FA 178a: Seminar on Chinese Calligraphy: History and Practice
Summer 2019
(Tentative syllabus, to be finalized)

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Course Description and Objectives
This seminar examines the art and history of Chinese calligraphy. The goal is to introduce students of different Chinese-language levels (not limited to native-speakers) to canonical works of calligraphy as well as the enthusiasm and creativity these works have generated through the ages. From anonymous oracle bones and stone inscriptions to famed masterpieces, such as Wang Xizhi’s “Lanting Pavilion Preface,” and from original renderings to copies of others’ compositions, this course showcases the kaleidoscopic range that makes calligraphy a visual-linguistic art form beyond “words.” The multifaceted functions of stylized writing—such as for political, religious, and expressive purposes—will also be explored.

In addition to acquiring knowledge of history, students engage in hands-on study through copying and creating calligraphy. We will discuss and reflect on calligraphy aesthetics through the ages. Students will gain a better appreciation of art from concept to product. This course which crosses between art history and studio aims to train visual thinking and improve hand-eye coordination. Students will also learn the rudiments of deciphering challenging script types such as the seal and cursive scripts, and to produce calligraphy for evaluation.

This “oral communication” course requires each student to make two Powerpoint presentations: a 15-minute introduction of an assigned reading and a 25-minute presentation on their final research topic. Students will receive feedback for improvement.

A supply list is provided. Students are responsible for bringing the required calligraphy tools to class.

Success in this course requires at least nine hours of work for every three hours of class time.

Requirements

1. Attendance. Active participation in class discussions and regular completion of assignments are expected. 30%
   - Active, earnest, thoughtful and prepared (25% or up)
   - Mostly passive but diligent and attentive (20% or up)
   - Little apparent sign of engagement and preparedness (below 20%)
More than two unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade; explain your absences in writing.

Oral introduction of readings (occasional). Read assignments thoroughly, present major points, and pose questions to stimulate discussions. (To be counted as part of overall attendance.)

2. Calligraphy assignments: students will submit practice calligraphy works on a regular basis. 25%

3. Powerpoint presentation on a research topic of your choice in consultation with the professor. 20-25 minutes per presentation. 20% (Graded for clarity, time management, and organization).

4. Final research paper (approx. 10 pages); topic is identical to the oral presentation. It is a written elaboration, expansion, and refinement of the oral presentation. More instructions will be given around the middle of the semester. 25% (Graded for research effort, presentation such as proper footnoting and illustration, and writing style.)

About Readings
Weekly readings are available on LATTE (assignments are listed in the calendar below). Before coming to class students should have already done the readings assigned for the day. Students will be asked to discuss the main points and be ready to pose questions regarding their contents and assumptions. Students are expected to approach the materials thoughtfully and critically. Some of the readings are meant to provide the relevant historical background for understanding the topic of the week, while others advance specific viewpoints.

Calendar is Subject to Change; please check LATTE for updates
I: Introduction: Historical Overview
   1. Chinese Language (Written and Spoken) vs Calligraphy
   2. Different Script types
   3. Calligraphy as Performance
   4. Hands-on: How to hold the brush and your posture; making your first strokes

Readings:


II: From Pre-paper to Paper
   1. Four Treasures of the Literati Studio (Paper, Brush, Ink, and Inkstone)
   2. Shang and Zhou Dynasties (Oracle Bone Script and Great Seal Scripts)
   3. Qin Dynasty: Small Seal Script
   4. Han Dynasty: Stone and Bamboo Strips
5. Hands-on: Hidden Tip (Centered-tip) practices for Seal Script

Readings:


III: Seal Carving; Writing Auspicious Sayings:

Readings:


IV: Seal Script Practice
1. Hands-on Seal Carving
2. Learning with a digital dictionary

Readings:


V: Running Script
1. The Three Greatest Works in Running Script
   a. Wang Xizhi, “Preface of the Lanting Pavilion”
   c. Su Shi “Hanshi tie”
2. Hands-on Clerical Script
3. Seal Carving Practice Continues

Readings:
VI: Transmission and Dissemination
1. Tang Canon—Question of Copying
2. Yan Zhenqing’s “Draft Eulogy for Nephew Jiming” continues and his Regular Script
3. Librarian’s Session

Readings:


VII: Regular Script
1. Huaisu’s Autobiographical Essay
2. Scripture Copying and Engraving
3. Running Script Copying

Readings:


VIII: Rubbings and Cursive Script; Buddhism and Calligraphy (including sutra inscription)
1. Stele (Bei) vs Copybook or Model Letters (Tie)
2. Sun Guoting’s Shupu
3. Demonstration of Scroll Mounting
4. Calligraphy Project Discussion

Readings:

IX: Political and Emotional Calligraphy: Song Dynasty to Yuan Dynasty

1. Huang Tingjian’s and Ouyang Xiu’s calligraphy
2. Su Shi’s calligraphy
3. Zhao Mengfu’s calligraphy

Readings:


X: Japanese Calligraphy: Introduction

Readings:


Final Calligraphy Assignment Due

XI: Paper Consultations

XII: Oral Presentations

XIII: Ming and Qing Dynasties to Modern: Graceful to Super-emotional

1. Wen Zhengming
2. Late Ming Eccentricity
3. Northern Stele School in Modern Times
4. Calligraphy for Reform

Term Paper Due

Readings:

Mattyssen, Mieke. “Scholars should be considered the last of the Four Classes’: The Case of Zheng Banqiao.” Journal of Asian History 47, no. 2 (2013): 219-44.


* If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please provide the relevant documentation immediately.

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential Sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.