

## Research Article

# Translating Chinese Calligraphy Into Indonesian: A Philological Approach

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**Abstract.**

This paper is entitled "Translating Chinese calligraphy into Indonesian: A Philological Approach." Furthermore, the researcher intends to: (1) present a translation of Chinese calligraphy script in Indonesian, (2) express the moral message contained in Chinese calligraphy script. This study used a philological approach, which consisted of manuscript research methods and text editing, utilizing Lucien Goldman's theory of philological explanation. Based on the Chinese calligraphy script found in Tjong A Fie's mansion, the researchers made pragmatic structural observations and presented them from descriptive, analytical and comparative stages. The results of this study are the reconstruction of calligraphy characters as the content of the text that is abstract and essential; to be precise the Chinese calligraphy characters are found at the front gate, main entrance, front door and back right-wing of Tjong A Fie's mansion. In this pragmatic observation of the Chinese calligraphy script, Chinese social and cultural values are obtained, such as the belief system, philosophy, and the relationship between humans and nature. These values are applied by the Chinese community as a guideline hence they can live in peace, harmony and balance.

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## 1. Introduction

The civilization of an area is represented by the knowledge and science advancement. For it is how city life was formed. That opinion is supported by the works that have been preserved until now. The level of civilization in an area can be seen through those works. Hence, those past works that have been preserved in places such as textual center need to be unfolded for research purpose. Those heritages contain a valuable authentic historical value, regardless of how they may look [7].

The massive amount of scriptwriter with various purposes made manuscripts spread to various places in which several manuscripts go through several changes, intentionally or not. Rewriting manuscript by students has already been a tradition since 3 BC in Greece. In that time, they already established rewriting rules as well. Which later known as philology and people who practice it are called philologist. As time goes by, the rules

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in rewriting have gone through several development and changes. But, still have the essence to rewrite a manuscript as close as the original [10].

According to Baried [2], a study towards past writings needs to be done because of a presumption that those writings still contain relevant value to today's life. Following the statement, the Chinese calligraphy in this research needs to be studied deeper so it can be understood by many people.

Based on the description above, several reasons are related to the Chinese calligraphy in Tjong A Fie house can be put forward as follows:

First, Chinese calligraphy has not been researched specifically. Hence, representative philology research regarding the object has not been made before. The result of this research will be useful for people who want to examine the calligraphy further for any kind of study.

Second, Chinese calligraphy is a work that consists of several essential elements such as the owner, beliefs, and also the relation between human and nature. Through these elements, it is a given that the owner wants to convey something useful for the people. With that in mind, this research tries to find the moral value contained inside it.

Third, this research is one way to help the government in carrying out the national development program in cultural aspect through research, study, and recording of past manuscripts to be understood, developed, and spread to all the people in Indonesia and also the world [8].

From those reasons, this research tries to study several aspects as follows: First, Chinese calligraphy translation. Second, decipher the moral and socio-cultural value contained inside Chinese calligraphy in Tjong A Fie's Mansion.

## 2. Methods

In this research, initially, the Chinese alphabet in the calligraphy is studied philologically. In studying the Chinese alphabet, philology explanation theory by Lucien Goldman, a French philosopher, is used. In that theory, he describes and classifies philology function proportionally in the general study, especially in a textual context. In this case, Chinese calligraphy alphabet is studied to analyze the message that is tried to be delivered by the author. According to Faruk [7], the theory is based on literary work as a structure. But, the structure is not regarded as something static, but a continuing historical process, that goes through structuration (assimilation), and destruction (accommodation) which live alongside the community. The theory has several basic concepts, which are humanity facts, collective subject, world's view, understanding and explanation.

Because of that, the dialectic method developed two sets of concepts, which are "whole-part" and "understanding-explaining". As a coherent structure, literary work is a unity which is built from smaller parts. But, literary works also a part of a bigger union. That is why we have to explain literary works and place it in the bigger union. This is where the concept of "understanding-explaining" takes place [7].

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Text Description

This text consists of Chinese calligraphy alphabets which are written on top, right and left side of the gate's wall, the main gate and also the backside of Tjong A Fie's Mansion. The Chinese calligraphy alphabet that is written on top of the gate is "通秉地" (*Tōng Bǐng Dì*), on the right side is "清前峙则" (*Qīng qián shì zé*), and on the left side is "斤间嘉生" (*Jīn jiàn jiā shēng*). Chinese calligraphy that is written on the main gate is "清和堂" (*Qīnghé táng* (top)), "馨明德" (*Xīnmíng dé* (right)), "斤间留威" (*Jīn jiàn liú wēi* (left)), "嘉官" (*Jiā Guān*)" and "金爵" (*Jīn Jué*). There is also a Chinese calligraphy alphabet on the right side of Tjong A Fie's Mansion, the writing is "尼葛辉斐" (*Ní Gē Huī Fēi*), and also "竹巴松茂" (*Zhú Bā Sōng Mào*)" written on the right side of the back gate of the house.

#### 3.2. Mayor Tjong A Fie

Tjong A Fie (阿非) is known as a settled foreigner from China who became successful as a banker, contractor and owner of several plantations in Sumatera. Other than known as a wealthy person, he is also known as a philanthropist one in Sumatera, Java and even Malaysia.

Tjong A Fie is known as a philanthropist because of his generosity, fairness, and honesty towards anyone. Because of that, he loves to help others who are in need regardless of their background. Tjong A Fie received trust from other Chinese who live in Sumatera Utara which later made him a leader for Chinese in Medan city.

His good political relationship with the East Indies government put him in a good relationship towards the Dutch official and also the sultanate, which gave him a great fortune from the integration between political and business. Even so, Tjong A Fie was not greedy. He spared some of his wealth for charity. He also involved in the development of worship places such as mosques, churches, and temples in Sumatera

Utara and Malaysia. Tjong A Fie also donated some of his lands for education facilities and government buildings [12].

In 1911, Tjong A fie gained the title of *Majoor der Chineezen* to lead the Chinese in Deli, replacing Tjong Yong Hian, for his great achievement. *Majoor der Chineezen* is a term used by Dutch as an ethnic leader of a community. The level of the title is lieutenant, assistant Major, and then Major as the highest position which also holds prestige in that time. Other than being an advisor, he was also a member of the city council (*Gemeenteraad*) and cultural council (*Cultuurraad*).

Tjong A Fie was much respected; besides, he also dominated the economy and politic. His business includes plantation, palm oil factory, sugar mill, bank, and Train Corporation. During his duty as a Major, Tjong A Fie had established his private business in Deli. One of the developments he made in Deli is Kesawan Bank, the pioneer of money-saving business in Deli, the development of Masjid Lama Gang Bengkok (1884), Vihara Kwan Im (1879), Jembatan Kebajikan/ Titi Beliani (1917), RS. Kusta in Pulau Sicanang, Menara Lonceng at Gedung Balai Kota, education facilities, hospitals, and other public facilities have made Tjong A Fie became an active public figure in Deli. Tjong A Fie passed away February, 8th 1921 and buried in Pulo Brayan, Medan, Sumatera Utara [14].

### 3.3. Front Gate

On the front gate of Tjong A Fie's Mansion, *Tōng Běng Dì* 通秉地 (top): *tōng* (ascend/arrived at a prosperous house), *běng* (grass/a well-planted plant), *dì* (house/house of aristocrats in the past) are written. The writings *Qīng qián shì zé* 清前世泽 (right), *Jīn jiàn jiā shēng* 金见家生 (left). *Qīng qián* is ancient money which was made from bronze; *shì zé* is ascendancy and wealth that is bequeathed by the ancestors. *Jīn jiàn* is a golden mirror, *jiā shēng* is a good name in Chinese culture in the past, all of the alphabets were carved on both of the gates, and all of them were prayers, hopes, and advice towards their descendant so they will have a good upbringing in the future. From the description above it is concluded that the meaning from all of this message is to take care of the descendants so they will always take care of the good name, goodwill and also the wealth that is left by the ancestors and also to have good solidarity in the community.



**Figure 1:** The front gate of Tjong A Fie's Mansion, 1890.

### 3.4. Main Gate

From the entrance of Tjong A Fie's Mansion, Chinese calligraphy alphabets written as, *Qīnghé táng* 清和堂 (top) shows that the owner of the house has the name of Zhang family. This is believed that Zhang family came from the descendant of Huangti emperor, Princess Hui who held the title of Gong Zheng (imperial archer master). Qinghe is the name of a city located in Heibei province, China. This place is believed as the beginning of the Zhang family, Princess Hui, who later had her descendant named with Zhang family.

Since Qinghe city is located in the north area of China, the majority of people there are Han tribe who originated from the north. Later, some of this north Han group migrated restlessly to the south of China and later known as Hakka sub-nationality (Kejia-ren/khek-lang). One of the purposes of the migration is Jiaying, which later known Meizhou metropolis, Meixian district, Guangdong province, China. Songkou city is included in one of the developed city in its district, which is the homeland of Tjong A Fie.

Read from the top right to bottom left as the reading rules of ancient Chinese. *Xīmíng jīdé* 勸善書 (right), *Xīmíng* came from a book written by Zhang Zai (Song dynasty) where this book explains that good deeds towards elderly, respecting each other, doing good deeds, and facing hard-times of life with a steadfast behavior, will give peace in life. The writing *Xīmíng jīdé*, have a meaning to make people giving a lot of good deeds as long

as he lives along with the law of nature, so people will have a peaceful life. The writing *Jīn jiàn liú wēi* 金鑑流微 (left), came from the word *Jīn jiàn*, where the meaning of alphabets Jian is a mirror, in the past, ministers presented golden mirror as a gift for king Tang Xuanzong, where minister Zhang Jiuling said:

*"A mirror can be used as a medium to see faces, deficiencies in you and try to keep improving from mistakes that have been made."*

Respecting each other, regardless of race, culture, and religion is hoped to bring great solidarity and virtue for eternity.



**Figure 2:** The main entrance of Tjong A Fie's Mansion, 2020.

Aside from that, *Jiā Guān* 加官 (right) and *Jīn Jué* 晉爵 (left) also written on the entrance gate of Tjong A Fie Mansion museum that represents aristocracy in Jin dynasty. In old Chinese belief, the aristocracy is divided into 5 categories which are, *Gōng* 公, *Hóu* 侯, *Bó* 伯, *Zi* 子 and *Nán* 男. From those titles, Major Tjong A Fie is hoped to be able to preserve the position and the trust that is given to him.

### 3.5. Right Side Gate

*Niǎo Gé* 飛鵬 (right), means luxury as in a palace, *Huī Fēi* 飛鵬 (left), means fly just like an eagle with a beautiful pair of wings. Chinese calligraphy alphabet can be interpreted as a form of gratefulness of every achievement that already achieved and useful for a big part of the community. This is also related to the morality of Tjong A Fie as pluralist



Figure 3: The main entrance of Tjong A Fie's Mansion, 2020.

figure when it comes to adapting to others, without looking at race, socio-culture, ethnic and religion.



Figure 4: The front door of the right wing of Tjong A Fie's Mansion, 2020.

### 3.6. Back Gate

*Zhú Bā Sōng Mào* 福祿壽 means a happy, prosperous, and harmonic family. This message is delivered to congratulate the new house. This Chinese calligraphy alphabet is also a figure of speech of achievement of Tjong A Fie's hard work in his life. This message is hoped to be a guide and a good deed for the elderly and ancestors and also becoming an inspiration and reference for the descendants, to preserve the good name, morality, and harmony in the family.



**Figure 5:** The back door of the right wing of the Tjong A Fie's Mansion, 2020.

## 4. Conclusions and Suggestion

From this research, it is concluded that Chinese calligraphy alphabets are based on human cultural information in the past which preserved inside it. Because of that, as disciplines, philology belongs to human science to unfold the culture product of the past which preserved in written artifacts. The concept of 'culture' in here is related to the idea, feeling, belief, tradition, and values in the community. In this context, the intrinsic meaning from Chinese calligraphy alphabets that are written by Tjong A Fie is interpreted.

Chinese calligraphy alphabet consists of several elements such as owner, belief, and also human relation with nature. From those elements, the owner of the house wanted to convey a message to people. This Chinese calligraphy alphabet research is an effort



to help the government conducting national development especially in the cultural area through research, study, and recording of old text to be interpreted, developed and spread to the people Indonesia and even the world. This research is far from perfect because Chinese calligraphy alphabet that is used as the data is still limited on the alphabets that are found Tjong A Fie house's gates Chinese calligraphy. Even so, hopefully, the result of this research can give benefits for the readers and also other researchers who want to continue the research in this field. It is also hoped that this object can be researched from any other different perspectives.

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