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**CALLIGRAPHY AS PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR WELL-BEING
STATE**

Maria Butucea (a)*
*Corresponding author

(a) Teacher Training Department, Technical University of Civil Engineering, Bucharest, Romania, Tacul Tei B-dv,
No.122-124, marrbu23@gmail.com,

Abstract

Chinese culture didn't give up to handwriting, 书法 (*shu fa*) in printing era or computer era, but it has become a form of art. Many Chinese school children are sent to learn traditional calligraphy as an extracurricular activity beyond classroom tasks, especially who are also practicing Kong -Fu. As many other authors, we found that calligraphy is more than art. It might be a psychological issue; it is a way to calm down, to relax and how to achieve well-being state, a form to combat the contemporary induced stress. Furthermore, this issue is for every child and adult, not only for disabled ones. Children can use for focus attention on the task, or balance different mind state. They can learn to pursue a goal or finish school tasks. Teachers also can improve self-control and equilibrium in classroom and everyday life. In Western culture calligraphy many years ago was enclosed in curriculum school for primary school. Beneficial state of mind could be reached by practicing it as some kind of therapy. Why not could be handwriting one of them? We will claim this idea based on previous studies and personal experiences and observation in P. R. of China and in our Romanian classroom.

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1. Introduction

During our new experience in China we observed some similarities that could be familiar, but some new questions aroused. These questions are basically about culture's practices like Calligraphy or Martial Arts and how they could preserve them.

It seems there are two way to preserve traditional practice in China. Martial Arts have been transformed in sport and pottery, paper-cut and calligraphy became form of arts in everyday life and in schools. We found that there is a third way; it could be possibly to value some practice as psychological achievement – in this case of calligraphy - as therapy for normal people, for everybody. From some time now, calligraphy as subject is rejected in Western culture due to development of technology. But we should reflect on. Comparing with Chinese practice is it simply a problem of skill using hand, or it is more? We think it also involve philosophical perception.

There are misconceptions belongs to new era of technology regarding this issue and also a strong necessity of improving handwriting for children and adult person as well. The situation could be similar in both culture (some Chinese youngsters is losing interest in), but it seems the loss is much higher in our culture then in China. Reconsideration needs studies for assume another perspective of teaching and learning.

Educational consideration must briefly ground on historical approaches and researches and might be linked with Easterner point of view for a better understanding of this activity.

2. Problem Statement

What calligraphy means in history and in nowadays? The word calligraphy (beautiful writing) come from ancient Greek and it means the aesthetic form of letters. Roman period and also Middle Edge need proper and beautiful writing when copies of books were in use. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica* we can read: "Old English calligraphy had its heyday in Europe between the 12th and 16th centuries. [...] This is the type of calligraphy that is commonly used on invitations and certificates in the modern world. Whereas ancient calligraphy may have been considered an art while still conveying literal messages or meanings behind words, the modern form can be more abstract." (Barbour, Williams, Nash., Anderson, Brown & Turner in. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2017, para.2). There are two aspects we should assume:

- Chinese meaning of *Shu Fa* is different. In Chinese culture is still regarded as a respectable form of art and more scholars are enriched it with psychological and medical dimensions.
- We can compare the two perspectives. In the modern period in westerner Curriculum was also settled subjects called "calligraphy". Chinese culture, being more traditional, still appreciates much better this practice. There are books (Zhuzhong & Desheng, 2007) and articles (Kao 2010; Kao, Lui, Guan, & Cao, 2012; Kao, Zhu, Chao, Yi Chen, Liu, & Zhang, 2014; Chu, Huang, & Wen, 2018) about Chinese calligraphy which explain how it survived centuries by pictographic language.

Linguistic hypothesis and psychological hypothesis can work together. Linguistic hypothesis is also common sense explanation. What is wired, is that even related to art handwriting evolved separately somehow. During history hand writing become as fingerprint of a soul, personal body and mind (心 - *xin*). According to other authors like H.S.R Kao and Huiwen Li and Yueming Yu calligraphy is also the way of meditation, clear mind, relax and self-control. (Kao et al. 2014; Li & Yu, 2015).

We observed that in Chinese classroom they show nowadays much appreciation for ancestors and every office or walls of classroom are decorated with same beautiful stamp as example and moral advices. Same teachers organize and exposed pieces of private collections in Minnan Normal University, Zhangzhou, Fujian, R. P. China. We had enclosed some stamp in my book regarding the case study of Chinese school Culture (Butucea, 2012, p. 186). During practicing Tai ji quan in 2017, in Zhangzhou, Fujian, R.P. China, we had been asked as interview by local newspaper about our impression regarding the role of stamps on the walls and the good understanding of motion and posture in the lessons and couch of Tai ji quan. Of course, all pictures have double role: to increase perfection of the movement and also to express moral advice for control and good behavior. In our class in 2017 for the subject Cross-cultural education at master degree level, Teacher Training Department of Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, we had some course notes regarding this topic.

3. Research Questions

Every book about fundamental and culture settled that calligraphy is one of the treasures of China. After long stay in a Chinese university we observed and wrote about Chinese culture and contemporary education trying to find the link between traditional practices and contemporary behavior like diligence, perseverance and accuracy. Some questions aroused regarding education

Is Chinese language so different, or is just a matter of life philosophy or good decision made by educationist staff? Could be true for phonetically languages, too, the idea that it can improve our mind? There is any benefice to write letters or phrases by hand like centuries ago?

In order to clarified or just try to do it, we can have a look in Chinese culture and emphasize that handwriting could become in any culture or system of writing a hobby for children or adults and that could make people feel enjoyed and improve well-being as state of mind. Our experience and practice showed a necessity to switch cultural perspective.

- Chinese culture is not impenetrable form of thinking and practice. Westerner can also practice Calligraphy enjoy and feel better. It could be a therapy for normal students and adults at any age.

- Chinese calligraphy has beneficial results, but also it could be the case for any calligraphy. For the second assumption it requires new more studies.

We claim here that it is not just a cultural matter at all, but is about perception of teachers on this practice as psychological matter.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to reveal Chinese Calligraphy as exemplarity and express the need of renew our point of view regarding Calligraphy in Westerner culture.

We try to emphasize that, being a character (pictographic or ideogram) or image of sound - a letter, it doesn't matter. What is important here is the state of mind involved in such activities or practices. We will focus in reveal some psychological state of mind making some cultural transfers and watch with a new eye the necessity of improving calligraphy in our classrooms. It might be a reshape of mind regarding education and quality of lesson and students' feelings acquired.

For a better understand we can have a look at first what is Calligraphy in Easterner culture, and how it have links with other form of human expression and practices. According to some Chinese scholars (Zhuzhong & Desheng, 2007; Fayuan, Hanning, & Goldham, 2010), nowadays as well online sites agreed that Chinese scripts are generally divided into five categories: *zhuan, li, kai, xing, cao*. We summerize here briefly some others carcateristics of Chinese perception regarding calligraphy.

▪ Chinese calligraphy's role is due to the fact that calligraphy is not just a method of communication, but also a mean of expressing emotions. Practice of calligraphy has connection with music, picture and Kong-Fu. (Fayuan, Hanning, & Goldham, 2010; Zhuzhong & Desheng, 2007). Also, in Chinese Calligraphy have great importance the tools. As an ancient technic of writing in China, it is special by using brush. "The brush [...] reveals much of the writer's himself - his impulsiveness, restraint, elegance, rebelliousness" (Delbanco, 2008, para.14). There are fewer words for emotions in Chinese. (The word "hao" – 好 the picture designed initially a woman and a child as expression of good, wellness, appreciation). So, the trace of brush can express emotion. More than is revealed the importance of meditation, that state of mind acquired by stillness. „As traditional methods, both CCH (Calligraphy) and meditation have positive effects in terms of stress reduction" (Kao et al., 2014, p. 52; Kao et al., 2014, p.47- 52) There also similarities between Kong-Fu and calligraphy. My students, who take classes of Tai ji quan are choosing the class of calligraphy as well. We have exchanged a lot of observation and comments by e-mails with my Romanian and Chinese friends regarding this topic. Romanian said that they don't understand how it could be such a link meanwhile Chinese are wondering why they cannot see it. Also, some observations and explanation of this connection as neural location are enclosed in our book (Butucea, 2012, p.186 -187).

▪ We've noticed that all these historic overviews present in classroom, make children proud of ancestors and the link between past and present is made strongly operational. They really could have desire to achieve such perfection like predecessors. We had also exposed the idea of perfectionism of Chinese people in our book (Butucea, 2012) and in many e-mails exchanged with Romanian and Chinese teachers and students during our stay and teaching in China, 2008-2017. Also in Westerner it might a connection between writing the picture, music (music notation) in different aesthetic period. They work together or inspire each other's (Leon de la Vega, 2016; Barcio, 2017). (The holistic philosophy is developing more intuitive mind, meanwhile the abstract and logical mind is proper to Westerner philosophy. The holistic vision proposes a connection of everything as image of human reality (mind, heart, hand, and body) and the explanation might be taken in consideration. Connectivity, fluidity and anticipation all are possible when the mind is calm. Regarding writing of Latin letters, we are still waiting to be revealed the advantage of handwriting centuries ago and how could possibly shaped our mind. References at calligraphy are fugitive in encyclopedias like Encyclopaedia Britannica and in schools or faculties' curriculum as subject is mostly disappeared.

5. Research Methods

In order to gain some clues about psychological state of mind at first, we made some search in previous studies and after we made some inquiries in our classroom with some groups of undergraduates and postgraduate's students. Finally, we count the answers and found the results.

Relevant studies and experiences show us that there is something important about state of mind gained by practicing calligraphy. We searched databases, for relevant articles using keywords “handwriting,” “Chinese calligraphy”. We found that in Hong Kong during the last three decades, Henry Kao has conducted systematic research on the bodily and mental processes involved in brush handwriting from a psychological perspective (Kao, 2010; Kao et al., 2012; Kao et al., 2014). Recently, some of this research has established Chinese Calligraphy as having positive effects on cognitive enhancement in children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and cognitive recovery in adult patients with Alzheimer’s disease (Kwok, Bai, Kao, Li, & Ho, 2011). Following some clinical evidence that calligraphy can help with behavioral change and emotional stability in patients with depression, Kao said: “The findings have implications toward the design of English writing alphabetic letters as well as the development of training tasks for 390 cognitive health and rehabilitation.” (Kao et al., 2014, p.10) In 2018 Chu published the article which must be a meta-analyze on this topic (Chu, Huang & Wen, 2018).

There are also a lot of sites and tutorials online which provide calligraphy lessons (Warnat, 2015; Leon de la Vega, 2016; Barcio, 2017; Wang, 2018). They show the complex interactions it takes between your brain, hand and eyes during handwriting or how abstract picture and thinking due to calligraphy. If there are so much interest in this issue that means we, educators can have a look on and improve our skills and adapt our pedagogical frameworks. Teachers Huiwen Li and Yueming Yu from Carnegie Mellon University proposed an assessment to evaluate the need to offer a Chinese calligraphy course (Li & Yu, 2015).

Capitalizing lecturers and observation of Chinese behavior and also trying to be involved in practice calligraphy for a while, we found new knowledge regarding the benefice for mind state. The descriptive methods and experiential acknowledgement are the mains form to acquire new convictions. What we could make after, is to try the transfer to westerner culture. The next step after awareness is to implement these in our classroom and invite others to reflect a little bit on.

We had experienced it with my Romanian students just for open mind and try to understand other cultures in cross-cultural lessons, asking them to answer to the question: “How do you feel practicing calligraphy?” Answers could be: I fell enjoyed, bored and indifferent.

For undergraduate students it works as application to the lesson Chinese culture and languages of Philosophy of culture course and for postgraduates as application of Cross-cultural course. We had 45 participant undergraduates and 25 postgraduates using special paper, ink and brushes.

Our purpose was not to promote Chinese language itself. So, this approach stared wandering if handwriting in any language can have a beneficial mind effect. Might be in future we will extend this for calligraphy using Latin letters.

6. Findings

Nowadays, using computer, writing become easier and faster. Nobody care about the letter’s form (Lawso, 2016). If something has not economic function, utility or it has not a special requested in everyday life, why we should improve it? Maybe we can regain handwriting utility not economical, but psychologically. It depends on teachers’ vision about health and quality of life.

We had summarized here researcher's opinion and personal observations, we will propose as working hypotheses that this kind of therapy (felt enjoyed) is also good for everyone. The outcomes of our practice were like this table 01:

Table 01. Results of answers of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

| Students | Enjoyed | Bored | Indifferent |
|---------------|---------|-------|-------------|
| Undergraduate | 37 | 5 | 3 |
| Postgraduate | 13 | 7 | 5 |

We also interviewed students if they keep to practice after class and if they relaxed or improve their state of mind, but the answers weren't relevant. Some of them said they would like, but their daily schedule is very busy. They still remember that class when they felt relaxed and keep focused in doing something exotic and posted that on-line for friends.



Figure 01. Students are posting on-line their works

Undergraduate students were more responsive and felt enjoyed then postgraduate students.

7. Conclusion

Based on search of researches with this topic and the plethora of websites who encourage that tip of activities, we try to make an awareness of educationists. Inspired by Chinese practice we've designed a small experiment in our classes and the results have been positive. We think is possible to improve of quality of lesson, improving motivation, interest and making students to feel well using calligraphy.

If computer games can provide novelty, speed, problem solution but meanwhile possible behavioral disorders, a traditional form like handwriting can give well-being state, relaxation, enjoyment and calmness.

For teachers it can be a better way to avoid stress, overthinking or anxiety, neuroses or other kind of behavioral possible disorders. Westerner culture and Easterner culture could meet in the middle of the way.

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