

Call for Papers

Reading Material: New Approaches to Textual Media in China

An Interdisciplinary Workshop for Junior Scholars in China Studies

Co-hosted by the Center for Chinese Studies and the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, UC Berkeley

April 16th-18th, 2021

Keynote Speaker: Cynthia Brokaw, Brown University

Roundtable Chair: Haun Saussy, University of Chicago

Application deadline:

January 15, 2021

Exiled from library stacks in the age of Covid-19, we find ourselves relying more than ever on ebooks and digital libraries like [c-text](#) and [Scripta Sinica](#). Although OCR (Optical Character Recognition) technology gives readers the godlike ability to trawl vast quantities of textual information, it nevertheless erases paratextual and material traces, such as institutional seals, unevenly carved column dividers, poorly inked blocks, images that bear no semantic content, and the wear-and-tear of paper.¹ This workshop aims to redirect our attention to the ineluctably material features of the texts we read.

What is lost when we read a text as data? How might formatting decisions--punctuating, lineating, paragraphing, paginating, binding, shelving, etc.--fashion the manner in which people read, write, and think? How might the affordances and limitations of different physical media--from turtle plastrons to stone slabs, from paper scrolls to touchscreen tablets--have initially shaped the conception and creation of a given text? What might be gained by taking into consideration how a text has changed, not incidentally but in its very essence, as it has been remediated across historical time? How might we expand our notion of authorship to include other forces--editors, copyists, typesetters, paper-makers, archivists, censorship bureaus, book-eating pests, fires, floods, commercial distribution networks, booksellers, software designers and the like--as they play a role in how, to whom, and for how long a text will communicate its meaning? And finally, how might we account for the ways digital materials and interfaces open up new possibilities for reading?

We welcome submissions from junior scholars in history, comparative literature, religious studies, and media studies. To facilitate this interdisciplinary dialogue, presenters should seek to make their presentation accessible to scholars working in different periods and areas of specialization. We envision this virtual gathering as the first in a series of workshops, bringing together scholars who share kindred interest in the materiality of writing.

¹ Donald Sturgeon, "Large-scale Optical Character Recognition of Pre-modern Chinese Texts," *International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture*, Vol. 28. No.2 (December 2018): 11-44.

To apply, please submit the following materials as a single continuous PDF to the workshop organizer (readingmaterialworkshop@gmail.com) by **January 15, 2021**.

1. The title and abstract (up to 250 words) of the paper you wish to present at the workshop.
2. A brief author bio and an account of:
 - 1) how this paper relates to your current research project;
 - 2) how your research complements and challenges conventional approaches to the materiality of writing