

# Writing and Culture in East Asia

ASIA 300 {TERM 1, 2018}

Buchanan B215, Tu + Th 11:00 am – 12:30 pm

Dr. Bruce Rusk

△ Asian Centre, rm. 404



Tu 2:00–3:00 pm + by appointment

✉ bruce.rusk@ubc.ca



(604) 822-5183

## Introduction

In this class we will explore the functions of writing in East Asia—loosely defined, of those places that have used Chinese characters and scripts related to them. Since the invention of Chinese characters over 3,000 years ago, writing has played a prominent role in politics, religion, the arts, science and scholarship in East Asia, yet its form and meaning have never been fixed and have often been the object of contention.

Writing has affected the lives of people in East Asia throughout recorded history—even those, the majority until the twentieth century, who could not read or write. Nearly every aspect of East Asian civilization is in some way canvassed to the issue of writing, but we will focus on three recurring topics:

- The origins of writing and its adaptation to new settings
- Conversations between writing and power, both human and divine
- The art and craft of reading and writing

Each of these subsumes a variety of other questions, and we will discuss how the three are connected.

### 1. Origins & Trajectories

Where do Chinese characters come from? Why were they invented? How are they related to the languages spoken in China? How did speakers of other languages use and adapt them? What other writing systems have been invented or used in East Asia, and how do they differ from one another and those used elsewhere? How have these systems been unified, reformed, or replaced?

### 2. Power

How has writing served as an instrument of power, temporal or supernatural? Who controlled writing? Who controlled whom with writing? What role did writing play in communication with and control of gods, spirits, and other supernatural beings?

### 3. Art & Craft

How was writing used in the arts? How did writing become an art form of its own—calligraphy? How did and do students learn the skills of reading and writing in East Asia, from the elementary level on, and is the process of reading and writing a universal or does it take fundamentally different forms according to the cultural and linguistic setting?

## Coverage & Readings

This class covers more than 3,000 years of history over a vast area corresponding roughly to modern China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Lectures and readings will therefore be selective and eclectic, and often dependent on the availability of sources in English. Knowledge of an East Asian language may be helpful but is not expected.

**One required textbook** is available for purchase at the UBC Bookstore (you may also find it elsewhere, including online vendors). It is also on reserve at Koerner Library.



Graffito of the word *wenhua* (“culture”). Taipei, 2014.

Source: [https://graffititaiwan.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/pieces\\_cinemapark\\_taipei-5.jpg](https://graffititaiwan.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/pieces_cinemapark_taipei-5.jpg)

- Andrew Robinson, *Writing and Script: A Very Short Introduction*

Additional material is in a **printed course pack** available at the bookstore, and some items will be made available electronically via Canvas.

### Course Requirements

**Regular attendance** and active participation in class discussions are required and constitute an important component of the course.

**Participation** will count for 20% of your total mark. Your score will be based on active, thoughtful, and well-prepared participation in class discussions, group activities, and optionally with postings to the Canvas forum (excluding required assignments).

If you know beforehand that you will miss a session, please inform the instructor as far in advance as possible; in cases of medical or other emergencies, please notify the instructor as soon as possible. In either case, be ready to provide appropriate documentation in a timely fashion or the absence will not be considered excused.

Several **writing assignments** of varying length will be given over the course of the term, either in class or take-home. Some will be marked for a grade and others only checked for completeness. Unannounced pop quizzes based on assigned readings may also be given and will count toward this component of the class.

In addition, every student will post to Canvas a total of **four** short (250–750 word) **response papers** based on assigned readings or on one of the two documentary films we will watch in class. **Two responses** must be completed **before the midterm** and **two after the midterm**; only one may be submitted in a given week, and none in the first, eighth, or last week of class. Otherwise, you may submit responses whenever you wish—they will not be specifically assigned or announced.

Responses to readings must be posted to Canvas **by 7 pm the night before** the class for which the reading is assigned. Late postings will **not** be counted for a mark (but like other postings on the Canvas forums they will count toward the general participation mark). Responses to either of the two documentary films viewed in class, which can be submitted in lieu of one of the reading responses, may be posted by the start of the following class meeting. Response papers will be marked on a five-point scale. **Missed postings will receive a mark of zero.**

At the end of the term, you may choose three to five pieces of writing from the course of the term (include at least one from the first half, before the midterm) to revise for a **portfolio**. This should include a summary of the changes you have made and, in the case of materials not originally submitted online, a copy of the original. It will be due as a hard copy at the final class meeting.

A **take-home final examination** will be based on material (readings/films, lectures, and discussion content) from the whole term. It will ask for responses in essay form. The topic will be made available after the last class meeting and the examination will be **due on December 11**, to be submitted via Canvas.

### Note on Pronunciation and Romanization

We will be reading about and discussing many languages; none of us speak all of them. So just do your best in trying to pronounce unfamiliar words and names and be generous with others' attempts at pronunciations of languages you are familiar with.

In your own writing, try to be as accurate as possible in reproducing transliterated words. You can leave out diacritics (squiggles above or below letters), though of course you are welcome to include them. For example, the name of the Vietnamese alphabet, quộ́c ngự̃, can just be written "quoc ngu."

### Scale for responses

√-	poor work, incomplete, or off-topic	3
√	satisfactory work, complete and clear	4
√+	excellent work, exceptionally insightful or thorough	5

### Basis for final mark

Participation	20%
Reading responses	10%
Other assignments	20%
Midterm	15%
Portfolio	5%
Final examination	30%

One source of confusion is the Romanization (transcription in the Latin alphabet) of Chinese. There are two major systems of concern to us, Wade-Giles and pinyin. Wade-Giles was developed in the nineteenth century and widely used in the English-speaking world until the late twentieth century (different systems were used in French, German, etc.). Pinyin, which was introduced in China in the 1950s, is now the international standard. Most of our readings about China use pinyin but a few employ Wade-Giles. This means that the same word could be spelled differently in two readings, and it will not be obvious that they are the same; conversely, identical spellings in the two systems could represent two different words. Most of our readings use pinyin, but a few older ones use Wade-Giles, so it is important to be aware of the difference and to be able to switch between them. The Canvas page has links to information about Romanization systems, including a chart for converting between pinyin and Wade-Giles.

### **Academic Integrity and Responsibility**

As a member of this class, you are responsible for contributing to the course objectives through your participation in class activities and your written and other work and projects. In the process of coming into your own as an independent, responsible participant in the academic community, you are encouraged to seek advice, clarification, and guidance in your learning from your instructor and/or Teaching Assistant. If you decide to seek help beyond the resources of this course, you are responsible for ensuring that this help does not lead you to submit others' work as your own. If an outside tutor or other person helps you, show this policy to your tutor or helper: make sure you both understand the limits of this person's permissible contribution.

Academic communities depend on their members' honesty and integrity in representing the sources of reasoning, claims, and wordings which appear in their work. Like any other member of the academic community, you will be held responsible for the accurate representation of your sources: the means by which you produced the work you are submitting. If you are found to have misrepresented your sources and to have submitted others' work as your own, or to have submitted work for which you have already received credit in another course, penalties may follow. Your case may be forwarded to the Head of the department, who may decide that you should receive zero for the assignment. The Head will report your case to the Dean's Office, where it will remain on file. The Head may decide, in consultation with your instructor, that a greater penalty is called for, and will forward your case to the Dean's Office. After an interview in the Dean's Office, your case may be forwarded to the President's Advisory Committee on Academic Misconduct. Following a hearing in which you will be asked to account for your actions, the President may apply penalties including zero for the assignment; zero for the course; suspension from the university for a period ranging from 4 to 24 months; a notation on your permanent record. The penalty may be a combination of these.

Academic communities also depend on their members' living up to the commitments they make. By enrolling in this course, you make commitments to an academic community: you are responsible for meeting deadlines; attending class and engaging in class activities; guaranteeing that the work you submit for this course has not already been submitted for credit in another course.

All work must be handed in on time and regular attendance is required. Late assignments will be penalized 10% per day and not accepted more than three days after the deadline. Any more than three absences over the term will be reflected in participation scores, and repeated unexcused absences will reduce the participation score significantly.

**Students with more than nine unexcused absences will be ineligible for a mark above C.**

If you find that you cannot meet a deadline or cannot participate in a course activity, discuss your situation with your instructor **before** the deadline or **before** your absence, and alternate arrangements can be made if appropriate.

### **Illness and Absence**

If you experience medical, emotional, or personal problems that affect your attendance or academic performance, please notify Arts Academic Advising or your home Faculty's Advising Office. If you are registered with Access and Diversity, you should notify your instructor at least two weeks before examination dates. If you are planning to be absent for varsity athletics, family obligations, or other commitments, you should discuss your commitments with the instructor before the drop date.

ASIA 300 {Term 1, 2018} Schedule of Readings and Activities (subject to change)

Wk	Day	Topics	Readings / Activities	Assignments (due by start of class)
1	09/06	Introduction /		
2	09/11	What is writing?	C "Character Amnesia" W 1–35, 74–109	Writing sample
	09/13		C Unger, Ideogram C Boone, "Writing and Recording Knowledge"	
3	09/18	Beginnings	W 52–73, 110–117 P Tseng, "The Beginning of Written Words"	Definition
	09/20		P Bagley, "Anyang Writing and the Origin of the Chinese Writing System"	
4	09/25		P Smith, "Are Writing Systems Intelligently Designed?"	
	09/27		C Bottéro, "Cang Jie and the Invention of Writing"	Summarize thesis
5	10/02	How does writing work?	W 117–122 P Hannas, Asia's Orthographic Dilemma, Ch. 1	
	10/04		C Perfetti, "Universal Grammar of Reading"	
6	10/09		P Hannas, Asia's Orthographic Dilemma, Chs. 2–4	Compare arguments
	10/11	Adaptation	C Kornicki, Chs. 1-3	
7	10/16		P Lee, Sources of Korean Tradition, "Early Chosŏn" C Kornicki, Chs. 6-7	
	10/18		P Ledyard, "International Linguistic Background"	Letters from Beesee
8	10/23		Midterm (in class)	
	10/25		A Debate (in class)	
9	10/30	Power of writing 1	P Scott, Art of Not Being Governed	
	11/01		C Hay, "Kangxi Emperor's Brush-Traces" C Yen, Calligraphy and Power	
10	11/06	Art of writing	W 123–134 P Billeter, The Chinese Art of Writing A Nushu (film in class)	
	11/08		A Writing in Water (film in class) P Barrass, Art of Calligraphy in Modern China	
11	11/13	MOA Visit	A MOA Visit, Groups 1 and 2 (11:00 and 12:00)	Writing & Power
	11/15		A MOA Visit, Group 3 (11:00)	
12	11/20	Power of writing 2	P Csikszentmihalyi, "Protective Talismans" C videos of spirit writing C Zeitlin, "Spirit Writing and Performance"	Object report
	11/22	Writing the future	C Hessler, "Oracle Bones" P Clark, The Kokugo Revolution	
13	11/27		P Chen, "Traveling Between Languages"	Translation
	11/29	Conclusions		Portfolio
	11/29		Final examination topics announced on Canvas (after class)	
	12/09		Final examination due via Canvas	