

ANS 361/LIN 350 Spring 2010

Why the Chinese Do Not Have An Alphabet

TTh 12:30-2:00 p.m.

Benedict 1.126

Dr. Chiu-Mi Lai (Léi 雷)

WCH 5.112

475-6054

cmlai@mail.utexas.edu

[All lectures, discussion and readings in English.]

Office hours: Tuesdays 2-4 p.m.; Thursdays 2-3 p.m.

Required Texts:

William G. Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System*

(New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1994)

Jerry Norman, *Chinese* (Cambridge, 1988)

S. Robert Ramsey, *The Languages of China* (Princeton, 1987)

Further Reading:

John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy* (Hawaii, 1984)

Michael Sullivan, *The Three Perfections: Chinese Painting, Poetry and Calligraphy*

(Revised edition: George Braziller, 1999) [Out of print – Paradigm Books custom printing]

Tsuen-hsuei Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk – The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions, Second Edition* (Chicago, 2004)

Course Description

This course will provide an introduction to the history of the evolution of the Chinese writing system and language. This course is open to all students and while recommended, no background in Chinese language, culture or linguistics is required. Course emphasis will be given to the study of the writing system and the cultural contexts that have preserved such a unique orthography from ancient to modern times. In this context, the course will include some discussion of the history of the Chinese language, including Chinese dialects. Lectures and discussions will focus on the cultural, historical, social, and political background against which Chinese writing and language have evolved.

- **The Chinese View of Writing and Why the Chinese Do Not Have An Alphabet**

There is no Chinese alphabet. There never has been one, and there likely never will be one. This is not to say that Chinese writing is backwards, rather it is highly developed and sophisticated. Today, as in ancient times, the system of Chinese “characters” is a viable working language that encompasses abstract as well as concrete concepts. As a result of an uninterrupted evolution since the earliest decipherable writing around 1200 B.C.E., Chinese writing is the only ancient system that does not need modern interpretation.

The earliest ancient writing systems – Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Chinese to name a few – originated in pictographic form. Recent archaeological finds of Neolithic pottery of the Dawenkou Culture (ca. 4300-2500 B.C.E.) with “pre-writing” pictographs suggest that origins of Chinese writing may be significantly earlier than any other system. Chinese also remains the only system that developed beyond the pictographic stage to a non-alphabetic system of graphs. All other systems evolved into a syllabary, namely, an alphabet.

What is the Chinese view towards writing that preserves a non-alphabetic system, even to the degree of resisting the development of an alphabet? Neighboring civilizations such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, in the development of their respective writing systems initially adopted the Chinese system in some form. These systems all developed an alphabet, although in some cases such as Japanese and Korean, Chinese characters remain in the orthography. Attempts throughout the history of the Chinese writing system to develop an alphabetic system have failed, in spite of the historically high rate of functional illiteracy. The most recent attempt in the latter half of the 20th century was made by the Chinese government under the Communist regime and the result was not an alphabet but a more complicated orthography of Chinese that includes “traditional” and “simplified” characters and a romanization system called Pinyin. (This “mock alphabet” of Pinyin has aided Western language foreigners more than the Chinese who do not consider Pinyin “real” Chinese.)

Ownership of Chinese civilization and culture is linked to claim of capability in reading and writing characters. Any other system would be considered spurious Chinese. To put it quite simply, the Chinese cultural view is inherently incapable of conceiving of Chinese as an alphabetic language. The Chinese worldview upholds writing, and not people, at the center of the civilized world. Consider, for example, the concept of citizen upon which the foundation of Western civilization rests. In contrast, evolution of Chinese civilization is marked by cultural production of writing. It is not coincidence, but by cultural design, that “writing” (*wén* 文), which originally included the meaning of “markings,” sustains the modern semantic backbone of “civilization” (*wén míng* 文明) and “culture” (*wén huà* 文化).

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- **This course will be graded on the Plus/Minus system.**
- There is no written final exam for this course.
- *Late assignments will be deducted by half a grade for each day past the due date. No assignments will be accepted after the last day of classes (5/7/10). Your final course grade will be based on work completed up to this date.*
- **Laptop Use Policy** – Classroom Laptop use for taking notes related to this course only. Please see me for an agreement form if you are planning on using a laptop in class for “notetaking.” Laptop activities unrelated to this course will lead to dismissal from class (and marked as an absence for that day). **Repeat offenders will result in a filing of a report of academic problems.**
- **Other Electronic Devices (Cell phone, Blackberry, I-Phone, etc.) Use Policy** – **All devices must be turned off during class.** Any use of these devices, including texting, websurfing, etc. will lead to dismissal from class (and marked as an absence for that day). **Repeat offenders will result in a filing of a report of academic problems.**
- There is a class attendance policy for this course.

Attendance is vital for success in this course and I value your contribution to class discussion. As well, lectures will be vital for background on historical context and schools of thought, and flesh out ideas and concepts for discussion, all of which cannot be replaced by reading lecture outlines online.

ATTENDANCE POLICY – More than 3 absences, final class participation grade deducted half a grade (e.g. A- to B+); additional half grades deducted for each additional 2 absences.

Religious Holidays – Religious holy days sometimes conflict with class and examination schedules. If you miss an examination, work assignment, or other project due to the observance of a religious holy day you will be given an opportunity to complete the work missed within a reasonable time **after** the absence. It is the policy of The University of Texas at Austin that **you must notify each of your instructors at least fourteen days prior to the classes scheduled on dates you will be absent** to observe a religious holy day.

Your grade for this course will be based on the following (see below for details):

- I. 20% *Class and online discussion, participation and “preparedness” (informal writing)*
- II. 40% *Reading and Discussion Questions*
- III. 20% *Two “Written Reports” (based on Panel Topics)*
- IV. 20% *Two Panel Oral Presentations*

- *Class attendance.*

Attendance is vital for success in this course and I value your contribution to class discussion. As well, lectures will be vital for background, and flesh out ideas and concepts for discussion, all of which cannot be replaced by reading lecture outlines online.

- *Class and online discussion, participation and “preparedness.” (20%)*

Discussion is essential for an understanding of the materials. Both verbal and written forms of expression in-class (informal writing) and online on Blackboard are emphasized in this course. Be prepared to expand on discussion questions and/or observations for class discussion days, including discussion following panel presentations.

- *Writing*

Writing is one of the most effective ways to brainstorm about ideas and to communicate our ideas in an in-depth manner. In addition to informal writing in class and online, there will be formal writing assignments.

On matters of writing at any stage, I encourage you to consult with me and/or make liberal use of the University’s Writing Center. <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/uwc>

Discussion Questions (40%)

There is NO make-up of Discussion Questions – the lowest grade (including 0 for a missed DQ) will be dropped in the final average.

Formulated “Discussions Questions” based on the material covered in Tuesday class lectures will be posted weekly on Blackboard to facilitate discussion for Thursday class discussions. For these class discussions, **at the start of class**, you will be expected to develop in written form one or more of these discussion questions into a longer and more thoughtful response. These discussion questions will be collected, read, and given feedback, and assigned a grade. Some of these topics will continue online on Blackboard.

Entries online will be recorded towards your class participation grade (see above), but not assigned a formal grade.

These discussion question responses are exercises in developing your ideas and observations – some of these will evolve into a formal essay. I would like you to regard informal writing as ongoing drafts, therefore you are NOT expected to focus on presentation (organization, clarity, usage of English). Rather, the focus is on thinking, analysis, and brainstorming in written form.

Critical Writing (20%)

Two Written Reports (each 4-5 pages, typed, double-space) due ten days after your panel oral presentation.

***Papers must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. of your due date on Blackboard under Assignments. Late assignments deducted half a grade for each day past due date.**

The written report is a research-based paper on a chosen topic that should be related to your panel oral presentation. Additional reading may be recommended for panel topics. I look to your papers to reflect responsible research, thoughtful observations and clear analysis regarding your chosen topic; incorporate relevant ideas and works from background reading, in-class and online discussion, and lectures; and last but not least, to reflect something of your own inspired interest in the topic. Footnotes or endnotes are required. (Citation guidelines on Blackboard.) Plagiarism will not be tolerated and consequences will include failure of assignment and may lead to failure of the course.

I expect you to proof your work carefully and to hand in final drafts with minimal errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Your paper will be assessed two grades, evaluated on the following:

Content Discussion of topic (including assimilation of research, background reading, discussion, lectures), expression of ideas and opinions, observations, etc.

Presentation Organization, clarity of expression of ideas and opinions, proper usage of English

- *Panel Presentations (20%)*

Two Oral Presentations on Panel Forums (5-10 minutes presentations, depending on class size). Panel topic forums to be determined (tentative topics listed below) – you are required to participate in one panel forum for each section. The process of preparing an oral presentation of one’s ideas is an integral part of developing ideas and refining observations. A prepared oral presentation is an excellent exercise in abstracting the essence of one’s ideas, basically “getting to the point,” and supporting one’s point with meaningful examples. The panel presentations will allow us to share ideas and research findings with one another in a formalized forum. The process in preparing the oral presentations is also designed to assist you in the refining stages of your written reports.

Your presentation will be evaluated on **Content and Presentation** as outlined above (under *Critical Writing*). You will not be directly assessed on oratory skills but a well-spoken and well-timed talk will greatly contribute to a communication of your ideas. As

well, oral presentations are always good practice for something you will be called upon to do at some point in your life and career, long after you leave the classroom.

- **Section I Panel Forums – Writing Systems**

Week 5 – Writing Mediums

Week 6 – Ancient and Early Writing Systems

Week 7 – Early Debates on Chinese Writing System, Calligraphic Scripts

Week 8 – Modern Chinese Orthography

- **Section II Panel Forums – Languages/Dialects**

Week 12 – Spoken Chinese: Historical Development, Adaptability and Idiomatic Usage of Tones and

Pronunciation (including phonetic usage), Grammar and Usage

Week 13 – Written Chinese: Historical Development, Adaptability and Idiomatic Usage of Grammar

and Syntax (including semantic usage), Classical and Vernacular Chinese

Week 14 – Dialects and Minority Languages of China

*****Applies to Graduate Students Only*****

For Graduate-Level Credit:

- **Complete a Conference Course Form and turn in by the add/drop date.**
- **See me to discuss details on additional reading and assignments.**

SCHEDULE

*Detailed class and reading assignments will be posted/handed out for each section.
All sections will be supplemented by lecture outlines and notes by instructor.*

**Weeks 1-8 Section I – Writing System
Panel Presentations in Weeks 5, 6, 7, 8**

(Week 9 Spring Break)

**Weeks 10-16 Section II – Language
Panel Presentations in Weeks 12, 13, 14**

NOTE – There is no written final exam for this course.

Use of Blackboard

This course uses Blackboard, a Web-based course management system in which a password-protected site is created for each course. Blackboard can be used to distribute course materials, to communicate and collaborate online, to post grades, to submit assignments, and to take online quizzes and surveys.

You will be responsible for checking the Blackboard course site regularly for class work and announcements. As with all computer systems, there are occasional scheduled downtimes as well as unanticipated disruptions. Notifications of these disruptions will be posted on the Blackboard login page. Scheduled downtimes are **not** an excuse for late work. However, if there is an unscheduled downtime for a significant period of time, I will make an adjustment if it occurs close to the due date.

Blackboard is available at <http://courses.utexas.edu>. Support is provided by the ITS Help Desk at 475-9400 Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., so plan accordingly.

The Undergraduate Writing Center

The Undergraduate Writing Center provides individual, professional advice on all aspects of writing to UT undergraduates on a drop-in basis or by appointment. Location: Flawn Academic Center 211, 471-6222.

Fall 2006 hours: Monday-Thursday 9 a.m.-8 p.m. (last appointments at 4 p.m.)

Fridays 9 a.m.-3 p.m. (last appointments at 2 p.m.)

*Last consultations begin 1 hour before closing. If your paper is due in two hours or less, you cannot meet with a consultant. You will not have enough time to revise after your consultation.

Writer's Advice Line: free and open to everyone.

Email your brief query or call at 475-VERB.

Website: <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/uwc>

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON UNIVERSITY POLICIES

The University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the University is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

University Electronic Mail Notification Policy

(Use of E-mail for Official Correspondence to Students)

All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked daily, but at a minimum, twice per week. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.html>.

In this course e-mail will be used as a means of communication with students. You will be responsible for checking your e-mail regularly for class work and announcements. Note: if you are an employee of the University, your e-mail address in Blackboard is your employee address.

Documented Disability Statement

Students who require special accommodations need to get a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students (471-6259 – voice or 471-4641 – TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). This letter should be presented to the instructor in each course at the beginning of the semester and accommodations needed should be

discussed at that time. Five business days before an exam the student should remind the instructor of any testing accommodations that will be needed.

See Website below for more information: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/ssd/providing.php>