thompson is a UBC Asian Studies Alumni who was formerly the Lead UX Designer at EA Games and is currently the UX Director at Geometry Global.

Could you tell us about your academic and career path up until now?

Before UBC leading up to my career, in high school I took an introductory course to Japan. It was a little bit of everything—culture, history, religion, and a very base level of language. It was fascinating to me because the relationship between Canada and Japan was so dichotomous, like night and day; the cultures were so different. I took the course and had the opportunity to go all expenses paid for eleven months to a Japanese private high school as an exchange student. I went and it was a great experience. Because of my exchange experience the seed was planted, my interest in Japan, and the desire to return there, was born.

I've always been a computer geek, and after my experience with Japan knew I wanted to live there. When I graduated from high school I had the opportunity to choose one of many different educational paths, but ultimately decided to go through the Asian Studies and Japanese language route, and UBC was the best fit at the time. When I graduated university I knew I wanted to do something with computers and Japan, so I moved there almost right away. I didn't have a set amount of time in mind but knew I wasn't going there for only one year—I was planning on staying for a while. I ended up staying in Japan for seven years. The majority of my work during that time was computer-related. One year I did take a break and was a Japanese to English interpreter/translator for a former professional fighter.

In terms of career path, staring back in high school, I learned about the web, and started creating websites back in the days of Geocities, Frontpage and Dreamweaver. When I was in Japan for the first couple of years, I had my own computer consulting business. I was creating websites from scratch for a variety of different clients. I was then hired by J. Walter Thompson (now JWT) for their Citibank Japan account and became a Web Producer. I was basically a Project Manager for the web team. I worked together with a team of designers, who helped put together the site. I did more work like that and I continued to work on my own. Fast forward to four years later, and after a number of contracts for clients in a variety of industries, was hired by Robert Half International, a US-based international recruiting firm as their Online Marketing Manager for Asia Pacific. I spent two and half of my last three years in Japan working for them.

So in terms of progression, I started doing Web Design, then Web Production, and that led to Online Marketing, which at the time was in its infancy, at least in Asia. Based in Japan, but covering the Asia Pacific Region, my job required me to travel to locations throughout APAC, including Singapore and Australia. It was also during my stay with Robert Half that I started more formally learning about concepts such as “user experience” and “user interface.”

User Experience (or UX) Design was something I was always doing but not really realizing it. In order to create or design a user-friendly, frictionless website you need to have an understanding of user experience and the user. Ultimately everything companies do, user experience is tied to.

I spent the last six months of my time in Asia travelling. I came back to Canada four years ago, and when I came back, user experience wasn't really defined—at the time of this interview it's still being defined actually. As an independent and recognized discipline, it's really only within the past two to three years that it has begun to proliferate in Canada.

After returning back from Japan and after a six month contract with the Vancouver Board of Trade, I found out through a friend that Electronic Arts (Canada) Inc. was looking for a User Experience Designer for a game
mode within FIFA—FIFA’s a large game and it has many different game modes. I was hired, and was really fortunate as I was one of the first UX Designers—I wouldn’t say the first—to be hired for EA Canada—and the first for FIFA. And to give you an idea of how much the profession was in its infancy at that time, I was helping define the role that I was being hired for as I was being interviewed.

So it’s now been just over three and a half years, as of September. And I’ve had the opportunity to work not only on FIFA, but to help out with some of the other local game teams, in addition to some of our global teams, to help identify and tackle a variety of UX challenges.

As with any organization there is no lack of user experience challenges. Everyday there’s something new. It’s exciting, it’s a great environment, and I have great co-workers.

**What exactly is “user experience”?**

I can see that you’re recording me on an iPhone. You know that when you press this button (the home button), something specific happens, right? And you know that when your phone is locked, you need swipe to unlock it. Certain apps on your phone I’m sure you think are great. They’re easy to use, they’re fun, they surprise and delight you, regardless of whether they’re a game or an app. They do what you expect them to do, in a seamless, efficient and fun way.

Other apps, certain ones you might think are terrible. You might delete them because they frustrate you; they’re not intuitive, they’re sluggish, they’re difficult to understand and not fun. There might be other ones still that are somewhere in between—they are okay, but they have certain points of friction, certain things that don’t work quite like you’d like them to; maybe certain times you press a button it’s not as receptive as you’d like it to be, or you accidentally press the ‘wrong’ button. Those apps you use that provoke some level of frustration or consternation—it’s because their user experience design, the way that they interact with you hasn’t been thought out as thoroughly as they could.

User experience design is how something interacts with a person and the emotional responses that are elicited by them as the interface with it. People tend to think of UX Design in terms of software—which is true—but everything has a user experience, right down to the furniture we’re sitting on for this interview.

To give a much simpler example, take a glass of water. It’s a glass, we take it for granted. But if you think about it, someone had to design it in such a way that the glass is strong enough that it won’t break when you lift it. The lip needs to be thin enough that you can get your lips around it and that it won’t break off in your mouth when you’re drinking from it. When you pour cold water into it, it needs to insulate things so that your hand doesn’t get cold, yet at the same time keep the water itself cold. If you pour warm water or hot water into it, it shouldn’t crack or break, while at the same time keeping the water hot. It should be light enough so that you can lift it easily, depending on the style of the glass, it might have a handle so that it’s easier to pick up. Is it dishwasher-safe? is it microwave-safe? What colour is it? How big is it? Does it have a design or pattern on it? Someone had to think about all the different interactions, the experience of using, and users’ perceptions of the glass.

When designing the experience of something, one must consider all the different edge cases—the things that are unlikely to occur but just as important because they’re still part of the experience. This is huge in terms of video games because of the complexities of all the different user paths or flows one can take when playing.

At the end of the day, especially for games—is it fun? Does it surprise and delight you? Is it enticing? Is it going to keep you engaged? Are you only going to use it once and not go back to it, or stay engaged and keep playing it? These are things you need to ask yourself when designing for users.

It’s not a new philosophy—the concept of “consumers first” has been around for years. It’s a matter of bringing that ideal to the forefront, and realizing that you need specialized individuals who understand consumer psychology, that have the specialized knowledge and experience, and who dedicate themselves to understanding, and being consumers.

**How do you think recent graduates of university can get a foot in the gaming industry? Or as a User Experience Designer like yourself?**

One answer I can give to both questions is passion. Unbridled, enthusiasm. Passion for what you do. While we all have to put food on the table, if you can’t enjoy doing what you do for your job, I’d question whether you’re in the right company, or potentially even the right industry.

In terms of seeking out a job, it’s the ultimate catch-22, you’re graduating and you need to find a job, and yet having work experience is what gets you that job. Be passionate, build your network and reach out to others, be proactive—it’s never too early to start.
Specific to UX Design, it’s never too early to start creating a portfolio. And there’s nothing wrong with pro bono work—it’s a great way to get experience. In addition to attending formal classes, there’re lots of great online resources that are inexpensive or free.

In terms of the video game industry, while formal training is important, after going through four years or however many—three years, five years of education at UBC for your bachelor, if you want to get into games you need a passion and understanding of the industry. I believe that everyone at EA is a gamer of one kind or another. Knowing, understanding and loving video games is key. If you don’t like games, it’s going to be hard to work for a video game company.

In terms of UX, understanding the base user experience of the products of the industry you’re looking to get a job in—and appreciating that it varies from industry to industry, is important. Someone doing industrial design or designing furniture is going to adhere to different principles than someone who’s designing games for example. At the same time as UX Designers we all want users to have a seamless experience, so while the specialized knowledge may vary, the passion for consumers is, or at least should be the same.

Pound the pavement, don’t give up, be proactive, and put together a portfolio. And read, read, read—increase your knowledge base. I can’t stress that enough. There are lots of great UX/user interface blogs out there. Magazines, one-time articles, weekly digests etc.—maintain (or if you don’t already have it, develop) a thirst for knowledge. You can never be knowledgeable enough. In almost all industries, not just gaming, everything is changing so quickly all the time, it’s essential to keep up with the latest trends.

Also keep track of things. Don’t let any ball drop, no matter how small. If you say you’ll do something, keep track of it, whatever your system may be, and follow-up without fail. It’s better to under-promise and over deliver (don’t mistake this for underperform, which is different) than overpromise and under-deliver.

Be accountable, be responsible, take responsibility and be sure to proactively keep track of everything, don’t let things fall through the cracks—which isn’t always easy.

Be autonomous. Be able to be your own boss. Every company is different, every manager is different, but I would say that for the most part in today's workforce, most managers don’t have the time to—and probably don’t like to—micromanage. I think for the most part, most employees, if they had a choice, don’t want to be micromanaged either. So be autonomous in what you do. You know what your job is, and I'm guessing you know what good looks like. Get it done, and don't just do the minimum—take it to the next step. Do what you need to do, plus more, and deliver in a timely fashion—without killing yourself.

And last but definitely not least, believe in yourself. It may be clichéd, but it's true. At the same time, be modest, and know your limits. Responsibility and ownership are hugely important. Learning from mistakes, taking responsibility, being accountable, and being proactive are all very, very important skills to have.

**What did you find most valuable about studying abroad?**

It was life changing for me. It really will broaden your horizons. I would even go so far as to say that it doesn’t necessarily mean you have to work or study in a foreign country. The opportunity itself to go to a foreign country (beyond as just a tourist) is valuable. Having the opportunity to learn a different culture, a different perspective, and being able to communicate in a foreign language are amazing opportunities that should not be taken for granted.

As long as you learn at least one important thing, it’s absolutely worth going abroad.

**What do you think is an important skill set to have regardless of what culture or company you’re working for?**

Being receptive to constructive criticism and feedback. None of us like it. It's tough and I've learned some really valuable life lessons through constructive feedback provided by my peers. Not taking things personally, wanting to better yourself—it’s important. One of the hardest things to do when someone sits across from you in a professional environment (or in any life situation), and gives you criticism, is to truly listen, thank them for it, and reflect on what you’ve been told.

It’s flight or fight for most people. It's natural to want to defend yourself, but if you actually listen to what's being said and are honest with yourself, more often than not you’ll find that there is merit in what is being said—and an opportunity for your to improve yourself. You'll refine your soft skills and ultimately get farther both inside and outside of the corporate environment.

>> Other alumni interviews