



Naquin's Corner, located on the south side entrance of Jones Hall

# THE NOT-SO-SECRET SUCCESS OF THE EAST ASIAN STUDIES LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

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Patricia L. Kennedy, JD, MA

“When I think about my language program, I sort of think of it as my second home—a social environment that allows me to get away from the chaos of the greater campus life.”

Angel Osaseri '23, Sociology major,  
earning a certificate in Korean Language and Culture

Outstanding teachers are essential to any consistently successful language program. Princeton's Chinese, Japanese and Korean language teachers are the hidden gems behind the not-so-secret success of the Department of East Asian Studies (EAS).

Department of East Asian Studies Chair, Professor [Anna M. Shields](#), puts a finer point on it: “There are so many ways to achieve linguistic competence (pedagogically)” but the “consistently excellent instruction and the genuine connection students feel to their language communities year after year is due to our outstanding language teachers.”



Directors of EAS language programs (from left): Ho Jung Choi (Korean), Jing Wang (Chinese), Shinji Sato (Japanese)

How does a department not only provide a rich cultural experience customized to meet the needs of each student but also create such an intimate community?

Students and language program directors provide what appear to be the same answer: innovation, collaboration, and dedication to students.

Angel Osaseri '23, a senior concentrating in Sociology, who is earning a Korean Language and Culture certificate, confidently asserts

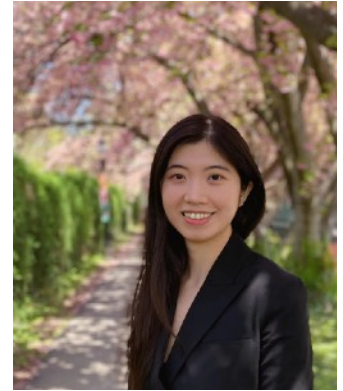
that “out of all of the classes that I've taken at Princeton—including my own department—there has been no other department, no other classes that I've taken, where I felt so welcomed. The genuine appreciation and passion in the program are undeniable.” And her experience is not unique.

Seiyoung Jang '25, a sophomore concentrating in History, posits that the “unique” aspect of his language program (Japanese) is “the pace paired with instructor support...[T]he professors are always there to help so it never feels overwhelming. The program has given me a lot more confidence as a learner because it feels like I am always improving.”

John Patrick '24, a junior concentrating in the School of Public and International Affairs, currently working on Language and Culture Certificates in Chinese and French, offers this insight: “The [Chinese] instructors have found the perfect balance between high expectations and understanding the stresses of college life. While I always felt an expectation to come to class prepared, none of my instructors ever made me feel bad for not understanding something quite perfectly. They also come to class with kindness, energy, and humor.”

[Jing Wang](#), Director of the Chinese Language Program, and senior lecturer in the department, who earned a doctorate in premodern Chinese Literature from the University of Wisconsin, firmly believes that across the department (not just in any one program) “our priority is on the individual academic potential of each student and their psychological well-being. Curriculum design, activities and new materials for teaching are about helping students meet their goals and realize their full potential by emphasizing these two ideas.”

“One way we help students understand that our approach is student-centered is by integrating student course assistants into language learning. We have one-to-one meetings we hold with students every other week to help them practice conversation skills, and students can choose to practice with these more experienced speakers of the language. Our course assistants understand students’ day-to-day lives and conversations can happen more organically.”



Xin Zou, advanced-level  
Chinese lecturer

## SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE: MAJORS, MINORS AND COURSES FOR DIVERSE STUDENT INTERESTS

While the EAS concentration allows students in-depth study and first-hand experience of East Asia, the department’s Chinese, Japanese, and Korean certificate programs (similar to a minor) encourage students to combine their interests in East Asian languages and cultures with other majors they pursue at Princeton. Students can acquire the *Language and Culture Certificate* through in-depth exploration of one East Asian language in at least seven language courses, a content course, and a research paper.

The *East Asian Studies Program Certificate* focuses more on interdisciplinary coursework and has fewer language requirements. This certificate is administered by the Program in East Asian Studies, which is an umbrella organization that promotes the interdisciplinary study of East Asia at Princeton.

Regardless of whether students concentrate, earn a certificate, or are simply fulfilling their foreign language requirement, EAS

encourages all students to pursue overseas study in East Asia. The EAS affiliated summer language programs: Princeton in Beijing (PIB), Princeton in Ishikawa (PII), and Princeton in Korea (PIK), all count for one year of language study.

An important feature of the department's language programs is the two tracks for language learners, one for heritage speakers and one for non-heritage speakers (Chinese and Korean). Princeton has offered two tracks for many years to meet the diverse needs of the many students of East Asian languages.

Whether a student is brand new to a language or has familiarity with it from family members speaking it at home, every Chinese, Japanese, or Korean language student can find a language course to suit their learning needs. Angel Osaseri self-studied Korean before coming to Princeton and tested into second-year Korean. As a non-heritage speaker, she was excited to have a class where she could share her passion for Korean language and culture. But she worried about trying to converse with heritage speakers, a person who has learned a language informally by being exposed to it at home. As a Chinese language certificate student, Joanna Zhang '21, who concentrated in philosophy, was used to speaking Chinese at home, but had never studied Chinese in a formal, academic setting. On the heritage track, Zhang enjoyed a wide variety of courses, including literature, film and intellectual history and was grateful for the fundamentals she developed in the classroom: "The emphases on essay writing, presentations, and Chinese class discussions were extremely helpful in polishing my formal/more academic Chinese."



From left: Susie Kim (Korean), Tomoko Shibata (Japanese), Luanfeng Huang (Chinese)



## A VIBRANT INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY: DYNAMIC TEACHERS, SCHOLARS AND STUDENTS

East Asian language lecturers plan and teach classes five days a week, design engaging assignments, provide meaningful feedback, and frequently test students to gauge proficiency. If one thought these responsibilities the sum of their academic work, one would miss a significant feature of their professional commitment.



Korean language students visit LG Electronics USA Headquarters in Englewood Cliffs, NJ

Princeton language lecturers are also research-active scholars, who are passionate about their intellectual pursuits. For language instructors, their scholarly research is ultimately meant to optimize the learning experience for their students. [Shinji Sato](#), University Lecturer and Director of the Japanese Language Program, who completed his doctorate in educational anthropology from Teachers College, Columbia University, and specializes in educational anthropology, enthusiastically describes

Princeton students' dedication and energy: "Princeton students are mature, very nice, and they work so hard! It's not an easy journey to learn Japanese, so I have to encourage them not to worry too much. We always try to remind them that we will guide them so they shouldn't be afraid to explore." And that environment has resulted in consistently steady enrollment near 100 students since 2019 (even through virtual instruction). 2023 boasted 121 Japanese language students, the highest number since 2019. The Japanese Language Program offers six levels of instruction in Modern Japanese, 14 courses within the curriculum and has five full-time lecturers.

"My motivation is always the conversations I have with my students, whether in class, in office hours, or at the language tables," notes Sato. "Conversation is the best way to get to know them. Sometimes the conversations that happen spontaneously are

the most valuable for getting to know a student. I want to make sure every student feels supported in their learning but also as a whole person, too. I am aware of the limitations of a standardized approach to my classroom because every individual is different.”

**The program has given me a lot more confidence as a learner because it feels like I am always improving.**

**Seiyoung Jang '25, History major**

“As an anthropologist, I want to emphasize the humanistic aspect of language instruction. As they learn, I want to challenge them and say, ‘does that apply to anyone?’”

Sato’s team uses small-group projects, with a clear purpose behind them (a strong “why” Sato calls it), to help students learn to communicate with one another and thus, work more effectively as a team. Sato believes group projects are one of the best ways for students to learn cooperation in a meaningful way by becoming more aware of their own beliefs and values.

Sato describes one of the best projects his beginning Japanese students created because of the important “why” behind it: to help

Japanese conference attendees. The students designed short videos with interesting landmarks to help those attending an on-campus pedagogy forum get to campus more easily from Newark Airport, since many had great difficulty in previous years. The videos were a huge success and, Sato adds, greatly appreciated by conference participants.

Beyond these courses in modern Japanese, EAS also offers specialized Japanese language classes such as Classical Japanese from the Nara through the Meiji eras and Kanbun, including “Japanese Kanbun.” These language classes, designed and taught by Keiko Ono, classical language specialist, are offered at the



Students participate in a sushi-making workshop

undergraduate level, but are of strong interest especially to graduate students and Japan researchers. Throughout North America and Europe there are only a handful of institutions offering both Classical Japanese and Kanbun regularly.

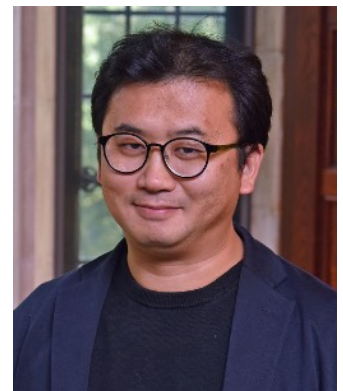
“Princeton students are very devoted and demanding in a good way. They put pressure on us to be more intellectually vibrant in the classroom.”

Jing Wang, Director of the Chinese Language Program

The EAS department hosts a weekly colloquium series, where professors, language lecturers, and advanced graduate students present their current research, and Wang believes this opportunity has contributed to new approaches in the classroom. She highlights Associate Professor [Paize Keulemans'](#) recent research presentation on the analysis of scenes from a popular film to examine hidden power dynamics within a society as a specific inspiration. The intellectual effort language lecturers devote to their scholarly research has kept their students engaged and their classrooms consistently full.

The Korean Language Program has grown significantly in recent years, tracking national trends. According to a recent NPR report by Ashley Ahn, U.S. college Korean language programs increased enrollment by 78% from 2009 to 2016. And according to the Modern Language Association, total enrollment in language classes has reached its highest levels. The Korean Language Program's enrollment from 2019 to 2023 averaged 90 students per semester in a department with five full-time lecturers, who offer six levels of Korean language study and 14 courses within the curriculum.

But enrollment is only one part of the story. The Director of the Korean Language Program and senior lecturer, [Ho Jung Choi](#), earned his doctorate in ESL and Foreign Language Education



Namseok Yong, lecturer of Korean language

(Korean focus) from the University of Iowa and has been involved in curriculum development for teaching Korean for many years. Choi currently serves on the executive board of the American Association of Teachers of Korean (AATK), whose current emphasis is shifting to culturally immersive experiences. In that spirit, the Korean Language Program has offered innovative cultural events, such as the popular Kimbap-making workshop and the Korean folk-art painting workshop.

Choi is always thinking of ways to fully engage language learners wherever they are, which is what inspired his most recent idea.

“Princeton students want practical relevance because they’re so busy: between summer internships, work, studying, trying to get jobs, and thinking about the future, they have little time to take a summer program in Korea. I thought, *‘why don’t I bring Korea to my students?’* This idea became especially relevant when travel was limited due to COVID.”

Choi began by filming famous sites around Seoul and saw how eager his students were to learn about day-to-day life for Korean college students, so he walked around Yonsei University’s campus and visited its cafeteria. All of the filming Choi did is now part of a Korean Virtual Reality Lab that students can use for cultural immersion and cultural proficiency.

Cultural events are a staple of all three EAS language programs and are a testament to the innovation, collaboration, and dedication that each language team brings to their students every day. The Japanese Language Program has offered a traditional tea ceremony and annual calligraphy workshops, and the Chinese Language Program has offered a student poetry exhibit and hosts an annual Lunar New Year celebration. Together all three language teams have collaborated to host “EAS Language and Culture Festival” this spring. This event featured cultural games, live student performances, food, and more.

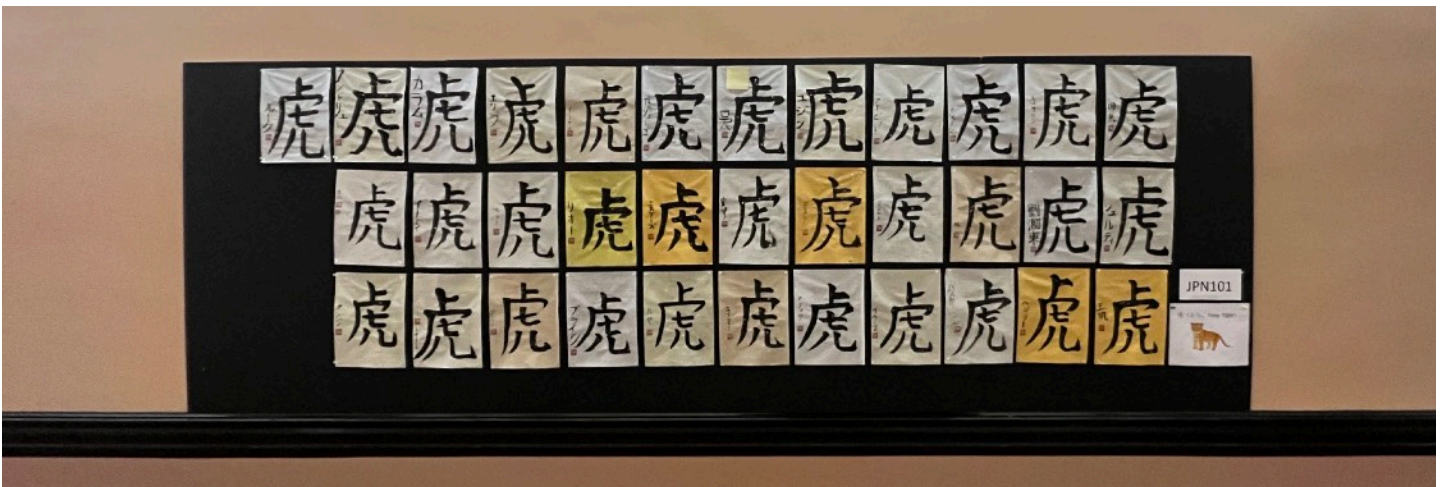


EAS Language and Culture Festival, spring 2023



Wang firmly believes the language lecturers' commitment is inspired by the unique dedication of Princeton students, "Princeton students are very devoted and demanding in a good way. They put pressure on us to be more intellectually vibrant in the classroom."

With 11 full-time instructors, the Chinese Language Program offers four levels of instruction in modern Chinese and 20 courses within the curriculum. The Chinese Language Program has consistently been one of the most popular foreign languages offered by the University, ranking in the top four even during the pandemic.



Japanese calligraphy which is displayed in the halls of Frist Campus Center

## A GENUINE CONNECTION: EAST ASIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Weekly language tables offered by all three language programs provide Princeton language students an opportunity to share an end-of-day meal and practice their conversation skills with fellow language learners, a lecturer, members of the Princeton community, and often esteemed emeritus faculty members, like Professor Seiichi Makino.

Sato expressed the unique value of language tables not only because of how much they help students with language learning, but also because they are a way to invite the community into the

University. Sato explains that he realizes the community is curious about campus life so when local guests are sometimes invited to the language tables, they always come, and occasionally bring family members. Sato especially enjoys these occasions because students can observe more real-life conversations.

EAS's language tables were the perfect way for Osaseri to feel comfortable as a new member of the Korean language community. "The Korean language tables helped break down those barriers and fears of not being exact and proper, and as I became comfortable in these spaces, I could feel myself being more empowered to unabashedly engage with other Koreans and talk about pop culture, social issues, and so on." And because of the increase in enrollment of non-heritage speakers in language classes, the language tables provide a wonderful opportunity for those students to begin to develop their language skills with heritage speakers.



Jingdong Stone Forest Park, China, as part of the Princeton in Beijing study abroad program in summer 2019

In addition to participating in language tables and inviting community members to join them, language lecturers regularly offer cultural workshops. These workshops are designed to expose students to important cultural practices that reinforce their language learning, or, for those who are not language students, help introduce them to a lively cultural community.

Outside the regular academic calendar, Princeton has offered excellent Chinese and Japanese summer language programs for many years. [Princeton in Beijing \(PIB\)](#), founded by Emeritus Professor C. P. Chou in 1993, is one of the most successful study-abroad programs for learning Chinese. PIB offers an eight-week intensive language program in Beijing equivalent to two semesters of Chinese language study. For summer 2023, PIB will operate its program in person in Princeton. [Princeton in Ishikawa \(PII\)](#), the Japanese summer program, has been popular since it began, even in the summers of 2020, 2021, and 2022, when it was held virtually. This year, PII will return students to Ishikawa for its unique intensive study and home-stay program. The Korean Language Program is also offering the first-ever [Princeton in Korea \(PIK\)](#) program this summer in partnership with Yonsei University's Korean Language Institute.

The Korean, Japanese, and Chinese Language Programs at Princeton University are a vibrant and tight-knit community, who cares deeply about language learning and is wholly invested in each student's optimal learning experience. And that genuineness is not lost on anyone who spends any time in the Department of East Asian Studies.

That sounds exactly like what a home should be.



Yukari Tokumasu (lecturer of Japanese) and a student show off an origami heart as part of the Language and Culture Festival