

This course was last offered in Autumn 2004.

Some good links for prospective students:

- Mark Rosenfelder's excellent article on the [basic properties of Chinese characters](#).
- Simon Ager's wide-ranging site on languages and [writing systems](#).
- Mark Swofford's [guide to books on romanization](#) of East Asian languages.
- Kida Jun'ichirô's outstanding website on [the history of Japanese script and script reform](#).

How Chinese characters evolved, work, and are misunderstood

EAL&L 683 SCRIPTS OF EAST ASIA

Call No. 02450-0

Time: MW 3:30 - 5:18

Classroom: UH 066

1. Overview

This interdisciplinary course is a critical response to well-known claims made about the uniqueness of Chinese characters. It gives students an opportunity to investigate the extent to which these claims have had an impact on linguistics, literary criticism, and other scholarly disciplines in both the past and present. It highlights, through a detailed examination of the workings of the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean writing systems, the flaws of these claims; relevant experimental data from psycholinguistics are introduced, and the practical research implications of these data are pursued.

This course is aimed at students in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Linguistics, Comparative Studies, and disciplines in which semiology (semiotics) is central issue (e.g. philosophy). Because of the heterogeneous background of students taking the course, it will be sufficiently general to accommodate undergraduates approaching graduation but demanding enough for graduate students.

The course will consist of lectures and discussions that either clarify the operation of writing systems, both in general and in East Asia, or deal with the claims of uniqueness referred to above. Students will read additional materials, which will be the basis for a mid-term exam and research paper (in lieu of a final exam) of approximately 10 to 15 pages on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor. Grades will be determined by class participation (40%), the mid-term (25%), and final paper (35%).

2. Syllabus

Weeks 1-3: Introducing Chinese Characters

The instructor must be in Japan until 1 October. Therefore, instead of the first three class sessions, students will read Unger 2004 on their own to prepare for the first class discussion, which will be held on Monday 4 October. The question of the day will be: Why is the notion of Chinese characters as ideograms so alluring?

Weeks 4-5: How are characters used to write East Asian languages?

Daniels & Bright 1996 provide general information, with supporting material in Kim-Renaud 1997 for Korean, DeFrancis 1977 and Hannas 1997 for Vietnamese, and Unger 1987, 1996 for Japanese. Packard 2000 presents a cogent linguistic argument that, although Chinese tend to speak of characters rather than words, Chinese has words (often longer than one syllable) just like other languages.

Students will have proposed final assignment topics by the end of Week 5, and there will be a mid-term

examination.

Week 6-7: Psycholinguistics of Reading and Writing

How do Chinese characters function at the psychological level? Paradis, Hagiwara & Hildebrandt 1985 and Kess & Miyamoto 1999 provide the background to the experimental and clinical literature. The important dissertations of Horodeck 1987 and Matsunaga 1994 are examined in detail. (See also Matsunaga's chapter in Erbaugh 2002.) Sproat 2000 shows how one scholar has made use of Horodeck and Matsunaga's work, and situates East Asian writing within the larger context of handling all writing systems on computers.

Week 8-10: Implications for Cognitive Science and Social History

Belief in the ideographicity of Chinese characters as used in Japanese writing is in some ways even stronger than in the case of Chinese, and so deserves special attention. Seeley 1991, Twine 1991, Gottlieb 1995, and Unger 1996 discuss the political aspects of Japanese writing and script reform. Unger 1987, Lunde 1993, and Gottlieb 2000 present contrasting views on the computerization of Japanese and other East Asian scripts. (Dreyfus 1992 provides background on Artificial Intelligence.) Finally, do alternatives to the cognitivist approach to symbols and meaning (Harris 2000, Toolan 1996) hold the key?

3. Required text

J. Marshall Unger, *Ideogram: Chinese characters and the myth of disembodied meaning* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

4. Books on reserve

I've put the following titles on reserve because they are likely to be helpful for writing up the final paper and provide detailed information on topics touched upon only briefly in the classroom discussions.

| | | |
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| Peter T. Daniels and William Bright | The world's writing systems | P211 .W714 1996 |
| John DeFrancis | The Chinese language: fact and fantasy | PL1171 .D385 1984 |
| John DeFrancis | Visible speech: the diverse oneness of writing systems | P211 .D36 1989 |
| John DeFrancis | Colonialism and language policy in Viet Nam | JQ820.L3 D43 1977 |
| Hubert L. Dreyfus | What computers still can't do: a critique of artificial reason | Q335 .D74 1992 |
| Umberto Eco | The search for the perfect language | P106 .E2813 1995 |
| Mary S. Erbaugh (ed.) | Difficult characters: interdisciplinary studies of Chinese and Japanese writing | PL1171 .D54 2002 |
| Nanette [Twine] Gottlieb | Kanji politics: language policy and Japanese script | BL524.73 .G68 1995 |

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| Nanette [Twine] Gottlieb | Word-processing technology in Japan: kanji and the keyboard | Z52.4 .G68 2000 |
| Wm. C. Hannas | Asia's orthographic dilemma | PL1171 .H37 1997 |
| Roy Harris | Signs, language, and communication: integrational and segregational approaches | P90 .H384 1996 |
| Roy Harris | Signs of writing | P211 .H353 1995 |
| David Kahn | The codebreakers; the story of secret writing | Z103 .K3 |
| Joseph F. Kess, Tadao Miyamoto | The Japanese mental lexicon: psycholinguistic studies of kana and kanji processing | PL513 .K46 1999 |
| Joseph F. Kess, Tadao Miyamoto (comp.) | Japanese psycholinguistics: a classified and annotated research bibliography | PL513 .K46 1994 |
| Young-Key Kim-Renaud | The Korean alphabet: its history and structure | PL918 .K67 1997 |
| Robert K. Logan | The alphabet effect: the impact of the phonetic alphabet on the development of Western civilization | P211 .L73 1986 |
| Ken Lunde | CJKV [Chinese-Japanese- Korean-Vietnamese] information processing | PL1074.5 .L86 1999 |
| Victor H. Mair, and Yongquan Liu (ed.) | Characters and computers | PL1074.5 .C372 1991 |
| Jerome L. Packard | The morphology of Chinese: a linguistic and cognitive approach | P1230 .P34 2000 |
| Michel Paradis, Hiroko Hagiwara, Nancy Hildebrandt | Neurolinguistic aspects of the Japanese writing system | RC394.W6 P37 1985 |
| Geoffrey Sampson | Writing systems: a linguistic introduction | P211 .S36 |
| Christopher Seeley | A history of writing in Japan | PL545 .S35 1991 |
| Richard Sproat | A computational theory of writing systems | P211.4 .S67 2000 |
| Insup Taylor and David R. Olson (ed.) | Scripts and literacy: reading and learning to read alphabets, syllabaries, and characters | P211 .S42 1995 |
| Insup Taylor and M. Martin Taylor | Writing and literacy in Chinese, Korean and Japanese | PL1171 .T37 1995 |

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| Michael Toolan | Total speech: an integrational linguistic approach to language | P106 .T666 1996 |
| Nanette Twine | Language and the modern state: the reform of written Japanese | PL525.6 .T95 1991 |
| J. Marshall Unger | The fifth generation fallacy: why Japan is betting its future on artificial intelligence | QA76.85 .U54 1987 |
| J. Marshall Unger | Literacy and script reform in occupation Japan: reading between the lines | PL549 .U45 1996 |

Last Updated 12 December 2004 by [J. Marshall Unger](#)