

Department: History

Course No: 1805 [107]

Credits: 3

Title: East Asian History Through Essential Hanzi

Contact: Daniel Caner

Content Area: CA1 and CA4 International

Catalog Copy: HIST 1805: East Asian History Through Essential Hanzi Either semester. Three credits.
Prerequisite: None Guanhua Wang

East Asian history taught through in-depth analysis of hanzi (Chinese character-based ideographic symbols). Students will learn how twelve essential hanzi , their meanings, and institutional manifestations changed in different regions over time

Course Information: A. Course goals and objectives: This course aims to teach East Asian history through in-depth analysis of Chinese character-based ideographic symbols called hanzi . Hanzi (kanji in Japanese and hanja in Korean) are embodiments of „ systems of meaning % for peoples of a vast territory in the Far East . Historically, what hanzi is for Confucian Asians can be compared to what Latin for was Europeans, except the former is being used even more widely than ever before throughout the world. Eleven characters are chosen for their frequent and broad usage from Shang Dynasty (1766-1050 BCE) until today in East Asia . These characters cover a wide range of social, cultural and political areas in East Asian history, from humanity, gender, familial ethics, government, crime and punishment, war and peace, to religion. By studying how the meanings of twelve essential hanzi , along with their institutional manifestations, have changed in different areas over time, students could learn aspects of Asian history more directly without being „ lost in translation % . In other words, this character-as-symbol approach to history aims at training students to be able to decipher coded meanings of vastly different cultures. This course will help students build a solid background for their further studies on topics related to East Asia , languages, and culture.

B. Course requirements This is an introductory-level history course.

Students are required to read approximately thirty pages translated classics weekly. In addition to two lectures, students are expected to participate in weekly discussions, normally on Friday. Students will also be asked to keep journals with twelve entries for the entire semester. Each entry will be a two-page analytical summary of lecture notes and readings on one particular hanzi . The journal will be reviewed by instructor and teaching assistants bi-weekly. Writings will count 30% of total grades, while the mid-term and final examinations will count the other 50%. Exams will include identifications and essays. Discussion participation will count 20% of total grades.

C. Course themes: The course concentrates on two major themes. One is how languages and socio-cultural aspects of history are related. The second is how meanings of words change as they travel in different places over time.

The same hanzi , for example, could have vastly different meaning and institutional manifestation in ancient China and mediaeval Japan .

Week 1 Introduction to ideographs as cultural symbols, history of Chinese writings in East Asia, Hanzi : structure, sound, and meaning; Week 2 Ren (human, people) ; Week 3 Ren (humanity, humanly love); Week 4 Nu (women); Week 5 Xiao (filial piety); Week 6 Jiao (to teach or religion); Week 7 Shu (book, writing, calligraphy); Week 8 Zheng (correct, upright, or to govern); Week 9 Zui (crime and punishment); Week 10 Bing (soldier, weapon, war) ; Week 11 Bing (soldier, weapon, war); Week 12 He (peace, harmony, or things Japan); Week 13 Qi (breath, spiritual energy, or mood); Week 14 East Asia languages and cultural in modern times

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: The course fulfils the UConn General Education goals, especially the following: "2. Acquire intellectual breadth and versatility"; 6. Acquire consciousness of the diversity of human culture and experience; and 7. Acquire a working understanding of the processes by which they can continue to acquire and use knowledge." More specifically, this course fulfills General Education goal number 7 particularly well because it teaches students a method of analyzing historical forms and meanings of words so that they could "continue to acquire and use knowledge" in the future. The approach this course adopts is inspired by Raymond Williams (Keywords), Geoffrey Hughes (Words in Time: A Social History of the English Vocabulary). As Williams and Hughes show in their respective works, cultural complexity could be illuminated by analyzing terms that are widely used and extremely rich in meaning. Since hanzi is visually structured, the script is an excellent candidate for keywords or

character-as-symbol approach to history. The course is different from, yet intimately related to, language classes, especially the new courses such as "Chinese I and II" and "Languages and Cultures."

CA1 Criteria: This course engages students in "Investigations into the modes of symbolic representation" of culture, society, and history of East Asia and Southeast Asia. Hanzi serves as building blocks of official and educational languages for Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, and Chinese. Since Chinese characters are often presented in art forms, this course also engages students in "Comprehension and appreciation of written, graphic and/or performance art forms". This course provides students skills to learn "other" cultures more deeply and directly through exploring temporal and spatial changes of essential language forms, their meanings, and institutional manifestations.

CA4 Criteria: This course meets Multicultural and Diversity criteria 1 ("Emphasize that there are varieties of human experiences, perceptions, thoughts, values, and/or modes of creativity; 2. Emphasize that interpretive systems and/or social structures are cultural creations") and 3 ("Consider the similarities that may exist among diverse groups") in particular. I will help students appreciate differences as well as commonalities among three key Asian civilizations : China , Korea , and Japan . For example, by learning hanzi jia (family), students also learn family as a social institute and cultural practice in China , Japan and Korea . The same is also true with other hanzi learning. Students "acquire consciousness of the diversity of human culture and experience" by learning that the same word in hanzi could vary significantly in conceptualization and practice in East Asian history. The character " zui " (crime), for example, refers to unfortunate "occurrence" to be "purified" in ancient Japan , but evil "deeds" to be punished in traditional China . Accordingly, the judicial systems have been vastly different in the two cultures, which contributes to, among other factors, the divergent views of war crimes and accountabilities between the two peoples.

Role of Grad Students: This course has received a grant from the Provost's General Education New Course Development competition.