

# The Dilemma and Outlet of Chinese Calligraphy in International Chinese Language Education

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**Abstract**—The international identity of Chinese calligraphy still has a long way to go from construction to identification. As a carrier of Chinese culture, calligraphy should be cherished in the field of international Chinese language education. Chinese calligraphy teaching in international Chinese language education has entered the classroom at both the Confucius Institute and domestic institutions. Due to the differences in cultural background and thinking mode, such factors as "accepting and rejecting", incomplete theory and practice system, incomplete professional quality of teachers, and insufficient understanding of Chinese traditional culture, calligraphy teaching fails to reach the ideal state. Therefore, starting from the particularity of Chinese calligraphy culture, this paper focuses on the issues that restrict Chinese calligraphy in international Chinese language education, and probes into the strategies to promote Chinese calligraphy in international Chinese language education, which can lead the international education of Chinese calligraphy to a wider and deeper dimension.

**Keywords:** *Chinese calligraphy, international Chinese language education, dilemma, promotion strategy*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In 2009, Chinese calligraphy and related traditional Chinese seal cutting and rice paper production techniques were selected into the "list of representative works of intangible cultural heritage of mankind", and the international identity of Chinese calligraphy was reconstructed. According to Xiong Bingming, a French Chinese, "calligraphy is the core of Chinese culture and the unique garden of Chinese soul." It shows the importance of calligraphy in Chinese culture. However, the international identity of Chinese calligraphy has a long way to go from construction to identification. As the carrier of Chinese culture, calligraphy should be cherished in the field of international Chinese language education. Based on the current situation of Chinese calligraphy in international Chinese language education, combined with the inherent cultural characteristics of Chinese calligraphy, the author discusses the way in which Chinese calligraphy can be deeply accepted in international Chinese language education.

## II. THE PARTICULARITY OF CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY CULTURE AND ITS DILEMMA IN INTERNATIONAL CHINESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

### A. *The particularity of Chinese calligraphy culture*

Mr. Zong Baihua pointed out in the article "aesthetic thought in Chinese calligraphy" that "there are two main factors that Chinese characters can become works of art: one is that the beginning of Chinese characters is pictograph, and the other is the pen used by Chinese people." [3] The fundamental difference between Chinese characters and other Pinyin characters is that they are not only used as a phonetic symbol. The relationship among the construction, stroke, structure, form, sound and meaning of Chinese characters implies the unique thinking of Chinese people. Some people compare Chinese characters to the "living fossil" of Chinese culture. In addition, the tool brush of calligraphy has the characteristics of softness. Cai Yong pointed out in "nine postures" that "the posture can't be stopped, but the soft brush is strange." It is because of the softness of the brush that the diversity of the brushwork and the richness of the lines, as well as the change of the ink color (such as Huang Binhong's opinion of "dividing ink into five colors") provide a rich image contrast relationship for the aesthetic system of calligraphy. These contrast relationships become the elements of the calligraphy art, which can only be called "writing". It is the uniqueness of Chinese calligraphy and its culture that makes it difficult for Chinese calligraphy to be accepted internationally. This paper takes calligraphy teaching and acceptance in international Chinese language education as an example. Chinese calligraphy is an important part of international Chinese language education. The spread of calligraphy lays a cultural foundation for international Chinese language education. "Words can help people read. However, when people are familiar with it, they can remember." [2] Therefore, the main purpose of setting up Chinese calligraphy course in the major of international Chinese language education is to correct the writing errors of Chinese characters, cultivate correct writing habits, and finally master the skills of Chinese calligraphy, so as to understand Chinese culture. The promotion of Chinese calligraphy among foreign learners is conducive to the exchange of different cultures.

### *B. The dilemma of calligraphy teaching in international Chinese language education*

Chinese calligraphy teaching in international Chinese language education has entered the classroom in Confucius Institute and domestic colleges and universities. However, the calligraphy teaching has not reached the ideal state, which is mainly manifested in several aspects: first, different cultural backgrounds and different thinking patterns cause "acceptance exclusion". Chinese characters are the combination of form, sound and meaning. After the long-term evolution of history, their strokes are linear and standardized. It has become a relatively abstract symbol system. The abstractness and complexity of this symbol make it difficult for foreign students to recognize, write and memorize Chinese characters, which increase the difficulty for foreign students in the initial stage of accepting calligraphy. Secondly, there is no complete system of theory and practice, and the theory and practice are separated. Students' interest in learning is not widely mobilized, and the characteristics and advantages of Chinese calligraphy are not highlighted, such as unclear position of curriculum positioning, lack of standardization of the teaching materials. Many colleges and universities do not pay enough attention to the calligraphy course, the definition of its type is not clear, there is a lack of a special base and platform for international communication of calligraphy, and the teaching objectives of calligraphy teachers are not clear. Thirdly, the professional quality of teachers needs to be improved, and the calligraphy teachers in the international teaching of Chinese language show a lack of comprehensive skills and cultural self-cultivation. The understanding of Chinese and Western culture is not deep enough, which makes it difficult to teach the culture with national characteristics to foreign students clearly. However, the quality of calligraphy teachers in China and foreign countries who have the ability of cross-cultural communication is greatly lacking, and comprehensive teachers are lacking. Fourth, the current teaching is still at the writing level of simple fonts, and the depth of traditional Chinese culture is not enough. For example, regular script is the most commonly used type of calligraphy. Overseas students only know that most of people write regular script, have no deep understanding of the origin and evolution of various calligraphy styles, have no overall balanced connection with various calligraphy styles, and still stay at a relatively shallow level of aesthetic appreciation of Chinese characters, which is determined by the level of understanding of Chinese culture.

### III. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE EFFECT OF CALLIGRAPHY TEACHING IN INTERNATIONAL CHINESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

#### *A. Paying attention to the differences between China and the West and reducing the difficulty in the initial stage of learning in cultural comparison*

The spread of culture and cross-cultural dialogue is a science. Herbert Reid, chairman of the British aesthetic association, wrote in the preface of Chinese calligraphy

(English-Chinese comparison) by Mr. Jiang Yi: "what interests us particularly is the similarity between the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy and the aesthetics of modern abstract art." Some western artists try to acquire two basic elements from excellent calligraphy works by understanding the principles of Chinese calligraphy: "learning from nature" and "motion in quiescence". This also shows that it is not accidental that the abstract characteristics of Chinese calligraphy art are recognized by western artists. [4] Another example is that calligraphers "use the flying brush to compose the poetry of the universe." This expression embodies the artistic commonality of calligraphy and music. With this commonality, students are guided to have a spiritual understanding of Chinese calligraphy, and they can feel the beauty of calligraphy, thus reducing the difficulty caused by the complex symbols and abstractions. Therefore, aesthetic education should be introduced in the initial stage of learning, so that the aesthetic and appreciation of calligraphy throughout. In addition, it is required to pay attention to combine the calligraphy teaching with the actual situation, realize the true teaching according to students' aptitude, pay attention to the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, make reasonable choices for the learning habits of Chinese calligraphy, respect and accept the learning methods of students from different nationalities, cultural backgrounds and living habits, such as Chinese art learning is quiet; foreign classrooms are more active; and many foreign students are active and talkative, which require reasonable guidance in the process of teaching.

#### *B. Improving the teaching curriculum system and enriching the teaching content at different levels*

One is to combine the reading of characters and aesthetic feeling in teaching by elaborating various forms of calligraphy textbooks. In the compilation of teaching materials, students' interest in learning Chinese characters should be emphasized, the memory of the order of Chinese characters' strokes should be deepened, and the understanding of the rules of Chinese characters' formation should be deepened. The Chinese characters in the table of modern Chinese characters can be used as the source of calligraphy class, and the appropriate model characters can be selected from the ancient inscriptions, focusing on the literacy and artistry of Chinese characters. The teachers can guide the students to appreciate and feel the changes of strokes in Chinese writing and the symmetry of spatial structure, and transform the boring and monotonous Chinese language class into an artistic experience class with rich aesthetic pleasure and full of fun. The second is to teach students according to their aptitude and implement classified teaching according to different cultural backgrounds. For overseas students in China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Vietnam, East Asia, Southeast Asia and other countries and regions that belong to the "Chinese character culture circle", they are relatively easy to learn Chinese characters and Chinese language, and they are also easier to understand and accept Chinese culture. They can take learning calligraphy skills and imparting relevant cultural knowledge as the main content of teaching. For students from "non-Chinese culture

circle", teachers should recognize the differences between students from two different cultural backgrounds, and pay attention to arouse the enthusiasm of overseas students to learn Chinese language and stimulate their interest in learning Chinese characters. [5] The third is to carry out classified teaching. For the students and beginners who seldom contact with Chinese, calligraphy class should belong to the teaching of Chinese characters, with the students' recognition and literacy as the main purpose, calligraphy teaching as the auxiliary teaching principle. And the teaching of writing skills training should focus on the writing of basic strokes and radicals of Chinese characters. For the learners who have reached the middle and advanced level of Chinese language, they can guide the students to understand and feel the aesthetic factors of Chinese calligraphy. Learning calligraphy can promote the students to follow the principle of "learning from simple to complex, from less to more, from easy to difficult, step by step". First, they should learn the basic strokes, then the changes of strokes, and the simple pictographs, monosyllabic characters, and finally complex compound characters.

### *C. Improving the quality of teachers*

To strengthen the teaching and explanation of the background knowledge of Chinese calligraphy culture, it is necessary to have the corresponding institutions and specialized talents of international communication of Chinese calligraphy. These specialized talents should be able to skillfully use foreign languages to explain Chinese calligraphy and the Chinese aesthetic values behind Chinese calligraphy, which is a very high requirement. [6] It is necessary to adopt various ways in a planned way, establish a perfect and reasonable training mechanism, and train high-quality teachers with the ability of calligraphy education. Calligraphy teachers should have a variety of comprehensive qualities, master the knowledge of pedagogy and psychology, be familiar with foreign culture, and have certain cross-cultural communication ability. In order to enhance the attraction of calligraphy class, it is necessary to try the best to use intuitive, vivid and interesting teaching methods.

### *D. In-depth understanding of Chinese traditional culture through calligraphy carrier*

People's attitude towards calligraphy changed from focusing on simple techniques to systematic perception and participation in calligraphy. Calligraphy works have become the materialized form of calligraphers' emotion, morality, thinking, character, temperament, will, ideal and other spiritual characters, which embody the philosophy, universe and life views of thousands of excellent ancient Chinese intellectuals. In particular, the philosophy, aesthetic concept and personality realm contained in the Chinese calligraphy art are the concentrated embodiment of the national spirit of the Chinese nation, which people urgently need to carry forward and spread. [7] It's known that calligraphy is not only a kind of writing skill, but also a kind of cultural and artistic form that needs a lot of skills. Therefore, the students can visit some famous calligraphy and painting exhibitions, appreciate some calligraphy inscriptions and literati songs in

scenic spots and historic sites, or go to some museums to visit ancient inscriptions, Han slips, treasures of calligraphers of past dynasties. These extracurricular experience activities can cultivate students' aesthetic sentiment. Students can experience the unique charm and national cultural psychology of Chinese culture in typical cultural forms. There are many famous calligraphers, such as "Wang Xizhi", "Wang Xianzhi", "Yan Zhenqing", "Xu Su", "Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, Mi Fu and Cai Xiang" of Song dynasty, Zhao Mengfu, Wang Duo, Deng Shiru, Wu Changshuo and so on. These classics, which have gone through the wind and rain of the times, are the main objects of learning calligraphy in the western world. [8]

### *E. Paying attention to the achievements in the field of foreign calligraphy research and expanding the theoretical system of calligraphy research and learning*

Major international cultural exchanges in history have provided materials for westerners to study Chinese calligraphy, such as Chinese Notes by Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), Chinese-English dictionary by Morrison (1782-1834) (published in 1815), Correct Handwriting (The book is actually the translation of the ninety-two laws on the structure of Chinese character form) by Davis (1795-1890), a British diplomat, and Grass Vocabulary [9] by Millot. According to these works, people can see the westerners' understanding of Chinese calligraphy under different cultural backgrounds in different periods. Learners and researchers can follow this vein to deepen. For the academic research of calligraphy in the international art career, it is required to pay more attention to its sustainability. Starting from the advantages of western research on Chinese calligraphy, it is necessary to give full play to the advantages of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary research background. For example, German sinologist Lothar Ledderose studied the "modularization" of Chinese calligraphy from the perspective of socialization, and his research perspective is novel. At the same time, it is necessary to probe into the tradition of Sinology and pay more attention to the noumenon of calligraphy. Italian scholar Billroth studied the interest and charm of Chinese calligraphy in the vision of China.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The problems faced by Chinese calligraphy in international Chinese language education are caused by the particularity of Chinese calligraphy culture, the cultural differences between China and the west, the teaching curriculum system of Chinese calligraphy, the quality of teachers and other factors. In order to realize the construction of international identity, Chinese calligraphy needs to probe into the current problems, pay attention to the differences between China and the west, and reduce the difficulty in the initial stage of learning in cultural comparison, improve the teaching curriculum system, and enrich the teaching content at different levels, and improve the overall quality of teachers. Gradually, the students can get improvement from the external configuration of the font which is the

representation of calligraphy learning to the aesthetic of calligraphy art. Through the carrier of calligraphy, the students can understand the spirit of traditional Chinese culture, attach importance to the existing achievements in the field of foreign calligraphy research, and expand the theoretical system of calligraphy research and learning, so as to make Chinese calligraphy obtain good results in international Chinese language education.

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