

EALL 399: Writing in East Asia: From Graphs to GIFs

Summer 2025

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Course Description and Goals

This study abroad course, taking place in Taipei, Taiwan, and Kyoto, Japan, explores the linguistic, historical, and cultural features of East Asia's three dominant writing systems of: Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. The three open up fundamental questions about the nature of writing, since each of them represents language according to a distinct logic: logographic or morphographic (Chinese), syllabic (Japanese), and alphabetic (Korean). Over the centuries, writing in China, Japan, and Korea has become inextricably intertwined with the political and cultural worlds of their users, providing key touchstones for the expression of individual and collective identities. They continue to play this role today, even while communication platforms with a global reach have helped transform them into a digital phenomenon, often driven by innovations developed in East Asia (e.g. *emoji*, created by a Japanese engineer in 1998). We will closely investigate these historical and cultural dynamics throughout the summer, taking advantage of the rich resources for field learning in Taipei and Kyoto. We will additionally devote some time to study and practice of Chinese and Japanese, with students divided into groups according to their familiarity with either language (from beginning to more advanced).

By the end of the course, students will have a broad understanding of the historical development of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, as well as the role of writing in contemporary politics and culture. In addition, they will be able to answer key theoretical questions in the study of writing (e.g. What is the difference between writing and symbols? What is the relationship between writing and spoken language? How writing has been related to nation building? How technological innovations have influence writing?).

Learning Outcomes

1. **Describe and compare general linguistic features:** Describe and compare the features of the writing systems used in China, Japan and Korea, and assess how these systems compare to one another.
2. **Explore Historical Development:** Trace the historical evolution of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean writing systems, identifying key milestones and their impact on the political and cultural landscapes of East Asia.
3. **Analyze Writing and Identity:** Analyze how writing systems have served as tools for constructing individual and collective identities in historical and contemporary East Asia.
4. **Apply Theoretical Frameworks:** Apply theoretical frameworks to investigate critical questions about writing, such as its relationship to spoken language, its distinction from symbols, and its role in nation-building.
5. **Evaluate Writing in Technological Innovations:** Assess the influence of technological innovations, such as invention of paper, typewriter, and emoji, on the evolution and use of East Asian writing systems in global contexts.
6. **Knowledge of Chinese and Japanese:** Through lessons and practice inside and outside of class, students will learn to communicate in Chinese and Japanese at a level appropriate to their knowledge of the languages.

Students will be developing these general skills:

1. **Research:** Read professional materials to seek answers to complicated problems
2. **Communication:** Report findings effectively in oral and written formats; contribute productively to discussions; listen to others carefully and actively; contact the instructor promptly when issues arise
3. **Organization:** Manage schedule and workload effectively, making proactive plans and meeting deadlines
4. **Collaboration:** Work well with others, helping each other, contributing feedback, being inclusive
5. **Professionalism:** Act professionally

Required materials:

Writing and Literacy in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese (revised edition), by Insup Taylor and M. Martin Taylor. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2014. Available as an e-book on the UO Knight Library website.

Supplemental readings indicated on the syllabus will be available through the course Canvas page.

Requirements and evaluation

Attendance and participation (10%): Students are required to attend classes. Various activities (e.g., background survey, introductory discussion board post) will also be assigned on Canvas, and they will be counted as participation points. Students can miss up to two times without losing attendance points. However, students who miss more than 25% of the class meetings (5 classes) will receive an automatic F.

Daily reflection (20%): Students will write daily reflections on Canvas, to record the highlights of their experiences and learnings from the previous day. Each post should be 300-500 words and include one or more supporting pictures. If fieldwork was assigned on the previous day, findings should be included in the reflection.

Weekly reflection (20%): Students will write a weekly essay reflecting on their experiences and learnings, connecting them to classroom topics and excursions. Posts, including several pictures, will be published on the course blog (<https://blogs.uoregon.edu/eall399sum25/>). Each weekly reflection should be 300-1000 words.

Reading responses/annotations for the assigned readings (20%): Students will complete response and annotation assignments for the assigned readings on Canvas.

Mini-research (30%): Students will conduct mini-research projects related to course topics, presenting their findings through an oral presentation (20%) on the last day of class and a blog post (10%). Work must be entirely your own: no use of AI or chatbot helpers.

Below are some suggestions for the mini-research project. Regardless of what you decide to do, you will need to speak with the course instructors first and clear it with them, just to make sure that your idea is doable in the time we have.

- 1) *Comparison of Taipei and Kyoto*: Choose an aspect of daily life that interests you—preferably one in which writing plays a prominent role—and compare and contrast its manifestation in Taipei and Kyoto. What cultural significance does it have? How do you account for any differences you observe? Your chosen cultural phenomenon could be anything: street signage, menus in restaurants or coffee shops, maps, advertisements, etc. You will probably want to incorporate pictures and images into your project, and perhaps even interviews with locals (perhaps ask the local students that you’ll be meeting?).
- 2) *Further reading/reflection on course content*: Choose a particular subject related to writing in East Asia that interests you, and do more reading and research that will allow you to understand it in greater depth. You will want to develop a research question, and identify the particular sources or evidence that will help you answer that question.
- 3) *Invent a writing system*: Do you have an idea for a new writing system? Try your hand at inventing one! Depending on the nature of your system, it does not necessarily have to be fully complete. At the very least, your final product should describe a) the principles behind your system; b) an example of some of the characters (be they logographic/morphographic, syllabic, or alphabetic) used in your system; c) a sample sentence or statement using your system; d) an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of your system.
- 4) *Something else*: If you would prefer to do something else for your project, please come speak with the instructors.

Grading rubric

A+ (98-100): Quality of student’s performance significantly exceeds all requirements and expectations required for an A grade. (Please see note below.)

A (90-97): Quality of performance is outstanding relative to that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates mastery of course content at the highest level.

B (80-89): Quality of performance is significantly above that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates mastery of course content at a high level.

C (70-79): Quality of performance meets the course requirements in every respect; demonstrates adequate understanding of course content.

D (60-69): Quality of performance is at the minimal level necessary to pass the course, but does not fully meet the course requirements; demonstrates a marginal understanding of course content.

F (0-59): Quality of performance in the course is unacceptable and does not meet the course requirements; demonstrates an inadequate understanding of course content.

Plus (+) is added to a grade when the student’s performance is at the upper end of the range for that grade (x7-x9).

Minus (-) is added to a grade when the student’s performance is at the lower end of the range for that grade (x0-x2).

Note: A+ is available only for students who do not use extra credit assignments.

SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Weekly structure

Monday-Thursday: 9:00-12:00 language lesson, lecture, discussion
 1:00-5:00 field work, activities, excursions
 (one or a few days per week, PM hours are designated for self-directed study)

Many Fridays: Excursions

Weekends: Unstructured free time or excursion

	Topic, Readings, and activities	Student work submitted
WEEK 1	<p>8/12 – Getting oriented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introducing ourselves ○ Review of syllabus and plan for the summer ○ Understanding the neighborhood, basics of Taiwanese culture and Chinese language ○ Visiting a convenience store ○ Afternoon: Excursion to Longshan Temple, Herb Alley, and Chiang-Kai Shek Memorial Hall <p>8/13 – Defining writing and Chinese language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Language (Chinese): Zhou Wenping ○ Readings: <i>Required</i> – Taylor and Taylor, 1-18; short selection from <i>Wenxin diaolong</i> (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons), by Liu Xie. <i>Optional</i> – Saussy, “The Prestige of Writing: 文, Letter, Picture, Image, Ideography” 35-74 ○ Discussion: Worlds of writing ○ Afternoon: Excursion to National Palace Museum ○ Evening: Visit local night market <p>8/14 – Excursion to Maokong</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reading: Chapter from Benn, <i>Tea in China: A Religious and Cultural History</i> (required) ○ Morning: Gondola ride to Zhinan Temple ○ Afternoon: Maokong Tea Area <p>8/15 – The origins of Chinese writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Language (Chinese): Zhou Wenping ○ Readings: <i>Required</i> – Taylor and Taylor, 37-42; Bagley, “Anyang Writing and the Origins of the Chinese Writing System,” 190-237 ○ Discussion: Worlds of Chinese writing ○ Afternoon: unscheduled free time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading responses • Field notes, pictures, blog posts • Weekly reflection

WEEK 2	<p>8/18 – Education, literacy, and pre-modern technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language (Japanese): Visiting Family Mart Reading: <i>Required</i> – Taylor and Taylor, 89-91, 95-8 (starting with “Invention of Paper and Printing”), 103-5; Egan, “To Count Grains of Sand” (33-62) Discussion: Social and cultural contexts of writing in China Afternoon: Visit Nishiki Market <p>8/19 – Reforming Chinese in the modern era</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language (Japanese): See below Reading: <i>Required</i> – Taylor and Taylor, 112-18; Hu Shi, “A Preliminary Discussion of Language Reform” (5 pages); “Zhou Youguang, Who Made Writing Chinese as Simple as ABC, Dies at 111,” <i>New York Times</i>, January 14, 2017. <i>Optional</i> – Hessler, “The Lost Alphabets,” 401-17; Sang Bing, “The Divergence and Convergence of China’s Written and Spoken Languages: Reassessing the Vernacular Language During the May Fourth Period,” 71-93; Discussion: Making Chinese “modern” Afternoon: Visit local tatami factory <p>8/20 –Overview of Japanese Language and Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language (Japanese): See below Reading: Taylor and Taylor, Chapter 15, 257-70 Optional Yoga or Qi Gong <p>8/21 – Early Writing in Japan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language (Japanese): See below Reading: Taylor and Taylor, Chapter 16, 271-83 Afternoon: Visit Heian Shrine and Craft Museum <p>8/22 – Excursion to Nara, including Todaiji Temple and Nara Park</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading responses Field notes, pictures, blog posts Weekly reflection
WEEK 3	<p>8/25 – Kana – Japanese Syllabary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language (Japanese): See below Reading: Taylor and Taylor, Chapter 17, 284-93 Afternoon: Calligraphy Class <p>8/26 – Script Choice in Japanese</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language (Japanese): See below Reading: Robertson, W. (2019). Scripted voices: script’s role in creating Japanese manga dialogue. <i>Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics</i>, 10(1), 87-105. Afternoon: Visit to Nijo Castle <p>8/27 – Introduction to Korean and early writing in Korea</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading responses Field notes, pictures, blog posts Weekly reflection Research

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language (Japanese): See below Reading: Taylor and Taylor, Chapter 9, 157-71 <p>8/28 – Han’gūl: A “perfect” alphabet?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language (Japanese): See below Reading: Taylor and Taylor, Chapter 11, 180-98 Afternoon: Cooking Class <p>8/29-31 – Trip to Osaka</p>	
Week 4	<p>9/1 – Learning to read and write in modern East Asia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language (Japanese): Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Required</i> – Taylor and Taylor 134-40; 333-45 <i>Optional</i> – Yi-shan Tsai, “The Role of Comic Books in Literacy Education in Taiwan” (16 pages). Discussion: Learning Chinese and Japanese <p>9/2 – Modern technological change: From typewriters to computers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language (Japanese): Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Required</i> – Thomas Mullaney, “Controlling the Kanjisphere: The Rise of the Sino-Japanese Typewriter and the Birth of CJK,” 725-53. <i>Optional</i> – Thomas Mullaney, “QWERTY in China: Chinese Computing and the Radical Alphabet,” S34-S65. Afternoon: Visit Sanjusangendo <p>9/3 – Writing and digital culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language (Japanese): Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Required</i> – Nanette Gottlieb, “Playing with Language in E-Japan: Old Wine in New Bottles”; Guy Almog, “Reassessing the Evidence of Chinese ‘Character Amnesia’”, <i>China Quarterly</i> 238 (June 2019): 524-33. Afternoon: Visit Arashiyama Bamboo Forest <p>9/4 – Final class/presentations</p> <p>9/5 – Ryoanji Temple</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading responses Field notes, pictures, blog posts Weekly reflection Research presentation

***Textbooks for Japanese**

Yukiko Ogata, Kana Sumitani, Yasuko Hidari and Yukiko Watanabe (2009). *Nihongo Fun & Easy: Survival Japanese Conversation For Beginners*. ASK Publishing.
Tsukuba Language Group | Feb 1 (1996). *Situational Functional Japanese Vol 1*. Bonjinsha.