

ASIAN STUDIES U OF L NEWSLETTER

FALL 2023 - VOL. 8



Alpensia Ski Resort, Daegwallyeong,
Pyeongchang, South Korea

Asian Studies is an interdisciplinary program at the University of Lethbridge which seeks to understand the human experience in Asia and the Asian diaspora. We create opportunities for students to learn about Asia through courses, presentations, exchange programs, and faculty and student research. Thanks to our colleagues, Admin Assistant Jenny Oseen, students, International Office, and Arts & Science Deans for your continued support!

Upcoming Presentations

Friday, November 3 2:00 to 4:00 pm

Dr. Hillary Rodrigues, Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies, presents, "**Understanding 'What Is': The Krishnamurti-Factor in the Neo-Nondual Spiritual Movement (NSM)**" in UHall C640. Refreshments provided. [Dept of History & Religion Colloquium | Notice Board \(ulethbridge.ca\)](#)

Friday, November 10 3:00 to 4:30 pm

Dr. Maho Ikeda, visiting professor from Hokkai Gakuen University presents, "**Transformative Years: The Rise of Political Parties in Meiji Japan**" in UHall B660. Co-sponsored by Asian Studies and Women Scholars' Speaker Series.

[Transformative Years: The Rise of Political Parties in Meiji Japan | Notice Board \(ulethbridge.ca\)](#)

Asian Studies Courses in Spring 2024

RELS 2360 A Japanese Religions CRN 11434
Shayne Dahl TR 9:00-10:15 C610

RELS 3100 A Pilgrimage, Heritage, and Tourism in India CRN 11437
Rutika Gandhi MW 12:00-13:15 C630

JPNS 1100 A Beginners' Japanese II & Lab 1
CRN 10685/ 10686
Abigail McMeekin MWF 10:00 - 12:50 D632

JPNS 2020 A Intermediate Language II & Lab 1
CRN 10687/ 10688
Abigail McMeekin MWF 14:00- 14:50 D630

HIST 3290 A Japan, 1570-1890 CRN 10600
Gideon Fujiwara MW 13:30-14:45 D631

HIST 4040 A Nation & Nationalism in East Asia
CRN 10605
Gideon Fujiwara MW 10:30-11:45 W514

Feature Interview with Rutika Gandhi, PhD Candidate at UBC

GF: Hi Rutika! I remember you took my first class I ever taught at the U of L. You later went on to get your MA in Religious Studies on Buddhist Pilgrimage and Tourism in Modern India under Dr. John Harding's supervision, and along the way you won the Michael Chan Prize. Now you are pursuing your PhD at the University of British Columbia. Please tell us about your remarkable journey, beginning with your undergrad through your Masters program at the U of L.

RG: I originally started out in a BSc program but the U of L focuses on Lib Ed, so why not take a course in World Religions? The class was taught by Dr. Atif Khalil and Dr. Hillary Rodrigues, and as someone who grew up in a Hindu household, I learned many reasons behind the beliefs and practices I initially took for granted. I then took The Hindu Tradition with Hillary, a course I teach now. I could not be more appreciative for the knowledge I have gained from him. Then I met Dr. John Harding when I took East Asian Religions, which ultimately pulled me to a General B.A. Degree with a Minor in Religious Studies.

I worked as a TA with John when he was teaching Asian Studies. I enjoyed it, and...

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Interview with Rutika Gandhi (cont'd)

...asked him to be my supervisor when I did my Masters degree. I focused on Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Sarnath, where the Buddha taught his first sermon. I wanted to take a more anthropological approach, which John supported. I was grateful to U of L for the funding, and I got to return to India for the first time after being in Canada for most of my life. I took a course on Asian Religions and the West during this time, which led to me writing an essay on Digital Religion that won the Michael Chan Prize.

GF: Tell us about your current PhD research.

RG: I am currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan campus, in the Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies – Global Studies program. I contacted Dr. David Geary, my current supervisor, after I encountered his work on Bodh Gaya, one of the most important Buddhist pilgrimage sites because it's where the Buddha attained Enlightenment. My research currently focuses on Hindu religious and secular tourist sites in Gujarat, where I was born. As you know, the current Indian Government, under Prime Minister Modi, has been associated with the promotion of Hindu nationalist ideologies, often framed as efforts to foster national unity. Within this context, my primary area of interest is the Statue of Unity, which stands as the world's tallest statue and is located in Gujarat, where I did fieldwork. I view this statue as a symbol of Hindu nationalism intertwined with identity politics, interpreting it as a 'religio-secular' monument.

I'm also interested in the digital narratives present on social media. Particularly, I am interested in the affordance of digital media that lends people a sense of anonymity, and allows one to transcend time and physical space. So, I am interested in understanding the relationship between the two—the digital narratives and the practice—based on what I see “on the ground.” David Geary and I are currently working on a paper on “selfies” at the pilgrimage site Sarnath.

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Malaysia Work Study course MGT 4640 will be offered by **Prof. Andrea Amelinckx** from April to June, 2024 and will again offer the pre-req waiver for students in Asian Studies. Participants can apply for funding of up to \$6,000 from the Global Skills Opportunity Bursary through the International Centre. See details here: [Malaysia work-study | University of Lethbridge \(ulethbridge.ca\)](https://ulethbridge.ca/malaysia-work-study)

The 2023 winner of the Michael Chan Prize in Asian Studies is Yumeka Ogita for her Religious Studies 3990 Independent Study titled “Practices of Japanese Religion”! Yumeka carried out her project under the supervision of Prof. John Harding, while travelling across Japan in the spring of 2023. **Congratulations, Yumeka!!**

Yumeka characterized her unique project as follows: “This course focused on the ways in which different generations interact with Japanese religion while exploring the question “Is Japanese Religion dying?” This final project is presented in two main documents. The appendix includes all my reflections on texts that provided fundamental information about Japanese religion and articles that shared instances of generational differences in religious practices, and my journal entries with all the observations I made at temples and shrines I visited in Japan. The final reflection aims to answer the previously mentioned question by referencing pages in the appendix as supporting evidence.”

Our sincere thanks to Professors Emeriti Ian MacLachlan and Trevor Harrison, for serving as co-adjudicators. Many thanks to Prof. Bonnie Lee, founder and steward of the Chan Prize, and to the many donors whose generous support continues to recognize and encourage student excellence.

Michael Chan Prize in Asian Studies, Value: \$1,000

Michael Wing-Cheung Chan (1952-2001) was a Chinese Canadian scientist and humanitarian known for his brilliance in mathematics and his passion in promoting Canada-Asia understanding. **Eligibility:** Continuing or graduating full-time undergraduate or graduate students in any degree program. Outstanding achievement in a course project or paper on an Asian topic. Submit your project to gideon.fujiwara@uleth.ca as an e-mail attachment accompanied by a cover letter.

Next submissions due Aug 20, 2024. Learn more at [Scholarships | University of Lethbridge \(ulethbridge.ca\)](https://ulethbridge.ca/scholarships)

Interview with Rutika Gandhi cont'd

Our research delves into the unique and interactive ways individuals are engaging with sacred spaces in the digital age.

I remember when I began my Master's fieldwork, and John told me, in support of my methodological approach, that's where he sees the future to be: religion is not just in the text, but it is something living and breathing... This is so true, especially because I'm interested in studying contemporary religion.



Above: Rutika at Heritage site in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

GF: What were some of your discoveries during your research travels across India?

RG: As somebody who was born in India, I thought that I would blend in when I returned to India. That definitely did not happen. The debates about the insider/outsider experience: I was the living example of this—a contradiction. When I first went to India for my MA fieldwork, I emailed John about how defeated I felt, because even my language was at least 10 years older since languages evolve. Though I look Indian, I wasn't always recognized as completely Indian, which led to some challenges. John reassured me that I have a unique perspective as someone who's between both an insider and outsider.

For my PhD project, I learned it is important to push yourself, but to also let go, and let the field open up to me. I did my comprehensive readings, but once I got to India

it all falls apart; and this is a completely normal experience in the field.

GF: You are now teaching RELS 2100 The Hindu Tradition. How has this experience been?

RG: This has been a really amazing experience for me. I didn't expect to be in the same office as Hillary, and I feel I've come full circle... to be teaching the same course I took. The students have been lovely and patient with me. I'm sure I've also learned a lot with my students. I really enjoy the discussions we have in class in the safe space we've created together.

When the students come up to me to say they're enjoying the course, it makes it feel like all these extra hours are all worth it. I also have wonderful and supportive colleagues, such as Dr. Jim Linville and Dr. Jennifer Otto who have given me some great advice.

GF: Can you share about some of your future ambitions?

RG: I would really love to continue teaching. This is the first time managing my own course, and it solidified for me that this is what I want to do.

I will finish my PhD and pursue more of my research on digital religion. I'd like to focus more on social media and instant messaging platforms because these have become so influential. A fascinating thing that one person told me in India is they were happy that Covid-19 happened because it brought them closer to God. They used to go to the temple to listen to devotional teachings, but now he can turn on his phone and WhatsApp and he can connect [to the teachings] while eating lunch. It's fascinating to hear that social media platforms can bring you closer to the divine.

GF: What do you enjoy doing when you're not studying or working?

RG: I love collecting and taking care of plants. I also nurse some plants back to life, which I find really rewarding. I owned 40 plants at one time! I also enjoy meditating. Whenever I feel I need to come back to myself I meditate. I'm also getting back to yoga. I see it as an exercise of the body and mind. I also like to watch TV
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Interview with Rutika Gandhi cont'd

...during my downtime. For fun I like to travel! I have been to Japan, South Korea, Italy, Croatia, and France, and I hope to see more! My trip to Japan was my first solo trip, and I was inspired to take that trip after taking courses from you and John. It was my graduation gift to myself.

GF: Do you have any advice you'd offer undergrad or grad students at the U of L?

RG: I would tell students to take advantage of all the resources at the U of L. That could mean taking a semester abroad. When taking electives keep an open mind. Follow your passion. You're committing 4 years of your life to university. I'm really happy with how my journey has turned out.

Take advantage of the Writing Centre, student conferences, etc. My first conference was the Student Conference of Religious Studies (Next year's is on April 25-27, 2024; details TBA). I had a fear of presenting, but it helps to get over that fear when you see familiar faces. That's why I'm comfortable with presenting now, including at the American Anthropological Association (AAA/CASCA) annual conference this November in Toronto. You start feeling more confident, in academia or work or in a meeting...

GF: Thanks so much for your time and insights, Rutika! We're all so proud of you, and delighted that you're now teaching for the Dept. of History and Religion. Please keep in touch, and continued best wishes on your exciting journey!

Right: Shayne and Gideon learn from hoop dancer Lawrence Roy Junior at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon during JSAC banquet.

Dr. Shayne Dahl is a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow—the first ever for the U of L. Dr. Dahl has continued to be active in research and teaching. On Sept. 25, he gave an invited lecture at Simon Fraser University, titled, "Indigenous Entanglements: Shugendo and the Politics of Global Indigeneity." Sept. 29 to Oct. 1, he along with Gideon Fujiwara attended the Japan Studies Association of Canada (JSAC) Annual Conference hosted at University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, SK. He recently published "Sutra as Speech Act: Shugendō Rivalries and the Heart Sutra in Northeastern Japan" in *Pacific World*, Series Four Volume 4 (October 17, 2023)

<https://pwj.shin-ibs.edu/2023/7084>

Congratulations, Shayne!



The inaugural recipient of the **CAFA** (Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations) **Distinguished Precarious Teaching Award** is **Dr. Chris Churchill**, Adjunct Associate Professor, Dept. of History and Religion!

Dr. Churchill is an exceptional teacher who applies innovative teaching methods, supports all students in his classes, and connects students to community and career opportunities. He does this while living and working with a cognitive disability coming from epilepsy. We appreciate Chris' valuable contributions to Asian Studies. Congratulations, Chris, on such well-deserved recognition!

Chris shares his acceptance speech he gave at the CAFA Awards Dinner on Sept. 14:

[\(36\) How I Teach with a Cognitive Disability | LinkedIn](#)

Dr. Trevor Harrison, Professor Emeritus in the Sociology Department, received **CAFA's Distinguished Academic Award** in 2023! Dr. Harrison has disseminated his research via numerous authored books, reports, journals, and conferences. He has also extended his insights to the public by way of media interviews, letters to the editor, and through research institutes including the Parkland Institute, Prentice Institute, and Kule Institute.

Asian Studies has benefited from Trevor's valued input and contributions. Congratulations, Trevor!

The **International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations** and the **Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Lethbridge** are planning an upcoming international and interdisciplinary conference on **Health, Healing and Civilizations** from May 21-24, 2024 to be held at the U of L campus. Bringing together the themes of health, healing and civilizations, this big picture conference offers a departure from discipline-specific gatherings, fostering critical inquiry and new interpretation of issues pertaining to this pivotal moment in human history. Start thinking about an abstract for submission for stimulating conversations. Stay tuned for details! **Dr. Bonnie Lee** [Home \(iscsc.org\)](http://iscsc.org)

Coordinator's Desk: This edition highlights exciting courses offered in Spring 2024, upcoming events, and success stories of our students and colleagues including a feature interview. Thank you for reading! Gideon
More details on our website: [Asian Studies | University of Lethbridge \(ulethbridge.ca\)](http://AsianStudies|UniversityofLethbridge.ulethbridge.ca)
Questions can be directed to the Coordinator at gideon.fujiwara@uleth.ca

The Japanese Canadian Histories in Southern Alberta: Time Map, Audio Journey, Memory Booth, a collaboration between the Nikkei Memory Capture Project and the Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden was a finalist for the Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Community Programming. Congratulations to **Dr. Carly Adams** and **Dr. Darren J. Aoki** (University of Plymouth), the principle investigators of this project, and to the team at **Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden!**

[2023 Shortlist for the Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Community Programming - Canada's History \(canadashistory.ca\)](https://canadashistory.ca)

Prof. Glenda Bonifacio begins her new appointment as Dean of Social Sciences and Humanities at Lakehead University from November.

Glenda's valuable contributions to Asian Studies include her many publications on gender and migration, disaster and community, and equity, diversity, and inclusion. She taught several courses on Asia including Introduction to Asia and the Study Tours to the Philippines, while mentoring many graduate students.

Thank you, Glenda, and best wishes in your new endeavors!

Enjoy the **Winter Light Festival at Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden**, which begins on November 29 and runs until February 24, 4 to 9 pm. See the website in advance for schedule, ticket info, and other details: [Home - Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden](http://Home-NikkaYukoJapaneseGarden)



U of L Students, are you interested in learning about Asia's societies, cultures, and histories? Want to make your degree international? Considering traveling Asia or pursuing work with ties to Asia?

If so, declare your Minor in Asian Studies!

Required courses: ASIA 1000 Introduction to Asia plus 5 courses with at least 1 at the 3000/4000 level.

Consider structuring the Asian Studies Minor into one of the following combinations:

Major/Minor; Major/Double Minor; or within a General Humanities/Social Science degree. Be creative!