



Friday Seminar

Feb 24

P
M 1:00 - 2:30

NAH213

(BOTH in-person and online)

Join Zoom: <https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/91836450611>

ID: 918 3645 0611

Passcode: 789996

Silent Conversation: Writing as a mode of face-to-face interaction in early modern East Asia

Sharing no spoken language, diplomats and educated individuals from China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam often resorted to 'brush talk'—written exchanges in literary Chinese—in transnational encounters throughout history. Utilizing brush talk as a lingua franca, East Asian literati synchronously yet 'silently' negotiated conflicts, exchanged inner thoughts and created a convivial atmosphere, all of which were essential ingredients of the region's cross-border interactions that transcended the purely linguistic functions of Chinese. I will use silent conversations conducted by Sun Yat-sen, Liang Qichao, Ōkuma Shigenobu and Phan Bội Châu to explore socio-cultural functions of Chinese writing in order to analyze this (unique) cultural practice from an anthropological perspective. I will problematize the meaning of literacy in translinguistic settings and question Lévi-Strauss's proposition that the primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery.



Reijiro Aoyama is a Senior Lecturer at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research has focused on transnationalism and migrant communities in East Asia. His research interests include narratives of migration, media discourse and literacy, language education, and digital platforms and online work.