

总第 77 期

不期而遇 相伴相惜

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你好，我来江湖看看
里约之外，巴西很大
沿着旧地图，就找不到新大陆

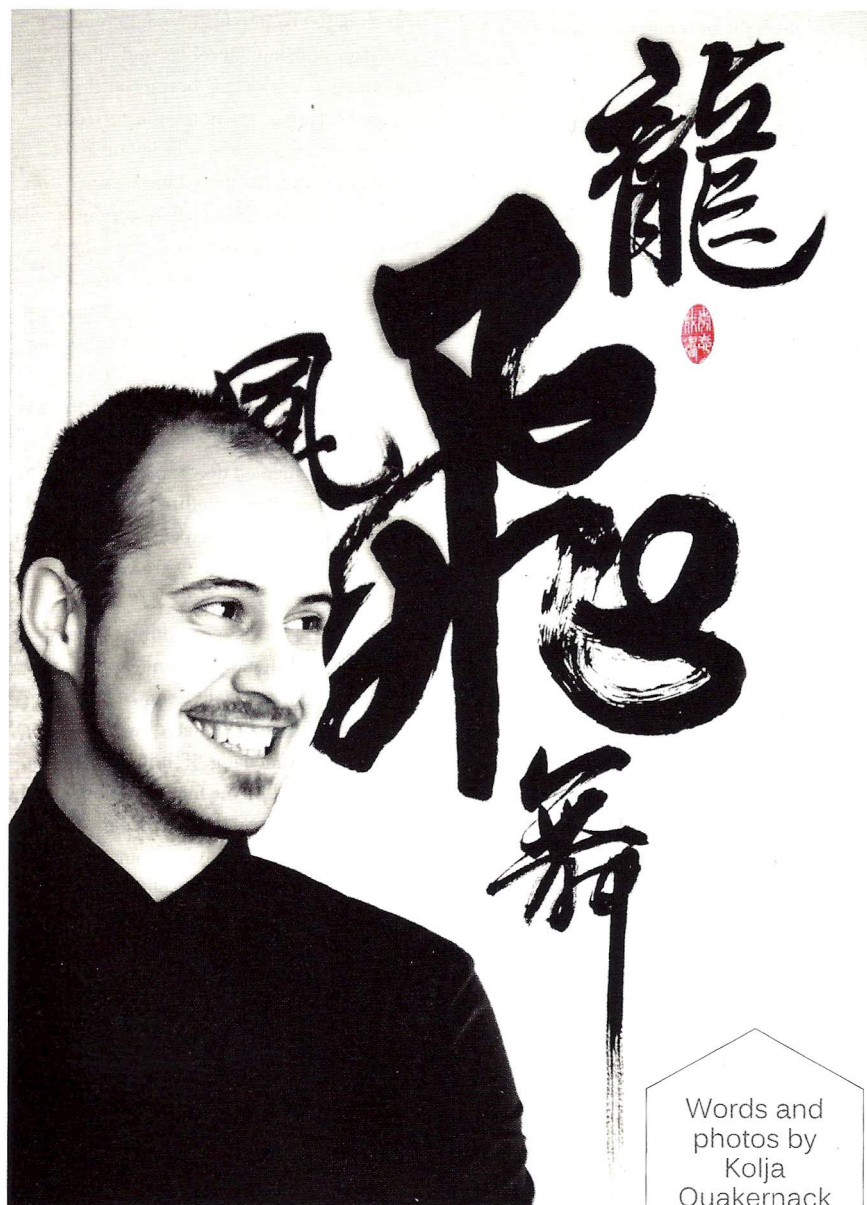


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Chinese calligraphy has the power to connect you and me



Words and
photos by
Kolja
Quakernack

My name is Kolja Quakernack. I am a calligrapher from Germany and came to Shanghai in 2011. Now, a few years later, I have made myself a name as a calligrapher in Shanghai's foreign community. My Chinese name is 李志成 (Lǐ Zhìchéng). As a pseudonym, I use the name 李老外 (Lǐ

Lǎowai) – Foreigner Li. In the following article, I will tell you how I became an expert at Chinese calligraphy.

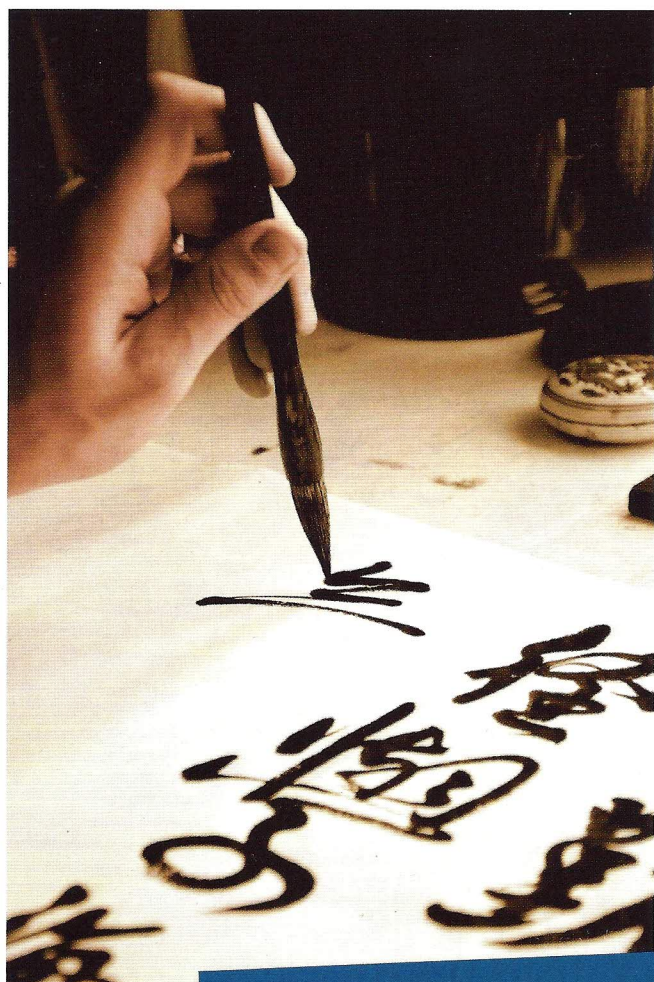
This is how my journey with the brush began. I participated in a Japanese ink-painting ("sumi-e") class with the German

master Markus Wortmann in Bielefeld, Germany. From painting to writing was only a small step then. The individual style, the tender strokes, the spiritual journey which lies within Chinese calligraphy – all these peaked my interest, and so I even began studying Classical Sinology and Philosophy at Muenster University in Germany. From the first moment, I tried to mentally visualize the Chinese characters and I am constantly searching for new ways to write them.

International calligraphy teachers followed, and I have learned calligraphy from German, Korean, Taiwanese and Shanghainese teachers. After my studies, I came back to Shanghai to live. My wife is a German teacher, so we decided that she would work at one of China's German Schools. There are two German Schools in the People's Republic of China, in Beijing and in Shanghai. We decided on Shanghai but we also travel to Beijing sometimes. Both cities are very different, so it is difficult to say how life would be different if we had chosen Beijing instead, but I think we made the right decision.

Thinking of the mere 26 letters in the Latin alphabet, the huge number of Chinese characters astonished me and continuously makes me excited about the never-ending challenge of writing with the brush. Of course, such a huge challenge has its difficulties. It is not easy to convince people that I understand Chinese calligraphy from its roots, meanings and aesthetics. I am a foreigner, not born here, and my mother tongue is not even Chinese. How can I understand deep calligraphy and its philosophy? Speaking Chinese is already a big step. Writing characters is a whole new dimension, especially writing with a brush. I understand that people at the beginning doubt my expertise – until I let my brush speak for me.

My main customers in Shanghai are expats. Most of them order calligraphies



01

01 Kolja is writing Chinese characters with brush.

02 Kolja with his wife and daughter.

Contribution:

If you are interested in sharing your life experiences in China, please send your story to qing-wang3@hnair.com or mi-tian@hnair.com. Nice photos are welcomed.

for themselves or to take as presents for friends and family. It is a typical Chinese gift, even in the business world. Chinese calligraphy combines traditional art with a timeless statement or poem. It has something mystique and unique, because a person's handwriting cannot be forged. So, it contains very individualized characters and, as in every piece of art, is an expression of the writer as well. It is always an encouraging thought that my calligraphies, and therefore a piece of me, hang in households all over the world. The same with Chinese tattoos on people's bodies that I created for people, whose language I do not even speak. It seems that Chinese calligraphy has the power to connect people - people with very different life stories - people like you and me.

That's what Chinese calligraphy does to other people, but how does it influence me? I simply adore calligraphy. Sometimes I feel frustrated or tired, but the diligent effort is worth it. Writing with the brush is like therapy for me. I calm down and concentrate on this one thing, here and now. My brain is working, but is not overwhelmed, while my body is relaxed. I normally know after a few strokes on paper how my current mood is. Am I well rested? Focused? Am I mulling over something? Can I listen to my body today? Do I have control over the brush? Am I disciplined enough for my daily exercises? Attention to myself is the key here. Calligraphy is like a mirror, you just have to look and accept what it shows you. Of course, that is not always satisfying. Nobody likes everything about him- or

herself. Sometimes you can learn and change something in your life. Sometimes you just have to accept the circumstances.

I also work with children and adults, giving calligraphy classes at the German School Shanghai Pudong. My most important lesson: calligraphy is always a mixture of pleasure and work. How will you be able to write beautiful characters (which mirror yourself), if you are not happy while you are writing? This is why I tell my students, "Try to be happy and have fun while you are writing." If you are unhappy, you will write ugly characters. That will make you frustrated - a vicious circle.

I have a wife and a three-year-old daughter, who also live in Shanghai. People ask me sometimes if I teach my daughter Chinese or calligraphy. Of course, I like the idea of my daughter learning calligraphy when she is older. She cannot write Chinese characters yet, but she likes painting using a brush and water. I believe every child likes drawing. It is a good way of personal expression, it is good for children to believe in fantasy and use their imaginations, and last but not least painting develops spatial sense. Hopefully, one day she finds as much pleasure with Chinese calligraphy as I do. The question, if and when we will go back to Germany, cannot be answered yet. Everything has its time. So does Shanghai. We want our daughter to grow German roots as well, so I guess we will stay here a bit longer, but someday we will go back to Germany for sure. Back to Germany, back to the roots. Back to where it all began. 🇩🇪

02

