

## Preparatory Readings – Chinese Studies

### General

For those who have been offered places to read Chinese Studies at Cambridge, the short period between leaving school and coming into residence offers a valuable window of opportunity to do some effective preparatory work. This page is intended to provide guidance on the best ways to use this interlude to prepare for the Cambridge course.

Since learning to speak, read and write Chinese is one of the main components of the course, it would seem natural to want to make a start on that. However, knowledge of Chinese is not required for students starting the course as we teach Chinese to first-year students from scratch. While it may be true that the very few who come to Cambridge with some knowledge of Chinese are initially at a slight advantage, the Cambridge Chinese course is very intensive and those who don't have knowledge of Chinese at the start can catch up with and even surpass those who do.

For those who would like to make a start of learning the language prior to coming to Cambridge, it is advised to read the following sections in the Oxford Beginner's Chinese Dictionary (ISBN:0-19-929853):

Basic rules of writing Chinese characters; Learning and lifestyle kit; Dictionary know-how; The Chinese words and phrases you must know; Numbers; Phrasefinder; Dates for your diary; Quick reference guide to life and culture; Social survival guide.

The advice of the teaching staff in Chinese at Cambridge is, however, **not** to try to start tackling the language, but it would be useful to review at least the first five chapters of the first-year textbook: *Chinese for Beginners* by Jianji Liu (Beijing Language and Culture University Press, 2003). It is also important to do some exploratory reading about China and the Chinese tradition. There should be two aims behind such reading. The first should be to stake out the basic facts about China and Chinese history, to acquire a preliminary orientation on China and the East Asian tradition. To do this in advance of coming to Cambridge will make it easier to assimilate the enormous amounts of information with which you will be presented. It will also make it easier to continue to see the wood for the trees, to keep the larger questions about China in mind during the demanding process of learning the language.

The second aim should be to clarify the nature of one's own interest in Chinese Studies and to develop it. If at times during the course it seems that the sheer hard work and frustration involved in learning Chinese may kill your interest in the subject, it is as well to realise early on that there are many who have found rewards of the highest quality in the Chinese tradition.

## Introduction

If you are offered a place to read Chinese Studies at Cambridge, the short period between leaving secondary school and coming into residence offers a valuable –and necessary – window of opportunity to do some effective preparatory work.

This reading list is also useful for preparatory reading for those applying to the Chinese Studies Tripos. Your admissions interviewers will be suitably impressed by the fact that you have done some useful reading prior to the interview.

## Chinese language: The Oxford Beginner's Chinese Dictionary

If you wish to make a start with learning the language before arriving in Cambridge, we advise you to read the following sections in the **Oxford Beginner's Chinese Dictionary** (ISBN:0-19-929853):

- Basic rules of writing Chinese characters
- Learning and lifestyle kit
- Dictionary know-how
- The Chinese words and phrases you must know
- Numbers
- Phrasefinder
- Dates for your diary
- Quick reference guide to life and culture
- Social survival guide

## East Asian history

In the first year you will be following a course on East Asian history covering China, Japan and Korea. To prepare for this you should read the following before the start of your first term in Cambridge:

- Hansen, V., *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600* (Norton) or Ebrey, P., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (Cambridge UP)
- Hane, M., *Premodern Japan* (Westview Press) or Totman, G., *Japan before Perry* (Univ. of California Press)
- Hunter, J., *The Emergence of Modern Japan* (Longman) or Barnhart, M., *Japan and the World Since 1868* (Edward Arnold)

## Preparatory reading list

The full list of recommended reading relating to Chinese Studies is available below. You can pick and choose according to your own interests and inclinations. The more widely you read the more prepared you will be for the course, the year-abroad experience as well as your future engagements with China!

## The Chinese Language

- Norman, Jerry. *Chinese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)  
A thorough and concise account of the Chinese language, its history and modern dialects and of the script and its history.
- [Yuan, B.](#) and [Church, S.K.](#) *Oxford Beginner's Chinese Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

- DeFrancis, John. *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984). Debunks many myths about the Chinese language (e.g. each character being a picture).

## History

- Ebrey, Patricia Buckley. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- Elvin, Mark. *The Pattern of the Chinese Past: A Social and Economic Interpretation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973). 'A superb introduction to the distinctive patterns of Chinese history over the span of two millennia.'
- Marks, Robert B. *China: Its Environment and History* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012). A comprehensive history of how Chinese history has shaped and been shaped by its relationship to nature and the environment, from Peking man to the present.
- Hansen, Valerie. *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600* (New York: Norton, 2000).
- Gernet, Jacques. *Daily Life in China: on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion, 1250-1276* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1962). A richly evocative account of Chinese urban culture in the thirteenth century, it serves as a highly informative and enjoyable introduction to many features of Chinese society and thought.
- Spence, Jonathan. *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1983).
- Huang, Ray. *1587, A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981). Through a series of perceptive biographies the author unravels for the Western reader many of the more perplexing features of the Chinese scene. No other account of traditional Chinese government captures the feel of political life in early modern China with such poignant authenticity.
- Ko, Dorothy. *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).
- Spence, Jonathan. *The Question of Hu* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).
- Kuhn, Philip. *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). A highly insightful portrayal of Chinese social and political life in the eighteenth century. Novel in its focus on popular religious obsessions, it makes a significant watershed in Western writing about Chinese social history.
- Harrison, Henrietta. *The Man Awakened from Dreams: One Man's Life in a North China Village, 1857-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- Spence, Jonathan. *The Search for Modern China* (London: W W Norton and Co, 1991.) An overview of Chinese history, which effectively presents the grand drama of the past few centuries of political and cultural change in China.
- [van de Ven, Hans](#). *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
- XU, Guoqi. *Strangers on the Western Front: Chinese Workers in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
- Schram, Stuart. *Mao Tse-tung* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970).

A compelling biography of the most influential figure of twentieth century China as well as an informative account of its turbulent history.

- Shapiro, Judith. *Mao's War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China*. Cambridge University Press 2001.
- Yue Daiyun and Carolyn Wakeman. *To the Storm: The Odyssey of a Revolutionary Chinese Woman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
- Kraus, Richard Curt. *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
- Cook, Alexander C. *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- Waldron, Arthur. *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- Gao, Mobo. *The Battle for China's Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2008).
- Harrison, Henrietta. *The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

## **Society, Culture and Religion**

- Ebrey, Patricia B. (ed.) *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*. Second edition (New York: The Free Press, 1993).
- Loewe, Michael. *Bing: From Farmer's Son to Magistrate in Han China* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2011). In this engaging volume, Michael Loewe (Lecturer in Chinese Studies at Cambridge from 1963 to 1990) mines the written and material records to depict the imagined life of an ordinary person, Bing Wu, from the hardships of his earliest years on a rural farm to his retirement from a respected position in government service.
- Yu, Anthony. *State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspectives* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005). Discusses the complex relations between state and religion throughout Chinese history.
- Lopez, Donald S. *The Story of Buddhism: A Concise Guide to Its History and Teachings*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001. Introduction to Buddhism that pays adequate attention to its developments across East Asia.
- Kieschnick, John. *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) If you want to know how the Chinese learned how to use the chair (and many other things) from the Indian Buddhist missionaries!
- François Jullien. *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*. Translated by Paula M. Varsano (New York: Zone Books, 2004).
- Spence, Jonathan. *The Death of Woman Wang* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980). A re-creation, part historical and part fictional of the living conditions in a poor part of China in the late seventeenth century, this short work presents a compelling account of the problems of being poor and female in traditional China.
- Meskill, Johanna Menzel. *A Chinese Pioneer Family: The Lins of Wu-feng, Taiwan 1729-1895* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

- Pruitt, Ida. *A Daughter of Han: The Autobiography of a Chinese Working Woman* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967[1945]).
- Wolf, Margery. *The House of Lim: A Study of a Chinese Farm Family* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968).  
A good introduction to the dynamics of Chinese family relations. As enjoyable as it is instructive.
- Landsberger, Stefan. *Chinese Propaganda Posters: From Revolution to Modernization* (Amsterdam: The Pepin Press, 1995).
- Chan, Anita, Richard Madsen and Jonathan Unger. *Chen Village: Revolution to Globalization*. Revised Third Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).  
A village level account of the dramatic socio-political changes in China during Maoist and reform eras.
- Gilley, Bruce. *Model Rebels: The Rise and Fall of China's Richest Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
- Jing, Jun (ed.). *Feeding China's Little Emperors: Food, Children, and Social Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- Coe, Andrew. *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- Adrian, Bonnie. *Framing the Bride: Globalizing Beauty and Romance in Taiwan's Bridal Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
- Scott, Janet Lee. *For Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors: The Chinese Tradition of Paper Offerings* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).
- Oxfeld, Ellen. *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong: Family and Enterprise in an Overseas Chinese Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993)
- Davis, Sara L. M. *Song and Silence: Ethnic Revival on China's Southwest Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
- Palmer, David A, Glenn Shive and Philip L. Wickeri, eds. *Chinese Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)
- [Chau, Adam Yuet. \*Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China\*](#) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).
- Moskowitz, Marc. *Go Nation: Chinese Masculinities and the Game of Weiqi in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

## Literature

- Graham, A. C., *Poems of the Late T'ang* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977, reprinted).  
A masterly translation of complex poems from the mid-eighth to the early tenth century, plus a sensitive introduction to the place of these famous poems in the overall development of Chinese poetic traditions.
- Hawkes, David, translator. *The Story of the Stone: A Chinese Novel by Cao Xueqin* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin Books, 1973).  
Also known as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, this eighteenth-century masterpiece of Chinese fiction tells of the rise and fall of a large upper-class family. Its rich detail and psychological realism combine to fascinate the reader with the complexity of late imperial life. It is essential, and enjoyable, reading for any student of China.
- Lu Xun. *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*. Translated by William A. Lyell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990).
- Lu Xun. *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun*. Translated by Julia Lovell (London: Penguin Classics).
- Han Shaogong. *A Dictionary of Maqiao*. Translated by Julia Lovell (Dial Press. Reprint edition, 2005).
- Yu Hua. *To Live*. Translated by Michael Berry (Anchor Books, 2003).

- Mo Yan. *The Republic of Wine: A Novel*. Translated by Howard Goldblatt (Arcade Publishing, 2012).

## The Arts

- Cahill, James. *Chinese Painting* (Lausanne: Skira, 1960)  
An excellent introduction to the major stylistic developments of Chinese painting from ca. 800 to 1800. Written thirty years ago in fluent prose, it remains unrivalled in its ability to stimulate interest in and understanding of this grand tradition.
- Ledderose, Lothar. *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)
- [A Pure and Remote View: Visualizing Early Chinese Landscape Painting](#)—a lecture series by Professor Emeritus James Cahill (UC Berkeley):
- Clunas, Craig. *Art in China (Oxford History of Art)*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

## General

- Stafutti, Stefania and Federica Romagnoli. *China: History and Treasures of an Ancient Civilization* (White Star Publishers, 2010).
- Han, Lifeng; [Wu, Emma Lejun](#); *Cai, Hua, Insider China* (Lexus Ltd., 2009)  
A truly fascinating portrayal of Chinese life and culture. Here you have the real insider's knowledge of China and things Chinese, a vast range both ancient and modern.
- Needham, Joseph. *The Grand Titration: Science and Society in East and West* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1969).  
Dr Needham is the pioneer of the study of the history of science and technology in China and the founder of the Needham Research Institute at Cambridge. This volume of his essays contains many of the ideas that inspire his world-famous multi-volume *Science and Civilization in China*, published by Cambridge University Press.
- [Sterkx, Roel](#). *Chinese Thought: from Confucius to Cook Ding* (Pelican Books, 2019).  
An engrossing history of ancient Chinese philosophy and culture from an eminent Cambridge expert.