

Religious Studies

San Diego State University • Spring 2008

Japanologist Joins Department Faculty

Dr. Wilburn Hansen joined the Department of Religious Studies in the Fall 2007 semester, where he taught Buddhism and World Religions. He got off to a running start by substitute teaching Religions of East Asia for part of the semester to support Prof. Julius Tsai's paternity leave.

Dr. Hansen specializes in modern Japanese religions, and focuses on Shinto and Buddhism. He lectures on ethnography, folklore, and healing, and this fall gave a public lecture on "New 'Spirits' of Japanese Nationalism—Evidence of Supernatural Patriots." His forthcoming book from the University of Hawaii Press, *When Tengu Talk*, concerns the relationship between science and the supernatural in nineteenth-century Japan.

Dr. Hansen received his A.B. in East Asian Studies from Columbia College, his M.A. in Religious Studies from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and his Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Stanford University. He taught at U.C. Santa Barbara and at Western Kentucky University before accepting the post of assistant professor of Japanese religions.

The Iowa native has spent approximately five years in Japan, since his first visit in 1989, as both a student and a teacher. The translator of numerous works of Japanese, both novels and scholarly studies, he served as co-translator of the Encyclopedia of Shinto for Kokugakuin University in



2002-2003. He met and married his wife Kelly in Japan, who will soon finish her doctorate in Japanese Literature from the University of Hawaii. Welcome Will and Kelly!

Religious Studies Hosts Important Chinese Cultural Event

On November 18, 2007 the Department of Religious Studies offered a unique glimpse into the living richness of Chinese religion and culture. In a very rare public performance, Celestial Masters Daoist priests

a temple."

The performance utilized 500 pounds of rice to design a 20-foot-long dragon, which is symbolic of the divinities of earth. Through the dramatic summoning of the dragon and



from Taiwan performed the "Pacifying the Dragon" ritual.

The day-long event drew several hundred students, faculty, and community members to Scripps Cottage on the SDSU campus. It coincided with the meeting of the American Academy of Religion in San Diego, the national professional association of Religious Studies scholars, and drew a number of attendees to campus.

Chinese scholar and Daoist Priest Li You-kun led the unique ceremony symbolizing the establishment of universal ecological harmony between humanity and nature. "This ceremony would be a rare sight even for a Chinese audience," said Julius N. Tsai, Ph.D., assistant professor of religious studies at SDSU and organizer of the event. "One might only see it at a significant anniversary of the founding of

the exorcism of the tiger—two cosmic beasts with deep resonance within Chinese tradition—the Daoist priest channels life-and-death configurations of yang and and yin forces for the good of the gathered community.

Although the ritual was performed in Chinese, Prof. Tsai provided an able and helpful commentary, explaining what was happening to the audience assembled.

Support for the event came from a variety of sources: SDSU's College of Arts & Letters, SDSU Department of Religious Studies, The Charles Wei-Hsun Fu Foundation, SDSU Institute of Chinese Studies, SDSU Arts and Letters Alumni Chapter, The Many Paths Fund of Religious Studies, Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Los Angeles, Sing Tao Buddhist Association, Vien Dong Market, Global Unified Chinese Associations from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, DDH Enterprise, Inc. and the American Academy of Religion.

Alumni Photo Album



Jeff Murico (Religious Studies '07) and Emily Giles (SDSU '07) both took REL S 358, Death, Dying and the Afterlife in Spring '07 before graduation. This fall they constructed their own ofrenda for El Dia de los Muertos, and invited friends over to memorialize loved ones who had died. The Day of the Dead is a fiesta celebrated in Mexico and Central America which honors the dead. Jeff and Emily enjoyed building the altar, and their guests found the event both meaningful and fun.

Religious Studies Alumnus, Major See Scholars at AAR Meeting in San Diego

Cliff Delaney ('07) is shown with Dr. James Cone, pre-eminent scholar of Black Theology. The department's Prof. Roy Whitaker (SDSU Religious Studies '97) took two Religious Studies students, Cliff Delaney and Goldman Jacobs, to the American Academy of Religion Convention this past November. Held in San Diego in 2007, the AAR convention saw more than 7,000 scholars descend upon the convention center. Prof. Whitaker, who taught a course in African American Religion in Fall '07, was able to introduce students to a number of his own academic mentors at the AAR, including Peter Paris, Cornel West, Brian Blunt, and Chris Tirres. He accompanied the students to sessions on topics in the field of African American Religious Studies. Most notably, they all attended an academic tribute in honor of Cornel West titled "Make It Plain: Speaking Truth to Power and Empowering the People," a Covenant with Black America

session hosted by the leader, broadcaster, author, advocate, and philanthropist Tavis Smiley. They also attended a conference on the first African American commentary on the New Testament called True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary. Besides hearing and meeting Cornel West, whose anthology on African American religion was used in the Fall '07 course, they also took the opportunity to meet and talk with Anthony Pinn, who was the author of other books used in the class. The experience helped to link course content and classroom discussions with the greater community of scholars in religion. Thanks go to Prof. Whitaker for making this happen!



Religious Studies Graduate Writes His Own "Motorcycle Diaries"

Patrick Turrietta ('07) headed south, way south, after graduation. Here is his report from the field.

Unsure of whether to pursue a career in the chaplaincy or to look for a job in a field unrelated to his major, I did the noble and courageous thing and ran away to South America for a couple months. But little did I know that once religious studies gets under one's skin, it never leaves, no matter how much bug spray or sunscreen one tries mask it with.

I found myself holding 10-foot ancondas one minute and then asking my guide how indigenous tribes adapted Catholicism into their own tribal religions; riding at breakneck speeds on a gaucho's stallion, only to be bucked off seconds later, and then inquiring why church hierarchy was so strictly enforced and expected, not only in Catholic denominations but as well as Protestant. Was it because of the strong and dominant history of the Catholic Church in this continent?
**

I left San Diego the 18th of September and they sent the package [with my camera] a week later so it's been over a month and a half in transit. Packages, as well as music, seem to take a long time to reach South America. All the popular music here from the United States is from the 80s. (I'm sorry, but the prevalence of 80s music is starting affect me)

For the most part, my travels have been confined to Bolivia. I am not complaining though. Bolivia is, by far, the most beautiful country I have visited. And it's incredibly cheap as well. I have spent the last six weeks in La Paz working at a home

for street kids and orphans. It was difficult work but rewarding. It is hard enough getting 8 to 12 year olds to do what you want them to do when you speak the same language. When you throw in a language barrier it is nearly impossible. I spent the days preparing the kids' meals, helping with household chores and homework, waking them up and getting them ready for bed, getting humbled in futbol games, and just hanging out with them. The days were long and hard but I enjoyed the time I spent there.

Right now I am in Uyuni, a small town in southern Bolivia famous for its salt flat, the largest in the world. I spent the last three days exploring this surreal landscape in a 4x4. It was an incredible experience and despite the fact that I was stricken with a wicked case of food poisoning, I enjoyed the vast openness of the Salar de Uyuni. I return tonight to La Paz where I will be catching a bus headed for Cuzco, Peru and afterwards, spending the next four days hiking the famed Inca Trail to Machu Pichu. Hopefully, Pachamama will grant me clear skies and cool weather along the way. On a side note, it is interesting to see the way western religions, mainly Christianity, have been adapted and integrated to fit with those of the



indigenous people. I wonder if this is the work of the missionaries or the people themselves. Considering the history of the majority of Christian missionaries, I have a feeling it was the work of the natives.
**

My friends and I decided to rent a car for our journey to Patagonia and, let's just say, it's been interesting.

Calling All Religious Studies Alumni! Please send us photos and news about where you are and what you are doing. Whether it's new kids, new pets, new jobs, or new locations, keep us posted on what's going on in your lives. And, we'd like to keep you up-to-date on happenings in Religious Studies with newsletters, announcements, and flyers. We promise no spam!!



Willard L. Johnson 1939 - 2006

Professor Willard L. Johnson, Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies, died on 29 December 2006, of cancer. His wife, Livia Berg, survives him.

Prof. Will, as his students called him, started teaching part-time in Religious Studies at SDSU in 1977, and joined the faculty in a fulltime tenure-track position in 1988. He was an adjunct professor in American Indian Studies and served on the Advisory Committee for the program. He officially retired from SDSU in 2001, although he continued to teach in Religious Studies until 2004.

An avid explorer of all aspects of religious experience, Will taught pop-

ular classes in World Religions, the Dynamics of Religious Experience, Religion and Psychology, Shamanism, Native American Religions, Religions of India, and Religions of China. As a child, Will attended the International School of Geneva, where he learned French, before traveling with his family throughout Europe, to Tangiers and the Middle East. He graduated from Oberlin College with a B.A. in History and Philosophy (1961), and from there moved to India, where he taught at the American College (for men) and the Lady Doak College (for women), and traveled throughout Asia, visiting Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Japan.

After returning to the U.S., Will turned to the academic study of Sanskrit. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1972), with a specialty in Indian Languages and Literatures. The University of California Press published his dissertation, *Poetry and Speculation of the Rg Veda* (1980), a book that interprets the imagery of the most enigmatic verses of the Rg Veda.

Will went on to an exceptional academic career that included the publication of a wide array of articles (26) and four more books. These included *The Buddhist Religion*, now called *Buddhist Religions*, a textbook begun by Will's mentor Richard H. Robinson, and which Will himself saw through five editions. Perhaps his

best-known book is *Riding the Ox Home: A History of Meditation from Shamanism to Science* (1982). This book attempts a world history and description of meditation, a life-long pursuit of his.

Will was a wonderful colleague. He loved life and considered it a mystery. He loved students, and taught Freshman Success classes each fall. He founded the Society for the Academic Study of Religion, the student organization in Religious Studies at SDSU, and for many years led weekly meditation sessions for students.

In an autobiographical note that he distributed to students in his classes, Will wrote: "I am excited about teaching this class and eager to lead you through the understandings presented by our textbooks... I have taught this class many times before, and still consider myself learning about its topics, so please join me in the adventure of learning!"

—Linda Holler

A Postscript: The October fires that swept through San Diego county in 2007 threatened the house on Mount Palomar that Will and Livia shared. Although there was some fire damage to the garage, most of the house remained intact. Miraculously, the fire surrounded the tree where Will's ashes had been buried, but did not touch the tree.

Thanks Go to Our Friends!

We would like to thank the friends of the Department of Religious Studies for their on-going support of our programs. If you would like to see your name on this list, please make a contribution to help underwrite commencement ceremonies, honorariums for guest speakers, research expenses, scholarships, and other programs needed by Religious Studies students and faculty.

Honor Roll

Peter Dragin (Religious Studies '01)

Stephen J. Mather

Harriet Newmark (Religious Studies student in her 80s!!)

Helen and Alan Sparks (Alan was Religious Studies Department

Chair in the 1990s and continues to teach World Religions)

Julie Werner (Religious Studies '03) and The Many Paths Fund

Your Name Here!

To get on the Religious Studies mailing list, to make a contribution, to send a photo and article, or to just stay in touch, please fill out the form below, or email us your information: mbolthou@mail.sdsu.edu

Name _____

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Melissa Bolthouse Joins Department

Melissa Bolthouse became the Administrative Coordinator for Religious Studies and Classics and Humanities in June 2007. She replaced Margie Hoagland, who became the Administrative Coordinator for the Astronomy Department at SDSU.



Ms. Bolthouse served as receptionist for the Dean's office in the SDSU College of Arts and Letters for three years. Prior to that she was in Event Fundraising, working for several nonprofit organizations.

She has a B.A. in International Relations from Evergreen State College in Washington State, with a specialty in Southeast Asian Studies. She is working on her first novel and continues her studies by auditing classes at SDSU. She plans to work toward a graduate degree in writing or literature.

What Religious Studies Faculty Are Up To...

Service

Prof. Samy Swayd organized 3 public lectures on Religious Diasporas in Spring '07, co-sponsored by the Department of Religious Studies and the Institute of Diaspora Studies at SDSU. Speakers included Karen Leonard, U.C., Irvine; Tariq Modood, University of Bristol (England); and Gabriel Sheffer, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Prof. Sthaneshwar Timalsina organized two public lectures in Fall '07. He brought Dr. Jeffrey Lidke, one of the leading scholars of South Asian Cultures, to campus to perform on the tabla. He then brought Lama Rinchen Phuntsok, a scholar and meditation master of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Faculty continue to serve as public scholars, interpreting research to the wider community. Profs. Julius Tsai and Will Hansen made presentations to OASIS, an adult-learning center in San Diego... Prof. Rebecca Moore spoke to the local Humanist Association, led a class in Gnosticism at San Diego School for Christian Studies, and continues to give lectures at the Senior Center at Beth Jacobs Synagogue... Prof. Risa Levitt Kohn gave literally dozens of talks to scholars, school groups, religious groups, and others as part of her work as Curator of the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit at the San Diego Natural History Museum. More than 400,000 people saw the six-months-long exhibit, while normal attendance for the entire year is usually under 300,000... Prof. Yehuda Shabatay incorporated the scrolls exhibit into several assignments for his Hebrew

Bible class, and 40 students went on a group tour of the scrolls with him... Prof. John Gillman taught a course on the Psalms, along with his wife Dr. Florence Gillman, at the Holy Spirit Seminary College of Theology and Philosophy in Hong Kong last May... Prof. Khaleel Mohammed spoke at the Atheist Convention in Toronto, at the Ner Tamid Synagogue in San Diego, at the Chautauqua Institute in New York, and at the Hillel Center in San Jose... Prof. Pat Boni continues to lecture through the Osher Institute, part of SDSU's College of Extended Studies... Prof. Mary Kelly is developing a course on religion and gender for the fall '08 semester... Prof. Scott Meltzer continues to lead the Congregation at Ohr Shalom Synagogue and teach Exploring the Bible to SDSU undergraduates.

Transitions

In December 2007, Prof. Brad Kirkegard, Lecturer in Bible, completed his doctorate in Religious Studies with a specialty in Early Christianity from the University of Pennsylvania... Prof. Bernard Cooke, Lecturer in Bible, retired (again) after teaching in the department for two years. Dr. Cooke will continue to teach Religious Studies courses through various continuing education programs... Prof. Howard Mueller, Lecturer in World Religions and Asian Religions, retired (again) due to health issues. Dr. Mueller will be greatly missed by students who enjoyed his approach to religious studies... Prof. Rita Cefalu, Lecturer in World Religions and in Bible, Prof. Lori Stewart, Lecturer in World

Religions, and Prof. Pam Fox Kuhlken, Lecturer in Bible, joined the faculty this past year.

Publications

Shaker Verlag, a respected European press in religious studies and Indology, published Prof. Sthaneshwar Timalsina's book Seeing and Appearance, an analysis of the Advaita philosophy of non-dual awareness-in-itself. Routledge Press will publish his second volume, Consciousness and Reality, this coming year... Prof. Jesse Thomas published an article on the "Psychology of Religion" in the Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies (Liturgical Press, 2007)... The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland awarded the first Professor Mary Boyce Prize for an Article Relating to the Study of Religion in Asia to Prof. Julius Tsai for his article "Reading The Inner Biography of the Perfected Person of Purple Solarity: Religion and Society in an Early Daoist Hagiography"... Rowman and Littlefield brought out A Portable God: The Origin of Judaism and Christianity, by Profs. Risa Levitt Kohn and Rebecca Moore. The co-authors discussed the book at the Robert Siegel Memorial Lecture at the San Diego Jewish Book Fair... Prof. Pat Boni is co-editing a collection of the letters of renowned Jewish theologian and philosopher Martin Buber... Prof. Khaleel Mohammed is co-editing the volume Coming to Terms with the Qur'an for Islamic Publications International and is working on several other books, including Misinterpreting the Qur'an and Islamic Law Maxims.



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