

The Asian Studies Thesis FAQ

Writing a thesis may seem like a daunting task, but this guide should help answer some questions about the thesis and the thesis process, and should put some of your fears at rest. After reading through these FAQs, and are ready to start talking out your thesis idea, make an appointment with the Asian Studies advisor (michelle.low@unco.edu) to start brainstorming and figuring out your senior thesis project.

1. What is a Thesis?

The Asian Studies Thesis is the culmination of your studies at UNC. It is a primary-source based research project using interdisciplinary methods on whatever appropriate topic within Asia of the student's choice. The thesis must answer a specific research question, and must utilize primary sources from Asia and in Asian languages to answer that question.

2. Why is the Thesis a requirement?

Because Asian Studies is an interdisciplinary program, the Asian Studies Thesis allows you the opportunity to show that you know how to ask and answer a compelling question about something relevant in Asian Studies and can think critically and analytically, and synthesize those thoughts into a coherent discussion of issues in Asian Studies. It shows your ability to use one or more Asian languages skillfully, integrate content from different disciplines and different aspects of Asian Studies, and to work independently conducting original research. Successful completion of the Asian Studies Thesis serves as evidence that you can do all of the above and will help you show employers that you have cultural competence in another culture and an Asian language, and can help you get into graduate programs.

3. How do I get started?

The best way to start the thesis is to decide on the thesis topic. The topic should be on some aspect of Asia that the student is sincerely interested in and would like to do more work on, since the Asian Studies thesis could be the basis for future graduate studies or professional work. From this topic, the student will be able to formulate a specific research question, particularly after consultation with the student's Asian Studies advisor/thesis advisor.

4. How long does the thesis have to be?

While the emphasis of the thesis is quality, not quantity, in general a thesis should be somewhere between 35 to 50 pages of original text. This page count does not include the bibliography or appendices. Original text of much less than 35 pages indicates that either the research question is too narrow for extensive analysis or that the student has not done enough scholarly in-depth analysis. Original text of more than 50 pages indicates that the research question is too broad for undergraduate analysis, and would be a better suited for graduate work.

5. What can I do my thesis on?

While the topic can be on any Asian-related subject that the student is interested in, there are certain constraints for an undergraduate thesis. The most important consideration is that the research question needs to be answered by using primary sources in an Asian language that the student can read and understand without assistance. If the thesis does not demonstrate the student's Asian language competency, then it cannot count towards graduation. Next, the question cannot be too broad (e.g. why does Neo-Confucianism become popular across East Asia from the 13th to the 19th centuries?) or too narrow (e.g. why did the Mongol invasions of Japan fail to conquer the Kamakura shogunate?), because such questions will not make a successful undergraduate thesis. Finally, the thesis topic should be something that the student is willing to research for over a year, since completing a successful Asian Studies thesis will take at least that long.

a. Some previous topics

Previous topics for Asian Studies theses include: literary analyses of 21st century Chinese literature or the influence of Heian literary classics on modern Japanese popular culture, the historical and political implications of the island boundary disputes between China and Japan, analysis of the experiences of foreigners teaching English in Japan, and the analysis of gender roles in Japanese manga.

Previous thesis titles:

Voices of the Early 21st Century: Han Han, Guo Jingming and the Literature of the *Baling Hou* Generation

Gender Roles of Japanese Women in Anime

Getting the most out of JET

Rocks in the Sea: Understanding the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute in the East China Sea

Genji Then and Now

6. When should I start working on my thesis?

You should be **thinking** about what interests you when you begin the Asian Studies program. The courses in the program are designed to give you a sampling of the different fields and directions you can go in Asian Studies. As you take the Asian Studies courses in Asian civilizations, literature, history, etc., you can start thinking about what topics interest you most, and start thinking about the kinds of things you might want to explore in depth. Start talking with your advisor early on to discuss your interests and try to get some possible directions. By the middle of your Junior year, you should begin working with your thesis advisor, and choose your thesis committee (your "Readers"). The [Recommended Thesis Timeline](#) breaks down your last three semesters into more detail.

[Recommended Thesis Timeline](#)

7. How do I find a **Thesis Advisor**?

Begin by speaking with your Asian Studies advisor to discuss some of the topics and ideas you have for your thesis. Your advisor can help you choose a thesis advisor based on the faculty members' fields of expertise. You will then need to make an appointment with that faculty member to ask if s/he would be willing to serve as your Thesis Advisor. It is your responsibility to explain what you will be researching for your thesis, and what role you hope the faculty member will play as your Thesis Advisor. If s/he agrees, have the faculty member sign the [Thesis Advisor and Reader Agreement Form](#).

8. How do I **get Readers?**

When you meet with the Asian Studies advisor to discuss your thesis topic and thesis advisor, you will also talk about which AS faculty members have expertise in your thesis topic, and who might be willing to serve as readers. You will have to meet with the readers you choose to explain your proposed project, and ask them to sign the [Thesis Advisor and Reader Agreement Form](#), too.

9. What is the **Thesis Proposal?**

Follow the link to the ["AS Thesis Guidelines"](#) Handbook

10. What is an **Annotated Bibliography?**

Follow the link to the ["AS Thesis Guidelines"](#) Handbook

11. When do I do my **Presentation?**

See the ["Recommended Thesis Timeline"](#)

In order to graduate with a degree in Asian Studies, you must present your thesis in a public forum. This is not an oral defense. Rather, it is your chance to speak to interested people about your work. The purpose of the presentation is to educate others on your topic and gain presentation experience.

You are allowed to present at any appropriate venue, but most students present at UNC's Research Day on the "Asian Studies Panel." If you are graduating in December, you should plan to **present at Research Day in the spring semester before your December graduation**. You are welcome and encouraged to invite whomever you would like to your presentation. Your Thesis Advisor and thesis readers should be present, if possible. You should also invite other Asian Studies faculty, your family, and friends. The bigger the audience, the better!

12. What is the **Format of a Thesis?**

Follow the link to the ["AS Thesis Guidelines"](#) Handbook

13. Forms are included in the AS Thesis Guidelines and can be downloaded from the Asian Studies Advising page.

[AS Thesis Advisor and Reader Agreement Form](#)
[AS Thesis Sample Title Page & Signature Page](#)