

# THE WORLD'S WRITING SYSTEMS

HUMA 1012

DIVISION OF HUMANITIES

Spring semester

LECTURER: Dr ZHU Xiaonong 朱曉農, Room 3343, Phone ext. 7797, email [hmxzhu@ust.hk](mailto:hmxzhu@ust.hk).

LECTURE TIME: Tue, Thu 16:30-17:50

OFFICE HOURS: TBA

## COURSE OBJECTIVES:

In this course you will make the acquaintance of many exotic writing systems, and have a try at creating your own scripts. Major topics to be discussed in the course include:

1. Overview of the world's writing systems.
2. A brief history of writing scripts (the development of writing in general and the Chinese script in particular).
3. Earliest scripts: Sumerian cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphs, etc.
4. Relationship between language and the script that encodes language.
5. The story of alphabet.
6. Development of the Chinese script.
7. Language reform in China: simplification and *pinyin* Romanization.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

[1] Daniels, Peter & William Bright (eds.) 1996. *The World's Writing Systems*. Oxford UP.

[2] 周有光 1987. 《世界字母簡史》. 上海教育出版社.

[3] Chen, Ping 1999. *Modern Chinese*. Part III: The modern Chinese writing system. Cambridge UP.

[4] 胡裕樹 (主編). 《現代漢語》. 香港: 三聯.

## ASSESSMENT

An assignment	15%
Class performance	30% (including attendance, class discussion, in-class quizzes.)
Final examination	55%

	Course ILOs
1	Identify various types of writing systems in the world;
2	Describe the relationship between oral and written forms of language;
3	Illustrate how script decipherment works and create their own writing scripts;
4	Evaluate the benefits and shortcomings of the writing reform in China.

**SYLLABUS**

Wk	Contents	Reading	Quizzes
	Throughout the semester students will learn little by little a hundred fifty oracle bone scripts, and do many exercises and quizzes to get familiar with various writing scripts in the world.		
1	About this course. An outline of the world's writing systems. Distribution of modern writing systems. Definition	[1] §1. esp.8-10 [2] §1.1-1.2	Jiaguwen Sanskrit
2	Linguistic units: word, morpheme, syllable, phone. Relationship between script and language. Typology and classification of writing systems.	[4] §1.1-1.5, 3.1	Tajik Japanese Hangul Arabic
3	Primitive writing symbols – pictorial writing. Pictograms, ideograms, phonograms. Analytic – word order	[2] §1.2.	Dongba Cheyenne
4	Rebus. Create your own pictorial writing. In-class test: Luvian		Ojibwa
5	Types of language structure. Language families. Writing and civilization. Functions of writing. Purposes of the invention of writing.	[3] §8.3. [2] §1	Turkish Aztec
6	Earliest scripts: Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Maya script. Earliest script: Sumerian cuneiform.	[2] §3. §5 [1] pp. 8-10 [1] §3. [2] §2.	Hieroglyph Maya Cuneiform Assignment 1
7	A story of alphabet. English spelling.	[2] §6	A, B, C... English spelling
8	Synthetic Writing and civilization. Direction of writing Functions of writing.	[2] §1	Aztec Nahuatl
9	Discussion on assignment 1. The origin of Chinese script: 倉頡造字, 半坡陶文.	[3] §8. [1] §14	Georgian

## Course Syllabus

	The development of the Chinese script. From the oracle bone script to the regular script.		Nahuatl
10	Six principles of the formation of new characters 六書. Phonetic compounds 諧聲和假借. The traditional theory of semantic components 右文說.	Handout	Jiaguwen Deconstructing characters
11	Popular characters. Etymology and popular etymology 字源和俗字源拆字	Handout	Popular characters Assignment
12	The language reform: simplification of characters The language reform: <i>pinyin</i> Romanization.	[3] §9. [1] §15 [3] §10, 11.	Jiaguwen Tocharian
13	Sinoform scripts: Zhuangzi, Nushu, Xixia, Yi, Japanese, Vietnamese, etc.	[1] §18, 19 [2] §4.2, 4.3	
14	Discussion on assignment 2 Review		