

# Department of Asian Studies

Fall 2009

Dear Friends and Alumni,

2009 was an eventful year for the Department of Asian Studies. We have good news to report about our faculty's accomplishments, a new major concentration in South Asian Studies, and growing enrollment in our language classes. The newsletter highlights activities led by our faculty, honors won by our students, and news from some of our graduates now in Asia.

After becoming Chair in July, I have been learning more all the time about the Department. I am grateful that Li-Ling Hsiao, Associate Professor of Chinese Literature and Theater, agreed to take on the position of Associate Chair and Director of Undergraduate Studies. Our new roles make us realize how much we owe to Professors Gang Yue and Sahar Amer for their leadership. It is fitting to devote the annual Chair's column to extending them our profound gratitude.

Gang Yue became Chair in 2004, the same year as the Curriculum in Asian Studies graduated to becoming a Department. Professor Yue's accomplishments in this position are numerous, and include shepherding the move to our current home in New West, creating the Associate Chair position, and increasing our staff

## *From the Chair...*

from two part-time positions to two full-time positions. The Department's course offerings expanded and the number of students majoring in Asian Studies increased during his administration. He also guided the launch of majors in Arab Cultures and South Asian Studies and a minor in Hebrew. Study Abroad to Asia and donations to Asian Studies flourished under Gang Yue's leadership. The Department has more associate professors and has expanded our team of lecturers, thanks in many ways to Gang Yue's leadership. We wish him well on his much deserved research leave.

We also thank Professor Sahar Amer for her leadership as Associate Chair and Director of Undergraduate Studies and for her work as Interim Chair in the fall of 2007. Sahar Amer brought vision and enthusiasm to the Curriculum Committee, leading us to improve and promote our language programs and courses. She devoted herself to improving advising, the honors courses, and enrichment activities for students, and worked in a host of other areas that brought positive attention to the Department. During this time, Sahar Amer also served as the Coordinator of the Arabic Program, expanding our fine staff of lecturers, and, with Professor Nadia Yaqub, instituting a concentration in Arab

Cultures. We wish her well as she, too, embarks on a much deserved research leave. This fall we welcomed Ash Barnes as our new office assistant. Please see Ash's self-introduction in this newsletter. I also take this opportunity to thank Sara Beaman for serving in this position for the past two years. We were also sorry to see Professor Ryuko Kubota leave us, but we are happy that she is enjoying her new job at the University of British Columbia. We are grateful to have Lori Harris continuing in her position as Department manager.

We look forward to a new decade for the Department of Asian Studies and we wish our friends and alumni all the best for a happy and successful Year of the Tiger.



Jan Bardsley  
Chair



## Inside this issue:

Chair's Column	1
Music Events	2
South Asia Major	3
Book Awards	3
Lunar Festival	4
Faculty News	5
Grads in the Field	6
Gift Form	7

## Did you know?

The department is growing! As of Fall 2009, the Department of Asian Studies had 20 Arabic language majors, 43 Chinese language majors, 29 Japanese language majors, 40 interdisciplinary Asian Studies majors, and one major in the new South Asian Studies program.

Over the last five years, the department has experienced a 120% increase in enrollment in our language courses.

## Special points of interest:

- Our professors do more than teach classes (p. 2)
- We have a new major! (p. 3)
- A year of publications (pp. 4-5)
- Asian Studies grads: where are they now? (p. 6)

## Asian Music Events

We were in tune with Asian music in 2009, thanks to the talents and generosity of our musical faculty.

In spring 2009, **Dr. Li-Ling Hsiao** presented a *guzheng* (a traditional Chinese instrument) recital at the Ackland Art Museum in conjunction with the opening of the exhibition of "Sage in the Bamboo." Although it was a cold and rainy Sunday afternoon, such a crowd gathered that the performance was standing-room-only. Dr. Hsiao told the audience about the history of *guzheng* performance in between playing melodic pieces. She also regularly introduces *guzheng* music to Chinese and Taiwanese communities in Raleigh, Chapel Hill, and Durham. In 2009, Dr. Hsiao was invited to perform at the lunar New Year celebration hosted by the cultural exchange committee in Kernersville, North Carolina. She is also a member of the Taiyin Choir, a choral group that has been introducing Taiwanese music to the local communities for more than thirty years.

Another member of the Taiyin Choir is **Dr. Eric Henry**, who is accompanist and arranger for the chorus. Dr. Henry encourages appreciation of Chinese and Vietnamese music in his research, teaching, and community activities. He communicates regularly on musical and other matters with the Vietnamese songwriter Pham Duy, and has translated his four volumes of memoirs into English. In spring 2010, he will teach "Introduction to Vietnamese Culture through Music and Narrative," a course that examines the social history of Vietnamese popular music in the twentieth century starting with the late 1930s, when Vietnamese songwriters first began writing western-influenced songs.

**Dr. Afroz Taj** organizes many entertaining events to draw interest to South Asian music and culture. He organized a concert of Sufi Qawwali music by Pakistani vocalist Imran Aziz Miyan in col-

Devotion and Desire in India and Pakistan." Meanwhile Dr. Taj continues to host the weekly Geet Bazaar South Asian radio program on WKNC 88.1 FM every Sunday morning from



(Above) Li-ling Hsiao plays the *guzheng* at the Ackland Art Museum.

laboration with the Department of Music. UNC Chancellor James Moeser and Director of Carolina Performances Emil Kang invited Dr. Taj to give a first-year seminar lecture and "curtain talk" on South Asian Music in conjunction with the Ravi Shankar concert on October 6. On November 27 Dr. Taj was a guest host on the Global Music Show on WXYC 89.3 FM (a collaboration of the UNC area studies centers); his feature presentation was titled "From Saint to Screen: Music of

10:00 am to 12:00 noon.

The Carolina Asia Center (CAC), directed by Kevin Hewison, brought attention to Asian music, too. In September, the CAC hosted Sang Mi Kang, a professional Gayageum player, to perform "Korean Music Concert Featuring the *Gayageum* and *Janggu*." In November, Dr. Marzanna Poplawska, performer and UNC-CH Music Department instructor of central-Japanese gamelan and dance, organized a gamelan performance to follow the public lecture "Indonesian Textiles – Culture, Traditions and Techniques" by Sally Kahler.

## South Asian Studies Major Launched

The Department of Asian Studies is proud to announce that the long-awaited South Asian Studies Concentration is now official. South Asia comprises the Indian subcontinent and includes the modern nations of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Iran. Asian Studies majors wishing to concentrate in South Asian Studies take eight courses including two Hindi-Urdu language courses at the advanced level, one introductory culture course, and five additional courses. Courses may be selected from Asian Studies language or content course offerings, or from a host of other departments including Religious Studies, History, Art, Geography, or Anthropology. Students may also use courses taken on the UNC Summer in India Study Abroad Program toward the concentration.

This program was developed in response to the academic needs of students who seek more intensive training in the area of South Asian languages, history, and cultures and as a direct response to changing times in our state, our country, and the world. In recent decades North Carolina has witnessed an unprecedented demographic shift, with South Asians now comprising the largest Asian immigrant population in the state. South Asians likewise constitute a large and vocal sector of Carolina's student body; they are also of increasing prominence nationally. From a global perspective, India has recently emerged as a major international force with one of the fastest-growing economies, and a population that will soon overtake that of China. By most counts, Hindi-Urdu is the second most commonly spoken world language (after Mandarin Chinese). South Asia is also home to one of the most linguistically, politically, and

religiously complex world civilizations, with a continuous literary tradition spanning almost three thousand years.

The new concentration benefits from a range of Triangle-wide resources for South Asia. UNC is a founding member of the NC Center for South Asia Studies, a Title VI-funded national resource center. UNC participates in this consortium, along with Duke and NC State, to support library development, language teaching, graduate fellowships, annual seminars and conferences, and a host of programming initiatives that enrich the academic study of South Asia. The new concentration in South Asian Studies thus draws upon, and contributes to, a larger intellectual community in the region.

For more information, students should contact concentration advisor Prof. Afroz Taj ([taj@email.unc.edu](mailto:taj@email.unc.edu)) or Prof. Pamela Lothspeich ([ploth@email.unc.edu](mailto:ploth@email.unc.edu)).



## Book Awards to Professors Sahar Amer and Inger Brodey

2009 proved to be a stellar year for faculty book awards. Sahar Amer, Professor of Asian Studies, and Inger Sigrun Brodey, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and adjunct faculty in Asian Studies, both won major prizes. We extend hearty congratulations to both.

At the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association of America in December 2009, Sahar Amer received the seventeenth annual Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for Comparative Literary Studies for her book *Crossing Borders: Love Between Women in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). The prize is awarded annually for an outstanding scholarly work that is written by a member of the associa-

tion and that involves at least two literatures. The selection committee paid high tribute to the book: "*Crossing Borders* is a bold and meticulous recovery of the dialogue between medieval Arabic and French literary cultures regarding the representation of female same-sex erotic experience. Sahar Amer brilliantly interrogates the cross-cultural resonances between, on the one hand, Old French texts such as Etienne de Fougères's *Le livre des manières*, the Yde et Olive narratives, and Jean Renart's *Esconfle* and, on the other, Arabic erotic treatises such as the tenth-century *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* and the narrative tradition of the *Alf layla wa layla* (One Thousand and One Nights). Her argument unfolds like an elegant critical detective story, resolving the disappearance of long-suppressed lesbian themes in the unexpected restoration of a vital encounter between Islam and the West."



Inger Brodey's new book, *Ruined by Design: Shaping Novels and Gardens in the Culture of Sensibility* (Routledge, 2008), is this year's recipient of the South Atlantic Modern Language Association Book Award. In November 2009, Dr. Brodey received her award at the annual SAMLMA meeting in Atlanta. One reviewer wrote: "*Ruined by Design* provides a brilliant analysis of the philosophical shift from reason and order toward imagination and feeling in both landscape innovations and literary experimentation during the eighteenth century." Inger Brodey was also recognized for her outstanding teaching, receiving a Chapman Family Faculty Fellowship for Distinguished Teaching from The Institute for Arts and Humanities at UNC-Chapel Hill. She will use the leave to work on her new book project, "Revenge, Law, and Nation-Making in the Western and Samurai Film," and is also pursuing ongoing research on Jane Austen's afterlives in Asia.



## Students Celebrate Chinese New Year



On February 7, 2009, the Lunar New Year Gala was celebrated. Organized and sponsored by Asian Studies and the Chinese Undergraduate Student Association, this big event drew nearly 170 students, faculty members, and their friends. All participants enjoyed diverse interactive activities from arts and crafts, karaoke, games, and wrapping dumplings to the great performances of the lion dance, martial arts, singing, and other festive dances.

## Faculty Publications and News

**Sahar Amer** received major honors in fall 2009. In addition to the Scaglione Prize, Dr. Amer's article "Medieval Arab Lesbians and 'Lesbians-Like'" (*Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 18, no. 2 (May 2009): 215-236) was selected as the September 2009 Article of the Month for the *Feminist Medieval Women and Gender Index*. UNC-Chapel Hill awarded her a Pogue Research Leave for Fall 2010 to pursue her new project, a study of representations of homosexuality in the contemporary Arab world. Dr. Amer continues to be an innovative instructor as well. She added a service learning component to her ASIA 455 class (Arabs in America) with an alternative spring break trip to Dearborn, Michigan, which is the largest Arab community in the U.S.

**Jan Bardsley** won a Tanner Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching in 2009. *Manners & Mischief: Gender and Power in Japanese Conduct Literature*, co-edited with Laura Miller, is forthcoming from University of California Press. Dr.

Bardsley also edited a special issue of *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* (vol. 36, 2009) titled "Kitchen Tales: Recipes for Resistance and Renewal," and published articles on the relationship of Japan's New Women to photography and translation. She taught the new First-Year Seminar, "Chasing Madame Butterfly."

**Mark Driscoll** was promoted to Associate Professor in July 2009 and became Coordinator of our Japanese program. His second book, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895-1945*, will be published by Duke University Press in April 2010. This book is the first treatment of Japan's imperialism to foreground the productive dynamism of life and labor. Dr. Driscoll gave invited presentations in Seoul and Tokyo last summer and will give more this coming spring, including lectures on *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque* across the pond in London and Dublin in March 2010.

**Kevin Hewison** was invited to present papers at several universities and institutes in the Asia-Pacific region during summer 2009. He presented papers in China at Yunnan University, and the National Institute of Advanced Study in Social Sciences, Fudan University, Shanghai; in Thailand at the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok; in Taiwan at Academia Sinica, Taipei; and in Australia at the Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University, Brisbane, and the Asian Research Centre, Murdoch University, Perth. He will be a visiting professor at Warwick University in the UK in spring 2010. Dr. Hewison

expanded the gateway course, "Asia: An Introduction," so that 75 students could enroll this fall.

**Li-ling Hsiao** has completed her second monograph, titled *Illustration, Theater, and Criticism: The Late Ming Illustrated Editions of Pipa ji* (in Chinese) which is currently under consideration by Press of Academia Sinica, Taipei. Most recently, she has published an article titled "Loyalty vs. Filial Piety: the Late Ming Commentaries of Pipa ji," in *Chinese Culture Quarterly*, Fall 2009, volume 7, no. 3: 2-67. Dr. Hsiao received a Grier/Woods Presbyterian Initiative Fellowship to work on her third book project, *Beyond Words: Pictorial Metaphor in the Ten Bamboo Studio Stationery Catalogue*.

**Wendan Li** completed a book manuscript during her 2008-09 Grier/Woods Presbyterian Initiative Fellowship. *Chinese Writing and Calligraphy*, forthcoming from University of Hawaii Press in May 2010, offers a description of Chinese brush writing techniques and the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy in linguistic, cultural, historical, and philosophical dimensions. Writing styles developed throughout history are also examined together with an overview of the historical development of the Chinese writing system. In fall 2009, Dr. Li taught the new course

"Chinese Language and Society," which examines the Chinese language in relation to the social, cultural, historical, and political situations in China from early history to the era of the Internet.

**Pamela Lothspeich** published her book *Epic Nation: Reimagining the Mahabharata in the Age of Empire* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009). Drawing from a wide range of literary genres, *Epic Nation* shows how the reimagining of this famous Indian epic at the height of British domination served as a form of protest and resistance to colonial rule, while also providing ideological support for the Indian nationalist movement. She also published "The Mahabharata's Imprint on Contemporary Literature and Film," in *Popular Culture in a Globalized India*, ed. K. Moti Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayake (London: Routledge, 2009), 82-94. Two grants from UNC-Chapel Hill—a University Research Council Grant and a Junior Faculty Development Award—will support her fall 2010 research in Bareilly, India where she will continue research on Indian performance traditions. In spring 2009, she co-taught with Duke and NCSU faculty a course titled, "A Passage Through India: An Introduction to Modern South Asian History and Culture."

**Yaron Shemer** published "The Hilarity of Evil: The Terrorist Drama in Israeli and Palestinian Films" in "The State of the Arts in the Middle East," a special edition of *The Middle East Institute (MEI) Viewpoints* series, May 2009. In summer 2009, Dr. Shemer was a Fellow at the Schusterman Center's Summer Institute for Israel Studies at Brandeis University. This fall, he received an Institute for Arts and Humanities Fellowship and a UNC-Chapel Hill Junior Faculty Development Award for the research project "Neighboring Identities: The Jew in Arab Cinema." In spring 2010, he will teach the new course, "Language, Exile, and Homeland in Zionist Thought and Practice."

**Afroz Taj** directed the UNC Summer in India Study Abroad program

for the eleventh year in a row. Students took courses in Hindi language and modern Indian society. Afterwards, Dr. Taj went to Islamabad as a guest of the U.S. Education Foundation in Pakistan to continue work on the Darvazah Urdu learning website, a project funded by a major grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Taj's original poetry was published in several issues of *Hindi Chetna*, a Canada-based Hindi literary journal. His article on "Hindi, Urdu, and Hindustani: Mistaken Identities" was published in the journal *Garbhanal* (vol. 35, October 2009). He has a research leave in spring 2010 to work on his book on late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Urdu opera (the Parsi Theater).

**Robin Visser** was promoted to Associate Professor in July 2009. Her forthcoming book, *Cities Surround the Countryside: Urban Aesthetics in Postsocialist China* (Duke University Press, 2010), illuminates the cultural dynamics of three decades of radical urban development in China. Interpreting fiction, cinema, visual art, architecture, and urban design, she analyzes how the aesthetics of the urban environment have shaped the emotions and behavior of individuals and cultures, and how individual and collective images of and practices in the city have produced urban aesthetics. Dr. Visser also published her translation of Yushan Huang's essay, "Women's Cinema in Taiwan since the 1990s," in *Engendering Cinema: Chinese Women Filmmakers Inside and Outside China*, Volume 1, ed. Lingzhen Wang (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). She has been active giving lectures in the U.S. and abroad, speaking at Central University for Nationalities in Jiaxing in 2009 and the "Spectacle and the City: Urbanity and Popular Culture and Art in East Asia" conference in Amsterdam in June 2010. Dr. Visser is the Interim Director of the Carolina Asia Center in spring 2010.

**Nadia Yaqub** received an American Council of Learned Societies/National Endowment for the Arts/ Social Science Research Council Fellowship 2009-10 to work on a new book that will explore the relationship between contemporary Palestinian films and the political contexts in which they are made and seen. Dr. Yaqub was also the first recipient of UNC-Chapel Hill's James Moeser Award for best small grant proposal

submitted to the University Research Council. Recent publications include "Gendering the Palestinian Political Cartoon," in "Towards a Palestinian Cultural Studies," a special issue of *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, and "Arts Under Occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip," *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 8, 2008. She gave an invited lecture, "Palestinian Road Narratives From Ghassan Kanafani to Hany Abu Assad," to the Arabic Seminar, Columbia University, September 2009.

**Gang Yue** served as the Resident Director of UNC-Chapel Hill's study abroad program in Xiamen, China in fall 2009, and also taught a course on the theme of China's rise in global influence. Dr. Yue received a Grier/Woods Presbyterian Initiative Fellowship to work on a new book manuscript tentatively titled "China's Tectonic Shifts of 2008: How Disasters and the Olympics Reveal Ideological Fault Lines and Re-Shape the Intellectual Landscape." Primarily a book of political-intellectual history aimed at capturing "the national scene," its narrative accounts will be inspired and enriched by an anthropological perspective to include select cases of grassroots social engagement in the response to major events of 2008.



*Professor Afroz Taj posing with a portrait of Ganesha*

## Grads in the Field

**Sean Green wrote his 2000 honors thesis on Japanese science fiction and earned his Ph.D. in Biology in 2009. He writes about working in Singapore.**



People often asked me when I was a student at UNC, “What on earth can you do with a degree in Biology and Asian Studies?” In 2000, when I left UNC, I had a chance to find out. A few months after graduation, I traveled to Japan, where I worked as an Assistant English Teacher (AET) through the JET program. Although I enjoyed the experience immensely, it was important for me to continue my education in a scientific field related to my Biology degree. By 2002, I had made it into graduate school at the University at Buffalo, where I tackled research on topics ranging from visual motion perception to humpback whale song, with varying degrees of success. In 2009, I at long last attained my Ph.D., and I am now in Singapore teaching the Neurobiology of Animal Communication as part of the University at Buffalo program at the Singapore Institute of Management. I am grateful to UNC for preparing me for this unique and somewhat meandering postgraduate experience.

Singapore has been an incredible experience so far. The people I’ve met have been extremely friendly and helpful. The culture is such a vibrant mix of Chinese, Indian, Malaysian, British, and many other influences that Singapore is providing me with endless opportunities to learn. If the first two weeks are any guide, the next few months (or years, if I’m lucky) will be quite an adventure.

**After graduating from UNC–Chapel Hill in 2004, Princess Small taught English in Japan and South Korea. She’s now a certified tour director in the U.S.**



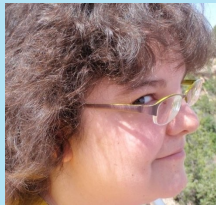
Young people and even not-so-young people have so many opportunities to explore a world that’s becoming more and more like a sprawling village. One such opportunity is the JET program, created by Japanese governmental agencies in the 1980s to foster relations between their people and English-speaking countries. I spent two eye-opening years in a city of half a million, learning the gentle art of calligraphy, being tossed around a mat in *shorinji kempo* class, and singing duets in a tiny jazz piano bar. Amidst all this, JET allowed me to discover what I valued as an independent human being and I learned lessons in and out of the classroom that have translated into life in the U.S. In the same vein, teaching ESL in South Korea added to my growth substantially by freeing me of my comfort zone, making me think more about work ethic, intercultural sensibilities, and global issues. By going out on my own, working and making a way to the best of my ability while having fun and collecting experience, I’ve uncovered facets of myself I had no way of knowing existed. Many times young and not-so-young people think they can’t do this or can’t go there, but it’s 2009. Focus on your goals and maintain perspective! The world is finally, truly, our oyster.

**After graduating from UNC–Chapel Hill in 2009, Katie Littlefield moved to Singapore.**



I am a strategic sales analyst at DigitalGlobe, a Colorado-based provider of commercial satellite imagery. Two summers of UNC study abroad programs were excellent preparation for my new life as an expat. I love exploring new cities, and I’m thrilled to have a job that pays me to roam around the hemisphere. In my quest to find things to do with my newfound freedom from college homework, I am working with the GAA to set up a Carolina Club in Singapore. We should be fully established in the next few months—just in time to welcome the 2010 group of SEAS first-years to their summer home at the National University of Singapore.

**Ash Barnes wrote her honors thesis on Japanese monsters and graduated from UNC in 2009. She loves it so much here that she hasn’t left yet.**



As the newest staff member in the Asian Studies Department at UNC, I am privileged to see my favorite professors daily, and I help to organize the same kinds of events I happily attended as a student. Most importantly, I am able to watch the department grow firsthand, and I leave campus every day knowing that I have been an essential part of that process. I intend to travel the world someday, but at the moment I am incredibly proud to call this university my true blue home.

## Students Visit Japan

Yuki Aratake took 18 students to Japan on the UNC Summer in Tokyo Program in 2009. Along with trips to Kamakura and Nikkō, and homestays with Japanese families, students enjoyed learning about Japanese tea ceremony. Pictured from left to right are Mrs. Ikuko Ikeda, Yuki Aratake, Gary Wong, Katherine Shaw, James Ray, and Jonathan Vargas.





## 2009 Senior Honors Colloquium



Six students presented their Honors Thesis research at the Annual Senior Colloquium and Student Recognition Day on April 16, 2009. The presenters were (l-r) Joshua Phelps, Katie Littlefield, Cameron Manning, Adam Jones, Ash Barnes, and Matthew Myers. Also recognized were several students associated with the Department of Asian Studies who had won honors for community service, scholarship, and post-graduate internships and fellowships.

### Make a Gift to Asian Studies

Your gift to Asian Studies supports a number of important initiatives by faculty and students, including outside speakers, cultural events, projects by student groups, and faculty travel to pedagogical workshops and professional conferences.

Please send your contribution to:

**The UNC-Chapel Hill Development Office**

**P.O. Box 309, Chapel Hill NC 27514-0309**

All contributions are tax-deductible. Thank you for your support.

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# Department of Asian Studies

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**We would like to hear from you! Please send us information for inclusion in next year's newsletter.**

- Name/degree and year \_\_\_\_\_  
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- Your recent accomplishments, awards, career changes, or any other news that you would like to share (use back if necessary, or send separate sheet):

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