

# Writing and Culture in East Asia

ASIA 300 {TERM 1, 2024}

M + W 9:30–11:00 am, SWNG 205

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Asian Centre Rm 404

Office hours: Wednesday 11:30–12:30 or by appt.

UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam) people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.

## 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 connected to the issue of writing, but we will focus on three recurring topics:

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

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

### 1. Origins & Trajectories

Where do Chinese characters come from? How and why were they invented? How are they related to the languages spoken in East Asia and elsewhere? How did speakers of other languages use and adapt them? What other writing systems have been devised 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



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)

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?

### **Prerequisites**

There are no prerequisites or corequisites for this class. However, it is recommended for students who have taken previous coursework in Asian Studies or in related fields in the humanities. Knowledge of an East Asian language will sometimes be helpful, but it is *not* required or expected.

### **Learning Outcomes**

In this class we will focus both on core knowledge about East Asian writing and on building key skills for understanding the humanities and for expressing yourself, including:

1. Knowledge of major issues and debates in the study of writing and its history
2. Familiarity with major contemporary and historical writing systems of East Asia and their relationship to East Asian languages
3. An understanding of major uses of writing in East Asian societies and cultures
4. Identifying, summarizing, and comparing the claims made by others, in scholarly works and elsewhere
5. Synthesizing and applying ideas from multiple fields of study, and putting them in relation to one another
6. Building your own claims by defining terms, assessing arguments, and incorporating evidence
7. Expressing your understanding and ideas in writing, orally, and/or visually

Most of the course activities will involve developing one or more of these skills; see the section on Course Requirements below, linking assignments to the above outcomes (LO1 to LO7).

### **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 the topics often depend on the availability of sources in English.

Our readings will include relatively straightforward introductory materials, historical documents in English translation, and academic writing from various fields. Some of these will be challenging, and you should expect to encounter unfamiliar terms and concepts, including technical language and words from other languages. When you encounter difficult material, be prepared to read slowly and carefully, take note of and look up unfamiliar words, and make a list of questions to ask in class, in the Canvas discussion boards, and/or in conversation with the instructor (by email or in office hours).

### **Class Activities**

Class activities are marked on the schedule at the end of the syllabus. Most regular sessions will include a mix of lecture, discussion, and other activities. In general, lecture slides shown in class will be made available on Canvas before the start of the next class session.

Some short lectures will be pre-recorded and available to view on Canvas. The instructor will alert you when these are available and let you know when to view them.

There will also be one showing of a documentary film and an in-person visit to the Museum of Anthropology on campus (with multiple sessions to accommodate smaller groups). Participation in these activities is a required part of the course, but if you are unable to participate for any reason please let the instructor know as soon as possible, to make alternate arrangements.

**Basis for final mark**

Participation	15%
Reading responses	10%
Quizzes	5%
Midterm exam	15%
Writing assignments	25%
Portfolio	5%
Final examination (take-home essay)	25%

**Course Requirements**

Before each class session, you should be sure to complete the assigned reading (listed under that day on the schedule at the end of the syllabus). It is recommended that you take notes as you read, first recording general information about the assigned material (its author, title, and date, its genre or field of study), then recording main points, arguments, evidence, and your own questions, uncertainties, reflections, and links you make to other course material. Taking notes as you read helps you understand and retain the content, and also makes it easier to refresh your memory or find a particular part of a reading when you go back to it, for instance when writing about that material for an assignment.

Many class sessions will open with a **quiz** (LO1, LO2, LO3) on Canvas about the assigned material, including readings and recorded lectures. These quizzes are intended to check that you understand the major points of the material; they will consist of multiple choice and/or fill-in the blank questions. These quizzes count for 5% of the total mark; your lowest two scores will be dropped.

**Participation** (LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4, LO7) will count for 15% 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). It will also include peer review activities.

Several **writing assignments** (LO4, LO5, LO6, LO7) 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. Most of these assignments will focus on a skills and techniques that go into scholarly work in the humanities: defining terms, identifying, summarizing, and assessing the arguments found in academic writing, and integrating other’s arguments into your own writing.

In addition, every student will post to Canvas a total of **four to five** short (250–500 word) **response postings** (LO4, LO5, LO6, LO7) 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, seventh (midterm), or thirteenth (final) week of class. Otherwise, you may submit responses whenever you wish, based on material of your choice—they will not be specifically assigned or announced. Optionally, you may submit a fifth response; if you do so, only the four highest response marks will be counted.

**Responses** to readings must be posted to Canvas **by noon the day before** the class for which the reading is assigned (see the schedule at the end of the syllabus). This gives the instructor and fellow students an opportunity to read the posts in advance of the session where we will be discussing the relevant material. For that reason, late postings will **not** be counted for a mark as a Response assignment (however, 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 before the start of the following class session. Response papers will be marked on a five-point scale (see the table above). **Missed**

**postings will receive a mark of zero.** Your responses are intended to spark discussion—you can check your classmates’ postings before class to see what people are thinking about, and possibly before you start a reading to see what others have thought about it.

At the end of the term, you may choose three to five pieces of writing (including your response postings and other assigned work) from the course of the term (include at least one from the first half, before the midterm) to revise for a **portfolio** (LO7). 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.

**Marking scale for responses**

0 to 3	missing, incomplete, poor, or off-topic work
4	satisfactory work, complete and clear
5	excellent work, exceptionally insightful or thorough

A **midterm examination** (LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4, LO5) will be held on October 16, in class. It will ask you to summarize and synthesize what you have learned to that point about the course content, based on lecture, discussions, and assigned readings. The format will be announced in class beforehand; it will include an essay component.

A **take-home final examination** (LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4, LO5, LO6) 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 submitted via Canvas.

**Communicating with the Instructor**

The instructor will try to be available for any inquiries related to course content, other related questions, issues that affect your academic work, and so forth. If you have a question about specific course content that could be of interest to others, you can bring it up in the Canvas discussion forums—in the general Q&A forum for general class matters, in the weekly forums for matters specific to a reading, lecture content, or assignment. (This is participation!) I will monitor the forums regularly, but if the question is time-sensitive you can email one of us to let me know your question has been posted.

If the question is private (for example, related to your answers to an assignment), or not related to the class), you can either discuss it in office hours or email/use Canvas messaging directly.

The instructor will aim to reply within 48 hours, Monday to Friday. If the inquiry requires immediate attention, please add the word URGENT to the subject line.

**Note on Pronunciation and Romanization**

We will be reading about and discussing many languages; none of us speak all of them (we will even discuss languages that no one speaks today). 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, 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 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 of our 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 the two systems](#).

### **Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence**

In accordance with University policies, all coursework submitted is expected to be your own, unless otherwise indicated. For the purposes of this course, any text, image, etc. that is created with generative AI (including large language models such as ChatGPT) is *not* considered to be your own work. If such work is submitted without identifying its source, it may be a violation of UBC's academic integrity policies and subject to the processes described below for plagiarism. (This does not apply to sentence-level editing with tools such as Microsoft Editor and Grammarly, which may be used without further documentation.)

However, for most assignments, unless otherwise indicated by the instructor, you may use AI-generated material as the basis for all or part of your submission, under the following conditions:

1. In your submission, you clearly indicate which AI tool(s) you used (see [here](#) for a standard citation format for AI material)
2. You keep a list of all the prompts you used to generate the output and include that list; if you tried multiple prompts, provide a brief description of the process of refining the prompts
3. You include the raw output from the AI tool that you used or incorporated into your submission
4. You provide an edited/corrected version of the output as your submission, and a short reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the output, along with a description of the changes you made or how you incorporated the output into your own writing
5. You do not upload any course material, including all or part your own past assignments, writing by fellow students, course slides, or assigned readings, to an AI system (e.g., to create a summary), without the permission of the author of that material

Any portion of an assignment submitted that is based on AI-generated material will be assessed on the basis of the student's work in using the tools and evaluating the output, including recognizing errors and other shortcomings in the output.

### **University Policies**

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to

acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available [here](#).

### **Academic Integrity and Your Responsibilities**

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.

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Violations of academic integrity (i.e., misconduct) lead to the breakdown of the academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or cheating may result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam and more serious consequences may apply when the matter is referred to the Office of the Dean. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences. A more detailed description of academic integrity, including the University's policies and procedures, may be found in the [UBC Calendar: Student Conduct and Discipline](#).

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 should be handed in on time and participation is required. If circumstances make it difficult for you to participate or to submit coursework in a timely fashion, please discuss your situation with the instructor as soon as possible to make other arrangements. By default, late assignments will be penalized 10% per day and not accepted more than three days after the deadline.

### **Respectful Environment**

Our interactions in this class must adhere to the Student Code of Conduct and Respectful Environment statement.

- <https://students.ubc.ca/campus-life/student-code-conduct>
- <https://hr.ubc.ca/working-ubc/respectful-environment>

As participants we commit to fostering an inclusive, respectful, and welcoming environment. When we gather to learn, we come together with a diversity of human attributes and perspectives and multiple, intersecting identities, including differences in ability, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, position, gender, and more. These differences can be visible or invisible. We all share a responsibility to create and maintain an environment which benefits everyone taking part. All course participants are expected to treat each other with respect and consideration and alert the instructor of any concerns.

## **Illness, Absence and Academic Concessions**

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.

If you miss marked coursework for the **first time** (assignment, exam, presentation, participation in class) and the course is still in-progress, immediately submit a Student Self-Declaration to me so that your in-term concession case can be evaluated.

If this is not the first time you have requested concession or classes are over: If you are an Arts student, fill out Arts Academic Advising's [online academic concession form](#) immediately, so that an advisor can evaluate your concession case. If you are a student in a different Faculty, please consult [your Faculty's webpage on academic concession](#), and then contact me where appropriate.

## **Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities**

Academic accommodations help students with a disability or ongoing medical condition overcome challenges that may affect their academic success. Students requiring academic accommodations must register with the [Centre for Accessibility](#) (previously known as Access & Diversity). The Centre will determine that student's eligibility for accommodations in accordance with [Policy LR7: Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Academic accommodations are not determined by your instructors, and instructors should not ask you about the nature of your disability or ongoing medical condition, or request copies of your disability documentation. However, your instructor may consult with the Centre for Accessibility should the accommodations affect the essential learning outcomes of a course.

## **Course Material and Intellectual Property**

The lectures I give in this course, the course syllabus and other handouts, and the slides I use in support of the lectures, are my intellectual property, and as such are protected by law. That protection applies to the slides themselves, and your transcription (e.g. copying word-for-word) of the slides (whether or not you've added annotations).

Permission to make recordings falls within my discretion as the instructor as informed by instructional purposes, classroom order, property interests and other reasonable considerations arising in the academic context. If I do authorize you to record a lecture, the recording may only be used for the purpose of individual or group study, or for other non-commercial purposes that reasonably arise from your membership in this class.

Lecture slides and recordings of this class may not be exchanged for any commercial purpose, for compensation, or for any purpose other than your personal study. Unless authorized by me in advance and explicitly, any other commercial or any non-personal use of slides or recordings constitutes a misuse of my intellectual property and is a breach of the UBC Student Code of Conduct. I reserve the right to report students who misuse my intellectual property, and such students may be subject to disciplinary measures; see the UBC Student Code of Conduct here: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,750,0>

**ASIA 300 [Term 1, 2024] Schedule of Readings and Activities (subject to change)**

<b>Wk</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Script of the Week</b>	<b>To Read or Watch</b>	<b>+ Assignments due / * Activities</b>
<b>1</b>	09/04	What Is writing?	Mystery Scripts		
<b>2</b>	09/09		Cuneiform Hieroglyphics & "Hieroglyphics"	Robinson, <i>Writing and Script</i> Ch. 1 Unger, <i>Ideogram</i> , Chs. 1–2	<b>+ Survey</b> <b>+ Definition of writing</b>
	09/11			Boone, "Introduction: Writing and Recording Knowledge"	<b>+ Writing Sample</b>
<b>3</b>	09/16	Origins	Oracle Bone Script Bronze Script	Robinson, <i>Writing and Script</i> , Ch 2, Ch 7 (first part on Chinese writing only) Tseng, "The Beginning of Written Words"	<b>+ Definition</b> revision
	09/18			Bagley, "Anyang Writing and the Origin of the Chinese Writing System"	<b>* Translation</b>
<b>4</b>	09/23		Aramaic & its descendants	Smith, "Are Writing Systems Intelligently Designed?"	
	09/25			Bottéro, "Cang Jie and the Invention of Writing"	<b>+ Thesis summary</b>
<b>5</b>	09/30	Systems & adaptation	Kana Hangul	<b>National Day for Truth and Reconciliation</b> (no class meeting)	
	10/02			Robinson, <i>Writing and Script</i> , Ch. 5, Ch. 7 (just the last part on Japanese) Hannas, <i>Asia's Orthographic Dilemma</i> , Ch. 1	<b>+ Summary</b> peer review (10/01) <b>+ Summary</b> reflections (10/04)
<b>6</b>	10/07		Kundoku	Perfetti, "Universal Grammar of Reading" Hannas, <i>Asia's Orthographic Dilemma</i> , Chs. 3–4	
	10/09			Kornicki, <i>Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia</i> , Ch. 1–2	<b>+ Compare arguments</b>
<b>7</b>	10/14	<b>Thanksgiving holiday</b>			
	10/16	<b>Midterm</b> (in class)			
<b>8</b>	10/21	Art of writing	Sini	Billeter, <i>The Chinese Art of Writing</i> Zito, <i>Writing in Water</i> (film in class)	
	10/23			Yen, <i>Calligraphy and Power</i>	<b>* MOA visit</b>



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<b>9</b>	10/28	Power of writing	Khitan Tangut	Lee, <i>Sources of Korean Tradition</i> , "Early Chosŏn" Kornicki, <i>Languages</i> , Chs. 3, 6	<b>+ MOA Object Report</b>
	10/30			Yang, <i>Nu-Shu</i> (view on your own) Yu Li, <i>The Chinese Writing System in Asia</i> , Ch. 19	<b>* Beesee debate</b>
<b>10</b>	11/04		Phags-Pa		Scott, <i>Art of Not Being Governed</i> , Ch. 6½
	11/06				<b>+ Letter to Beesee</b>
<b>11</b>	11/11	<b>Midterm break / no class</b>			
	11/13				
<b>12</b>	11/25	Writing the future	Talismans Latinxua sinwenzi	Csikszentmihalyi, "Protective Talismans" Spirit writing	<b>+ Writing &amp; Power</b>
	11/27			Hessler, "Oracle Bones"	<b>+ Writing &amp; Power</b> peer review
<b>13</b>	12/02		Pinyin & Wubi	"Character Amnesia"	
	12/04				<b>+ Final Portfolio</b>
	12/16			<b>Final examination due via Canvas (topic announced on 12/04 after class)</b>	