Asian Studies at Colgate

NEWSLETTER

Fall 2022

What’s happening in Asian Studies at Colgate and Beyond

What’s inside:

- From the director
- Program events
- New faculty books
- Letter from our alumni
- and more!

Find us at: http://www.colgate.edu/asian-studies
From the Director

In Japanese there are similar two-character compound words: seigi (正義) and taigi (大義). The two words share the same second character 義 (“good/moral”), but the former is preceded by 正 (“correct/right”) while the latter with 大 (“big/broad”). They are often synonymously translated as “justice,” but the latter is also translated as “greater cause.” One time my Japanese colleague told me that when a village community discusses a major initiative, villagers typically ask themselves, “what is the taigi of doing it?” Not seigi. I find this intriguing. Maybe because seigi may sound like assuming the presence of “wrong-side”--something to be corrected, while the taigi is about asking “what’s good for us but for others as well?”

The Asian Studies Program thrives (and survives) on the courses that are offered every semester by faculty members who teach a variety of subjects on Asia. Virtually all of those courses are housed in departments, programs, and the CORE program. Without those courses and without those faculty members, the Asian Studies Program would simply not exist. Thus, I want to thank all the faculty members teaching courses for the program. They support the program, but they benefit all Colgate students learning more about Asia from various perspectives.

As the program external review is being planned for Spring 2023, I see two broad goals in the next few years. The first is to continue to build and strengthen the program as a “meeting place” of faculty and students who are interested in all things Asia. As the covid-related restrictions are eased, we can have more occasions to build a community of scholars, which can impact the quality of the program in a number of direct and indirect ways. The second goal is curriculum revision. I would like the program to begin the process of re-examining our existing curriculum structure in order to propose a curriculum that reflects the changing terrains of our faculty interests and strengths, students’ needs and interests, and the dynamic realities of “Asia.” I wholeheartedly welcome your active participation in this process!

Thinking about these initiatives, it may be helpful to reflect on the taigi of our program and what we do.

Daisaku Yamamoto

Front cover: ikebana by Darryl J. King
Why Study Asia?

By all measures, the global significance of Asia has only grown since the beginning of this century. Though the boundaries of Asia are fluid and vary depending on observers, it covers over one-third of the Earth’s land surface, 60% of population, and over 35% of global GDP. Its diversity is equally tremendous with about 2,300 living languages, variegated colonial experiences, and a wide range of political regimes. It is also the site of ongoing and emergent geopolitical conflicts, environmental distress and struggles, persisting socio-economic disparities, and public health challenges that have global implications. Furthermore, knowledge of and from Asia can also help decenter and destabilize the knowledge systems rooted in “the west” and lay ground for innovative ideas and more empathetic engagement with the world. Accordingly, an increasingly globalized world demands deeper place-specific knowledge and wisdom to cope with a variety of challenges that we face.

In the spirit of liberal arts education, Asian Studies provides you with an intellectual space that accommodates and encourages your aspiration to engage with the whole of the place and people, rather than viewing them through a specific disciplinary lens alone. Our premise is that if you want to understand something about the Chinese economy, for example, you cannot do so without knowing the country’s historical experiences, geographical settings, political dynamics and its relations with other countries, changing social values and realities, evolving language, and so on. Engaging the many changes taking place in Asian societies today requires a diverse set of intellectual skills, which will prepare you to extend your career in and with one of the most dynamic world regions of our time.

The Asian Studies Program offers Major and Minor in Asian Studies. For more information about the program visit us at: http://www.colgate.edu/asian-studies

Please stop by the “Asian Studies corner” in East Hall (Center for Women’s Studies) when you have time! Cathy (program coordinator) and Ellie (student assistant) have been doing a fabulous job!
Events on Asia at Colgate

The Debt Crisis and the Sri Lankan Uprising

On November 9, several speakers spoke about the 2022 uprising in Sri Lanka, one of the largest in the country’s history. The speakers discussed the complex causes for the crisis, including institutionalized political patronage, neoliberalism, internal class divisions, the Ukraine crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, the protests are uniting the previously divided Sri Lankan people against a common political adversary. The nature of the protests introduces some optimism with the collective solidarity of women, Tamil, Muslim, and queer communities in these protests. Speakers included Sumith Chaaminda (Colombo University, Sri Lanka), Geethika Dharmasinghe (Religion), and Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham (English).

Unearthing China’s Exalted Scriptures

On October 28, Professor Edward L. Shaughnessy (East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago) was invited by the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures to give a lecture on the millennia-long controversy over the "ancient script" chapters (Shang shu) and showed how the manuscripts (original scripts are written in ink on strips of bamboo) recently acquired by the Tsinghua University of Beijing finally proved that they were indeed forgeries.
Japan’s Strategy in a Changing Indo-Pacific

Dr. Sheila A. Smith is a John E. Merow Senior Fellow for Asia-Pacific Studies Council on Foreign Relations. On October 5, Dr. Smith delivered a lecture about the history of Japan’s security policy and how it relates to the country’s current strategic review of its constitution. She discussed factors such as changing leadership, pressures from neighboring countries, and Japan’s alliance with the U.S. Japan is looking to revisit its interpretation of the constitution and rewrite its national security strategy by the end of 2022. At the end of the presentation, Dr. Smith held a Q&A session and distributed free signed copies of her recent book, Japan Rearmed: The Politics of Military Power.

Music of Silk and Bamboo

On October 14, a concert of “Music of Silk and Bamboo” was performed by the chamber ensemble, Music From China. The group played a variety of traditional Chinese songs, and the director Susan Cheng gave background information about the history of each song and the region of China it originated from. Music From China is comprised of four members, each on a different instrument: Wang Guowei on erhu (two-stringed fiddle), Yu Chen on dizi (Chinese flute), Sun Li on pipa (Chinese lute), and director Susan Cheng on daruan (bass guitar). As a group, Music From China has performed at many celebrated venues, and it is the recipient of a Chamber Music America/ASCAP Adventurous Programming Commendation.
Yoga Stories of Ancient India

Dr. Raj Balkaran, a tutor at the Oxford Centre of Hindu Studies and the Director of the School of Indian Wisdom, visited Colgate on October 19. He led audience members through the importance of oral storytelling and mythology in the human condition, with a focus on Hinduism and ancient India. Dr. Balkaran also delivered a few stories from his new book, *The Stories Behind the Poses: The Indian Mythology That Inspired 50 Yoga Postures*. At the end of the program, he took questions from audience members and gave advice for effective storytelling. He ended the program by emphasizing the importance of being the hero in your own story. (On October 18, Women’s Studies also hosted Dr. Balkaran as part of their Brown Bag Series; he spoke on “The Greatness of the Goddess.”)

Japan Study Group 2024: Info Session & Inari-zushi

On October 22 during Family Weekend, there was an info session about the upcoming Study Group to Kyoto in the spring of 2024. Japanese snacks were served, and student volunteers met with Professor Yukari Hirata beforehand to prepare homemade inari-zushi for families.
Life Environmentalism: Theorizing Sustainability from Asia

On September 29, Prof. Dai Yamamoto gave a talk at the Social Sciences Luncheon Seminar in Alumni Hall. The talk addressed the “life environmentalism” (生活環境主義) approach that has been developed in Japan since the 1980s. He drew on empirical studies that looked into a local water management system near Lake Biwa and the post-nuclear disaster farming initiatives in Fukushima. Yamamoto highlighted potential areas of intellectual contributions and of engagement with Anglo-American theories of environmental management and sustainable development.

ALANA Multicultural Fashion Show

The annual ALANA Multicultural Fashion Show took place on the ALANA patio on October 21. Two of Colgate’s student dance groups, Sipsam and Wolfpack, performed K-pop dance routines during the show.

From the current Japan Study Group (Fall 2022)

With weekly site visits and various outings, our group has experienced many wonderful things since arriving in Japan. Not only have we been able to visit Shinto shrines, such as Fushimi Inari Taisha, and Buddhist temples studied in class, but our individual adventures around Japan have taught us so much about Japanese culture and society that cannot be learned from books (Keegan Kessler & Sophia Ferrero).
Scott Mehl, *The Ends of Meter in Modern Japanese Poetry*

East Asian Languages and Literatures Professor Scott Mehl gave some words regarding his 2022 book:

**How did you decide on the topic for *The Ends of Meter in Modern Japanese Poetry***?

In Japanese poetry today, we have poetic forms like the haiku (5-7-5 syllables) and the tanka (5-7-5-7-7). We also have long free-verse poems. But one interesting feature about contemporary Japanese poetry is that there isn’t really a space for long poetry that’s metrically regular.

The situation I’ve just described hasn’t always been the case. As I discovered when taking a graduate seminar in modern Japanese literature, there was a roughly thirty-year span of time (starting in the late 19th century and lasting into the early 20th century) when there actually did exist a long, metrically regular form of Japanese poetry. But—to use a biological metaphor—that form of poetry effectively went extinct. *The Ends of Meter in Modern Japanese Poetry* provides the backstory to that dramatic change.

I came to my topic because of reading that I did for one of my courses. The courses that we take as students can be foundational for all of our later thinking on the topics that become important to us—although in my case it took me a long time to comprehend how crucial my coursework really was.

**Could you talk a little bit about the research process? What were some challenges you faced while writing?**

The research process was one of the most enjoyable aspects of the work that went into *The Ends of Meter*. While drafting the book, I visited the National Diet Library (NDL) in Tokyo several times. The NDL is a major archive, with amazingly extensive holdings. The many available services in the NDL all follow slightly different borrowing protocols—the procedure for requesting a microfilm is somewhat different from the procedure for requesting a book, for example—and for a long time it felt like I was learning something new every time I visited the NDL. Just acquainting myself with that library was something of a challenge, and I know there’s still more for me to learn—for instance, I haven’t done any work with the NDL’s audio holdings. But my familiarity with the NDL has made it easier for me in subsequent years to branch out to other libraries.
Do you have any future projects coming up?
If you’re referring to book-length projects, then yes. I’m working on a history of comparative literature in modern Japan. In English at least, there is precious little work being done on how comparative literature has been practiced and imagined in places outside of immediate European colonial influence. Histories of non-Euro-American comparative literatures are going to be one necessary means for redressing this problem.

I’ve also done a fair bit of translation in the past few years. If I ever have the time, I would love to translate something by the remarkable art historian, Tanaka Yūko. Her book *Edo hyakumon* (One Hundred Dreams of Edo) is one that I’ve enjoyed reading again and again. I’ve assigned sections of Tanaka's book to students in some of my upper-level Japanese language classes, and if their favorable reaction to the text is any indication, I’m sure it would find a warm reception.

**Megan Brankley Abbas, Whose Islam?**
Religion Professor Megan Abbas on her 2021 book:

*How did you decide on the topic for Whose Islam?*
Undoubtedly, there were many moments that sparked my interest in this particular book project, but the first one that comes to my mind now occurred when I was an undergraduate studying abroad in Indonesia. I spent my entire junior year living and studying in Indonesia, and during the Spring semester, I decided to join an Australian program that enabled foreign students to enroll directly in one of Indonesia's largest and most prestigious universities, Universitas Gadjah Mada or simply UGM. At UGM, I was excited to take Indonesian history classes with Indonesian students that were taught in Indonesian. The classes were fascinating, but I was surprised to discover that Indonesians tended to use European and American scholarship to study their own history. I began to wonder: what does it mean to teach and study the history of your people through texts written by your colonizers and other Western writers? What impact was the Western academy having on Indonesian self-imaginings and politics? These questions stayed with me when I entered graduate school and underpinned my interest in the global politics of Western universities.
Could you talk a little bit about the research process? What were some challenges you faced while writing or some aspects you particularly enjoyed?

I'm an archival historian by training, so this book project brought me to archives both large and small across multiple countries. In North America, I spent time in the McGill University Archives, the University of Chicago Archives, and most importantly, the Rockefeller Foundation Archives in Tarrytown, NY. I also visited a major Islamic university in Malaysia and then spent over a month working at the National Archives of Indonesia in Jakarta. I love archival research. It is like being a detective - you never know what you're going to find in the next folder or box that the archivist delivers to your table. I would say that the most challenging part of the research process was securing an Indonesian research visa. This is a notoriously difficult process because you have to get approval from multiple different Indonesian ministries and police stations. I actually had to spend an entire day at the headquarters of the Jakarta police waiting to get a stamp on my research visa!

Do you have any future projects coming up?

Yes! I am now starting to work on a second book project that will explore the questions: how has U.S. foreign policy shaped Indonesian Islamic politics since the country's independence in 1945? How can we account for the impact - or lack thereof - of American soft power during the Cold War and the post-Cold War period in Indonesia? I'm looking forward to diving into State Department and other US governmental archives soon as part of this research.

Letter from an Asian Studies alum in Taiwan

My name is Alex Almer, Colgate class of 2022. I was an Asian studies and Geography major and am now living in Taiwan teaching English at a cram school (補習班). After I graduated I wanted to teach English as a foreign language, improve my Chinese language abilities, and gain a broader perspective, so moving to Taiwan was the perfect opportunity for me. I am living in Miaoli (苗栗), a smaller city in a less densely populated area of the west coast of Taiwan. I began teaching at the end of August and am now 42 school days in.

I am feeling a lot more comfortable teaching than I was the first day, I get less nervous, and the kids know me and I know them, which is nice. Highlights so far have been seeing quiz scores improve and seeing some of my shyest kids become more comfortable. Most of the kids have come to like me and my kindergarteners have gotten into the habit of barricading the door when it is time for me to leave!
Over Moon Festival (中秋節) I was invited to spend the holiday with my friend and former language tutor and her family. It was a special feeling to be a foreigner who has only been here for about a month now and be invited to celebrate a major holiday in a family environment.

Church here has been going really well. I am steadily becoming more comfortable and my Chinese level is improving. I can understand a decent amount of what's said, almost all of the worship songs, and I can talk to people without too many language issues. Soon I will be joining a men's small group and I can't wait.

A while ago we had several earthquakes here. I felt two of the ones today in Miaoli and it was my first time to experience an earthquake. The stronger of the two was about a 4.0 intensity according to the national weather bureau. My building was shaking a decent amount (I am on the 3rd floor) and it was not enjoyable, but earthquakes are fairly common here, although only really dangerous on the eastern side of the island (I'm on the west).

I've also done some traveling to Sanyi (三義), a local smaller town and Taipei (台北). I saw wood carvings in Sanyi and in Taipei I saw the National Palace Museum (故宮) and went to the top of Taipei 101. Attached are 4 photos, one of Taipei 101 from the bottom, one of the view from the 88th floor observation area, one of The National Palace Museum, and one of Green Jade Cabbage (翠玉白菜), which is the most famous piece in the National Palace Museum.

This move has not come without its challenges, including culture shock, making friends, finding work-life balance, and enduring some work-related stress and frustrations, but I have found a community here and have already made some very good friends. I've also learned how to get by smoothly in daily life in Chinese. There are some parts of how the cram school system works that I don’t necessarily enjoy as a teacher, but I am making the best of it and focusing on being a positive part of the kids’ lives over anything else. Overall, I am enjoying my life here in Miaoli, Taiwan so far, and I am glad I decided to take the step of faith to make the move.
Oshaberi Cafe

Oshaberi Cafe is for people who are interested in Japanese language and culture. Everyone is welcome regardless of your year and Japanese language level! If it's sunny, we can go for a walk, so if you want to go, please bring your comfortable shoes! (There will usually be a group staying in the classroom even on sunny days). If you have any questions, please email Japanese language intern sokazaki@colgate.edu. Looking forward to seeing you at Oshaberi Cafe!

Abroad and Beyond

Studying Abroad with Asian Studies

The Asian Studies Program strongly encourages majors to participate in Colgate study groups and in approved programs in India or other locations in Asia. Faculty of the program serve as directors of study-abroad programs in China, Japan, and Korea.

China Study Group spends approximately four months in Shanghai, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, in intensive language training and first-hand observation of recent cultural, political, and economic changes.

Japan Study Group, based in Kyoto, provides lodging with Japanese families; intensive language training; and instruction in Japanese politics, economics, business, religion, art, linguistics, and literature.

Approved Programs

- China, Shanghai: CIEE Shanghai: China in a Global Context
- China, Shanghai: IFSA: 21st Century City
- India, Bodh Gaya: Antioch Buddhist Studies in India
- Japan, Hirakata City: Kansai Gaidai
- Sri Lanka, Kandy: IFSA - ISLE Program

There are many other approved programs and extended studies that take place in Asia. For more information, please visit the Office of Off-Campus Studies website [Search Programs]!!
New Courses on Asia in Spring 2023

**ENGL 371  South Asian Diasporas: North America, England and South Africa**

M/W 1:20-2:35  Instructor: Nimanthi Rajasingham

This course is an introduction to literatures, films, and critical theory from the South Asian diasporas in North America, England, and South Africa, with a focus on Ethnic Studies. It focuses on diasporic subjects’ different histories of arrival, their place as hyphenated identities, and their shared struggles with other oppressed groups within a framework of slavery and segregation at home, and empire abroad. Readings focus on texts from the early colonial periods, Jim Crow/apartheid, the Post-WWII reconstruction, and the War on Terror.

**RELG 217  Violence and Religion in Asia**

T/R 2:45-4:00  Instructor: Geethika Dharmasinghe

Students consider how persons use religious discourses and practices in imagining and conceptualizing an ideal form of ethnically or religiously majoritarian state. In the current global modern context, the state has often withdrawn partly or fully from some spheres through deregulation and privatization. At the same time, other forces are ascendant, among them organized religions. They often favor what is perceived as an earlier, purer, and better way of life. How should one explain the roles currently played by religion, including militant violence across Asia? Is it a revolt against the uncertainties produced by modernization? How do people interpret foundational religious concepts when responding to changing circumstances including the place of state and non-state? Students access broader questions regarding not only how religious discourses dictate and regulate the modern states in Asia but how modern secular discourse accommodates their novel positioning. Attending to ways in which people draw on religious ideas in their critique of the state also reveals the contested ideas on virtues and violent activities.
Gender history has made critical interventions into various big ‘topics’ of history, including the study of nation and nationalism. This course seeks to study the gendered aspects of nation building and nationalism in the modern world, with case studies of India, Algeria, Iran, and the United States. This course will interrogate the constructed nature of both “gender” and “nationalism” in order to explore the intersections that have molded historical understandings of movements, events, and multiple contexts. Students will read various texts and respond to different genres of historical writing. Some of the questions we will explore include: what is the difference between the nation and nationalism?; what roles do gendered subjects play in crafting the nation?; who constitutes the ideal subject of the nations? Students will be asked to engage with different types of sources and consider how to read them effectively as historical materials. Students will produce writing that asks them to think about both content and structure.

Film has quickly become a central media in disseminating history and a shared culture to a wider audience. India, the world’s largest democracy, is also the largest film industry in the world, with studios across the country making movies in over twenty languages. Bollywood, the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), is the most popular, producing over 1,000 films a year. This is a history course that will both trace the evolution of Bollywood and the history of modern India through some of the most well-known and critically acclaimed films to have emerged out of India. **Weekly film screenings required (HIST 373L Thu 4:15-7:00 pm).**
Spring 2023 Courses for Asian Studies

| ARTS 245 A | Palaces and Paintings       | ARTS 246 A | From Emperors to Anime       |
| CHIN 122 A | Elementary Chinese II       | CHIN 122 B | Elementary Chinese II       |
| CHIN 202 A | Intermediate Chinese II     | CHIN 222 A | China thru Literature & Film |
| CHIN 304 A | Readings in Social Issues   | CHIN 406 A | Readings in Modern Literature|
| CORE 154C A | Indonesia                  | CORE 167C B | Japan                       |
| CORE 165C A | China                      | MUSI 321 A | Explorations in Global Music |
| CORE 138S A | Advent of the Atomic Bomb   | POSC 305 A | Coconut-iPhone: Pol of Econ Development |
| HIST 255 A | The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1924 | RELG 234 A | Women & Rel Trad: South Asia |
| HIST 264 A | Modern East Asia            | RELG 281 A | Hindu Traditions             |
| HIST 317 A | Gender & Nationalism        | RELG 285 A | Buddhist Traditions          |
|             |                             | RELG 329 A | Modern Islamic Thought       |

Selected Recent Work by Asian Studies Faculty


Song, Yang, Kang, Le and Lei, Ziteng and Song, Yang and Zhang, Peng, Gender Differences in Reactions to Failure in High-Stakes Competition: Evidence from the National College Entrance Exam Retakes (October 20, 2021). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3861378 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3861378.

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