



## Translation of the Names of Chinese Calligraphy from Skopos Theory

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### ABSTRACT

Chinese calligraphy is an ancient and historic art. Ranging from seal script, clerical script, regular script, running script, to cursive script, the calligraphy has been sending out the charm of art. Chinese calligraphy is not only a carrier of the Chinese cultural heritage, but also the media to show the history of the Chinese nation of thousands of years. Therefore, Chinese calligraphy is a brilliant art of Chinese culture, and one of the world's unique treasures. Based on Skopos theory, this paper explores the effective translation methods of the names of Chinese calligraphy, and explains Chinese cultural values and the inside meanings.

**Keywords :** *Skopos Theory, Chinese Calligraphy, Translation Method, Writing Stroke*

### INTRODUCTION

Calligraphy, native to China, is a traditional art with a long history and national characteristic features. It is the happy result of the painstaking and creative efforts of generations upon generations of artists. It has many styles, ranging from seal script (篆 *zhuān*), clerical script (隶 *lì*), regular script (楷 *kǎi*), running script (行 *Xíng*), to cursive script (草 *cao*) etc., and the styles change with the passage of time, shifting from charm, artistic conception, image, to delight. Its functions also vary from time to time, from self-enjoyment to self-cultivation. Calligraphy is known for its beautiful shape, rich emotion and artistic conception. It is often likened to a picture, a piece of music and a poem. Its flowing strokes not only remind us of the beauty of nature, but also express the beauty of human spirit. Chinese calligraphy is not only a splendid flower in the garden of the Chinese culture, but also a shining pearl in the treasure-house of arts of human beings.

The art of calligraphy is a direct result of Chinese characters. With the elapse of time, five major scripts, namely seal script, clerical script, regular script, running script, and cursive script, have evolved from Chinese characters in the course of their development. And each script has resulted in different styles and schools of calligraphers. These different schools of calligraphy produce different artistic effects through various ways of writing. Of the five scripts, seal script boasts the longest history. Inscriptions on oracle bones, those on ancient bronze objects and those on drum-shaped stone blocks belong to the system of greater seal script (大篆 *da zhuān*), an ancient style of calligraphy, current in the Zhou Dynasty, the characters being non-simplified, thus having more strokes. After the unification of China by Qinshihuang, the first emperor of China, another style of calligraphy, lesser seal script (小篆 *Xiao zhuān*) was adopted for the purpose of standardizing the script. Lesser seal script is characterized by its roundness and naturalness, all the strokes more or less the same in thickness, and the character looking comparatively longer. It is on the basis of lesser seal script that clerical script came into being in the Qin Dynasty. Known as the official script of the Qin Dynasty (秦隶 *qín lì*), it is famous for its squareness, smoothness and naturalness, crooked lines becoming straight ones. In the early days of the Western Han Dynasty, clerical script became the official script of the Han Dynasty (汉隶 *hàn lì*), the character becoming flatter, with the appearance of the

turning stroke, left-falling stroke, right-falling stroke, etc. Regular script and cursive Script are noted for their large number of schools and styles, and therefore they are the most influential scripts. Running script is something between regular script and cursive script.

## **SKOPOS THEORY**

### **Skopos**

Skopos is a Greek word for “purpose”. According to Skopos theory, the prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose (Skopos) of the overall translation action (Nord, 2001: 27).

In the field of translation, there are three possible kinds of purpose: the general purpose aimed at by the translation process (perhaps “to earn a living”), the communicative purpose aimed at by the target text in the target situation (perhaps “to instruct the reader”) and the purpose aimed by a particular translation strategy or procedure (for example, “to translate literally in order to show the structural particularities of the source language”) (Vermeer, 1989: 100). The term Skopos, however, usually refers to the purpose of the target text.

Apart from the term Skopos, Vermeer uses the related words—aim, purpose, intention and function. “Aim” is the final result which an agent intends to achieve by an action; “purpose” is a provisional stage in the process of attaining an aim; “function” refers to what a text means or is intended to mean from the receiver’s point of view; while “intention” is conceived as “an aim-oriented plan of action” on the part of both the sender and the receiver, pointing toward an appropriate way of producing or understanding the text (Nord, 2001: 28). These four concepts are very confusing and thus sometimes are considered equivalent. As a matter of fact, they are not identical. “Intention” is defined from the viewpoint of the sender, while “function” is from that of the receiver. An action has an “aim”, while a translation text has “purposes”.

### **Three rules of Skopos theory**

#### **Skopos rule**

The central and primary idea of Skopos theory is that “the translation purpose justifies the translating procedures” and it is generally expressed as “the end justifies the means” (Nord, 2001: 29). Therefore, in Skopos theory, the top-ranking rule that any translation should observe is the “Skopos rule”. According to the Skopos rule, the translator must do translation in accordance with some principles respecting the target text by adapting to the addressee’s background knowledge, expectations, and communicative needs, since the reader, or rather, the addressee, is the main factor determining the Skopos.

#### **Coherence rule**

The coherence rule specifies that a translation should be acceptable in a sense that it is coherent with the receivers’ situation (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984: 113). Being “coherent with” is synonymous with being “part of” the receiver’s situation. Baker (2004: 236) also points out: the starting point for a translation is a text as part of a world continuum written in the source language. In other words, the target text must be translated in such a way that it is coherent for the target text receivers, given their circumstances and knowledge (Mundy, 2001: 79).

#### **Fidelity rule**

Since a translation is an offer of information about a preceding offer of information, it is expected to bear some kind of relationship with the corresponding source text (Nord, 2001: 32). Fidelity rule merely states that there must be coherence between the translation and the source or, more specifically, between: the source text information received by the translator;

the interpretation the translator makes of this information; the information that is encoded for the target text receivers (Mundy, 2001: 79-80).

The important point is that the translated text must be loyal to its corresponding source text in a certain level of features, including special collocations, sentence length, grammatical features, or even rhetorical devices, in style, in function, and so on, or to a certain extent between a complete imitation and a complete deviation. It is the translator's task to decide the aspect and the extent of the fidelity, according to his own understanding of the source text and the translation Skopos.

### TRANSLATION OF CHINESE FOUR TREASURES OF THE STUDY

Writing brush, ink stick, Xuan paper and ink slab are regarded as the four treasures of traditional Chinese paintings and calligraphy. They have played a pivotal part in the development of Chinese civilization over the past thousands of years. The names stem from the time of the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-589 AD). Writing brush and ink stick are two of the legendary "Four Treasures of the Study" tools of Chinese calligraphers. The other vital elements of culture are Xuan paper, and ink slab for grinding the solidified ink stick.



Figure 1. Chinese four treasures of the study

In China, calligraphy occupies a distinguished position in the field of traditional art. It is not only a means of communication, but also a means of expressing a person's inner world in an aesthetic sense. The distinctive and elegant arts of Chinese calligraphy have in recent years taken a prominent place in the international art world, and become the focus of much interest and discussion. A Chinese aphorism goes "To do a good job, one must first sharpen one's tools". An artist naturally takes selection of his tools very seriously. In dynasties of literary prominence, such as the Tang (618-907 AD) and Sung (960-1279 AD) Dynasties, Chinese four treasures of the study made a great contribution to the development of Chinese painting and calligraphy. The popularization of printing and mass production of paper and ink in the Sung dynasty permitted the works of the many outstanding calligraphers who emerged at that time to be widely distributed. Many books published in these early times are still extant today; the fact that the paper remained intact and the ink did not fade away after more than one thousand years is proof of the high quality of workmanship employed.

#### Writing brush

The earliest writing brush that has been found is a relic of the Warring States Period (476 BC – 221 BC). From that time onwards, the brush has evolved into many forms. The nib can be made from rabbit's hair, wool, horsehair, weasel's hair, or bristles, and so on; while the shaft may be made from bamboo, ivory, jade, crystal, gold, silver, porcelain, sandal, ox horn, etc. It is important to see that there can be both soft and hard brushes each producing their own particular styles.

毛笔 (maobi) is one of the most important tools in Chinese four treasures of the study. According to the research, there are four different translations: Brush, Chinese brush, Brush

pen and Writing brush. In the Oxford dictionary, “Brush refers to as an object that you use for cleaning, painting, making your hair tidy etc., made with a lot of hairs, or thin pieces of plastic fastened to a handle expressed the brush is covered with wool to use a tool”. So only one word “Brush” to translate is obviously not able to complete the expression of brush effect. Chinese brush has no specific analysis on the brush. Relatively speaking, Pen brush can show the intended use of the word, but the pen has caused a lot of misleading, for in the survey many people mistakenly understand a brush pen as a special pen rather than a brush. As for writing brush, from the perspective of teleological analysis, everything from reality, writing means writing the word what it appears, the reader will have a very intuitive feel and a visual impression, followed by a brush, which will allow the reader to appreciate more clearly where the brush functions. So based on the skopos theory, translating the word 毛笔 (maobi) should be corresponding with Writing Brush.

### **Xuan paper**

Paper is one of the most famous Chinese inventions. It is widely accepted that paper was invented by Cai Lun in the Eastern Han. Before the existence of paper, our ancestors utilized knots in cords to record events. They then carved on bone, ivory, tortoise shell and bronzes. For very many years they wrote on pieces of bamboo. There is a story that tells how Confucius was such an avid and diligent reader that he would wear away the strips of ox-leather used to bind the pages of bamboo books together. During the early Han Dynasty wealthy people would write upon white silk but this was beyond the reach of the majority as the cloth was so precious.

After the Eastern Jin Dynasty, paper was extensively used instead of traditional writing materials such as bamboo slips and silks. Various methods of producing paper emerged one after another. In the Tang and Song Dynasties, the paper producing industry was very thriving. Celebrated products in best quality appeared one after another. 宣纸 (xuanzhi) produced in Jing Prefecture of Anhui (Xuan Zhou), became the special paper for painting and calligraphy, and was regarded as “the king of the paper”. Xuan Paper is in line with the purpose of Skopos theory which means using some special purpose to be achieved.

### **Ink slab**

砚台 (Yantai) can be translated into Ink Slab, which is the reputed head of the “four treasures”, for its sobriety and elegance have endured the passage of time. From the Longman dictionary, slab means a thick flat piece of a hard material such as stone, while stone means a hard solid mineral substance. It is not suitable to express the ink stone directly. According to the loyalty principle of the skopos theory, Ink Slab is a better translation than Ink Stone.

### **Ink stick**

Similarly, 墨 (heimo) can be translated into Ink Stick. A good ink stick should be ground so as to be refined black with luster. With the invention of paper, ink sticks were improved accordingly. Since the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD), they have been made from pine soot, mixing with glue, steaming and moulding. In ancient times, the emperor, such as Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911AD), had paid great attention to the production of ink sticks and were expert in their appreciation of quality inks.

## **TRANSLATION OF WRITING WAYS OF CALLIGRAPHY**

In China, ancient people paid great attention to calligraphy. It was the essential whereby a candidate could manifest his literary talent in the Imperial Examination, for it gave a first impression to the examiners. Children of high officials had to learn and try to write a good hand; even emperors themselves were good at calligraphy, have left us many examples of his

handwriting on steles in temples and palaces. Calligraphy, like a mirror, is a silent reflection of the soul. It is believed to have verve, optimism, moderateness, or pessimism. Su Dongpo, one of the four litterateurs in the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 AD), composed many bold and unconstrained ci (词), a form of poetry that flourished in the Song Dynasty), also could write handsome characters in good taste.

Today, although various modern ways have been substituted for the original calligraphy, especially which created with a writing brush, people still love the ancient form and practice it untiringly. During the traditional festivals, propitious couplets are always indispensable decorations each written in a beautiful style.

To practice calligraphy requires the basic tools of Chinese four treasures of the study as well as much concentration on guiding the soft writing brush charged with fluid ink, and writing on the paper where the ink will diffuse quickly. Once the brush movement hesitates, a black mark is created, so speed, strength and agility are the essence of fine artwork. When writing, many calligraphers will forget all worries and even themselves, combining all thoughts in the beauty of their art.

Calligraphy has endured for more than 2,000 years, and evolved into five main ways of writing each with different techniques (seal script, clerical script, regular script, running script and cursive script). Even today, these are still followed and practiced often as a hobby. Calligraphy is not only considered an important means of achieving artistic cultivation, but also an active way to help practitioners keep fit and build endurance, an exercise is believed to be as healthy as Taichi. Therefore, practitioners are advised to follow the suggested instructions regarding writing postures and brush holding.

### **Physical postures**

Calligraphy should be done while seated or standing. For sitting posture, the position of the head, body, arms and feet is important as it affects the writing quality. Generally speaking, the body needs to be as relaxed as possible and all the parts must work as a “team.” The head should be held straight, so you have a better view of the spot on which you intend to write. With your head aslant, you may produce characters that are not so neat and regular. The upper body should be erect, the shoulders relaxed and balanced, and the chest kept a fist’s width away from the desk. With the two arms slightly apart, the writing hand holds the brush, while the paper is held down by the other hand. The feet are evenly apart and relaxed on the ground. With all these parts in harmony and relaxation, the writer needs to concentrate on the writing hand, which will ensure the smoothness of each stroke, instead of playing undue attention to the posture.

More experienced writers often stand while writing, a posture which is also assumed to write larger characters. On the basis of the place in which characters are intended standing postures are of three types. The first position is assumed for writing at a desk by suspending the arm in the air, while lowering the upper body and facing down on the paper. Another posture is adopted when writing on a wall or a board about the height of the body, with the arm naturally extending to reach the spot and the eyes looking straight ahead or up. For writing extra-large characters, the third posture, different from posture two, is a dynamic one and the writer works while moving, with the hands holding a special brush and bending forward.

### **Ways of holding the brush**

The way to hold the writing brush has been a controversial issue, and many calligraphers disagree with each other. A popular manner is called “thumb-fingers method,” which requires a coordinated force of the four fingers and thumb, resulting in balanced and exact movements. In addition, the palm, wrist, elbow and even the upper body also help with the method. The palm

is held in the manner as if you were holding an egg and right above the paper. The wrist and the forearm are kept parallel, while working, to the paper. When larger characters are intended for, the wrist and the forearm need to be suspended so as to coordinate the forces from the finger, the thumb, the palm, the elbow, and the arm, which produces more forceful writing. Furthermore, the position of holding the brush depends on the style intended. When you are writing the regular script, you need to hold the lower part of the shaft---an easier way to handle and move the brush steadily. Holding the upper part of the shaft enables you, when writing the running script or cursive script, to move your fingers and thumb more nimbly and quickly.



Figure 2. Thumb-fingers method

In addition to the “thumb-fingers method,” there are some other ways of holding the brush, such as “four-finger method” and “three-finger method” with the increasing proficiency in writing, many calligraphers adjust their ways of holding the brush based on their creative needs, which varies from person to person. In any case, the standard postures and the cultivation of good writing habits are absolutely necessary for beginners.

### Techniques of writing strokes

The Eight Principles of the Character 永 (yong, meaning permanence) explains how to write the eight common strokes in Chinese characters and their translations from the Skopos theory, which are considered the basis of Chinese regular script strokes.

#### (1) Dot (点 dian)

Go right immediately after the tip of the brush touches the paper, and then go down a bit with increasing force before an upward finish.

#### (2) Horizontal stroke (横 heng)

Go right immediately after the tip of the brush touches the paper, which is followed by a shout horizontal bar before you finish.

#### (3) Vertical Stroke (竖 shu)

Start where you have finished the previous horizontal stroke, and then go downward for a vertical line, but with a short and slight left turn.

#### (4) Hooked Stroke (钩 gou)

Press down as you finish the previous vertical stroke, and then finish with a short and upward hook.

**(5) Rising Stroke (提 ti)**

Go right with force immediately after the tip of the brush touches the paper, and then move toward upper right to finish the stroke. Make sure that the stroke is thinning as you go.

**(6) Long Down Stroke to the Left (弯 wān)**

Make a tapering line toward lower left, a stroke which is written in a quick and forceful manner.

**(7) Short Down Stroke to the left (撇 piě)**

Draw a short tapering line with a forceful start, but thinning toward lower left.

**(8) Down Stroke to the Right (捺 nà)**

Draw a thickening line toward lower right, finishing with a downward force and followed by a very short, thin and horizontal stroke.

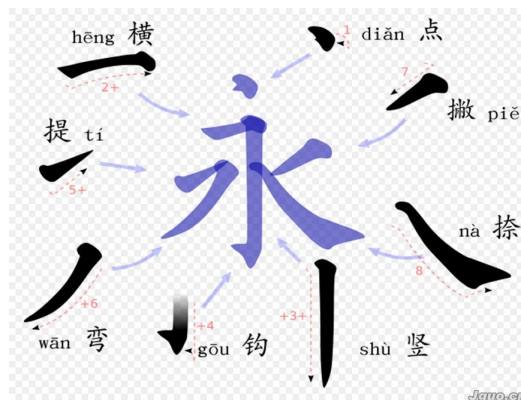


Figure 3. The eight principles of the character 永

**Special terminology and tips for using the brush:**

The special terms for the strokes are divided into three steps: the beginning of the stroke, the continuation of the stroke, and the finishing of the stroke. And the following writing skill translations are also based on the rules of Skopos theory.

**Beginning the stroke**

**落笔 Luobi:** the first touch of the brush on the paper, which locates a stroke and prepares the writer for the next movement.

**藏锋 Cangfeng:** a skill with which the writer “hides” the first touch of the brush in a stroke, starting to write in the direction opposite to the one intended: moving the brush a bit to the left first when a right-to-left stroke is intended or moving it upward a bit when you are to write a downward stroke. Make sure that the opposite movement should be short and slight and can never be overdone; otherwise, the first touch would be ill-formed.

**顺锋 Shunfeng:** a way to wield the brush after luobi or, specifically, with the tip of the brush pointing to the direction opposite to the intended movement, pause a bit after luobi to allow the ink to permeate, before continuing with the middle section of the brush.

**强锋 Qiangfeng:** a turning or revolving movement of the brush before touching on the paper, which is usually used in writing the first stroke of a character or during a short pause between strokes, serving as a void connection in writing.

## Continuing the stroke

行笔 Xingbi: a way to wield the brush on paper, without stopping, from one place to another. All strokes are results of xingbi.

驻笔 Zhubi: a pause between writing different strokes. It is a slight movement between ticking and pressing with the brush, which requires skilful controls over the fingers and the wrist.

顿笔 Dunbi: a skill to press the brush with force to allow the ink to permeate, as if you were hammering a nail into the wall or forcing the brush through the paper. While pressing, a slight ticking movement is needed for a second pressing action. The combination of ticking and pressing helps with the progress of the brush, while producing a firm stroke.

蹲笔 Dunbi: It is a similar skill to the precious one, dunbi, but slighter in force to allow a slower permeating of the ink into the paper. Regular script requires, by and large, a moderate thickness of the stroke and strokes should not be overdone or underdone.

提笔 Tibi: a slight ticking, without lifting the tip of the brush away from the paper. This skill is also used for long and thick strokes. Make sure that while a ticking the ink permeates smoothly and evenly to produce a thin but real stroke. An incorrect writing speed or a wrong angle between the tip of the brush and the paper will result in broken or dotted stroke.

挫笔 Cuobi: a change in direction of the tip of the brush and away from the original place after tibi. In regular script writing, the skill is normally used at the turning point to avoid a round turn. It is also used to brush a gou (hooked stroke) or na (down stroke to the right) to add a sense of thickness to the position of hook or the direction of the pressing.

弩笔 Nvbi: a backward move of the tip of the brush after cuobi. The skill is used to avoid a stroke being too smooth and add variation to it, creating an impression of firmness and vigour.

拖笔 Tuobi: a way to spread the tip of the brush to the two sides after dunbi so as to produce a thicker stroke.

## Finishing the stroke

回锋 Huifeng: a backward movement of the brush along the inner or outer line when finishing a stroke. This skill is used for all strokes in regular script, except for those with a sharp trip.

纵笔 Zongbi: It is a movement to finish a stroke letting the tip of the brush to go without a backward movement.

空手 Kongshou: a quick backward movement of the brush at the end of a stroke, after the tip of the brush is away from the paper.

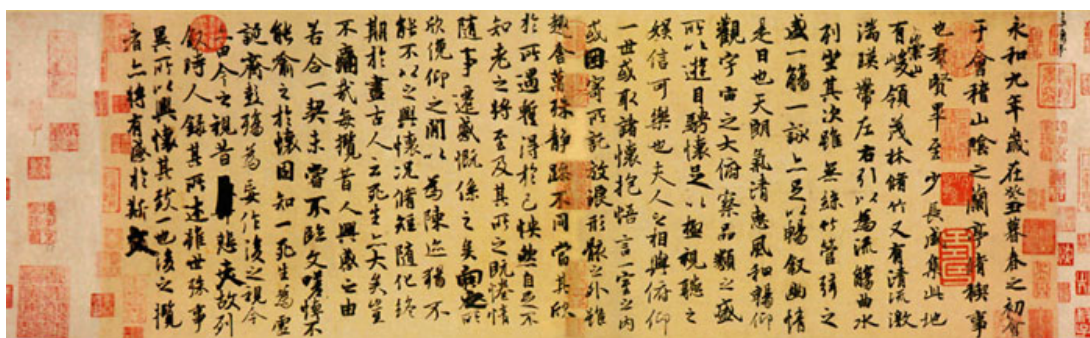


Figure 4. Preface lanting pavilion collection, by Wang, Xizhi (303-361), Eastern Jin Dynasty

Calligraphy is the art of lines, or strokes. Lin Huimin, a famous dancer from China's Taiwan Island and director of the Cloud Gate Dancing Troup, once choreographed a collective dance



named “Running-Cursive Script”, which gained him worldwide. His inspirations came from Chinese calligraphy, and dancing enlivened the spirit of the art of writing. The dancer onstage becomes no more dancer but a calligrapher wielding his /her brush and applying ink to paper, pausing one moment and writing in high spirits the next. His/her movements are now swift, smooth and elegant, and then slow, gentle and enchanting. Although there is neither script in the setting nor characters on the stage, the audience can easily feel the presence of the intriguing art of calligraphy.



Figure 5. A collective dance named “Running-Cursive Script”

## CONCLUSION

Chinese calligraphy is an ancient art form that utilizes Chinese characters as a vehicle to communicate the emotional and aesthetic world of the artist. In 2010, Chinese calligraphy has been included into China’s intangible cultural heritage of the catalogue, as one of the world’s cultural treasures of mankind. Recently, Beijing Municipal Education Commission has also made calligraphy as a compulsory course added to the primary school classroom. Chinese calligraphy has become a leisure and cultural life of the majority of Chinese people. In short, calligraphy with its long history and unique cultural charm has been integrated into Chinese culture. It is of great importance that translators should continue to complete the translation works of Chinese calligraphy.

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