The Asian Studies Update - November 22nd

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 394: Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema

Taught by Dr. Nasrin Askari, this course will analyze the gender politics, family relationships, and women's social, economic, and political roles in post-revolutionary Iran as shown through Iranian cinema.

>>Seats are still available for Term 2!

Alumna Sonja Arntzen makes the CBC Poetry Prize Longlist
A huge congratulations to UBC Asian Studies alumna Sonja Arntzen who made it to the longlist of the CBC Poetry Prize!

>> Click here for details

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**Book your Graduation Photos with Artona**

Graduating next spring? Want your photo to be included in the graduate composite? Practice your smile and register for your photoshoot with Artona today. Sessions will be held between January 21st to February 18th.

>> Book your grad photo here

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**ChinaFile Interview with Chris Rea and Bruce Rusk**
Watch a video interview with our Department’s very own Chris Rea and Bruce Rusk as they discuss their new translation The Book of Swindles by Zhang Yingyu.

>> Watch the video interview here

Meiji at 150 Podcast Interview with Christina Yi

In this Meiji at 150 Podcast, Dr. Christina Yi reads the Meiji Period from the perspective of literary studies and discusses the impacts of the Meiji Restoration on writers in Japan, especially Korean and Korean-Japanese writers composing literature in Japanese.

>> Listen to the podcast here

Dealing with Diaspora: Kiran Sunar on Punjabi Legacies & Queer of Color Community
PhDivas interviews Asian Studies PhD student Kiran Sunar about Rupi Kaur and the power of Instagram poetry, disgraceful Canadian histories, and the importance of ice cream to queer trans people of color friendship.

>> Listen to the podcast here
>> Read our interview with her here

Events

**Voices of Contemporary Himalayan Literature: Manjushree Thapa and Tsering Wangmo Dhompa in Conversation**

Join us for a conversation with two acclaimed Himalayan authors: Manjushree Thapa and Tsering Wangmo Dhompa! They will be discussing their recently published novels, short stories, poetry, and non-fiction, considering what it means to represent Nepal and Tibet in the English-language literary scene.

**Date:** November 20, 2017  
**Time:** 5:00pm - 7:00pm  
**Venue:** Liu Multipurpose Room, Liu Institute for Global Issues, 6476 NW Marine Dr
One Asia Forum

Hosted by Dr. Nam-lin Hur, this series will feature different speakers throughout Term 1.

Taiwan in the Age of Global China: Challenges and Opportunities

In the face of China's continued rise and transformation into a global power, how should we think of Taiwan?

**Date:** November 23, 2017  
**Time:** 4:00pm - 6:00pm  
**Venue:** Lilooet Room, Irving K. Barber Learning Centre, 1961 E Mall

>> Click here for details

Reflections on Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhist and Daoist Traditions

>> Click here for details
Dr. Jimmy Yu, a Sheng Yen Associate Professor of Chinese Buddhism at the Florida State University, is coming to UBC to give a guest lecture on self-immolation in Chinese Buddhist and Daoist Traditions.

**Date:** November, 22 2017  
**Time:** 4:00pm - 5:00pm  
**Venue:** Room 604, Asian Centre, 1871 West Mall  

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**Soul Traders: Early 17th Century Trading and Religious Controversies in Japan**

In 1603 Tokugawa Ieyasu became the Shogun and ruler of all Japan. His economic and trading policies served well to strengthen his position, however the repercussions that was felt in the trading environments of the time brought to the fore incredible paradoxes that will be addressed in this presentation.

**Date:** November 22, 2017  
**Time:** 12:30pm - 1:30pm  
**Venue:** Room 604, Asian Centre, 1871 West Mall  

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**Words, Images, and Sounds: One Hour in Chinese Literature**
You are cordially invited to this event presented by students in CHIN 481. We would like to share our joy in reading modern Chinese literature (1900s to 1940s) with you!

Students will present their understanding of the text in words, images, and sounds. Poetry, fiction, and drama, all will be explored in our creative journey of discovery. Among the gallery of writers you will find such names as Lu Xun, Xiao Hong, Wei Yiduo and Xu Zhimo.

**Date:** November 23, 2017  
**Time:** 11:00am - 12:30pm  
**Venue:** Auditorium, Asian Centre, 1871 West Mall

>> Click here for more details

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**Identity / Assimilation / Assertion**

Join faculty, students and members of the greater Vancouver arts community for this series of talks exploring theatre and film practices across the disciplines. Most talks feature two speakers, who will address the theme from diverse disciplinary locations. This talk in the series will feature our very own Ajay Bhardwaj, UBC Public Scholar, Documentary Filmmaker, PhD Candidate, Department of Asian Studies.

**Date:** November 27, 2017  
**Time:** 4:00pm - 5:00pm  
**Venue:** 1099, Buchanan Tower, 1873 East Mall

>> Click here for details

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**Theology After the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement: Notes from Hong Kong and Vancouver**
One of the hallmarks of the 2014 prodemocracy occupy protests in Hong Kong known as the Umbrella Movement was the presence of Christians doing theology on the streets, sometimes fused with Cantonese hero traditions. But in the aftermath of the movement, how has the relationship between theology and politics developed, especially in a time of greater authoritarian power exerted by the People’s Republic of China on its “Special Administrative Region”? What can be learned about the efficacy of God-talk in protest when the movement is considered to be over? How has such God-talk traveled transnationally to Vancouver?

Date: November 28, 2017
Time: 6:30pm - 8:00pm
Venue: Room 120, C.K. Choi Building, 1855 West Mall

>> Click here for details

A Tryst with Destiny? The Politics of Buddhist Heritage and the Making of Modern India by Douglas Ober

One of our own recent PhD graduates, Douglas Ober, is giving a talk in the CISAR Seminar series. It will be on the important role that Buddhist heritage played in the making of the modern Indian nation state. Scroll down
Whither Cultural Studies? Dissent, Despair, and Pedagogy in Hong Kong

Recent experiences in civil disobedience, social antagonism and political prosecution in Hong Kong demonstrate substantially how dissent is the condition of possibility for identity-imaginary, freedom and democracy. In light of the latest trend towards authoritarian governance, we could see in the ‘failed' resistances experienced so far by the HK people the roots of what is to come. We may re-think why people today first take dissent and now despair to be the vehicle for coping with the shifting social affectivity in a political colony locked inside a vacuum of hope.

Date: December 1, 2017
Time: 3:00pm - 5:00pm
Venue: Harbour Centre 1600, 515 W. Hastings St.

>> Click here for details
Join us for a seminar on Korean Studies with visiting scholar Professor Young Woo Kim from Inje University.

**Date:** December 7, 2017  
**Time:** 3:00pm - 6:00pm  
**Venue:** Room 604, Asian Centre, 1871 West Mall

>> Click here for more details

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

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### Event Recaps

**UBC Students Won 7 Prizes in 2017 BC “Chinese Bridge” Mandarin Singing Contest for University Students**

The BC “Chinese Bridge” Mandarin Singing Contest for university students was successfully held on November 4th, 2017. The BC “Chinese Bridge” Mandarin Singing Contest is one of the biggest annual events and opportunities for non-heritage students, who are interested in learning the Chinese language, to demonstrate proficiency in Chinese as a second language.

93 students from 10 post-secondary institutions in BC participated in the contest. After a fierce competition, UBC contestants achieved excellent results and won 7 out of the 16 prizes. Congratulations to all award-winners and every UBC student who participated in the contest! All of our instructors, TAs and volunteers in the Chinese Language Program are very proud of you! Thanks to everyone who participated and helped make this contest a great success!
To succeed in the competition, UBC contestants worked hard and focused intensely on their songs and choreography. Especially during their busy exam period. All of the contestants used their spare time to practice with their coaches and attended several dress rehearsals. All the efforts that students made are sincerely appreciated. We also appreciate the help of the instructors who persevered with the contestants in the face of challenges.

A big thank you also goes to our Chinese Language Program instructors (Ms. Zheng Bin, Ms. Yu-Chi Kuo, Ms. Mingzhu Lu, Ms. Xinxin Wu, Ms. Chieh-Yang Chang), TAs (Yiwen Zheng) and volunteers (Zehui, Tongyao Liao, Yiru Wang, Jiaojiao Han, Yu Hao, Wanshan Cen, Kate Zhou) for their enthusiastic participation and help with preparations. The performances were wonderful because your passion. It is love that ignites passion and transfers it between mentors and contestants!
Opportunities

**CALL FOR PAPERS: South Asia Conference of the Pacific Northwest (SACPAN) at UBC**

If you are a scholar or graduate student (Master's or Ph.D.) working on research related to South Asia across all time periods and disciplinary approaches, we welcome your proposal. This year we hope to hold targeted sessions on technology and resources, and indigenous issues, and particularly welcome proposals along such lines.

**HARF: A Journal of South Asian Studies (McGill University) Call for Submission**

*Harf: A Journal of South Asian Studies* invites academic work from undergraduate and graduate students working on South Asia. We are a new journal published out of McGill University in Montreal. We welcome all submissions pertaining to the anthropology, history, literatures, and religions of South Asia. We are interested, particularly, in essays that explore marginalized voices, communities, practices, and concepts.

**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.

**Arts ISIT Workshops - Instructor-Led Series**

In this series of workshops, faculty share their experiences with a learning technology and the approach they took to provide students with a richer and more effective way of learning. Hear about their challenges, successes and tips on best practices!

**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!

**Backpacking with a Purpose**

If you're into the idea of traveling to a foreign country in order to volunteer and play a part in hopefully making a social impact, then this could be the opportunity for you. Experience how it's like to live like the locals do with this immersive program that's meant to put you directly in the shoes of the locals who live in the foreign countries as you complete your volunteer journey. **Apply by November 22.**

**China's Rise and Transformation: the View from its Fastest Growing City (UBC - SWUPL 2018 Summer Program) - Chongqing, China**

The program will provide unique field visits on a daily basis with access to government, courts, companies, and research centers, allowing for interactions with many key players. Additionally, the program will offer unique opportunities to visit historical cities (Chengdu, Xian), including the Panda reserve, and to taste the cuisine of Sichuan and Chongqing, possibly the most colorful and endearing in China. **Apply by January 5th, 2018.**

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**On-Campus Events**

**Bull in A China Closet?: Trump to Asia and US Policy on North Korea**

North Korea's rapid advancements on missile and nuclear fronts has elicited international concern and condemnation. Foremost among United States national security concerns, as handed over from the Obama to Trump administrations, the North Korean challenge entails important aspects political, economic and military.

**Date:** November 21, 2017  
**Time:** 3:30pm - 5:00pm  
**Venue:** Liu Multipurpose Room, Liu Institute for Global Issues, 6476 NW Marine Dr

**The Emperor and His Poetic Subjects: The Utakai Hajime Ceremony and Meiji Japan**
Each New Year, Japan’s imperial court hosts a ceremony for members of the imperial family and general public to read waka poems they had composed on a preannounced theme. The *Utakai hajime* ceremony which had previously been conducted exclusively within the court began in the Meiji Period (1868-1912) to accept poems from the general populace, thereby making this elite cultural practice accessible to the common people.

**Date:** November 24, 2017  
**Time:** 4:00pm - 5:30pm  
**Venue:** Room 122, Allard Hall, 1822 East Mall  

**Taking Synchrony Seriously: The Crises of 1866 in Japanese and Global History**

An information session hosted by Douglas Ober, Research Associate, UBC IAR. One of the more curious incidents in the making of modern India occurred on the eve of Independence when a group of seventy-two women entered New Delhi’s Constituent Assembly and unfurled the newly chosen national flag. In a last minute change decided only three weeks prior, the Gandhian *charkha* or spinning wheel, was replaced by the Buddhist *chakra*, or dharma wheel, as the flag’s central symbol.

**Date:** November 30, 2017  
**Time:** 4:00pm - 5:30pm  
**Venue:** Room 104, Allard Hall, 1822 East Mall  

**Shooting Ghosts: An Evening with Finbarr O’Reilly**

Join internationally-acclaimed photographer and UBC alum, Finbarr O’Reilly, for a look through his lens at the unpredictability of war and his experiences documented in his brand new book, *Shooting Ghosts.*

**Date:** December 5, 2017  
**Time:** 6:30pm - 9:00pm  
**Venue:** Liu Multipurpose Room, Liu Institute for Global Issues, 6476 NW Marine Dr  

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**Interview**

**Douglas Ober, PhD Student in Modern Indian Buddhism**

*We published this interview in an earlier issue of the Update but are including it again as Douglas Ober will be giving an upcoming talk on November 30th!*
Tell us a little about yourself, your background and how you became interested in Asian Studies?

I was born in Chicago but I moved to the west coast when I was 18 to attend the University of Puget Sound, where I did my BA in History. Since then, I've been slowly migrating up the coast, first to Seattle where I did my MA in Comparative Religion at the University of Washington and now in Vancouver, where I'm finishing my PhD in Asian Studies. Of course, there were some long stints spent in South Asia in between and during those programs.

My interest in Asian Studies began as a teenager through the prism of Tibet and the Himalayas— I was, I suppose, “a prisoner of Shangri-la,” to use Donald Lopez’s famous expression. Over time and through critical academic studies and first-hand experiences, most of those earlier perceptions changed and developed into a deep and abiding interest in geography and cultural ecology of the region. As an undergraduate, I focused on modern Japanese and Chinese history but I also had the good fortune of studying abroad in India, Nepal and Tibet (Autonomous Region) with the School of International Training (SIT)’s “Tibetan Studies” program. That experience was extremely transformative and after I graduated, I returned to South Asia for two more years. I spent the first year working at a Buddhist monastic college (bshad gnya) in western Bhutan and the remainder was spent in north India, where I managed a series of travel and homestay programs in the northwest Indian Himalaya. During that time and after, I was able to experience firsthand the incredible diversity of the region (particularly in places like Afghanistan, India, western China) but I often left these trips feeling that I needed more context, more structure, and critical foundation. So I returned to school for my MA, narrowing my topical focus to South Asian religions and my linguistic training to Hindi and Tibetan.

Why did you choose the Asian Studies program at UBC? Was there an aspect of the program or location that was particularly attractive to you compared to other programs in Canada or internationally?

The location was always attractive but the reality is that I chose it in order to work with three different faculty members: Harjot Oberoi, Tsering Shakya and Jessica Main. All three are on my doctoral committee and have been central to my project since day one. While I have benefited immensely from their individual expertise and critical insights, it is from the totality of their supervision and mentorship that my project has been able to both probe deeper and reach a wider audience.

Could you explain to a non-expert what you are researching and why it is important?

My dissertation rests at the intersection of South Asian history and Buddhist studies. Put simply, the conventional view in academia (and beyond) is that sometime between the 12th–15th century, Buddhism “died” or “disappeared” from India before being “reborn” in 1956 when the Indian constitutionalist, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, converted to Buddhism along with half a million of his Dalit (“Untouchable”) followers. That is, of course, a rather compressed and simplified summary of the existing view but my research is an intervention in the grander argument. First, I argue that Buddhism never exactly disappeared from the subcontinent and that it lived on in various ways, through people’s memories, histories and the occasional pilgrim’s journey. Second, and this really forms the heart of my dissertation, I examine the 150 years prior to the mass conversions of the 1950s, and demonstrate that there was an incredibly robust conversation about Buddhism taking place among Indians of all walks of life. Most of this was stimulated by the Orientalists’ discovery of ancient Buddhist ruins in British India as well as the influx of Buddhist pilgrims and missionaries from foreign lands. Thus, by the turn of the century, you had Hindi schoolbooks comparing the Buddha to Abraham Lincoln, Burmese merchants sponsoring Hindu wrestlers to become Buddhist monks and conservative Hindu industrialists building Buddhist temples. These sorts of things gave tremendous shape to the way that South Asians (and the world more widely) understand what it means to be Buddhist and what Buddhism means to India and the modern world. With Buddhism being one of the fastest growing and most politically active religions in India today, the nature of this colonial inheritance has taken on a more urgent importance.

As a graduate student, what are your main activities?

Reading, writing, and more reading and writing. I think that is the hallmark of graduate school. During the first few years, this process is a bit more structured since you are taking classes but once you finish your comps (comprehensive examinations), your own reading and writing schedule takes on a more independent streak. Once you reach this stage, I find that attending conferences and lectures delivered by visiting professors, etc., is a great way to stay connected and intellectually stimulated. Teaching also forms an important part of your graduate training and I think it is extremely vital, not only for your continued intellectual nourishment but for learning how to best convey the complexities of academic scholarship to a wider undergraduate community.

What has been the most memorable or impactful moment of your graduate experience?
There hasn’t been any one moment in particular but rather the fluidity of the experience as a whole. Being able to get back to South Asia is always the most rewarding part. Although there is a large South Asian (particularly, Punjabi) community in Vancouver, being on the ground in South Asia is always an important reminder of why I began this study in the first place. Here in Vancouver, I feel very fortunate that I have had so much exposure to my own advisors—my work desk sits outside two of their offices! The UBC campus, and in particular, the corridor where the Department of Asian Studies, Institute of Asian Research, Anthropology Museum, etc., are located, is also just a very pleasant place to spend your days.

**What are your goals (career or academic) once you’ve completed the program? And how is our program helping you achieve them?**

In an ideal world, I would find employment at a university that integrates language study and semester-long study abroad programs into a central part of the undergraduate curriculum. If I don't find that, then I guess I'll have to build it…

Many UBC faculty (both inside and outside our Department) have shared their own experiences and thoughts on how to best approach the job market, attain success, and so on. Being able to serve on a job search provided a lot of insights into what goes on behind the scenes in hiring and the general dynamics of a large public university like UBC. That experience was especially helpful.

**Can you give any advice to new students in our program or for students considering applying to it?**

Research the program thoroughly and contact faculty prior to applying. Having strong faculty support—i.e., meaning faculty that are interested in your project—will have a profound bearing on your graduate school experience and success. Expect to work hard and be aware of the time and life investment it takes to complete a PhD. These are rewarding years but they can also be stressful. If you choose to enter academia, you will be entering a very competitive field, one with huge rewards but significant risks. All in all, UBC and the Vancouver area in general is an outstanding place to spend these years. Perhaps the only downside to UBC is that after you finish, you will (most likely) have to leave!

[Read other student interviews here](https://secure.campaigner.com/csb/Public/show/10jw--dygbq-5lj47ul82)