

Chinese Calligraphy: An Ancient Art in the Modern Era

Ziyuan Chen*

Georgetown Preparatory school, MD 20852, USA

ABSTRACT: Chinese calligraphy is an ancient character writing art. It germinated in the Shang Dynasty, reached its peak in the Tang Dynasty, and did not form a new calligraphy style for more than one thousand years. There are many similarities between Chinese calligraphy and western painting, including similarities in abstraction and symbolism. When the country went through the modernization of the 20th century, the western influence gradually increased, and the Chinese calligraphy art gradually formed new art forms such as hard pen calligraphy. At the same time, calligraphy art has also inspired and influenced the formation and development of western modern art in varying degrees since the 20th century. In the future, Chinese calligraphy will fully absorb the essence of western art, making this ancient art full of new vitality.

1. INTRODUCTION

As a unique art form, Chinese calligraphy has a high historical value. Many calligraphy artists integrate their own thoughts and feelings into calligraphy creation, forming unique calligraphy works with high aesthetic value [1]. At present, with the development of society, calligraphy art has gradually become a pursuit of people. This can not only improve people's aesthetic ability and spiritual realm of calligraphy, but also cultivate people's sentiment. Calligraphy is the inheritance of life art, and it also arouses people's surging feelings towards life. Calligraphy has not declined in Chinese long history, but many expressions and contents have been added. At the same time, people can feel the inner feelings of the calligraphers and the cultural atmosphere at that time through the study of calligraphy works, which is not only a study of calligraphy art, but also a good opportunity to display history and culture. As an art form with the most national characteristics, Chinese calligraphy has been greatly influenced by western modern art since the 20th century. At the same time, calligraphy has inspired and influenced the formation and development of western modern abstract art in different degrees since the 20th century. Many western modern artists have absorbed and borrowed the methods, skills and principles of creating expressive art forms from calligraphy. This paper will discuss the similarities, differences, the process and results of mutual influence between Chinese traditional art and western painting art, and provide reference for relevant researchers [2].

2. HISTORY AND CURRENT SITUATION OF CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY

In the past one hundred years, modernization and globalization have expanded at an increasingly rapid rate and have become highly influential factors in the way life is

experienced, traditions are continued, and art is practiced. Despite ever-shifting economic, technological, social, cultural, and political landscapes, Chinese calligraphy has managed to change and adapt. Encompassing numerous masterpieces by the most significant calligraphers in history, the Tang dynasty represents the peak of calligraphy [3]. For over one-thousand years following the end of the Tang Dynasty in 907 CE, no new calligraphic styles were created. However, when the country experienced the modernization of the 20th century, one of the first outcomes of gradually increasing Western influence was the adoption of hard-tipped pens, which ultimately changed writing habits significantly. Traditional art is forced to adapt with changing times and despite the practical function of brush writing becoming increasingly obsolete, the artistic nature of calligraphy has sustained the art form to exist, and even flourish, in modern society. This revived passion has led to several developments, including hard-pen calligraphy as well as the Modernist and Avant-Garde movements.

Hard-pen calligraphy has become a widely utilized and adaptable form in modern era, developing on a similar trajectory as brush calligraphy, from functionality to greater emphasis on stylistic concerns, and ultimately to a separation between the purely practical and the artistic. In principle, hard-pen calligraphy is similar to brush calligraphy, however, reinterpretation of the traditional principles and consideration of practical applications modernly has made for discernible differences. Like brush calligraphy, hard-pen calligraphy is composed in the major script styles: Seal, Clerical, Regular, Running, and Cursive [3]. As with brush calligraphy, hard-pen calligraphy begins with Regular Script, instilling the standards precisely before focusing more acutely on individuality. Calligraphy keenly indicates the wider tendencies of the society in which it exists; "calligraphy in the Qin and Han dynasties, for example, was characterized by classic elegance; the Jin dynasty featured graceful charm; the Tang emphasized principles;

*Email: zchen@gprep.org

the Song and Yuan emphasized spirit and poise; and the Ming and Qing stressed unadorned artistic delight.” [4]

The Modernist movement in calligraphy began in 1985, not long after the country reopened its doors to the world and, therein, Western culture and ideas. In a provocative Beijing exhibition, a collective of young artists challenged and astounded viewers with a new form of calligraphy. This collective believed that calligraphy must depart from its rigorous traditional tenants to develop and remain relevant in a rapidly modernizing country. These artists experimented with various media and techniques, “such as reshaping Chinese characters, taking titular characters back to their pictographic origins, and mixing various writing styles on the same piece.” [4] This collective drew inspiration from the experimental calligraphers of Japan and Taiwan, the Abstract Expressionists of the 1950s and 1960s, and from contemporary Western art, leading them to guide Chinese calligraphy toward conceptualism and abstraction. Utilizing calligraphic techniques to generate abstract symbols and images, they created work based upon the structure of Chinese characters but devoid of any linguistic meaning. As such artists contend that calligraphy cannot achieve modernization unless it expands outside of exclusive use of Chinese characters, they allege that calligraphy is an art of lines and does not have to be based solely upon the writing of Chinese characters. Further, these artists believe calligraphers must engage in artistic exchanges with the international art community to garner greater international recognition for the art form of calligraphy [5].

3. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY AND WESTERN PAINTING

3.1. Similarity in abstraction

In abstract painting, the concept of symbols is infinitely expanded, or people convey information with exaggerated symbols. However, abstract art has formed an internal cultural connotation and spiritual consciousness up to now. Abstract painting constructs the inner reality in the mind through the forms of lines, surfaces, shapes and colours to achieve the purpose of revealing phenomena and essential laws. This has something in common with Chinese "Tao". It is the embodiment of a metaphysical philosophical spirit. Calligraphy is the result of the ancients' diligent thinking, observing and summarizing the laws of the vitality of all things in the world, and it is also a way of existence of human life. Chinese traditional calligraphy emphasizes writing the heart, freehand brushwork and shape, which should be two orientations in artistic practice. The concrete form is only the carrier of spirit and value orientation, and it should change flexibly according to the needs of the mood when creating. Empowering for the sake of shape, often can't get a good artistic image, but there will be a feeling of affectation [6]. The arty pursuit of spirit and the pursuit of everything in the world will fail in blindness. Calligraphy and abstract painting, as different artistic

forms, have their own unique way of mastering their interest in the real world and the inner world, but they also reject pure figuration to some extent. When artists create, they are more involved in their personal feelings and their touch and hope for the world and the truth. Abstract painting, as a new creative concept of modern art, has shown its rejection of concreteness from the very beginning. The formation of this painting school is based on the abstract nature of the works. It is characterized by expression and develops a new field of painting language on the basis of commonness. In abstract painting, apart from expressing the emotion of the subject, we also want to express the internal laws and order of the natural universe [7].

3.2. Similarity in symbol

Chinese calligraphy is a unique artistic form of symbolic and symbolic unity. In the process of writing, Chinese characters, after being diversified and combined, have the function of expressing specific situations and subject emotions. That is to say, the similarity of dots and lines in calligraphy makes them have symbolic and metaphorical functions with natural objects and subjects [8]. This is because writing lines, driven by emotion, can acquire the value of symbolizing the main character. Of course, compared with western abstract paintings, Chinese calligraphy, as an oriental nation's understanding and expression of the world and the subject, has its own characteristics in specific ways. For example, in terms of objects of symbols and metaphors, Chinese calligraphy is not only related to natural phenomena, but also related to the subject's body, spirit and moral character. More specifically, Chinese calligraphy often takes everything related to strength, quality and movement in nature, people and objects as the object of metaphor and symbol. Western abstract painting plays the symbolic and metaphorical functions through points, lines, surfaces, colours and shapes. For example, American abstract expressionist painter Pollock, who was influenced by Freud's subconscious theory, created his paintings through the automatic method of getting rid of the rational control of the subject. The non-thematic points, lines, surfaces, colours and shapes in his paintings symbolize the existence of a purely natural subject, that is, the existence of a Pollock whom Pollock himself never knew. Of course, the symbolism of abstract painting language is characterized by uncertainty and fuzziness, which is related to the subject's specific feelings in a specific situation [9].

3.3. Similarity in structure

Chinese calligraphy is a writing form of Chinese characters, which creates visual space through a certain dot-line structure, and also expresses emotion and aesthetic interest through the special carrier of Chinese character stroke structure. It shows that this point and line are endowed with specific aesthetic connotation. Western abstract painting also relies on pure points, lines, surfaces, shapes and colours to construct visual space [10]. This picture composition of point, line, surface, shape and colour is essentially a pure abstract formal relationship. In this sense,

the artistic language of the picture not only has the real meaning of art itself, but also is the direct presentation of the externalized life form and the world existence. For this reason, how to form a heterogeneous and isomorphic relationship between the expression of points, lines, surfaces and blocks and the existence of the world itself, as well as between the artistic form and the life feeling of the subject, has become the key of abstract art. Chinese painting "line" is the foundation of modeling, and "line" is the fundamental method for painters to grasp the external world and internal spirit. The charm of lines, in the history of Chinese art, began with calligraphy. The figure in western classical painting is mainly composed of light and shade. With the evolution of history, this transitional form has gradually developed into a whole form. This kind of blocky brushstroke has a certain performance effect in space, especially in graphic design. By using blocky brushstroke, the visual effect of viewers can be improved. Chinese calligraphy is not only composed of lines, but also adds points, surfaces, shapes, colours and other elements, which will produce spatial effect on the plane picture and make the picture richer [11].

4. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY AND WESTERN PAINTING

4.1. Differences in material medias

Chinese calligraphy uses brush and ink to create on rice paper, silks and silks, while western abstract painting uses oil painting pens and oil paints to paint on linen [12]. The material of oil painting is stiff and elastic, but it doesn't pay much attention to hand feeling in the process of painting. The brush is different, and its elasticity is not as good as that of oil painting pen. However, in the process of the brush tip touching the paper and silk, the writer's hand controls the brush tip and changes the lines subtly. Abstract painting can be drawn from all things in the world and can also use colours. The spatial order, colour composition, texture and volume are also its special features. Calligraphy is based on Chinese characters, and its creation must be carried out on the basis of Chinese characters' schemata, and the clever use of word-making can express the writer's mood.

4.2. Differences in spiritual orientation

Influenced by traditional cultures such as Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, Chinese calligraphy pays more attention to holistic and perceptual thinking and pursues the charm, style and artistic conception of works. The abstract painting pays more attention to the expression and venting of the subject, and pursues individuality, style and language form. Although there are such great differences in carrier, cultural background, etc. Western painting art worships forms, pays attention to the visual effects of forms, acts on people's feelings, and gives people enthusiasm and impulse. It emphasizes the spirit and connotation of calligraphy, giving people edification and thinking.

Western painting art exposes the ugliness of society more, which leads to people's resistance to society. Calligraphy also shows the artist's inner grievances and melancholy, but it doesn't intensify contradictions, and it has the function of being sentimental and inviting people to be kind. However, we still can't avoid seeing that both of them have crossed similar artistic tracks together in the country of images [13].

5. INHERITANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY

While modern calligraphy does not communicate intelligible words, it offers emotion through shape, colour, shade, and placement [4]. Thus, modern calligraphers are inclined to offer that their utilization of abstraction brings a truer and deeper emotional level to their practice. Similarly, twentieth-century movements in Western art and literature, including Abstractionism and Cubism, sought to elicit an emotional response through connotation rather than appealing to literal meaning. Modern calligraphers also suggest that this form of calligraphy permits those unfamiliar with Chinese characters to garner greater appreciation for the art form [14]. However, traditional Chinese artists argue that calligraphy is defined and universally recognized as writing and that Chinese calligraphy is confined to characters written in brushwork. Further, traditional artists content that the properties of characters created with the brush exist simultaneously as an art form and linguistic units, comprising the unique nature of Chinese calligraphy that distinguishes it all other art forms. Additionally, the concept of altering Chinese calligraphy to include a form without traditional characters presents an issue of cultural disruption, as its essential to preserve traditional Chinese traditional and aesthetics. Thus, modern calligraphy could exist alongside traditional calligraphy, but appears largely as a modern extension of the art form rather than a substitute for the traditional art.

The inheritance and innovation of Chinese calligraphy art must combine the law of social development with the development trend of the times, and work out the inheritance strategy that conforms to the learning habits of the masses. Through the rational use of modern information technology, the advantages of its communication can be brought into full play to construct a social environment with a strong atmosphere of inheriting Chinese calligraphy. Calligraphy is a unique traditional art form of the Chinese nation and a treasure of Chinese history and culture. Only by growing up in criticism and appreciation, can we constantly improve our artistic expression ability, and make the calligraphy art continue to be passed down. Therefore, in order to realize the inheritance and innovation of Chinese calligraphy, the most important thing is to base on the dialectical perspective of appreciation and criticism. It is this dialectical perspective that has prompted generations of calligraphy artists to constantly improve themselves, innovate themselves and make progress and development in the inheritance and innovation of calligraphy. The so-called dialectical perspective means that in the

process of inheritance, one should not simply copy and imitate the calligraphy art of predecessors, but inject one's own thoughts and feelings into it to highlight one's own artistic characteristics. Similarly, in the process of innovation, we should not blindly pull away from the core of Chinese calligraphy art, but create on the basis of adhering to the spirit of Chinese calligraphy art to promote the stable inheritance and continuous innovation and development of Chinese calligraphy art.

6. INFLUENCE OF CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY ON WESTERN ART

Chinese calligraphy has also significantly impacted Western art, notably through its influence on abstract painting in the early twentieth century. Wassily Kandinsky, the father of abstraction, believed his art aligned with the tradition of Chinese calligraphy as he, in some capacity, intellectualized his work with Chinese philosophies just as Chinese artists would ultimately infuse their Modernist and Avant-Garde work with western philosophies decades later. The implementation of lines exhibiting varied pressure, movement, and flow by Kandinsky and other influential abstract expressionists, such as Willem de Kooning, may derive from Running and Cursive scripts. Notably, Running Script, which was exemplified by Wang Xizhi's masterwork, Lanting Xu, offers an expressive personal style, not intended for clear legibility but for aesthetic appreciation and dynamic, confident brushwork [5]. Pablo Picasso once declared, "Had I been born Chinese, I would have been a calligrapher, not a painter," concurrently acknowledging the influence on his artistic practice and his reverence for calligraphy as a form of high art [6]. However, despite the notable recognition of Chinese calligraphy by prominent Western artists, traditional Chinese calligraphy has influenced "the works of Western artists only in terms of the techniques they used in the production of lines." [7]

The lines in Chinese calligraphy not only have a great influence on western abstract painting in terms of rhythm, rhythm and power. In the process of writing, calligraphy itself has the aesthetic feeling of movement like dancing. The charm, posture, spirit and emotion, ideographic expression and splashing ink contained in the writing can be used as an independent art form. Dropping school action painting represented by Pollock embodies the characteristics of writing in calligraphy. Pollock spread the canvas on the ground, splashing paint on it, and his whole body moved like a dance during his painting. This painting process is exactly the same as the writing interest of calligraphy. What the painter completes here is not only a painting, but the whole process of painting. He emphasized that painting should pay attention to the spiritual experience in the creative process, so that every colour and line can become the symbol mark of action, and painting will eventually become the direct record of the painter's emotion. Pollock's trickle painting form is also very similar to the aesthetic taste of Chinese calligraphy. The cursive writers often finish their works with great passion, and people can feel the author's emotions in the ink. It is not limited by physical form itself, and fully expresses the author's

thoughts and feelings through the disorder of pen and ink [15].

7. CONCLUSIONS

For more than two thousand years, until 1985, Chinese calligraphy did not experience outside influences due to the isolation of Chinese and Western culture. Through the modernization of the 20th century, both cultures have experienced immense and varied interaction in numerous areas, including the arts. While the Modernist movement has expressed concerns about the continued viability of the traditional form of calligraphy, the interaction between traditional and modern, Eastern and Western, offers a unique opportunity for continued development and appreciation of the most significant and essential Chinese art form. As modern forms stemming from traditional styles of script can be found across the country today, the future of calligraphy does not appear to be based on rejection of traditional forms or of new methods; rather, traditional and modern forms may coexist peacefully, "reinforcing each other under the Daoist principle of harmony with diversity." [4]

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