

Unit 8
Reading C

China's Handwriting Challenge 《中国书法挑战》

Edward Tenner 爱德华·坦纳

1 One of my biggest surprises as a blogger has been the passionate interest of so many readers in handwriting instruction, pro and con.

作为一名博主，最让我惊讶的事情之一是，有如此多的读者对书法指导有着强烈的兴趣，无论是支持还是反对。

2 In exploring the topic I learned that handwriting is an issue not only in the U. S. and Europe (where schools taught the skill mainly for consistency and legibility, not for aesthetic values), but also in China, with its millennial heritage of calligraphy as one of the essential goals of education.

在探讨这个话题的过程中，我了解到书法问题不仅存在于美国和欧洲（那里的学校教授书法主要是为了书写的一致性和易读性，而非出于美学价值），在中国也是如此，拥有千年书法传承的中国，书法一直是教育的重要目标之一。

3 Last year the University of Pennsylvania Sinologist Victor Mair blogged about the trend toward dysgraphia, inability to write traditional characters with a pen, as opposed to using keystrokes to generate them electronically. Professor Mair concluded:

去年，宾夕法尼亚大学的汉学家维克多·梅尔在博客中谈到了书写障碍的趋势，即无法用钢笔书写传统汉字，与之相对的是使用按键以电子方式生成汉字。梅尔教授总结道：

4 Unlike aphasia, a type of language disorder that usually occurs suddenly because of physical injury, the impairment brought about by frequent cellphone checking is gradual. Nonetheless, the attrition that results is just as real as that brought about by dysphasia (limited aphasia).

与失语症不同，失语症是一种通常由于身体损伤而突然发生的语言障碍，频繁查看手机带来的损伤是渐进的。尽管如此，由此产生的损耗与言语困难（轻度失语症）带来的损耗一样真实。

5 Last year, I surveyed nearly two hundred individuals who are literate in Chinese, asking them what their preferred IME (Input Method Editor) was. About half of them were professional teachers of Chinese, and they hailed from around the world. Around 98% of the respondents used Pinyin (romanization) to input Chinese characters, with the remaining tiny handful using a shape-based system such as Cangjie or a stylus to write them on a pad or window. Both of those who used Cangjie were from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and a couple of respondents from Taiwan said that they used bopomofu (Zhuyin Fuhao), a phonetic inputting system somewhat reminiscent of Japanese kana, though it is not strictly syllabic.

去年，我调查了近两百名懂中文的人，询问他们偏好的输入法编辑器（IME）是什么。其中大约一半是专业的中文教师，他们来自世界各地。大约 98% 的受访者使用拼音（罗马化）输入汉字，其余极少数人使用基于形状的系统，如仓颉输入法，或者使用手写笔在平板或窗口上书写。使用仓颉输入法的两个人来自香港和台湾，有几位来自台湾的受访者表示他们使用注音符号（ㄅㄆㄇㄏ，即“注音符號”），这是一种语音输入系统，有点让人想起日本的假

名，尽管它不完全是音节文字。

6 Computers, cellphones, smartphones, and all other such electronic gadgets are wonderful tools for communication, but they all exacerbate the predicament of declining ability to write characters among the Chinese population, and they are hastening reliance on alphabetical access to literacy, instead of a direct approach through the 11 or so basic strokes, the 200 or so radicals, and the 850 or so phonetic components. Are these worrisome trends? Can anything be done to stanch the hemorrhaging of active character proficiency at the hands of cellphones and computers? Finally, is romanization inevitable?

电脑、手机、智能手机以及所有其他此类电子设备都是很棒的通讯工具，但它们都加剧了中国人书写能力下降的困境，并且它们正在加速人们对通过字母来获取读写能力的依赖，而非通过十一种左右的基本笔画、两百种左右的部首以及八百五十种左右的声旁这种直接的方式。这些是令人担忧的趋势吗？可以采取什么措施来阻止手机和电脑导致的汉字熟练运用能力的流失吗？最后，罗马化是不可避免的吗？

7 Now another scholar, Kyle David Anderson at Kentucky's Centre College, is working with his students on a documentary film about the fate of calligraphy in China in the 21st century. Professor Anderson has translated an interview of a distinguished calligrapher, Ma Tiankuo, who summarized China's generation gap thus:

现在，另一位学者，肯塔基州森特学院的凯尔·大卫·安德森正在和他的学生们制作一部关于21世纪中国书法命运的纪录片。安德森教授翻译了对一位杰出书法家马天阔的采访，马天阔这样总结了中国的代沟：

8 I know that folks in their 40s, 50s and older generally attended Dazi (calligraphy) classes in school before the 1980s. Elementary schools always held as a rule at least 2 sessions a week practicing character tracing. In Junior High, there were also a lot of extracurricular clubs, including calligraphy appreciation groups. So, it's likely that most educated people learned to wield a brush in their younger years. They had a firm understanding and grasp of the basics of writing and calligraphy. At the same time, they developed a sensitivity to the unique structures of characters and their proper stroke order. They also were quite familiar with radicals (roots) and character components. Because of all this exposure to writing nearly everyone had an active memory of the most commonly used Chinese characters and had possessed an aesthetic foundation for the appreciation of calligraphy. Despite the fact they later found other employment that didn't require writing, they still maintained a healthy ability to recall a large number of characters. And though many never studied enough to produce calligraphy at the artistic level, many still harbored an appreciation for the art of painting beautiful characters. Writing characters was more than a fleeting personal pleasure; it was a life-long endeavor for them.

我知道，40多岁、50多岁及以上的人在20世纪80年代之前通常在学校上过大字（书法）课。小学总是按照规定每周至少有两节课练习描红。在初中，也有很多课外社团，包括书法欣赏小组。所以，很可能大多数受过教育的人在年轻时就学会了使用毛笔。他们对书写和书法的基础知识有坚定的理解和掌握。同时，他们对汉字的独特结构和正确的笔画顺序有了敏感性。他们也非常熟悉部首和汉字部件。由于接触了这么多书写，几乎每个人都对最常用的汉字有活跃的记忆，并拥有了欣赏书法的美学基础。尽管他们后来从事了不需要书写的其他工作，但他们仍然保持着回忆大量汉字的良好能力。虽然很多人从未深入学习到能创作出艺

术水平的书法作品，但很多人仍然对书写优美汉字的艺术怀有欣赏之情。书写汉字对他们来说不仅仅是一时的个人乐趣，而是一生的追求。

9 But now, relatively speaking, young people in their teens, 20s and 30s, suffer from character amnesia to a much higher degree. This is a result of having gone through schools that transitioned from an agricultural to an industrial, scientific, technologically-based system. Practically every student's residential and scholastic environments have undergone radical changes, adjustments, and reforms. From preschool, through elementary to junior high school, the maintenance, promotion, and strengthening of character writing has continually weakened. In its place, the proliferation and establishment of computer labs has increased. Many students enjoy the daily increase of computer operational skills, but only at the expense of their writing ability. They may know how to take class notes or write down new vocabulary, but not much else. It's rare anymore to see a class dedicated entirely to practicing characters. Only in a handful of homes do parents sign their children up for after-school calligraphy classes. Most prefer to choose foreign language or Cantonese. Consequently, very few of the younger generations ever take up a calligraphy course, which only erodes further our inherited cultural base of characters and calligraphy. It's troubling.

但是现在，相对而言，十几岁、二十几岁和三十几岁的年轻人在更大程度上患有文字失忆症。这是经历了从农业体系向工业、科学和技术体系转型的学校教育的结果。几乎每个学生的居住和学习环境都经历了彻底的变化、调整 and 改革。从学前班到小学再到初中，汉字书写的维持、推广和强化一直在减弱。取而代之的是，计算机实验室的增加和建立。许多学生享受着计算机操作技能的日益提高，但这是以牺牲他们的书写能力为代价的。他们可能知道如何做课堂笔记或写下新词汇，但仅此而已。很少再能看到专门用于练习汉字的课程了。只有在少数家庭中，父母才会给孩子报名参加课外书法课。大多数人更喜欢选择外语或粤语。因此，年轻一代中很少有人学习书法课程，这只会进一步侵蚀我们传承下来的汉字和书法文化基础。这令人担忧。

10 I imagine, though, that one will find the same things written in foreign studies on foreign languages, as well as other similar byproducts of globalization. I only think that the degree of the problem in China is different.

不过，我想在关于外语的外国研究中以及全球化的其他类似副产品中也会发现同样的情况。我只是认为这个问题在中国的严重程度不同。

11 Ma sees handwriting education in a worldwide context:

As far as the significance of Chinese characters and calligraphy. . . That system and artistic tradition have been flowing for thousands of years. They are the spiritual embodiment and textual manifestation of the essence of the Chinese people, and house the culmination of cultural and artistic ideals possessed by mankind. The ancients often said that writing contains the truth. This statement is true in a way; in short, writing characters mold sentiment, completes personality, provides tools for self-reflection, and sustains health. It is the most significant form of expression and spiritual requirement of the abilities of both the literati and the masses. From the earliest times of human civilization, when hard work and ingenuity first created culture and its circulation and exchange, across the primitive ages of rock painting, tribal totemic worship, and sculptural writing, down through the development and evolution of the seal, li, kai, xing, and grass scripts, writing

has formed the glue of collective human wisdom. Even in foreign alphabetical systems this is the case. Therefore, characters and calligraphic art are not only the heritage of China but are also at the core of global culture.

马天阔从全球视野看待书写教育：

就汉字和书法的意义而言.....那个体系和艺术传统已经流淌了数千年。它们是中华民族精神的体现和文本表现，蕴含着人类所拥有的文化和艺术理想的极致。古人常说字中有道。这句话在某种程度上是正确的；简而言之，书写汉字陶冶情操、完善人格、提供自我反思的工具并有益健康。它是文人雅士和普通大众的能力中最重要的表达形式和精神需求。从人类文明的最初时期，当勤劳和智慧首次创造出文化及其流通和交流，经过岩画、部落图腾崇拜和雕刻文字的原始时代，再到篆、隶、楷、行、草等书体的发展和演变，书写形成了人类集体智慧的粘合剂。即使在外国的字母系统中也是如此。因此，汉字和书法艺术不仅是中国的遗产，也是全球文化的核心。

12 What does the loss mean visually? You don't need to know a word of Chinese to be concerned about what is happening. Chinese characters may not be endangered like some of the rare alphabets I've blogged about, but a critical element of culture can't be taken for granted.

这种损失在视觉上意味着什么呢？你不需要认识一个汉字就可以对正在发生的事情感到担忧。汉字也许不像我在博客中提到的一些稀有字母那样濒临灭绝，但一种关键的文化元素不能被视为理所当然。