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# Huisgenoot

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To: tiangotlost@gmail.com

Hi Tian,

I don't speak Afrikaans but I do understand Dutch, which is very similar. I've had a go at translating this article, though in many places I have had to guess wildly {my comments in curly brackets} and I can't guarantee it is 100% accurate. More like I can guarantee it isn't 100% accurate. Anyhow...

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It looks so cool when Zorro makes his mark in three strokes. Just three times with his sword and there is the big Z which shows the masked wonder was here.

Chinese and Japanese letters are even more impressive. This is why people want to choose them for tattoos. But you'd better just hope the bloke with that needle really knows what the character means...

Britney Spears thought that she sported the Chinese character for "secretive". Now she has "queer" {also "strange", "foreign", "weird" etc} written on her. Uh-oh.

The American basketball star Shawn Marion wanted his nickname, The Matrix, in Chinese on his leg. Now in place of that is something like "demon full of mothballs". His Mum would be so proud.

David Beckham decided he was going to have Victoria's name tattooed in Hindi on his arm - but now in place of that is Vihctoria. Oops.

Think before you ink, {this paragraph is really beyond me and I am guessing wildly} because it isn't just stars who have made such slip-ups. It has already happened to ordinary folk that their Eastern conversation piece has become an embarrassment.

The broadcaster and TV presenter Mark Pilgrim had done hours of research before he chose his symbol.

"My Japanese symbol is my life philosophy expressed as a mathematical equation and means essentially 'life over evil', explains Mark. "I had researched this and went to various websites to obtain the correct translation. In Japanese my tattoo literally means 'good over evil', but I interpret this as {this has me puzzled} 'fun in my life must increasingly resemble this problem'."

Mistaken ideas about symbols have now become such a worldwide problem that Tian Tang, a Chinese student who is studying in America, has begun a weblog Hanzhi Smatter ([www.hanzismatter.com](http://www.hanzismatter.com)). He is focusing this on "the misuse of Chinese characters in Western culture".

On his website are photos of tattoos which have been used and a pile of messages from people who wonder what their characters really mean.

One girl thought that her delicate example of ink art meant "Mamma", but it means "Good journey".

"I usually just shake my head. I feel like a doctor who does an autopsy and tries to find what went wrong," said Tang in connection with the Hiragana Times.

The Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie has a couple of tattoos, amongst which Thai letters on her shoulder. Charlize Theron has a mark on each foot.

Chinese and Japanese symbols are also a desirable choice with us.

"I have a whole wall full of Chinese symbols from which clients can choose," said the Durban tattoo artist Dave Edwards of Body Art.

"I have already done five symbols today," he said.

Most people want someone's name tattooed in Chinese or Japanese. He had his wife Renette's name in symbols on his body.

A general misconception is that these letters can only be Japanese or Chinese, but there is also Kanji, which is a desirable choice. "Kanji is a mixture of Chinese, Japanese and Korean and this is more than a century old," said Dave. "These symbols seem much better. A Japanese or Chinese person will be able to read them."

In order to guarantee that his clients are content with their choice, Dave has a Chinese calligrapher {or maybe calligraphy, guessing a bit here} who/which translates all these symbols and gives their backgrounds.

The Johannesburg tattooist Kay Naidoo advises that people also do their own research in order to be certain that the characters have the correct meaning. Just Google the words "Chinese tattoos" and look at what you get!

You mustn't think that you can ever replace a "concept" word like love, peace or power with a single stylish Japanese or Chinese letter.

"Chinese is easy to speak, but difficult to write," says Kevin Liu, a Johannesburg journalist who works for a Chinese paper. "In Chinese it often makes no sense to have a tattoo of just one character. Mostly you need to concatenate two or three characters together."

Another problem: If the Chinese character isn't precisely written, this can be ambiguous. "Speak with a Chinese person first before you have a Chinese tattoo," is his advice.

It seems that our local heroes do so.

Clint Brink, who plays the role of Tino Abrahams in Scandal, has on his left arm the Chinese characters which symbolize music, love and truth.

"You ought to really do some research first," he says. "That's what I did. I believe that if you decide to mark your body permanently, you must be one hundred percent sure of what you are doing."

The Idols presenter and actor Colin Moss has a Japanese symbol on his back and there is a Zen Buddhist symbol and a Japanese symbol on either side of his stomach. These stand for love, light and truth. He also sports a colorful dragon on the whole left side of his back. This is done in a traditional Japanese style and he had to lie under the needle five or six times.

The famous parents Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes have always told their daughter, Suri, her name is Hebrew for "princess" and the Persian for "red rose".

No way, say linguists. The Hebrew name Sara means "princess", whilst "suri" is dirty slang which in Hebrew means "go away".

Fortunately Tom hasn't yet had that name tattooed on his body...

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Best regards,

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