

Discussion on the Correct Direction of Stroke Order Teaching*

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Abstract—The primary purpose of paying attention to strokes is to make the words write fast and well. However, at present, the teachers spend a lot of thoughts on the strokes order teaching, but it turned out to be largely unsuccessful. The students' words are still not well-written. The core reason is that the direction of stroke order teaching is wrong. Teachers should not regard strokes order as rigid knowledge points for students to memorize. They should explain the formal relationship of Chinese characters, so that students can learn the specific processing of strokes and the overall coordination of structures on the basis of understanding the structure of Chinese characters. In addition, calligraphy classes should be added, and stroke order should be explained and practiced in calligraphy instruction and practice. It will be necessary to let students strengthen calligraphy practice, and this is the key to writing Chinese characters.

Keywords—Chinese characters; stroke order; write

I. INTRODUCTION

From elementary school to university, it is a common phenomenon for students to write Chinese characters without following the standard stroke order. Why not write according to the standard stroke order? Is it that the teacher does not talk about stroke order in teaching? After the investigation, it is found that this was not the real case. Taking the first-grade class from the survey in detail as an example, stroke order teaching is the focus of the first-grade primary school teaching. In addition to the fineness of each word in the language class, the slide show, the practice in the classroom, the class also uses a variety of methods to practice, there are also a variety of questions in the exam. Therefore, from the overall view, it has been paid a lot attention on the stroke order teaching. Another of the findings is that most Chinese students don't write very well, but Japanese students' words are generally written more neatly. What is the reason? Why do people spend a lot of effort to emphasize stroke order, but the words are still not well-written? And why many people who write well don't follow the stroke order to write? If people can't write the words well in strict accordance with the terms of the stroke order, what is the function of the stroke order?

II. STROKE ORDER AND ITS FUNCTION

Stroke order refers to "the order of strokes when writing."¹ The so-called incorrect stroke order means that it is substandard. Regarding the specification of stroke order, there are originally "Printing General Chinese Character Forms" and "Modern Chinese General Word List". These two words list stipulate the glyph structure, strokes and stroke order of the Chinese characters received, but do not list the stroke order one by one. By 1997, the National Language Committee and the Press and Publication Administration jointly issued the "Modern Chinese General Character Stroke Specification", which determined the standard stroke order of 7000 Chinese characters, and listed the stroke order of each word in one stroke. In 1999, the National Language Committee issued the "GB13000.1 Character Set Chinese Character Stroke Order Specification", which stipulated the stroke order specification of 20902 Chinese characters.

In addition, the "Xinhua Writing Dictionary" prepared by the Commercial Press Dictionary Research Center, with reference to the "Modern Chinese General Characters Writing Specification", marks the stroke order of 3500 first-level high-frequency words one by one, which is also an important basis for reviewing the standard stroke order.

What is the function of the stroke order?² The "Preface" of "Xinhua Writing Dictionary" points out that the main purpose of paying attention to strokes is to conform to the physiological functions of the wrist and the configuration principle of Chinese characters, so that the writing is smooth and fast, and the written Chinese characters are balanced, stable well-proportioned, and condensed. Simply put, the purpose of standardizing the stroke order is to guide people to write the words quickly. However, the reality is that it is difficult to remember the stroke order specification, and almost no one can write strictly according to the stroke order specification.

¹ Huang Borong, Liao Xudong, Modern Chinese (Updated No.5 Edition), Higher Education Press, ver.2011, P153.

² The Commercial Press Words Writing Research Center, ed. Xinhua Writing Dictionary, ver.2. The Commercial Press, ver. 2011.

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III. THE PROBLEM OF THE STROKE ORDER SPECIFICATION

There are norms, but people do not write according to the specifications, which is probably the biggest problem of the stroke order specification. In the first and second grades, they also talked and practiced the stroke order. The students had a certain grasp of the stroke order. From the third grade, the teacher no longer regarded the stroke order as the teaching focus, and the students' writing gradually became irregular. When arrived at the university, even Chinese students were not sure about the stroke order of many words. About graduate students of Chinese international education, and even many Chinese teachers, there is still situation of "reverse strokes".

Why is it not easy to remember the stroke order? There are roughly three reasons for this:

A. *The Stroke Order Is Too Complicated*

There are some basic rules for the stroke order of Chinese characters, such as the general seven: first horizontally and then vertically;³ first leftfalling stroke then right-falling stroke; top to bottom; left to right; from outside to inside; first inside and then sealing; first in the middle and then both ends. But "people also encounter some special words in practice, which cannot be solved with this basic rule." From the 1960s, scholars began to discuss the strokes of these "special" words, such as Wen Yizhan (1965) "General Law and Special Writing of Stroke", Li Bingze (1980) "Talking about the Stroke Rules of Chinese Characters", Zhang Jingxian (1990) "Modern Chinese Characters", Fu Yonghe (1992) "Chinese Characters", and other articles, pointed out that many "special" strokes do not meet the basic rules. There are too many "special" situations, and many of the similarly strokes are different, so it is not easy to remember.

B. *Different People Have Different Understandings of Stroke Order*

Wang Haoyu's (2014)⁴ "Study on Six Kinds of Regular Script Stroke Order Literature since the Yuan Dynasty" compares in detail the "Three Steps on Calligraphy", "Glossary", "Classified Introduction on Calligraphy", "Study Tips on Learning Characters", "Teachers' Inductive Method", "Introduction to Learning Characters" and other writing instructions. It is found that because the calligraphers have different understandings of the point painting function of the script, the division of the parts, and the structure of the whole word, some words have a variety of stroke order. From the diachronic point of view, the standard stroke order of some modern Chinese characters is also changing, such as the words like "皮" and "母" are not the same as before. Yi Hongchuan proposed that "a Chinese character with only one type of writing stroke order" would not be standardized. The "Preface" of the "Xinhua Writing Dictionary" also mentions:

³ Li Bingze, Talking About the Stroke Order Rules of Chinese Characters, Chinese Language Learning, 1980, 5.

⁴ Yi Hongchuan, Research on the Standardization of Stroke Order, Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies, 1999, 3.

"The rules of customary conventions are often easy to diversify. Coupled with the ever-changing Chinese characters, the physiological functions of the wrists have greater adaptability, which determines that many words' stroke order is not single."

Can stroke order of Japanese characters be the same as Chinese characters?⁵ The two sides of the strait now have their own specifications for the strokes of Chinese characters. The mainland issued the "Modern Chinese General Characters Stroke Order in the Standards of Writing" (in this paragraph, the "Standards"). In 1996, Taiwan published the "Standards of Stroke Order of Commonly Used Chinese Characters" (this paragraph is referred to as "Stroke Order"). The "Standards" received 7,000 characters, all of which were sorted and simplified after the founding of New China. "Stroke Order" received 4,808 words, including some old glyphs, traditional characters, variants, and rare words that were not collected in the "Standards". There are also some differences in the stroke order of Chinese characters that are identical to the "Standards". Gao Gengsheng pointed out that it is impossible for the two strokes to be exactly the same. It is thought that it is impossible for two calligraphers to write the strokes exactly the same, or to write exactly the same as the "Standards."

It can be seen that stroke order is a writing habit. In reality, it is difficult to write every word strictly according to the standard of stroke. In addition, everyone may have their own knowledge of Chinese characters. It seems that the details of some Chinese characters should be allowed to be written in a personally easy way.

C. *There Are More Running Scripts in Daily Writing, and the Regular Scripts Are Gradually Faded*

The senior students began to write running script, and the strokes of the scripts were slowly forgotten. Many people think that the Chinese students' words are generally not well-written because they do not understand the stroke order. This is one-sided, because it is not the guarantee to write Chinese characters well when they know the stroke order. Among the people who currently know Chinese characters, the primary school Chinese teacher is probably the most accurate person to understand the stroke order, but many of them are not well written. Most of the first-grade students' strokes are clearly remembered, but they are also poorly written. Therefore, the reasons for poor-writing of Chinese characters are various. To write the word well, is not only to understand the stroke order, but also to understand the specific processing of the strokes and the overall coordination of the structure, involving the comprehensive grasp of the stroke direction and gesture. Therefore, the stroke order can't be emphasized alone. A calligraphy class should be set up, and the teaching and practice of lectures should be combined.

⁵ Gao Gengsheng, The Specification of Chinese Strokes on Both Sides of the Taiwan Straits, Language Construction, 1999, 3.

IV. THE CORRECT DIRECTION OF STROKE ORDER TEACHING

In order to play the role of stroke writing, it is best to combine with calligraphy practice. It will be better to teach and remember the stroke order in the practice of calligraphy, instead of turning the strokes into dry knowledge points, which the students can hardly recite them.

A. *Teachers Should Pay Attention to Explain the Combination of Parts and the Relationship*

In the lower grades of elementary school, it is reasonable to emphasize the stroke order, because at this time the Chinese characters are simpler, and most of them are single characters and words with few strokes. Students mastered the single-character strokes to understand the stroke order of the various parts of the fit, which helps to accurately write complex Chinese characters. But how to teach the stroke order has a lot to discuss. This paper believes that a teacher should start from the original meaning of a new word, simply talk about the changes of the glyph from ancient times to the present, and explain the relationship between form and meaning. The teacher should also explain the stroke order on the basis of explaining the structure to make the students understand the overall rules of stroke order.

Of course, there are limits to speaking only the strokes of the script, and the senior students begin to write the running script, which is another kind of stroke order. This also shows that the secret to writing a word is not to get the correct answer of the stroke order of a word, but to insist on practicing calligraphy.

B. *Strengthening Calligraphy Practice*

First, the school must have enough calligraphy classes.

The calligraphy class has two functions. First, teachers will talk about the gesture and the stroke order when people about to write, which really plays the role of stroke order. This is more practical than the Chinese teacher making students remember the stroke order. Second, it will give students more time to practice.

The "Teachers' Inductive Method: Children Learning Method"⁶, written by Tang Biao in Qing Dynasty, discussed the skills of children in learning calligraphy. He pointed out: "书字下笔有次序, 不可紊乱, 紊乱则字难工。然其法须幼时讲究, 方能记忆。童子入学一二年后, 先生将此写成字式, 令其取法, 习而熟之, 则功省而效倍矣"。(Modern Chinese translation: When writing, there is an order, and people can't write it in a random way. A chaotic word is not good, so people need to pay attention to it from a young age. After a child enters school for one or two years, the teachers teach some rules of stroke order, allowing students to learn, and after practicing, they will get twice the result with half the effort.) It can be seen that in the calligraphy class, the stroke order should be used as a writing technique to let the students understand. It

is not only necessary to emphasize the stroke writing, but to ignore the good-writing of words.

As mentioned above, the Japanese students are generally written neatly (the students author contacts are all Japanese students. The author has not seen the situation of the Japanese people, so the Japanese students here are as examples). How do they make it? This important experience comes from Japan's long and complete tradition of calligraphy education. First of all, Japanese schools attach great importance to calligraphy classes. There are calligraphy classes in each grade. According to the survey, there are about two sections per week. There are calligraphy training classes after school, and a large number of students will participate. There are also calligraphy journals in folks. Each issue will publish keywords, a word, a poem, etc., and publish good calligraphy. In this atmosphere, students generally attach importance to calligraphy practice.

Second, the practice after class must be strengthened.

Although there are many primary school students in China who go to class to practice calligraphy, they often interrupt their practice because of the heavy workload. In comparison, Japan has the atmosphere of practicing calligraphy for all.⁷ According to "Amateur Life White Paper" published by the Free Time Design Association belonged to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan, the annual average "book population" from 2000 to 2008 was 6.29 million, accounting for 5% of the country's total population, that is, one of the 20 Japanese people practiced calligraphy. In Japan, there are proverbs such as "40-year-old to learn writing" would be "fun in old age" about calligraphy education, which reflects the public perception that Japanese calligraphy education should be lifelong regardless of age.

At present, every year in the New Year, shrines, civic halls, and schools all over Japan hold a Spring Festival test session. All ordinary citizens can participate and write their wishes for the New Year with a brush. On the one hand, these measures promote students to practice calligraphy, and on the other hand, they also point out that the whole society pays attention to writing words. China should learn from Japan's experience.

C. *Promoting the Attention of the Whole Society in the Writing of Chinese Characters*

In Japanese society, calligraphy is everywhere. The store name sign of the street alleys is not a neon sign, but a plaque written by ink; the product packaging does not use the same type of printed font, but a brush calligraphy with design elements added on the basis of handwriting. At the graduation ceremony, students will receive a diploma written in a brush. At the end of the year, almost every Japanese person will send a New Year greeting card written by hand to friends and relatives. Calligraphy has become an important means of educating high-quality nationals, and it

⁶ Gong Nanzhuang, etc. Zhicheng, Wenxin correct, Enlightenment and Education Books Collection (including Tang Biao "Teachers' Inductive Method"), Sanqing Press, ver.1989.

⁷ Jia Jia, Japanese Calligraphy Education Tradition, Journal of Northeast Asia Studies, 2016, 2.

has played a broad role in the three levels of universal education, vocational education and art education.

There is a saying in Japan that "if a person's writing is ugly, his mind would be ugly". If a person's writing is ugly, he will be criticized by the teacher and will be looked down upon by the boss. The Chinese also attach importance to calligraphy at the ideological level. Everyone thinks that the beautiful calligraphy has an advantage in the examination, but the actual action is not enough. Many schools do not open calligraphy classes, and some schools open calligraphy classes as decorated. The experience of Japan will give China a lot of inspiration. It is the core to write the words well by effective practice. China's old method is to rely on rote memorization and it has little effect. In addition, programs like CCTV's "Chinese Characters Dictation Conference" focus on encouraging people to read more books and read more words, but it has not given instructions to write the good words. This paper suggests that the school's calligraphy class should be kept open, and the practice order should be regular script to running script, which should be consistent. The school attaches importance to it, and then promotes the whole society to pay attention to writing, in order to gradually improve the writing level of the whole people.

To sum up, the reasons why the students don't write beautifully is a few "not enough". The method of teaching the primary school teachers is not scientific enough. The students' exercises are not enough. The whole society does not pay enough attention to it. To solve these problems, the effective method is to talk right, practice enough, and pay attention to it.

V. CONCLUSION

First, the rules of stroke order should be rough and not fine. Being generality will be strong in generality and the feasibility is great. The stroke order of some words allows for two or three popular strokes. Like "方" and "万", it seems that there is not much difference between writing "丿" first and writing later. The standard of the stroke order is of course necessary, but it is not necessary to spend too much energy on the standard, but should spend time on the good looks of the whole word. It is especially important for left-hand writers to allow for personal handling based on the principle of observance.

Second, it is not necessary to emphasize the stroke order in isolation. It must be combined the understanding of strokes with calligraphy practice. The key point is to let students learn to use the pen. Under the guidance of the calligraphy teacher, they should practice the Chinese characters well, instead of just writing the stroke order correctly. Therefore, in the primary school stage, it will be necessary to do less research on the stroke order, and spend more time on the calligraphy class to practice the words. Students can begin to practice calligraphy when they reach a certain grade, and practice writing the words well and fast.

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