Research on the Status of Cultural Inheritance in Chinese Character Teaching  
Thoughts Caused by "Character Amnesia"

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Abstract—This paper analyzes the instrumental and cultural causes of the problem of "character amnesia" during the cultural communication of Chinese characters, and it analyzes how to correctly distinguish the practical and aesthetic functions of Chinese characters and the status of cultural inheritance in Chinese character teaching. Simpler the Chinese character inheritance, more conducive to the exchange and dissemination of culture it is, and this historical trend is unstoppable. Practicality and aesthetic quality is the foundation for Chinese characters to be passed down, and the culture inheritance should be emphasized in the teaching of Chinese characters to enhance the teaching of Chinese characters from the aspects of aesthetics, culture and structure of Chinese character, so as to achieve the purpose of promoting the beauty of Chinese characters and inheriting the soul of Chinese characters.

Keywords—Chinese character; teaching; character amnesia; culture

I. INTRODUCTION

Chinese character has a long history and it is one of the oldest characters in the world. It is the main character of the Chinese nation that have been used for the longest period of time, and the only ideographic character system that has been extended to this day. It is an important symbol of Chinese civilization and an important carrier for the inheritance of Chinese culture. General Secretary Xi Jinping said: "Chinese character is the symbol of Chinese cultural heritage. The Oracle Bone Inscriptions in Yin Ruins are more than 3,000 years old. For more than 3,000 years, the structure of Chinese characters has not changed. This kind of inheritance is the true cornerstone of China." [1]

In 2013, CCTV and HNTV launched a new programme of Chinese characters respectively: "Chinese Characters Dictation Contest" and "Chinese Spelling Hero", with Chinese characters as the core, culture as the connotation, competition as the form, leading culture trend through modern media. It has made Chinese character this less active and not very eye-catching TV theme won a win-win situation in audience rating and reputation. It also has led to a series of social topics, such as: character amnesia, stroke sequence, and the print of the exam-oriented education were highlighted in Chinese character shows, whether the traditional culture is gradually drifting away from people. Some people have suggested that the Chinese character has reached a very dangerous moment. The author uses Chinese character TV programme as an introduction, analyzes what caused character amnesia, how to correctly distinguish the two major functions of practicality and aesthetics, and the importance of cultural inheritance in Chinese character teaching. A conclusion has been summed up: simpler the Chinese character inheritance, more conducive to the exchange and dissemination of culture it is, and this historical trend is unstoppable. Practicality and aesthetic quality is the foundation for Chinese characters to be passed down, and the culture inheritance should be emphasized in the teaching of Chinese characters to enhance the teaching of Chinese characters from the aspects of aesthetics, culture and structure of Chinese character, so as to achieve the purpose of promoting the beauty of Chinese characters and inheriting the soul of Chinese characters.

II. CAUSES OF CHARACTER AMNESIA

Whether it is "Chinese Characters Dictation Contest" or "Chinese Spelling Hero", they all presented a form, which is a phrase that usually sounds familiar but people just cannot write it down. That is character amnesia. People are accustomed to the intelligent input method, so characters are becoming stranger and stranger, and "Chinese character agraphia" has become a social phenomenon. "After an investigation on the writing of Chinese character, reporter found that the writing test of primary school students was the best, and the accuracy of writing by middle school students and ordinary citizens was average. They all say that they rarely use hand writing now." [2] According to the zero-point indicator data made by well-known public opinion survey institutions in China, the series survey of “Chinese Calligraphy" for 12 cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and others shows that 94.1% of the people have character amnesia, of which 26.8% have character amnesia very often. [3]

The phrase "Looking for lost Chinese characters in the keyboard" has caused too many people's emotional resonance. "A network survey of Tencent Weibo shows that..."
more than 90% of respondents have seen the situation of ‘character amnesia’. On how to contact friends and relatives, 60% of netizens say that they use WeChat, QQ, email, etc. to contact relatives and friends. About 33% of people use phone to contact, and only about 5% of people choose to write a letter. It can be seen that the keyboard input has impacted the traditional Chinese writing tradition, thus making correct writing of Chinese characters a challenge for us.”[2]

Today, with the increasing popularity of keyboard input, character amnesia has become a fact that everyone is experiencing. The reason is not only the change of writing style, but also the consequences of cultural crisis.

A. Change of Writing Style

The hits of “Chinese Characters Dictation Contest” and “Chinese Spelling Hero” not only test the literacy of the contestants, but also make people in front of the TV sweat. The square characters that Chinese people use every day for thousands of years seem to become a "stranger" from "familiar face", "character amnesia" is now becoming a common phenomenon, and the writing of Chinese characters seems to be facing a severe challenge.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, with the popularization of televisions and computers, human beings have entered the image-centered “Image reading era” from “Text reading era” which focuses on printing words, and people’s cognitive requirements for Chinese characters have been lower and lower, and then gradually stop at the level of pronunciation. With the rapid development of the Internet in the 21st century, and the development of smart phones and smart input methods, people can query the knowledge they need at any time, resulting in people's physiological functions and traditional skills are also weakening, extensive experience and good memory seem to have gradually gone. What is even more worrying is that from 2001 to 2011, nearly 50% of private bookstores in China closed down, digital reading has occupied the mainstream of reading, the rhythm of words has gradually been replaced by fast reading and brief reading. The proportion of Chinese characters acting as a bridge of communication in our lives is becoming less and less, and the direct communication between Chinese characters and words is becoming less and less. When technology changes life, it also places words in an awkward position. It should be pointed out that it is obviously inappropriate to blame "character amnesia" on the digital, intelligent input, image reading and other factors, because the spread of Chinese characters cannot be separated from the contribution of computer technology and informationization. In this regard, Professor Wang Ning of Beijing Normal University believes that the current problem of Chinese character cannot be called "crisis". He points out that the introduction of Chinese characters into computers is not a crisis; on the contrary, it will be a true crisis if Chinese characters cannot communicate with the world with the support of computer technology.¹ The author truly agrees with Professor Wang Ning and also believes the cultural crisis is the real challenge for Chinese character.

B. Absence of Cultural Level

Chinese character is a combination of image, sound and meaning. This feature is unique in the world of words. Chinese character mainly focuses on its meaning expression, and its structure determines the profound cultural connotation of Chinese character. In addition to the expression of meaning and content, the emotional communication of Chinese characters cannot be ignored. When people put a lot of books into the computer, ancient people’s insight and elegance of "The article reveals true temperament, and wind and rain comes with the laughter" cannot be felt from computers and the emotional exchange of “words like people” is missing. The reason is that, on the one hand, the cultural genes of Chinese characters that they carried has been neglected in the process of communication, so that the audience knows little about the cultural functions of Chinese character, and the cultural views of the Chinese nation reflected in the emergence and development of Chinese characters and the connotation of Chinese traditional culture are also nowhere to be found. On the other hand, basic education, including several Chinese character TV programmes, mostly focuses on literacy rate, rarely-used and difficult characters, and finally turns the spread of Chinese character into a memory competition. At last, without enough cultural interpretation of Chinese character, people have no enthusiasm for the recognition and emotion of Chinese characters, and thus they have no desire for writing.

III. CORRECT DISTINCTION OF THE PRACTICAL AND AESTHETIC FUNCTIONS OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

“The invention of character changes the knots recording method, and Cang Jie invented character based on the inspiration of bird’s footprint. It is the symbol of language and it is the material of article.”[4] It means that the formation of the character changes the knots recording method and it is the symbol of the language that constitutes the material of the article. In fact, Chinese characters have the functions of both practicality and aesthetics, which is the key to the inheritance of Chinese characters.

A. Practical Functions of Chinese Character

The first major function of Chinese character is practicality, acting as a tool for exchange and communication. "Chinese character has undergone several major changes in the development process. At the end of the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, there have been demands for the abolition of Chinese character. For example, Qian Xuantong later called for 'abolition of Chinese characters', Lu Xun not only agreed, but also had a saying of 'not reading Chinese books'. In the Republic of China, classical Chinese was replaced by vernacular Chinese, ¹ Some of the opinions of this article are based on the interview with Professor Wang Ning of Beijing Normal University in December 2014. Here I would like to express great gratitude, and mark annotation.
then Chinese pinyin was introduced, Chinese character began to be Latinized, and simplified character was promoted, several simplified processes were opposed.\textsuperscript{[5]}\textsuperscript{p5} For example, the classical Chinese is changed into vernacular Chinese, it is actually convenient to understand, exchange and communication, it is more concise, powerful, vivid and straightforward; the replacement of classical Chinese to vernacular is also a historical necessity. After it replaces classical Chinese, people find that there are more people who understand Chinese character than in the past. The intervention of Chinese Pinyin makes it more convenient to learn Chinese characters, including Pinyin input method, the typing speed has been greatly accelerated, and the speed of learning Chinese characters also has been greatly accelerated; another example is search through a dictionary, there are two ways of radicals and pinyin retrieval, the use of pinyin retrieval is now much more than the other. The change of classical Chinese into vernacular, the intervention of pinyin, and the simplification of words, etc. are the great social effects brought by the development of Chinese character. In addition, the uncommon characters in ancient books have rarely been used in daily communication, and their practical functions are basically impossible to manifest. It is impossible to "recover the essence of Chinese nation" by some uncommon characters in ancient books.

B. The Aesthetic Function of Chinese Character

If you think of character as a hobby rather than a tool, writing is a kind of nostalgia and aesthetic. The practicality and aesthetics of Chinese character should be separated in order to feel the beauty of Chinese character. Chinese characters will be popular in the art field, such as calligraphy, traditional Chinese characters will always be passed down through calligraphy. It will exist in the form of art in the ivory tower, and from the aesthetic point of view, only calligraphy can be called art, and the writing of other characters is far from being called art.

C. Literacy Teaching Focuses on the Inheritance of Culture

The genes of culture can be found in Chinese character, "Chinese character itself is a kind of cultural phenomenon" [6]. Writing Chinese characters is a sign of literacy. As a Chinese teacher of a primary school, the author believes that Chinese character teaching should be culturally centered and improved from the following aspects based on his own teaching experience and in combination with some views of Chinese character education by Professor Wang Ning of Beijing Normal University.

First of all, it is suggested to develop good writing habits and affinity for Chinese character, understand the beauty of Chinese character, the culture of Chinese character, and how Chinese characters are constructed. As Zhang Dachun said: "Teaching students to master the face and resume of Chinese characters is far better than only teaching them to finish their homework", \textsuperscript{[5]}\textsuperscript{p1} in the face of the lapse of traditional culture, what is needed is not to fight against the keyboard era and abandon modern and return to the ancient times, but to cultivate good writing habits, strengthen the affinity for Chinese character, and connect with tradition and inherit tradition.

Secondly, it is suggested to popularize "Shuo Wen Jie Zi", and pay attention to the construction principle of Chinese character and the exploration of its connotation. The early Chinese dictionary includes the "Shuo Wen Jie Zi" written by Xu Shen from Eastern Han Dynasty and the lexicon in the Southern and Northern Dynasties; since Chinese characters are continuously evolved from Oracle characters till now, all pictograms contain meaning, so Chinese dictionaries have unique characteristics, and Chinese dictionaries have also become a traditional cultural element. While pursuing the correct and beautiful writing, Chinese character teaching should also pay attention to the relevant interpretation of the construction principle of Chinese character in "Shuo Wen Jie Zi". On the one hand, the Chinese character making rules should be explained so that it is easy to understand, memorize and correctly write Chinese characters. On the other hand, it is necessary to strengthen the popularization of word source and philology, and to see culture through characters, and Chinese character without culture has no vitality. Because "Chinese culture has amazing continuity, till today, people can see some pictures in advertising, folk art and the daily life around them, those pictures are exactly the same with that of the inventors more than 3,000 years ago in grasping and reflecting the reality." \textsuperscript{[7]}\textsuperscript{p3}

Third, the basic education of Chinese character must be inherited. Chinese character is the cornerstone of Chinese culture and the essential element of social progress. Traditional Chinese character teaching is combined with textbook teaching, and the "Text-dependent" teaching method makes Chinese character always in a subsidiary position. However, Chinese character is life-oriented and developmental, and the methods used may vary, but the principles are the same. Here, the principle means pictographic, indicative, ideogrammatic, phonetic, cognates-transformed, and borrowed characters, which are the Six Chinese characters. The Six Chinese characters are the soul of Chinese characters. To a certain extent, the talent of image and the abstract thinking ability of Chinese people are also inseparable from the contributions of the six characters. \textsuperscript{[8]}\textsuperscript{p7} Therefore, the basic education of Chinese characters should inherit the "six characters" theory, and truly achieve the purpose of carrying forward the beauty of Chinese character and inheriting the soul of Chinese character.

At last, Chinese character teaching should focus on the frequently used erroneous words, and also check students' ability to apply Chinese characters and their ability to understand the cultural connotation of Chinese characters.

IV. CONCLUSION

The "Chinese Character Dictation Contest" and "Chinese Spelling Hero" have aroused the national enthusiasm and deep thinking on Chinese character, and among them, the discussion of "character amnesia" is the hottest. After analyzing the instrumental reasons and cultural reasons of character amnesia, the conclusion is made that simpler the
Chinese character inheritance, more conducive to the exchange and dissemination of culture it is, and this historical trend is unstoppable; practicality and aesthetics are the foundation of Chinese characters to be passed down to this day; the culture inheritance should be emphasized in the teaching of literacy, and the teaching of literacy should be strengthened from the aspects of beauty, culture and structure of Chinese character.

REFERENCES