



# History of Calligraphy Brushes

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# Brush Importance in Calligraphy

- The brush is considered the oldest part of the “Four Treasures of the Study” (文房四宝), which is a term referring to the materials used in calligraphy
- The brush is not only important for calligraphy
  - Painting also uses the brush
  - Painting and calligraphy originated at similar times
- The brush is important because of its stylistic abilities
  - Not as rigid as other writing instruments



# History of the Brush

- The brush is said to have been invented sometime during the 200s BC (Han Dynasty)
- However, there are even older artifacts that seem to have been painted with brushes - archaeological evidence thus suggests that brushes are older than the Han Dynasty
  - For instance, there is pottery dating back to even the 5000s-2000s BC that suggest some brush-like instrument was used for painting



# Brush Components and Characteristics



- The brush has two components: the hairs used for the writing tip + the tube used for holding the brush
  - The brush hair historically came from an animal such as rabbit or goat
  - The tube historically was made from bamboo or wood and in rare cases, jade or porcelain
- In modern times, a lot of brushes are now made with plastic and there is a wider variety of hair used for the tip - including horse hair and pheasant hair
  - Softer brushes typically use hair from animals like sheep
  - Stiffer brushes typically use hair from animals like rabbits
- Arguably the most important characteristic of a brush is its flexibility - important for the artistic form of calligraphy
  - Flexibility allows for different width size and stroke type

# Types of Brushes

- Brushes are commonly categorized according to the hair type: stiff, soft, and mixed
- Mixed brushes frequently combine “softer” hairs and “stiffer” hairs



## Why is this important?

This determines how much water / ink the brush can absorb and the stylistic output (how thick the characters will look, how easy it is to create more flowy / rigid script).

## Brushes in Other Countries and Cultures


- **Japan:** brush making tradition brought from China by the Buddhist monk Kukai in 806
  - Technique slightly diverged in order to write rounder characters
- **Korea:** brushes in Korean calligraphy are similar to the ones used in Chinese calligraphy, though there are sometimes extra objects used in conjunction with the brush (a special container to hold the brush, a bowl for washing the brush)



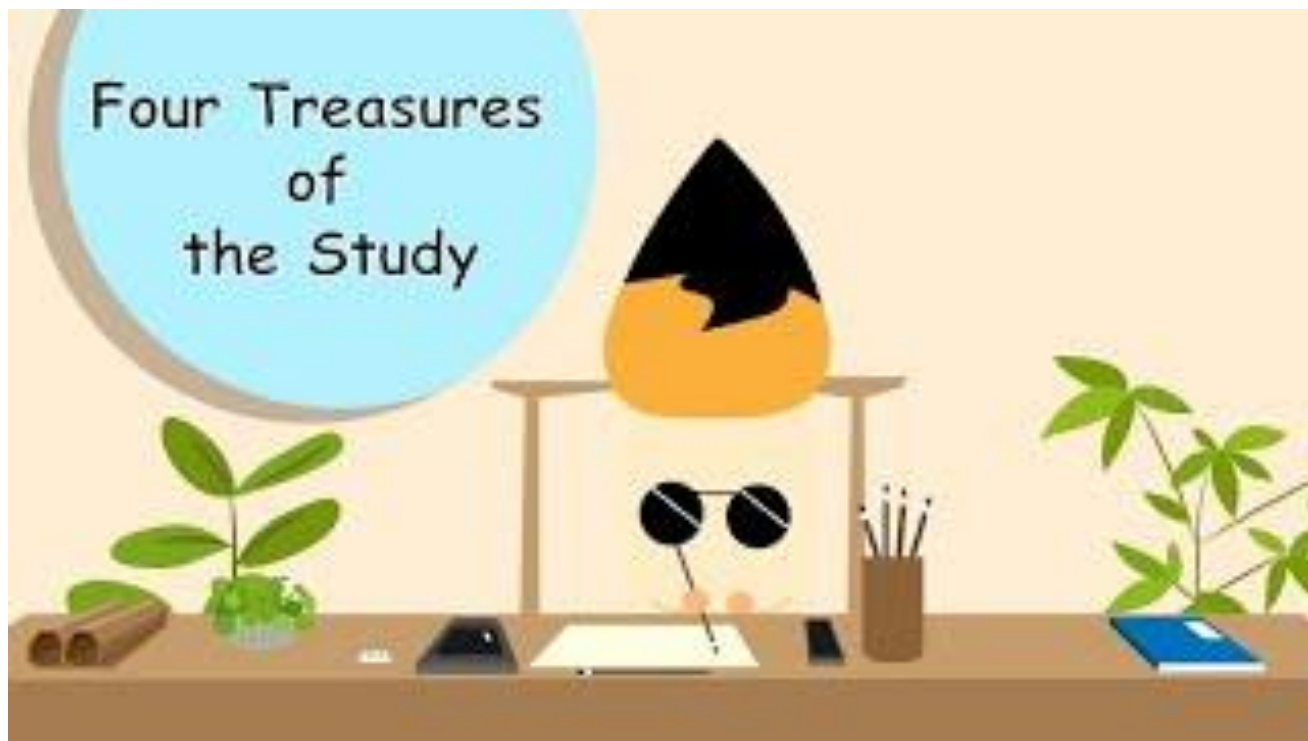
## The Other Three Treasures

- The brush is considered the oldest part of the Four Treasures of the Study, which also includes ink, paper, and ink stone
- Traditionally, ink came in a solid shape and is made into liquid by grinding it with water using an inkstone
  - The solid state made for easier transportation
  - Ink could be made into different shades depending on how much water was used
- Traditionally, the paper was made with mulberry bark, hemp fiber, and bamboo





## Four Treasures of the Study







## References

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