

Script & Culture in East Asia

ASIAN 2209 / ARTH 2901 / HIST 2891V

Fall 2010 / T R 2:55–4:10 / 262 Uris Hall

Bruce Rusk

△ 382 Rockefeller Hall

✉ bruskr@cornell.edu



T 10–11, R 11–12, & by app't.



255.0723



DEZIO, graffiti of the character *chai* ("demolish"). Shanghai, 2008.

Introduction

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

Writing has affected the lives of the majority of people in East Asia for most of recorded history—even those, the majority until the twentieth century, who could not read and write. Nearly any aspect of East Asian civilization is in some way connected to the issue of writing, but we will focus on three recurring topics: (1) origins and trajectories; (2) power, both human and divine; and (3) 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 to read and write in East Asia, from the elementary level on?

Coverage & Readings

This class covers over 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 dependant on availability of sources in English. This is an introductory course with no prerequisites and no language requirement: all readings are in English. Knowledge of an East Asian language may occasionally be helpful but is not expected.

Two **required textbooks** are available for purchase at the Cornell Store (you may also find them at other bookstores, including online vendors). They are also on reserve at Uris Library.

- John de Francis, *Visible Speech: The Diverse Oneness of Writing Systems*
- Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art*
- A required course packet

Other materials will be made available on the Blackboard page through Ares course reserve (under the Tools menu on the left-hand side of the page).

Course Requirements

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

Participation will count for 30% of your total grade. Your score will be based on active, thoughtful, and well-prepared participation in discussions in class and online, including postings to the Blackboard forum. For each class meeting, one student will be designated as note-taker and summarize that day's discussion to post on the Blackboard page. Students will also be assigned to contribute to an online glossary, which will list and define difficult or unfamiliar words that we encounter in our readings. If you know that you will miss a session, please inform the instructor as far in advance as possible; in cases of medical or other emergency, 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 **short writing assignments** will be given over the course of the semester, some in class and some take-home. Some will be graded and others only checked for completeness.

In addition, you will be asked to **post online** at least six and no more than ten short (250–750 words) **response papers** based on assigned readings, films, and artifacts viewed at the Johnson Museum. At least three responses must be completed before the fall break and at least three after the break, and only one may be submitted in a given week (none the first or last week of class). Responses to readings are due at the start of the class for which the reading is assigned. Responses to artifacts and films are due within two days of the viewing. Response papers will be graded on a five-point scale.

At the end of the semester, you may choose four to six of the short assignments written over the course of the semester (include at least one from the first half of the course, before fall break) 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.

A **take-home final examination** will be based on material (readings/films, lectures, and discussion content) from the whole semester. It will ask for responses in essay form.

All written work must be original and all sources must be clearly indicated. Instances of plagiarism will be taken very seriously; please review Cornell's Code of Academic Integrity at cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html.

Note to students with disabilities: Academic adjustments can be made if you have a disability-related need; please discuss them with the instructor as early as possible and provide a letter from Student Disability Services.

Films

In addition to the assigned readings, several films will serve as supplementary material. Only one of these, *Nu shu: A Hidden Language of Women in China*, is required viewing; you can attend a showing on 10/27 or view a copy on reserve at Uris Library. The other films will be optional, but you may use base response papers on them.

Basis for final grade

Participation	30%
Response essays and short assignments	20%
Portfolio of essays/assignments	10%
Take-home final examination	40%

Scale for response papers

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

Note on Pronunciation and Romanization

We will be reading and talking about 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 writing, do try to be as accurate as possible in reproducing the spelling of 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, quốc ngữ, can just be written *quoc ngu*.

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 recently (other systems were used in French, German, etc.). Pinyin was introduced in China in the 1950s and 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. The Blackboard page links to information about Romanization systems and links to a chart for converting between pinyin and Wade-Giles.

Schedule (subject to change)

B Blackboard	P Course Packet	TT <i>Ten Thousand Things</i>	VS <i>Visible Speech</i>
Day	Topic	Reading/Activity	
R 8/26	Introduction		
T 8/31	The Present	B Kazuko Miyake, "How Young Japanese Express their Emotions" B Xu Bing, <i>Book from the Ground</i>	
R 9/2		B Hessler, "Oracle Bones"	
T 9/7	Origins	VS 1–19 P D. Keightley, "Art, Ancestors, and the Origins of Writing in China"	
R 9/9		Museum Visit (Johnson Museum; meet in lobby) TT 1–50	
T 9/14	Debates & theories	VS 20–121 TT 51–137	
W 9/15		Film: <i>Hero</i> (7 pm)	
R 9/16		P Wang Bi, commentator, <i>The Classic of Changes</i> P Tseng Yuho, <i>History of Chinese Calligraphy</i> , Ch. 1	

B Blackboard	P Course Packet	TT <i>Ten Thousand Things</i>	VS <i>Visible Speech</i>
Day	Topic	Reading/Activity	
T 9/21	The writing spirit	Museum Visit (Johnson Museum; meet in lobby)	
R 9/23			
T 9/28		P M. Csikszentmihalyi, <i>Readings in Han Chinese Thought</i> P J. Zeitlin, "Spirit-Writing and Performance" B Youtube, spirit-writing	
R 9/30		Storytelling, Professor Jane Marie Law, Johnson Museum	
T 10/5	Adaptations	VS 121–149 P Sengyou, "Record of Similarities and Differences" P P. Lee, <i>Sourcebook of Korean Civilization</i> , I	
R 10/7		VS 174–208 P J. de Francis, <i>Colonialism and Language Policy in Viet Nam</i>	
Fall Break (at least three short pieces due by this time)			
R 10/14	Different strokes for different folks	P J. Fenby, J., ed., <i>The Seventy Wonders of China</i> TT 139–213 P F. Billeter, <i>The Chinese Art of Writing</i> P <i>Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy</i>	
T 10/19		P Tseng Yuho, <i>History of Chinese Calligraphy</i> , Ch. 5 P J. Hay, "The Kangxi Emperor's Brush-Traces"	
W 10/20		Film: <i>Helvetica</i> (7 pm)	
R 10/21		Museum Visit (Johnson Museum)	
T 10/26	Who wrote, who read	P V. Mair, "Buddhism and the Rise of the Written Vernacular in East Asia"	
W 10/27		Required film: <i>Nu shu: A Hidden Language of Women in China</i> (7 pm)	
R 10/28		P J. Scott, <i>Art of Not Being Governed</i>	
T 11/2	Brains	VS 209–270 P G. Luk & E. Bialystok, "How Iconic are Chinese Characters?"	
R 11/4		P C. Perfetti, "Universal Grammar of Reading"	
T 11/9	Reform & rejection	P Lu Xun, "An Outsider's Chats about Written Language" P P. Lee, <i>Sources of Korean Tradition</i> , II	
R 11/11		Guest Speaker: Professor Ding Xiang Warner B Reform documents	
T 11/16	Calligraphy-ism	P Yen Yuehping, <i>Calligraphy and Power</i> , Ch. 3	
R 11/18		P G. Barrass, <i>The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China</i>	
T 11/23		Museum Visit (Johnson Museum)	
Thanksgiving Break			
T 11/30	Conclusions	P E. Fenellosa and E. Pound, "The Chinese Written Character"	
W 12/1		Film: <i>Densha otoko/Train Man</i> (7 pm)	

B Blackboard		P Course Packet	TT <i>Ten Thousand Things</i>	VS <i>Visible Speech</i>
Day	Topic	Reading/Activity		
R 12/2				
F 12/10	Portfolio due 2:00 pm, to mailbox in 381 Rockefeller Hall B Final examination topic announced			
W 12/15	Final examination due by 2:00 pm, to mailbox in 381 Rockefeller			