

FORMS IN VISUAL TYPES OF MODERN CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

Modern calligraphy artworks have presented very strong visual arts attributes over the last few decades, and Chinese modern calligraphy art is no exception to this phenomenon. Chinese modern calligraphy, as a bridge between traditional, Western, modern, and contemporary art, demonstrates a clear relationship and mutual influence between Chinese modern calligraphy and global art. Line has always been the master content of traditional and modern Chinese calligraphy in the formalistic practise of calligraphy art. Recognizing the aesthetic experience requires an understanding of the Chinese concept of line. The author's analysis of lines in this paper is focused on the artworks of Wang Dongling and Qiu Zhenzhong in terms of modern Chinese calligraphy in order to explain divergences from lines in traditional calligraphy and to analyse the strength and emotional expression of the lines in the two artists' works.

Keywords: Calligraphy, modern calligraphy, Chinese modern calligraphy, lines, emotional.

INTRODUCTION

The art of Chinese calligraphy is much more than just creating beautiful writing that is decoratively arranged to adorn a surface. It is one of the most important art forms that has been practised in China up to this point, and it is unique in the context of world art because its distinctive features in writing (Adriana, 2013). Since the mid-1980's, Chinese calligraphy art has undergone a radical transformation and has become more open to experimentation. In China, art critics are currently engaged in a heated debate about Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy (*Zhongguo xiandai shufa*). There was a great deal of emphasis on the sense of form in the late 1980's exploration of modern calligraphy and a large number of abstract explorations works with "Chinese characters

as visual media” were filled with that era (Liu, 2009). Calligraphy became so popular that the government established the Chinese Calligraphers’ Association (*Zhongguo shufajia xiehui*) in 1981, bringing together thousands of calligraphers. The artistic atmosphere was fervent, which led to the First Exhibition of Chinese Modern Calligraphy (*Zhongguo xiandai shufa shouzhan*), which marked the birth of Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy (*Zhongguo xiandai shufa*) and the modernist movement.

THE FORM OF CALLIGRAPHY AND PAINTING

The modern exploration of visual forms and the expression of concepts through the pictographic nature of characters as the main factor of extraction and expression from the perspective of painting is referred to as calligraphy and painting. The artist’s main creation idea is the simple simulation of natural form, emphasising the meaning of painting rather than writing as the main feature of his visual schema. This kind of works are generally influenced by the ‘85 *New Wave Art Movement* (*Bawu xinchao*), in the free and loose atmosphere of creation, under the guidance of the theory of “homology of painting and calligraphy”, the transformation of calligraphy form based on Chinese characters led by painters, trying to find a different way between writing and painting from traditional calligraphy, the representations with a strong visual feeling impact on the traditional calligraphy of thousands of years of stagnant stubborn form. As an early form of exploration of modern calligraphy, the form of calligraphy and painting has had a profound influence on the concept and practise of modern calligraphy.

When viewed as a whole, the word “mountain” occupies more than half of the appearance, and the entire word written in thick ink overwhelms the word “destroy” in momentum (See Fig. 1). Words give a very unstable visual experience, as if the entire picture is about to be crushed by the whole mountain, the entire experience has a strong momentum, which means to completely break the old concept and enter a new world.



Fig. 1 GU Gan, *The Mountains Are Breaking Up (Shan cui 山摧)* (1985), ink on paper, 93.5 cm x 87.5 cm.

The increasingly pictographic shape of the characters, as well as the abstract combination of dots and lines, linked the ideas of “Expressionist calligraphy” and “Abstract art” (Wang, 2014). The reinterpretation of traditional painting and calligraphy ideas, the influence of contemporary Japanese calligraphy, the use of new materials, and the emergence of new visions resulted in new artistic results as a reaction to the feelings of the time and changes in Chinese society.

In concept, Ma Chengxiang’s work “Walking” (See Fig. 2) is a departure from traditional calligraphy creation (Pu & Guo, 2005). In 1985, Ma Chengxiang’s work “Walking” was displayed at the First Exhibition of Chinese Modern Calligraphy. This work vividly expresses the imagination generated in people’s minds by the verb “walk.” The work’s main character, “Xing,” is written in an ancient script (seal script).



Fig. 2 Ma Chengxiang, *Walking (Bu Xing 步行)* (1985), ink on paper

Four folding brushes divide the image into various sized spaces. The artist cleverly fills in the two most left and right spaces below with decorative writing content, establishing a sense of hierarchy right away. The multi-layer space shaping technique of deepening the first space has been greatly absorbed and used by artists in the creation of later modern calligraphy. What makes this work particularly interesting is that two footprints are painted on the front of the work, creating a more appropriate interpretation of the imagination that the word “walking” can evoke in the audience. Furthermore, the artist purposefully used ink to express the level of the picture, so that the work has the distinct taste of ink painting, a variety of ways of shaping the combination of the use of a variety of artistic vocabulary of the fusion of the work in the “Walk” in the interpretation of the image obtained great success.

THE FORM OF BRUSHWORK STYLE

Brushwork is the creation of writing techniques inherited from traditional calligraphy, which not only strengthens the writing techniques but also breaks

the original structure of Chinese characters, and the recomposition of the picture presents a different visual space expression from traditional calligraphy. Artists typically use a single word or a few numbers as the main visual elements, emphasising the overall impact of the image and employing large areas of brush and ink abstract expression techniques to provide the audience with a new visual experience (Wang, 2014).

GU Wenda (b. 1955) desired his first “Fake Characters Seal” in 1983, with two seemingly authentic Chinese characters that were completely unreadable at the time. As shown on Fig. 3, this was the starting point for the artist’s experimentation, as well as the beginning of his reflection on Chinese calligraphy and language, with the goal of completely deconstructing both.



Fig. 3 GU Wenda, Pseudo-Characters Series: Contemplation of the World (1983), ink on paper, 247.3 cm x 182.9 cm, collection of ZHEN Guo. Source: Bessire

Based on Fig.4, Bai Di's "Yan" reprocessed the character "Yan" in spatial composition while retaining the characteristics of cursive writing in traditional Chinese calligraphy. The audience can appreciate the strong and square writing skills brought by the feeling of watching stone inscriptions while also feeling like they are watching the vivid charm of the copybook from a point and a stroke of expression of the dense virtual reality (Wang, 2014). Bai Di Strode searched for the modern gene of traditional calligraphy in the exploration of abstract expressionism, based on the core value of calligraphy and the principle of "formalism first." The artist's abstract processing of the appearance of Chinese characters has altered the Chinese characters' habitual spatial structure. The work has a stunning visual impact due to the space created by large strokes and ink. This treatment method defies the fixed aesthetic criterion established by traditional calligraphy over thousands of years and provides viewers with a new visual experience, potentially paving the way for the establishment of contemporary calligraphy aesthetics.

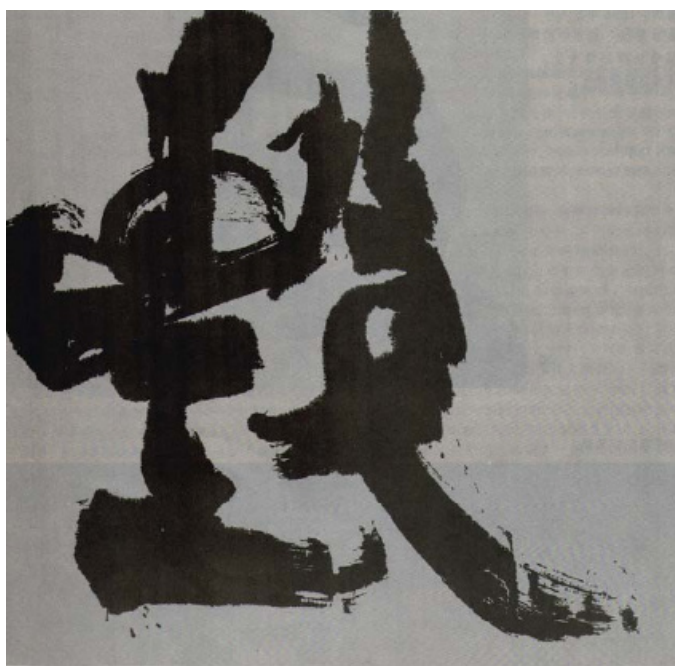


Fig. 4 Bai Di "Yan"(艳1991), ink on paper.

If calligraphy is to be considered an original abstract plastic art form, it must draw on the symbolism of Chinese characters and complete the abstract expression through symbolic meaning. It cannot just duplicate Chinese characters, as traditional calligraphy does, but must develop and investigate their meaning,

exaggerate and reinforce their shape, in order to achieve a greater visual impact and artistic appeal (Zeng, 2012). The artist deforms and exaggerates the original frame structure of the Chinese character “Wind” (see Fig. 5), thereby avoiding the literal meaning of Chinese characters and producing a unique emotion for this work. Based on Kandinsky’s point, line, and plane theory, the artist chose a square composition and deformation of the character “wind” after superimposing the outer frame, presenting an aesthetic expression that transcends the typical calligraphy aesthetic category.

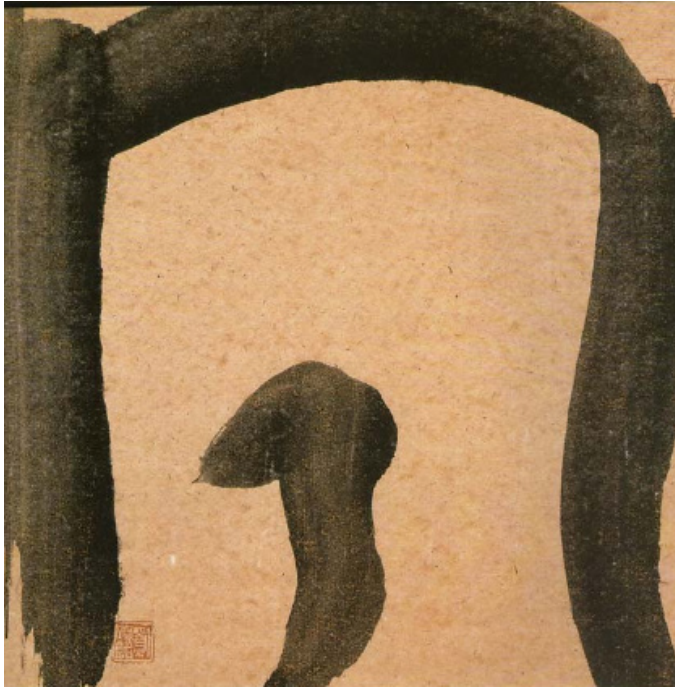


Fig. 5 Liu CanMing, Wind (风2003), ink on paper, 41 cm x 42 cm.

THE FORM OF INK EXPRESSION

In the ink style, the emphasis is on the technique of ink expression, which is based on five ancient calligraphy techniques: “dry, wet, thick, light, and burnt.” The artist’s use of expressive ink in connection with a wide array of paper textures lends modern calligraphy a variety of visual textures. For thousands of years, the development of creative techniques and tools has altered the relatively uniform appearance of traditional calligraphy, enriched the visual expression language of modern calligraphy, and modern calligraphy’s aesthetic changes conform to the aesthetic requirements of modern art. Xu and Wang (2005) contends that the concept of traditional calligraphy retains a new interpretation of Abstract art.

According to Zhu Qingsheng (2004), the expression of this ink painting is mostly determined by washing. The deep ink stains reflect the strokes' edge markings. Simultaneously, the rippling-like texture on the image is created by the immersion of a significant volume of water, or various reconcilable media items are utilised to infiltrate the ink, resulting in a random impression.

The collector Piccardo Farina explains. "I see the sea at home, I see the waves, the nets, the sand, the shells, and even my brother surfing." "The Sea" is a late-nineteenth-century masterpiece by Shao Yan. Based on the original meaning of the Chinese character "The Sea," the work explores various spatial abstraction possibilities for "The Sea" (see Fig. 6) through ink painting forms. The word "The Sea" is written out in its entirety following a rational framework and then perceptual writing. The blending and scouring of ink and water creates the illusion of hearing the sea breeze howling, the waves surging, and the ebb and flow of the sea tide in the dripping ink. The work expresses strongly the artist's conception of the sea and is replete with practises.



Fig. 6 Shao Yan, "the sea" series of four (海1995), ink on paper, 96cm x 90cm

As illustrated in Fig. 7, the most remarkable aspect of this work is the seamless match between the texture of ink on rice paper and the image of the Chinese character "ink." This visual form of expression is highly compatible with

the writing's content in terms of aesthetics; the work exemplifies a strong interest in the ink form, also by allowing the audience to appreciate the profound and broad spiritual significance inherent in Chinese ink culture. The work's distinguishing feature is its expressionless and ineffable expression. The slow and peaceful layout in a square image reveals to the audience, causing them to indicate on the work's enlightenment. The artist's brilliance lies in his use of multiple large strokes and ink rendering to vividly outline the structural characteristics of the Chinese character "ink," subvert the spatial layout of the word "ink" in traditional calligraphy techniques, and re-express the shape and meaning of the word using abstract expression methods.



Fig. 7 Zheng YiZeng, "Ink" (墨2005), ink on paper, 70cm x70 cm.

Abstract artists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem De Kooning, and Robert Motherwell frequently employ an expressionist style of writing in their abstract masterpieces; this undoubtedly serves as a concept and catalyst for the exploration of modern Chinese calligraphy (Hang, 2001). The reference to abstract artists was a significant inspiration for Hangfaji's calligraphy (see Fig. 8) explorations in a series of experimental works. The viewer appreciates art's self-presentation and individual expression through these expressive, seemingly disorderly and arbitrary ink and wash strokes. The artist's work employs a postmodern visual language of digestion, which is similar to pure abstract art in the nature of brush and ink.



Fig. 8 Hang FaJi, “Untitled” (无题1999), ink on paper, 1320cm x 68 cm.

CONCLUSION

Modern calligraphy art is only 30 years old, is still undergoing continuous development and transformation, and even within the same creative community, there are numerous divergent viewpoints. As the birthplace of modern calligraphy, calligraphy academia cannot overlook the historical significance and value of the mid-1980’s exploration of modern calligraphy, as well as the long-term and far-reaching influence on the exploration of modern calligraphy. The purpose of this paper is to begin with the inherent value of calligraphy, analyse numerous factors such as pen and ink, Chinese characters, writing style, and creation tools, and then develop a visual form classification system for contemporary calligraphy works. The classification of visual forms in this paper is not based on absolute concepts, but rather on a subjective classification with an emphasis on the audience’s perspective, because successful modern calligraphy works, from conception to completion, are frequently diverse in their display of creative means and modes of expression.

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