

ASIANetwork Member Profile

Asian Studies at Furman University

Jim Leavell

Chair, Department of Asian Studies

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

Furman, founded in 1826 by South Carolina Baptists, is the sixty-fourth oldest college in the nation. Issachar Roberts, associated with the origins of the Taiping movement, attended Furman as did scores of other Baptist missionaries to Asia. One might assume that the study of Asia grew out of this 19th century evangelistic zeal, but as we know, history is rarely so neat. Academic Asian Studies at Furman was spawned by the curricular idealism of 1960s.

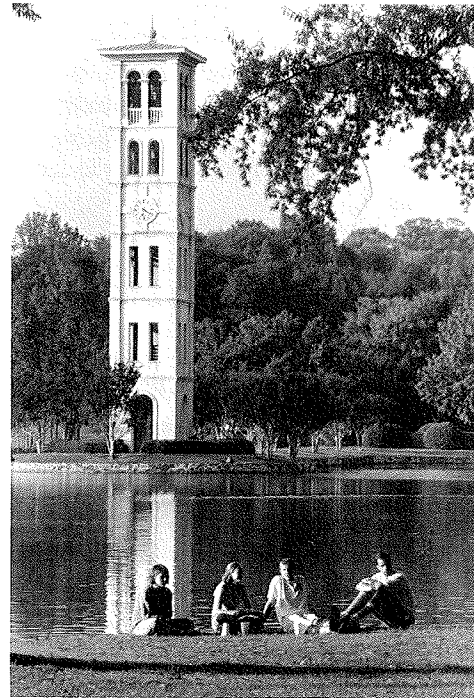
In 1968, well in advance of American higher education's increasingly healthy recognition of Asia's importance, the Furman faculty began requiring every student, regardless of major, to take a course on Asia or Africa to qualify for graduation. The faculty was inspired by the notion that no individual can be considered liberally educated without an appreciation of a culture other than his or her own. This decision was particularly remarkable since only one faculty member at the time, Ed Jones, had any academic training in such areas. Clearly the immediate task was to provide courses to meet the new need. The initial strategy was to "retool" several faculty members who were at the time in mid-career. Availability of funding for study in South Asia allowed Jones to organize a summer faculty development program designed to "jump start" Asian course development in history, art, literature, economic development, and religion. Job Thomas (Davidson College) served as the primary resource person for the group.

While "retooling" continues even today, various academic departments soon recognized the value of adding a formally-trained Asian specialist. The first, a Chinese political scientist, was hired in 1973. At present we have seven faculty members with graduate degrees in some area of Asian Studies. Three represent the second generation of Asianists having been hired to fill posts vacated by retirement. With the exception of the language teachers, all of us also teach non-Asian courses in our academic disciplines.

In 1987 Furman created a Department of Asian Studies. From that time all Asianists have maintained a dual appointment with both Asian Studies and a more traditionally defined discipline-specific department.

CURRENT FACULTY (rank and date hired)

Jim Leavell (Herring Professor of Asian Studies, 1974) teaches courses in Japanese and Chinese political, religious and art history. His current research interest is Japanese pilgrimage. He is currently serving as department chair and is active in Furman's program to utilize technology



Furman University Campus

in classroom teaching.

David Shaner (Poteat Professor of Asian Studies, 1982) edits a book series on philosophy and science for SUNY Press. As an Aikido master, he trained the two students who won the team world championship in 1997. His dissertation at the University of Hawaii was on Kukai and Dogen.

Long Xu (Associate Professor of Chinese Language, 1988) established our foreign study program in Shanghai which has grown dramatically during the last three years. He directs the Chinese language house and publishes English translations of modern Chinese literature.

Shusuke Yagi (Associate Professor of Japanese Language, 1989) is currently teaching an experimental introductory Japanese course using video conferencing. This project is funded by a Mellon grant which allows Dr. Yagi to simultaneously teach two groups of students—one at Wofford College and the other here on the Furman campus. As a trained anthropologist his doctoral dissertation on folk religion focused on Thailand where he spent his teen years. We had originally hoped he would be teaching some anthropology courses, but the success of the Japanese language program has absorbed his entire teaching load. He directs our Japanese language house.

Sam Britt (Associate Professor of Religion, 1992) has done research in India, China and Africa. As part of his sabbatical leave he is currently teaching Asian religion at Kansai Gaidai University. Dr. Britt is co-director of the South Carolina team working on Harvard's Pluralism Project.

Kailash Khandke (Assistant Professor of Economics, 1995). Although a native of Bombay, his interest in the economics of the Pacific Rim only developed after joining the Furman faculty. He specializes in the political economies of developing nations.

Demerie Faitler (Assistant Professor of History, 1996) is a historian of Song intellectual history. She is the energetic faculty sponsor of the ASIA Club and has interests in Chinese medicine and women's issues. Dr. Faitler participated in the ASIANetwork seminar to India directed by Job Thomas.

Kate Palmer (Assistant Professor of Political Science, 1997) researches Chinese minorities. She led our program in Shanghai during the fall of 1999.

Furman's Asian specialists have been active regionally and nationally. As one of the founding institutions of the South Atlantic States Association for Asian and African Studies (SASASAAS), Furman provided the executive director for several years. A Furman Asianist served as the director for the South Carolina Consortium for International Studies (SCCIS) during its first ten years. When the idea for A.S.I.A.N. had its origin at St. Andrews College, Furman faculty were among the first invited to help develop the concept. Two of our people have been elected to the presidency of the Southeast Regional Conference of the Association for Asian Studies (SER/AAS). One currently serves as an editor of the *Southeast Review of Asian Studies*, an interdisciplinary journal published by SER/AAS.

CURRENT PROGRAMS

Student foreign study was an early development following the curricular changes in the 1960s. Furman and Gustavus Adolphus became the first schools to link formally with Kansai Gaidai University in what is now the strongest undergraduate exchange program in Japan. During the fall of 1999 we sent twenty-six students on our own program located at East China Normal University in Shanghai. We have recently joined the program at Hong Kong Baptist University.

New dorms at Furman allowed us to create language houses for Japanese and Chinese in the fall of 1998. Students have organized the Furman University Japan Interest (FUJI) club as well as a broader Asia Club.

We are fortunate to be located on the outskirts of Greenville, SC where the large South Asian population has built a Vedic Center. Our students are invited to a variety of religious ceremonies and festivals throughout each year. Our courses in Japanese art and culture are enriched by the local Nippon Center's traditional tea room, extensive gardens, and seasonal festivals.

FURMAN'S ASIAN STUDIES MAJOR

The standard major at Furman consists of eight four-hour courses. (With few exceptions classes meet five-days per week.) Furman's academic calendar is a three-two-three arrangement with a short January-February term. In the spring of 1999 we had twenty Asian Studies majors and



Dr. Long Xu teaching a Chinese language class

several "fellow travelers."

An Asian Studies major must take. . .

An Asian language: Majors are required to take through the 21 level of Chinese or Japanese. The 21-level course counts toward the eight-course major requirement.

Two courses in history:

- Survey of South Asian (Indian) History [Faitler]
- Cultural History of China [Faitler/Leavell]
- History of Modern China [Faitler/Leavell]
- Cultural History of Japan (premodern) [Leavell]
- History of Modern Japan [Leavell]
- History of Japanese Religion [Leavell]

One course in social science:

- Asian Economics [Khandke]
- Politics of China [Palmer]
- Politics of South Asia [Palmer]
- Politics of Asia [Palmer]
- Issues in Chinese Politics [Palmer]

One course in fine arts or literature:

- The Arts of China and Japan [Leavell]
- Survey of Chinese Literature [Xu]
- Classic Chinese Fiction [Xu]
- Twentieth Century Chinese Literature [Xu]
- Modern Japanese Literature [Yagi]

One course in religion or philosophy:

- Philosophy of India [Shaner]
- Philosophy of China [Shaner]
- Philosophy of Japan [Shaner]
- Hinduism [Britt]
- Buddhism [Britt]
- History of Japanese Religion [Leavell]

One senior seminar/research project

One course in each of three Asian regional areas

Most courses in the Asian Studies curriculum carry both disciplinary credit (history, literature, etc.) and regional credit (India, China, Japan).

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