

## EAST 533 Classical Chinese

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Office Hours: W 1:30-3:30 pm or by appointment

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### What is this course about:

Classical Chinese was not only the written language of premodern China but also served as the lingua franca of premodern East Asia and was frequently used in diasporic Chinese communities. Mastery of classical Chinese is essential for accessing the rich history, culture, and literature of traditional China and will also enhance your understanding of the structure and vocabulary of modern Chinese.

Although it is impossible to master all the nuances of classical Chinese in one semester, this course is designed with three primary goals: first, by the end of the semester, you will gain familiarity with key grammatical concepts fundamental to reading classical Chinese; second, you will be equipped to classical Chinese texts with the help of dictionaries and

other tools; third, you will understand the cultural significance of classical Chinese in the greater context of East Asia and Asian diaspora.

**Who can enroll in the course (pre-requisites):**

It is recommended that you have completed three years of Chinese study (or have equivalent proficiency) before enrolling in this course. However, dedicated students with two years of Chinese experience may also find the workload manageable. I have included two pages from the first class readings at the end of this syllabus. Please review these materials to assess your readiness. If you have any concerns about your preparedness, feel free to reach out to me via email.

Classical Chinese courses are offered to both undergraduate and graduate students in Mainland China, Taiwan, and other Chinese-speaking regions. Therefore, native or near-native speakers of Chinese are welcome to enroll in this course. Please note that I will provide additional reading materials for students with advanced knowledge of modern or classical Chinese.

If needed, you may request that the EAS UPD count this course toward content credits rather than language credits to fulfill EAS degree requirements.

**How is the class conducted:**

In-class instruction and discussions will be conducted in a blend of English and Chinese (Putonghua). A typical session will proceed as follows:

Pre-Class Reading: Review and discuss selected readings online on myCourses or Perusall before class.

Group Discussion: In class, you will work in groups to discuss the readings for 20-30 minutes. Advanced students will engage with additional readings.

Grammar Clarification: I will address grammar issues and answer any questions.

Student Presentations: You will take turns presenting and explaining a few sentences or a short paragraph based on the day's grammar points. This activity is not graded but contributes to your participation.

Exercises and Quizzes: You will complete additional exercises or quizzes.

Preparation Time: You are expected to spend 3-5 hours per week preparing for class outside of scheduled meetings.

**Assignments:**

Class Participation (20%): This grade encompasses attendance, contributions to both online and in-class discussions, and participation in short in-class presentations on the readings.

Weekly Homework (15%): Homework consists of translating short passages or completing other exercises, graded on a pass/fail basis.

In-Class Quizzes (35%): Quizzes will cover vocabulary, grammar, and texts from the previous week, with additional bonus questions. There will be six quizzes in total, and the five highest scores will be used to determine your final grade.

Final Translation Project (30%): For the final project, you will work in groups of 2-3 to transcribe, annotate, and translate a set of historical texts written in classical Chinese. We will use "The Ten-Thousand Room Project"—an online collaborative workspace—for this exercise. You can view an example here: [The Ten-Thousand Room Project](#).

You have two types of texts to choose from:

- Literary Texts: I will provide selected literary works, such as fiction and essays. You will use the skills and knowledge gained in class, along with additional research, to produce an annotated transcription and English translation. Notable final projects may be recommended for publication, such as in *Orientalia*, McGill University's East Asian Studies Journal ([Orientations](#)).
- Historical Documents: These include materials written in classical Chinese by Chinese immigrants in Montreal during the 19th and 20th centuries, such as official documents and personal letters. With assistance from me and McGill librarians, you will locate, transcribe, and translate these documents into English, making them available to the public on a website.

Additionally, each group member will write a 2-page reflection essay on the project. Your final grade will be based on the quality of the final product, the research conducted, and peer evaluations from your team members.

**What are the course materials: (all books are available as e-books at McGill Library)**

Primary textbook:

Michael A. Fuller, *An Introduction to Literary Chinese*. Second Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004). Note: a 2024 print edition is available for purchase if you prefer.

Recommended Textbooks:

Paul Rouzer, *A New Practical Primer of Literary Chinese* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).

Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar* (University of Washington Press, 1996).

Naiying Yuan, Haitao Tang, and James Geiss, *Classical Chinese: A Basic Reader* (Princeton

University, 2017).

### Supplementary readings:

We will mainly use one textbook (Fuller). The supplementary readings comprise two types: First, the earliest Chinese philosophical texts: *Lunyu* 論語, *Mengzi* 孟子, *Laozi* 老子, and *Zhuangzi* 莊子; second, selected pieces of classical Chinese literature in different genres like prose, poetry, and fiction. We will also use footage from TV programs and movies to see how classical Chinese is reconstructed in popular media.

**Dictionaries:** Dictionaries are crucial for reading classical Chinese. We will introduce several of them at the beginning of the semester. I highly suggest that you refer to them frequently throughout the semester.

*Wang Li gu Hanyu zidian* 王力古漢語字典 (Wang Li's Dictionary of Classical Chinese Characters). Canonical and easy to use for literary Chinese.

*Gu Hanyu changyongzi zidian* 古漢語常用字字典 (A Dictionary of Commonly-used Ancient Chinese Characters). Concise and easy to use.

Luo Zhufeng 羅竹風, ed. *Hanyu daci dian* 漢語大詞典. Vols. 12. Shanghai: Hanyu da cidian chubanshe, 2008. One of the most thorough Chinese dictionaries  
Pulleyblank, *Outline of classical Chinese grammar*—this textbook may be used as a reference book.

Paul W. Kroll, *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*. Revised ed. Leiden: Brill, 2017.

Rick Harbaugh, *Chinese Characters: A Genealogy and Dictionary* (Yale University Press, 1999). New Features: Chinese Discussion Board; Chinese Characters Dictionary Web. (<http://zhongwen.com/>)

**Online Sources:** Although online dictionaries are easier to use than printed ones, I urge you to prioritize the latter, at least in the beginning period of your study.

Chinese Text Project (<http://ctext.org>), with a dictionary (<http://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=en>)

*Handian* 漢典 (<http://www.zdic.net/>)

*Dictionary of Chinese Character Variants* 異體字字典 (<https://dict.variants.moe.edu.tw/>)

### **Policies on Academic Integrity and Languages:**

“In accord with McGill University’s [Charter of Students’ Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded. This

does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.” (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009)

« Conformément à la [Charte des droits de l'étudiant](#) de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté, sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue. » (Énoncé approuvé par le Sénat le 21 janvier 2009)

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#)” (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003) (See [McGill's guide to academic honesty](#) for more information).

« L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon [le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et procédures disciplinaires](#). » (Énoncé approuvé par le Sénat le 29 janvier 2003) (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le [guide pour l'honnêteté académique de McGill](#)).

#### **Statement on the Use of Generative AI tools:**

While we do not encourage it, students may use artificial intelligence tools, including generative AI, in this course as learning aids. **However, students are ultimately accountable for the work they submit.** Students who choose to use generative artificial intelligence tools as they work through the assignments in this course must document their use in an appendix for each assignment. The documentation should include what tool(s) were used, how they were used, and how the results from the AI were incorporated into the submitted work. Any content produced by an artificial intelligence tool must be cited appropriately. Many organizations that publish standard citation formats are now providing information on citing generative AI (e.g., MLA: <https://style.mla.org/citing-generative-ai/> ).

#### **Late assignment policy:**

**No extensions will be given for assignments.** Late assignments are subject to a penalty of 3% per day, including weekends. No assignments are accepted after one week past the due date. Exceptions are only made in extraordinary circumstances (illness, family emergency), **if arrangements are made in advance of the due date**, and appropriate documentation (e.g., a medical note or a funeral notice) is provided to the instructor.

## **Class Schedule:**

Note: in-class quizzes to be scheduled; please access course readings on myCourses or Perusall.

### **Week 1**

Aug 28: Course Introduction

Aug 30: What is Classical Chinese: understanding the basic problems and methods

### **Week 2**

Sept 4: Basic Grammar 1

Sept 6: Basic Grammar 2

### **Week 3**

Sept 11: Workshop: Tools for reading classical Chinese

Sept 13: Basic Grammar 3

### **Week 4**

Sept 18: Basic Grammar 4

Sept 20: additional readings

### **Week 5**

Sept 25: Basic Grammar 5

Sept 27: Basic Grammar 6

### **Week 6**

Oct 2: Classical Chinese in popular media  
Introducing the final project

Oct 4: Basic Grammar 7

### **Week 7**

Oct 9: conversation with Dr. Nicholas Williams

Oct 11: more readings

**Fall Reading Break: Tuesday, October 15 to Friday, October 18**

**Week 8**

Oct 23: Basic Grammar 8

Oct 25: (tentative) Field trip and workshop at McCord Stewart Museum archives

**Week 9**

Oct 30: Intermediate and advanced readings

Nov 1: Group work on final project

**Week 10**

Nov 6: Intermediate and advanced readings

Nov 8: Workshop on Storymap and other tools

**Week 11**

Nov 13: Intermediate and advanced readings

Nov 15: Group work on final project

**Week 12**

Nov 20: Classical Chinese in East Asian and beyond

Kin, Bunkyō (Park, Si Nae, trans.) "Writing in Literary Sinitic: The Diverse World of Literary Sinitic in East Asia." King, Ross, ed. *Literary Sinitic and East Asia: A Cultural Sphere of Vernacular Reading*. Boston: Brill (2021), 164-212.

Lam, Lap. (pp 65-1106), "Gold Mountain Dreams: Classical-Style Poetry from San Francisco Chinatown", in *Hsiang Lectures on Chinese Poetry*, Volume 7 (2024).

Nov 22: Group work on final project

**Week 13**

Nov 27: Final project presentation and exhibition

Nov 29: Final project presentation and exhibition

**(class schedule is subject to changes, August 2024)**