

Soren Edgren
H-85: The History of the Book in China
9–14 July, Charlottesville, Virginia

Narrative Course Evaluations

1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Are there any readings that you would like to see added or removed in future years?*

1. Yes, without pre-course reading, my experience of this course would have been very different. Readings and lectures complement each other extremely well.
2. {no response}
3. Extremely helpful, well-chosen, a finely curated introduction to the class material.
4. {no response}
5. Yes. Maybe too many. But they are great resources.
6. The required readings prepared me well for the course. We referred back for ideas that had been introduced in the readings several times.
7. Yes, they were very useful to provide a foundational background.
8. The required readings are solid and useful. I could not add anything on the list, already quite introductory while easy reading. The referral readings are quite sufficient for the incoming students.
9. Yes. Maybe having a simplified glossary of key terms and Chinese Dynasties to focus on/memorize would have contextualized the content a bit better.
10. Generally, yes. It would have been useful to have a short description of each and how they fit together in the course in advance.
11. Yes, the readings were very good. Sending the electronic copies to UVA print was a bit of work—but saved me a lot of time.

2) *What are your thoughts on the course workbook and/or other teaching materials distributed during class? Was the content appropriate and useful? Will it continue to be useful for you after the course?*

1. Love the booklet!
2. The course workbook was very useful. I used the chronology in the appendix quite frequently, as I am not familiar with the time periods in Chinese history, and the dynasties were referenced all the time. I will most definitely refer to it in the future.
3. Impressive, well-organized, easily referenceable in the future.
4. Love the course workbook, it has so much info and is such a great resource—you can tell a lot of energy, time, and knowledge went into making it. I will definitely continue to use it as a resource after the class.

5. Yes. I will use it after the class.
6. The content was appropriate and useful. I wish we could have been sent copies of the slides for future reference. The glossaries of terms in Chinese and English were especially useful and I shall refer back to them.
7. The course materials were extremely thorough, with additional recommended readings listed to seek out additional sources. The content was very appropriate and useful.
8. The course workbook is quite well prepared. The terminology part is extremely helpful, no need to say the suggested reading. For sure, the reading list is quite good, some works mentioned are very helpful.
9. I wish we had a photocopy/print out of the slides—even if they were condensed thumbnails, having that context to match the descriptions would've been extremely helpful. I'm not sure the workbook itself will be very useful to me now without that context though the bibliography and appendices are good as "FYI's."
10. Very useful, but it would have been good to have access to the slideshows or at least the pictures as it is difficult to document everything and the descriptions make the most sense in context.
11. Yes. The workbook was very well prepared. I will refer to it. It was a lot of work to compile.

3) *Which aspects of the course were most intriguing and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*

1. The most memorable insight is the rhizomatic journeys of technology, texts, manuscripts and books across time and space in East Asia. This course gave me the foundation, materials, and many exciting ideas for designing courses on book history.
2. Understanding the sheer amount of work and artistry that goes into Chinese books was life-changing, to be only slightly hyperbolic. But as a person who doesn't read Chinese, I fear that my eyes used to skip over the characters on the page when a Chinese book came across my bench. Now that I know so much more, I know what to look for and what I'm looking at. I am confident in simple but extremely important details of the books now, and I have already shared those insights with members of my team.
3. 1) The Chinese never had a reason to use animal-based bookbinding materials (leather, parchment) because they've had paper for more than two millennia! 2) In spite of their incredible artistic skills, Asian decorated papers (black-printed, gilt, su-minigoshi) were not commonly used for bookbindings. 3) They really perfected the book form centuries before Europe even had printing.
4. {no response}
5. It is relevant to my job. Maybe inspire me with some new project idea.
6. As an amateur bookbinder, it was thrilling to get to hold authentic and facsimile copies of the bindings I hope to reproduce myself. I was able to understand how several

techniques work that I have had trouble visualizing from textual descriptions. I have many notes on projects I wish to do in future.

7. The realia and personal stories/experiences of SE. I walked away with many new insights—it will take some time to process!
8. I am a student in a distantly-related field to this course, and to book history. After a session which was related to my field, I have some new ideas/topics to conduct in the future. Definitely helpful and introduced some cross-disciplinary information to me.
9. Being able to handle materials and hear anecdotes from SE were the most compelling, though I did get confused at times matching items with their descriptions. (If each item had a small marker that indicated its corresponding workbook description that would've been great.) SE's vast and deep knowledge of this field made the materials and information resonate more profoundly.
10. The course was a stretch for me as a Western book history specialist with no Chinese language skills. Despite the lack of background on my part I found it accessible and very useful.
11. Yes. I wish I had come to SE twenty years ago and to RBS ten years ago. I feel like it was a new beginning. SE has opened my horizon to bibliography.

4) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*

1. Yes!
2. Yes, I learned what was promised in the course description.
3. Absolutely. I feel much more comfortable with the big-picture development of the book and printing in this area of the world and more capable of making informed conservation decisions when presented with these objects.
4. Learned a lot of good background fundamentals, and enough that I now know what kind of questions to ask to do the rest of the research when I go back home.
5. Yes. The instructor is fantastic.
6. Yes, very much so. SE is a wealth of anecdotes and facts that helped to illuminate the social transactions and traditions that books were involved in. I was pleased to learn about the distinct questions about the authentication of rare books in East Asia that differ from those in Europe.
7. Yes; it was a lot of information but all very helpful. The course moves quickly, but we are able to digest on our own with the recommended reading lists.
8. Yes, and yes.
9. I was hoping to gain a more precise understanding of the parts of the book and evolution of printing in China as well as how to distinguish print styles, but I'm not sure I got that. I'll have to do a lot of independent study to fully grasp everything the course went over. At the same time, those details are fairly easy to research. While SE's stories and firsthand experiences were remarkable to hear, in some ways, I'm slightly

disappointed by this lack of structure. But I've come out of this really wanting to engage more with these materials and see more oriental items.

10. Yes and many things that I did not know that I needed to know.

11. I hope to do more work on bibliography and the course certification will be like a letter of recommendation.

5) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*

1. At the moment, primarily for designing courses for undergraduate students. I could see future research projects emerging as well.

2. I will use them very frequently in my day-to-day work as a conservator since I have started to work with Chinese books more recently.

3. To both increase my efficacy in my role as a conservator and to be a more empathetic and globally-informed researcher.

4. I hope to use what I learned to catalog some Chinese books and get them in our system, and also use the knowledge to bolster class visits, open houses, and exhibits. I may also use the knowledge in blog posts and online exhibits.

5. I will use it for my projects and work.

6. In improving the range and quantity of my bookbinding.

7. I plan to continue library work focused on Chinese materials.

8. For a research project, as a part of my future doctoral dissertation.

9. Maybe towards comparative research, especially among Japanese and Korean texts with those from China, as well as general Western vs. Eastern print differences.

10. They will be very useful to provide additional scope to my book history teaching.

11. I plan to do more bibliography and to study PRC books.

6) *Who might benefit the most from taking this RBS course?*

1. Anyone interested in the history of the book in China and East Asia.

2. Conservators, archivists, and librarians who have Eastern books in their collections, scholars who study China and Chinese history.

3. I'd recommend it to anyone with an interest in Asian print culture or global book history tradition.

4. Anyone—people interested in Chinese print history, general interest in book history, Chinese history, &c.

5. I don't know about others, but I learned a lot.

6. {no response}

7. Someone with a background in East Asian studies or a related book background.

8. Students/individuals have some knowledge of Chinese history/language.

9. Someone with a cursory knowledge of Chinese and academic interest in the field. I think this course will be extremely challenging for a total newbie and someone without

Chinese language will miss out on the full potential of the course.

10. East Asian scholars, scholars and librarians with an interest in the wider scope of the field.
11. Grad students in the humanities. Study of IT databases on Chinese content evolution of Chinese data.

7) *If applicable, what were the most powerful, or otherwise noteworthy educational moments in the course? Were there any "aha!" moments you'd like to share?*

1. Too many. There are so many concepts that were difficult to grasp until I saw the actual physical object or heard SE's explanations, e.g., thread-bound books are actually not held together by threads!
2. Just being able to immediately identify, before even opening the book, which is the correct way to open it! I knew that the Chinese had an established printing culture before the West, but it was really made clear the extent of their technological development. I began to put together a complex understanding of Chinese culture and how it impacted book and paper development.
3. See Q3.
4. {no response}
5. Many "aha!" moments. Especially when I learn something new and touch the real books.
6. Understanding the difference between album and pleated binding, and between wrapped-back and thread-bound books. Having experts in Western book history and making gave us interesting observations on what we were learning. I enjoyed seeing how modern collectors, like SE, fit into the long tradition of scholar-collectors.
7. The variety of materials we got to interact with. It was particularly great to see the Polychrome prints.
8. A photo was shared and it is related to a picture I was working on. Totally made a huge step.
9. {no response}
10. Material texts helped me to understand the various forms of Chinese binding and mise-en-page. A clear sense of eras and traditions that sorted out the chronology.
11. SE's Guanhailou collection was excellent with many great items.

8) *Are there any other ways in which the course could have been improved?*

1. I loved standing around objects while SE introduced them and answering our questions. I know there's a very tight schedule to this course, but I'm wondering if we could use more of such a format.
2. If the books ("realia") could circulate around the class with the corresponding number in the workbook, that would make the realia sessions more efficient.

3. {no response}
4. Labels to go with the realia, even if just the printed catalog info (name, title, or realia #).
5. The dorm could be closer. Maybe more options, e.g. 1 bed, 1 bath.
6. I would like to have discussed the changes in different types of secular books that were published over time in more depth, but that might have been out of the scope of the course. It would have been cool to see some more poisonous books (vermillion end papers).
7. No immediate improvements—it might be nice to spend a little time at the beginning going over basics—the parts of a book, the definitions, &c., just for those without an explicit background or perhaps a visual demonstration of how binding is completed, &c.
8. I think it would be better to state that some basic understanding of the history of China would be definitely helpful.
9. Having a bit more structure or a predominant theme/timeline would have been helpful.
10. Generally excellent. A little more sense of overall structure early on would be useful!
11. It was like a dream come true. The Guanhaiyou collection is amazing.

9) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? How likely are you to recommend this course to others? On a 1–10 scale, 1 would indicate that you disagree that you got your money's worth, 5 would indicate a neutral response, and 10 would indicate that you agree that you got your money's worth.*

1. 10
2. 10
3. 10
4. 10
5. 9
6. 10
7. 10
8. 10
9. 7
10. 9
11. 10

10) *If your course made any (virtual) field trips outside of the classroom or had guest speakers, do you feel that they enhance the course experience?*

1. No.
2. {no response}
3. {no response}

4. N/A
5. Yes. If possible. For example, cooperating with academic libraries to feature their rare books with a short workshop, &c.
6. {no response}
7. N/A
8. No. Did not do a field trip.
9. N/A
10. {no response}
11. No trips.

11) *Do you have any additional thoughts or advice for anyone considering taking this course in a future year?*

1. Do the pre-course reading!
2. I definitely felt at a disadvantage not knowing Chinese. Download a translation app on your phone prior to the first day of class, and that will help you identify at least the title page.
3. Take time to read the advanced resources, familiarize yourself as much as possible with the chronology, geography.
4. Let SE know your background or what you're interested in or what you want to take away: he's really good about noting things that would be beneficial or of particular interest for you.
5. I have recommended the class to many of my counterparts.
6. {no response}
7. It is helpful, though not necessary, to have a Chinese language background to fully appreciate the magnitude and diversity of materials. It might also be helpful to have some knowledge of book history generally.
8. Read the readings. Maybe having some basic ideas of the history and language of China would be very life-saving.
9. {no response}
10. A good overview beforehand will help you take in the huge mass of detailed material. Chinese language skills are a real plus, but by no means necessary.
11. It is transformative for persons in East Asian humanities.

12) *If you had to sum up your RBS experience with a single sentence, phrase, or a haiku, what would you say?*

1. A rare opportunity to study with a towering authority of this field, using a remarkable collection.
2. True bibliophiles / revel in the work and awe / you keep coming back.
3. Xylography is king.

4. {no response}
5. It is the most "worthy" workshop I have attended so far.
6. {no response}
7. Thank you for such a wonderful experience!
8. Time is quite fast.
9. Intense! But fun in the nerdiest possible way.
10. Excellent as always!
11. A dream within a dream.