**The History of East Asian Writing Systems**
(01:098:410 & 16:217:510)  
Spring 2020

Instructor: Professor Young-mee Yu Cho  
HC N106  
Tuesday 1:10-4:00  
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Office Hours: Tuesday 10-11 am & by appointment  
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**Course Description:**
The course examines the history of writing systems in East Asia, starting from the evaluation of oracle bone inscriptions in early China in the context of the historical development of writing in Mesopotamia and Egypt. The first part of the course will be devoted to the evolution of character-based writing in China and the importance of a “literary language” in the Sino-sphere over the past two millennia. Then, we introduce the rise of vernacular traditions, with the local development of writing in Japan and Korea in terms of the linguistic classification of written symbols (syllabic and alphabetic). In particular, the crucial role of kana in Japanese and han’gŭl in Korean will be discussed in dealing with conflicts arising from historical diglossia. In addition, we touch on related topics such as the effect of literacy on the development of each society, print culture and the calligraphy traditions, psychological aspects of writing/reading, historical attempts at reforms, and technological innovations affecting East Asian scripts in the Digital Age.

**Requirements and Grading:**

1. **Attendance/Participation** (10%): Physical attendance, timely completion of all assigned readings and active participation in all classroom discussions are mandatory.

2. **Class presentation** (10%): Each student will be responsible for one or two in-class presentations. These presentations should summarize and analyze the main arguments of the readings and pose questions about them. All other students will read in advance the selected material and be ready to pose questions about the reading.

3. **Homework** (10%) & **Quizzes** (10%): There are three at-home assignments after each major unit of the course, and at least three quizzes throughout the semester.

4. **Midterm** (20%): Students are required to acquire a broad array of historical and linguistic knowledge about the three East Asian writing systems, and will be tested on the development of
writing in China, Japan and Korea, with special attention to the relationship between language, script and culture.

5. **Final Research Presentations (10%) & Paper (30%)**: Write a research paper (10-15 pages in length) that critically reviews one area within the three writing systems covered in the course. It will be evaluated based on the logical presentation of empirical data and their analysis based on historical and/or linguistic concepts covered in class reading and discussion. For the final paper, students are strongly encouraged to use primary and secondary texts written in one of the East Asian languages, and, therefore, proficiency at least in one of the East Asian Languages is required.  **Paper due on May 4 (Monday) by noon.**

**Statement of Academic Integrity & Public Domain:**

All students writing for the course may be read and shared by all members of this class. All the work you submit in this course must have been written for this course and not another and must originate with you in form and content with all contributory sources fully and specifically acknowledged. Violations of academic integrity, such as cheating, plagiarism, helping others to violate academic integrity, or submitting another’s work as your own, will not be tolerated. Any violation will result in zero credit for that assignment and will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. Ignorance of the rules and conventions of attribution and citation is not considered a mitigating factor. See Rutgers guidelines on academic integrity at: [http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml).

**Course Materials:**

**Textbook:**


**Reference Books:**

Class Schedule:

Week 1 (1/21): Introduction
How natural languages are represented graphically throughout the world?
- Fromkin, et al. (2011): An Introduction to Language, Chapters 1, 3, 7, 12
- Diamond (1997) Chapter 12 “Blue Prints and Borrowed Letters” (215-238) in Guns, Germs, and Steel

Characteristics of Chinese, Korean and Japanese languages
Facts about the World’s Languages (2001)

Week 2 (1/28): The Historical Origins of Writing
Coulmas (2003): “What is Writing?” (1-17)

Weeks 3&4 (2/4, 2/11): Writing in Early China
Mair, Victor (1999): “Modern Chinese Writing” (200-208) in The World’s Writing Systems

[Optional]
Cross (1989): “The Invention and the Development of the Alphabet” (77-89)

Week 5 (2/18): Test on C, K, J Phonology & Romanization Systems
*Wiki project:
1. Each group (C, K, J) examines relevant entries and write a one-page rationale of your project.
2. Contribute three paragraphs (of revision and addition) to wikipedia by midnight 2/24 (Mon).
3. Submit your 2-3 page report of your project (including a summary of the above process and a screenshot of your contributions highlighted) on 2/25.

Adaptations on Chinese Characters
Lee and Ramsey (2000): Chapter 2 “Korean Writing” (13-60)

[Optional]
**Weeks 6&7 (2/25, 3/5): Writing in Early Japan**

**Weeks 8-9 (3/10, 3/24): The Korean Invention**
Ledyard, Gari (1998): The Korean Language Reform of 1446: The Origin, Background, and Early History of the Korean Alphabet
King, Ross (1996): “Korean Writing” (218-227) in The World’s Writing Systems

**Midterm: 3/31**

**Week 11 (4/7): Literacy/Print Culture/ Calligraphy**

**Week 12 (4/14): Writing Reforms & Digitalization of East Asian Scripts**
Coulmas (1992): “Writing Reform: Conditions and Implications” (241-263)
Taylor and Taylor (2014): Chapter 7 “Reforming Spoken and Written Chinese” (112-129)

[Optional]
Daniels, Peter (1996): “Analog and Digital Writing” (883-892) in The World’s Writing Systems
“Online Symposium: Book Culture at the Crossroads” (archived articles from 2002-2004 on Chinese, Korean, and Japanese print and electronic media)


Conclusion
East Asian Writing: Overviews and Mental Processing
Tranter, Nicholas (2001): “Script ‘Borrowing,’ Cultural Influence, and the Development of the Written Vernacular in East Asia” (180-204) in Language Change in East Asia (Curzon)
Harris, R.(2000): “Ideographic Hallucinations” (138-161) in Rethinking Writing (Indiana U. Press)
Taylor and Taylor (2014): Chapter 23 “Eye Movements and Text Writing in East Asia” (365-379), Chapter 24 “Reading and the Brain” (380-394)