

# Zhang Yinlin: A Preface to Chinese Calligraphy Criticism (1931)

Translation and introduction by Shi Xiongbo

## Introduction: aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy in early 20<sup>th</sup> century\*

To readers of the present journal and to researchers of Chinese aesthetics, Zhang Yinlin 張蔭麟 (1905-1942) is not a familiar figure. After all, he is best known as an historian, and he produced few works on Chinese art.<sup>1</sup> However, in 1931, Zhang – then a philosophy student at Stanford University – wrote a 13,000-character treatise laying out the basis for the discipline of calligraphy criticism. Although he entitled this treatise ‘A Preface to Chinese Calligraphy Criticism’ 中國書藝批評學序言 (‘Preface’ hereafter), much of the text concerns wider issues in aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy. Before introducing Zhang’s ‘Preface’, it is necessary to contextualise this work by briefly reviewing writing on Chinese calligraphy aesthetics during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Following the introduction of Western aesthetics at the turn of the century, theoretical writing on art had undergone a paradigm shift in Chinese academia. As far as Chinese calligraphy was concerned, the publishing of Kang Youwei’s 康有為 (1858-1927) *Guang yizhou shuangji* 廣藝舟雙楫 (Expanding on Two Oars of the Ship of Art) in 1891 marked the end of traditional calligraphy criticism<sup>2</sup>, and Wang Guowei’s 王國維 (1877-1927) treatise ‘On the Position of the Refined in Aesthetics’ in 1907, to many contemporary calligraphy theorists, initiated modern calligraphy aesthetics, or modern Chinese aesthetics at large. Wang’s article bore the stamp of Western formalist theory, that all beauty is in essence formal beauty that lies in the symmetry, variety, and harmony of form.<sup>3</sup> His treatise, however, dedicated only a

\*I’m grateful to Dr Richard Bullen and Professor Peter Sturman for reading the article and for their comments and criticism. I also wish to thank Kara Kennedy for her help proofreading the introduction.

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of Zhang Yinlin’s writings, see Chen Rucheng, Li Xinrong, eds., *Zhang Yinlin quanji* 張蔭麟全集 (A Complete Collection of Zhang Yinlin), Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of Kang’s text, see Chen Fangji and Lei Zhixiong, *Shufa meixue sixiangshi* 書法美學思想史 (A History of Calligraphy Aesthetics), Zhengzhou: Henan meishu chubanshe, 1994, 643-655.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of Wang Guowei’s theory of ‘the Refined’ (*guya shuo* 古雅說), see Wang Keping, ‘Wang Guowei: Philosophy of Aesthetic Criticism’, in Chung-Ying Cheng and Nicholas Bunnin, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002, 37-56.

small paragraph to calligraphy, in which he labelled it an ‘inferior art’ (*dideng zhi meishu* 低等之美術).

The 1920s was the first golden period of modern Chinese aesthetics. In 1920, Liu Renhang 劉仁航 (1884-1938) translated the first foreign book on aesthetics, *Jinshi Meixue* 近世美學, or *Modern Aesthetics*, originally written in Japanese by Takayama Chogyū (1871-1902).<sup>4</sup> Following that, more than a dozen books on aesthetics were published during the 1920s, being either translated works or original works by Chinese scholars.<sup>5</sup> Concerns discussed by Chinese aestheticians were often the same as those covered in Western aesthetics at the same time, such as aesthetic feelings, form and content, and aesthetic judgement. These new conceptions or categories were destined to reform calligraphy criticism in China. An early example was Liang Qichao’s 梁啟超 (1873-1929) speech ‘A Guide to Chinese Calligraphy’ (*Shufa zhidao* 書法指導), delivered at Tsinghua University in 1926.<sup>6</sup> Liang’s talk was much influenced by Western aesthetic ideas, such as Kant’s view that judgements of beauty are disinterested. Liang proposed that the beauty of Chinese calligraphy lies in four aspects: beauty of lines, beauty of light<sup>7</sup>, beauty of power, and expression of personality. Published as an article late in 1926, Liang’s paper exerted a considerable influence within China’s academia at the time, which can be partly confirmed by Zhang Yinlin’s frequent reference to it in his ‘Preface’.

The study of the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy began to thrive in the 1930s. Many scholars, most of whom had studied in Western countries, started to pay attention to the field. Zhang Yinlin’s ‘Preface’, serialised in the Literary Supplement of *Da Gong Bao*, was most probably the first paper on calligraphy aesthetics published in the 1930s. Deng Yizhe 鄧以蟄 (1892-1973), who had studied literature and aesthetics at Waseda University (1907-1911) and Columbia

<sup>4</sup> Takayama Chogyū, *Kinsei Bigaku* 近世美學, Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1899.

<sup>5</sup> In 1921, Geng Jizhi 耿濟之 translated Leo Tolstoy’s *What Is Art?* Xiao Shijun 肖石君 translated Henry Marshall’s *Aesthetic Principles* in 1922. Heavily influenced by German Aesthetics, Lv Cheng 呂澂, from 1923 to 1926, published four books on aesthetics: *Meixue qianshuo* 美學淺說 (An Elementary Introduction to Aesthetics), *Meixue gailun* 美學概論 (An Introduction to Aesthetics), *Wanjin meixue sicao* 晚近美學思潮 (Modern Aesthetic Thoughts), and *Wanjin meixueshuo he meide yuanli* 晚近美學說和美的原理 (Modern Aesthetic Thoughts and Aesthetic Principles). In 1923, Xu Dachun 徐大純 published *Mei yu rensheng* 美與人生 (Beauty and Life). In 1924, Huang Chanhua 黃懺華 wrote probably the first history of Western Aesthetics in Chinese – *Meixue lueshi* 美學略史 (A Brief History of Aesthetics). Liu Sixun 劉思訓, in 1927, translated John Ruskin’s *Lectures on Art*, and in the same year, Chen Wangdao 陳望道 and Fan Shoukang 范壽康 published two books with the same title *Meixue gailun* 美學概論 (An Introduction to Aesthetics). Xu Qingyu 徐慶譽 published *Meide zhexue* 美的哲學 (Philosophy of Beauty) in 1928.

<sup>6</sup> Liang Qichao’s speech was included in Zheng Yizeng, ed., *Minguo shulun jingxuan* 民國書論精選 (A Select Collection of Calligraphy Criticism in Republican China), Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 2013, 15-29.

<sup>7</sup> According to Liang’s speech, the light of calligraphic works refers to the variations of ink tones.

University (1917-1922), wrote his first article on calligraphy aesthetics in 1937. Entitled 'Appreciation of Calligraphy' (*Shufa zhi xinshang* 書法之欣賞), Deng's article divided all art into two types: decorative art and pure art, the latter's purity arising from the free expression of the artist. For Deng, Chinese calligraphy was a pure art. In contrast to Zhang's overt Occidental perspective, Deng's article integrated Western aesthetic concepts implicitly. In discussing calligraphic brushstrokes, for example, Deng wrote:

Brushstrokes in calligraphy are not the traces of individual lines, but the overflowing beauty out of the brush and ink controlled by the calligrapher's finger, wrist, and mind; this is so-called expression.<sup>8</sup>

Also in the 1930s, writing on calligraphy by two other Chinese scholars who mainly wrote in English, Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895-1976) and Chiang Yee 蔣彝 (1903-1977), influenced the West's understanding of calligraphy at a deeper level. Lin Yutang's calligraphy criticism was faithfully recorded in his first English book, *My Country and My People*. In this 1935 US bestseller, Lin devoted a section to Chinese art – Chinese calligraphy, painting, and architecture. Crediting calligraphy with the central position in the Chinese artistic tradition, Lin Yutang stated:

So fundamental is the place of calligraphy in Chinese art *as a study of form and rhythm in the abstract* that we may say it has provided the Chinese people with a basic esthetics, and it is through calligraphy that the Chinese have learnt their basic notions of line and form.<sup>9</sup>

To explain rhythm and form, Lin Yutang proposed an 'animistic principle'. According to this principle, Chinese calligraphers, in exploring rhythms and forms, have derived 'artistic inspiration from nature, especially from plants and animals.'<sup>10</sup> It is commonplace for traditional calligraphy criticism to compare calligraphic forms with images drawn from nature, and Lin Yutang's 'animistic principle' inherited this tradition in some ways.<sup>11</sup>

In 1938, Chiang Yee – then a Chinese teacher at the School of Oriental Studies (now School of Oriental and African Studies), University of London – published his book *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to Its Aesthetic and Technique*,

<sup>8</sup> Deng Yizhe, 'Shufa zhi xinshang' (書法之欣賞), in *Guowen Zhoubao*, Vol. 14, No. 24, 1937, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People*, New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935, 291.

<sup>10</sup> Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People*, New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935, 293.

<sup>11</sup> A lot of calligraphy commentaries use natural imagery, such as Wei Furen's *bi zhen tu* 筆陣圖 (Diagram of the Battle Formation of the Brush) and Sun Guoting's *shupu* 書譜 (A Treatise on Chinese Calligraphy). For English translations of the two texts, see Richard M. Barnhart, 'Wei Fu-jen's Pi Chen T'u and the Early Texts on Chinese Calligraphy', *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America*, Vol. 18, 1964, 13-25; Chang Ch'ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, trans., *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

the first detailed English monograph on Chinese calligraphy. Chiang Yee noticed the fundamental role of calligraphy to Chinese arts, and also observed the relationship between dynamic calligraphic form and natural imagery. A novelty of Chiang's aesthetics lies in his connecting the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy with the aesthetics of modern abstract art, in his contention that the 'significant forms' in calligraphy are a representation of reality as well as a simulation of the lively forms in nature. Art critic Herbert Read, in his 1954 preface to the second edition of Chiang's book, affirmed this comparison in proclaiming that 'a new movement of painting has grown up which is at least in part directly inspired by Chinese calligraphy.'<sup>12</sup> For Read, the aesthetic principles of Chinese calligraphy are the 'aesthetic principles of all genuine art.'<sup>13</sup>

The works listed above, in varying degrees, adopt the Western aesthetic categories, such as 'form', 'expression' and 'inspiration'. They pioneered and represented the paradigm shift in twentieth-century calligraphy criticism, a shift from the traditional discourse to one that engages in a dialogue between Chinese calligraphy criticism and Western aesthetic theories. And with regard to a comparative perspective, Zhang Yinlin went even further. In his 'Preface', Zhang focused on three key issues – aesthetic experience, classification of art, and the formal elements of Chinese calligraphy. He began by considering whether calligraphy is an art. Unlike other contemporary calligraphy critics, who regarded the answer as self-evident, Zhang arrived at his answer from the perspective of aesthetic inquiry. His starting point was the experience of beauty. 'In order to discuss the peculiarities of Chinese calligraphy,' as he wrote, 'we need to elucidate the concept of aesthetic experience.' It is not a coincidence that Zhang Yinlin started his calligraphy criticism with aesthetic experience, given that it had been a major focus in British and American aesthetics in the first few decades of the twentieth century,<sup>14</sup> and that Zhang was studying philosophy at Stanford while writing the 'Preface'. To be precise, Zhang's approach to aesthetic experience is a mixture of the theories of British aesthetician Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923) and the American philosopher DeWitt Parker (1885-1949). His contention that aesthetic experience, in its narrow sense, refers to 'beauty' had its source in Parker's *The Principles of Aesthetics*.<sup>15</sup> In order to explicate 'beauty', and to define art, Zhang Yinlin introduced the term *juexiang* 覺相 (literally meaning 'perceptual form'),<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Chiang Yee, *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to its Aesthetic and Technique*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973, ix.

<sup>13</sup> Chiang Yee, *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to its Aesthetic and Technique*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973, viii.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed discussion of American aesthetics in the early twentieth century, see Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics. Volume 3: The Twentieth Century*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 235-308.

<sup>15</sup> DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 53.

<sup>16</sup> The word *juexiang* 覺相 was a Buddhist term where *jue* means 'perception' and *xiang* means 'appearance or posture or form'.

most probably chosen as a Chinese equivalent to Parker's 'sensuous medium'.<sup>17</sup> Parker employed this term to ameliorate Croce's definition that 'art is expression' when he described expression, 'for our own ends, as the putting forth of purpose, feeling, or thought into a sensuous medium, where they can be experienced again by the one who expresses himself and communicated to others.'<sup>18</sup> For Parker, not every expression is a work of art, and the sensuous embodiment of what is expressed is essential to artistic expression and the definition of art.<sup>19</sup> Influenced by Parker's definition of art, Zhang put emphasis on *juexiang* (perceptual form), within which he identified three features. First, some perceptual forms can evoke relevant feelings, some cannot. Second, some perceptual forms, such as gustatory and olfactory forms, are pure and simple and have no variations in structure; some visual and auditory forms are complex and diversified, and thus they can generate diverse levels of feelings. Third, perceptual forms engender two kinds of feelings, namely 'positive feeling' and 'negative feeling', and if a perceptual form can arouse 'positive feeling' and is manmade, it may be described as 'beautiful' or an 'artwork'. These three features owe their clarity to Bosanquet, who, at the beginning of his *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, introduced three characteristics of pleasant feelings in aesthetic objects – stability, relevance, and community.<sup>20</sup> All of these discussions are aimed at revealing the nature of Chinese calligraphy, and for Zhang, works of Chinese calligraphy, as perceptual forms, evoke emotions, have complex structural variations, and engender positive feelings, and therefore are artworks.

In the second section of the 'Preface', Zhang enumerated five classifications of art and defined calligraphy through its relation with other arts. First, because of the sensory organs employed, Chinese calligraphy is a visual art. Second, in terms of the states and properties of the objects, Chinese calligraphy is a spatial art.<sup>21</sup> Third, in terms of the means or tools used in its practice, Chinese calligraphy is a graphic art. The fourth classification was based on Bosanquet's differentiation between *a priori* (or directly expressive) form and representative form. By *a priori* forms, Bosanquet means that their 'expressiveness must be in some degree inherent in the form,' and 'they are...direct resemblance of emotions, that is, without making the circuit of reference to anything which had a name and existence in the external world.'<sup>22</sup> The expressiveness of representative forms,

<sup>17</sup> The translator chooses 'perceptual form' rather than Parker's 'sensuous medium' every time that Zhang mentioned the term *juexiang* in his 'Preface'.

<sup>18</sup> DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics. Volume 3: The Twentieth Century*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 266-267.

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, London: Macmillan, 1915, 3-6.

<sup>21</sup> Zhang classified arts as spatial art and temporal art based on the state of movement or stillness of aesthetic objects. Some calligraphy theorists today would argue that calligraphy is both a spatial art and a temporal art, since it not only achieves freedom from time, but also within time.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, London: Macmillan, 1915, 48, 53.

however, has to rely on meaning that can only be acquired with the aid of knowledge and past experience. Observing that the beauty of Chinese calligraphy lies in the forms of the symbols of Chinese characters and is irrelevant to their meanings, Zhang considered Chinese calligraphy to be a directly expressive art. From the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s, a period of intense activity for modern Chinese aesthetics, a group of Chinese aestheticians labelled Chinese calligraphy as a 'linear art',<sup>23</sup> and asserted that its beauty lies in its 'Significant Form', a term they borrowed from the English art critic Clive Bell.<sup>24</sup> Zhang's identifying Chinese calligraphy as *a priori* form, to some degree, then was an antecedent of late twentieth-century calligraphy aesthetics. The last classification divided art into pure art and utilitarian art, and for Zhang, Chinese calligraphy is, as we would expect, a utilitarian art.

The third section of Zhang's 'Preface' dealt with the formal elements of calligraphic works: colours, individual lines and structures of brushstrokes. In this section, Zhang drew inspiration from the work of early twentieth century American aestheticians, such as DeWitt Parker, Ethel Puffer, and George Santayana, and he directly translated or paraphrased sections of their work. In parts of his text, their work was used as models for interpreting the aesthetic experience of Chinese calligraphy. For example, in order to elucidate the sensation of calligraphic lines, Zhang adopted from Puffer the term 'bodily resonance', a concept that fits quite well with the traditional aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy. Other adoptions strike the reader as inappropriate. Puffer's psychological analysis of colours, for instance, is incongruous with a Chinese view of the variations of ink tones. Perhaps some artistic terms, like 'form' and 'style', are relative to their living aesthetics and cultural backgrounds, and do not translate easily into another culture. This was a frequently encountered challenge whenever Chinese art theorists attempted to adopt a comparative perspective in explaining Chinese arts. At the end of this section, Zhang briefly discussed *shi* 勢 (momentum, power), one of the most important aesthetic categories in Chinese calligraphy criticism. Citing Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811-1872), Zhang claimed that to achieve *shi*, calligraphers have to maintain a uniform style of characters within a calligraphic work, and the 'centres of gravity' of all characters in a column should roughly fall in a straight line. Zhang's discussion of *shi* was far from comprehensive, considering the many dimensions of the term in Chinese calligraphy criticism – *shi* as the tendency of natural things, as the movement of the body and the brush, as the tension within a

<sup>23</sup> Liu Gangji, *Shufa meixue jianlun* 書法美學簡論 (A Brief Introduction to the Aesthetics of Chinese Calligraphy), Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1979; Li Zehou, *The Path of Beauty*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994; Jin Xuezhi, *Shufa meixue tan*, 書法美學談 (A Discussion of Calligraphy Aesthetics), Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1984; Qiu Zhenzhong, *Shufa de xingtai yu chanshi* 書法的形態與闡釋 (Calligraphic Form: An Explanation), Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1993.

<sup>24</sup> For Clive Bell, 'Significant Form' in art refers to the lines and colours and their combinations.

stroke or character, and as the dynamic configuration of a whole work.<sup>25</sup> At the end of his article, Zhang abruptly stopped the aesthetic discussion and turned to propose a general research outline for the subject of 'Chinese calligraphy studies'. It could be claimed that Chinese calligraphy studies in the twentieth century did not go beyond Zhang's outline.

Zhang's 'Preface' is strong evidence for the influence of American and British aesthetics in the early twentieth century, during which period few American and British aestheticians had not been influenced by Benedetto Croce's theory of art as expression. And there is no wonder that a central thesis of Zhang's 'Preface' is that Chinese calligraphy, as a unique art, is an expression of feelings and emotions.

After graduating from Stanford in 1933, Zhang returned to China and took up a teaching position in the department of history at Tsinghua University. In the philosophy department of Tsinghua, Zhang also taught a course – Selected Readings of Modern British and American Philosophers, a course that included philosophers like Bosanquet, George Edward Moore, Pierce, and John Dewey.<sup>26</sup> The 'Preface' remained his only article on Chinese calligraphy. He died in 1942, at the age of 37.

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<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the term *shi*, see Francois Jullien, *The Propensity of Things: Towards a History of Efficacy in China*, New York: Zone Books, 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Mary G. Mazur, *Wu Han, Historian: Son of China's Times*, Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009, 193.

**Translation of Zhang Yinlin's****'A Preface to Chinese Calligraphy Criticism' (1931)<sup>27</sup>**

A unique phenomenon in Chinese art history is that language symbols could also be aesthetic objects, and the attention of many of China's finest minds has been devoted to them. I believe that calligraphic works by famous masters, in terms of their function and value, are the same as what are universally recognised as artworks in the majority of cultures. This is partly revealed by the Chinese combined term *shuhua* (calligraphy-painting). The creation of Chinese calligraphy is based on the shape of Chinese characters, which I term *shuyi*, or 'the art of writing', an art that has existed in China for at least two thousand years. Two thousand years of experiences and judgments of this art cannot possibly be grounded in an illusion, and Chinese language symbols must offer unusual possibilities as material for art, and as material there must be some fundamental principle underlying their applicability for it to develop into an art form.

Given this, the following questions have yet to be answered:

1. Are there some essential similarities between Chinese calligraphy and the arts of all cultures, similarities that render Chinese calligraphy an art? Carefully examined, this question in fact contains two further issues: (1) Are there any similarities between calligraphy and all the other arts? (2) Are these similarities the defining elements of art?
2. If the art of calligraphy possesses these artistic elements, how are they realised in calligraphic works?
3. Are there some fundamental differences between calligraphy and other arts, differences that make calligraphy a special art? In other words, what are its special strong points and limitations with regard to the art of Chinese calligraphy? What constitutes the 'generic feature' of Chinese calligraphy?
4. What is the aesthetic significance of the art of Chinese calligraphy?

Answers to the above questions can form a new branch of aesthetics that I would call 'The Aesthetics of Chinese Calligraphy'. And based on the principles of aesthetics, we can establish the subject of 'calligraphy criticism', the task of which is to explore the standards of beauty in calligraphy, and illustrate the applications of these standards. This paper, entitled 'A Preface to Chinese Calligraphy Criticism', intends to answer the above questions and lay a foundation for the subject of calligraphy criticism. Lacking artistic training and being short of knowledge of aesthetics, I was neither confident nor satisfied when making the

<sup>27</sup> The translation is based on the following edition: Zhang Yinlin, 'Zhongguo shuyi pipingxue xuyan' 中國書藝批評學序言, in Chen Rucheng, Li Xinrong, eds., *Zhang Yinlin quanji* 張蔭麟全集 (The Complete Collected Works of Zhang Yinlin), Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2013, 1177-1192.

following statements. I venture to publish this article because there has been no investigation of Chinese calligraphy from the perspective of aesthetics and I hope that this paper will inspire more in-depth studies.

I. <sup>28</sup>

In order to discuss the peculiarities of 'the art of writing', we need to elucidate the concept of aesthetic experience in the first place. We have various attitudes towards external objects (or presentation of them). For example, if we behold an object and then think about how to utilise it to achieve a goal in life, we adopt a pragmatic attitude to it. If we behold an object, and then analyse its variations and compare it with other things for the purpose of obtaining the general principles within all things, we adopt an investigative attitude to it. If we behold an object with no purpose in mind, and just follow the heart to contemplate it and lose ourselves in the imageries that linger in perception or imagination, we then have an aesthetic attitude. When this aesthetic attitude is projected onto external things (or presentations of them), an aesthetic experience arises. This is aesthetic experience in the broad sense, and the so-called beauty lies in the objects of such experience. In a narrow sense, aesthetic experience refers only to the experience of beauty. But, what is beauty?

Perception and imagination are always activated by something that I term 'perceptual form' (*jue xiang*).<sup>29</sup> Feelings are internalised in some perceptual forms, while others do not provoke feelings. Opinions vary as to the connotations of feeling, which this paper will not discuss. Denotations of feeling, however, can be grasped by common sense. Readers, please hear the whoosh of cars on the road for a while, and then listen to a Beethoven symphony; or try to read some business correspondence first, and then read a famous poem by Du Fu.<sup>30</sup> Comparing these two groups of experience, we will know what feeling means. In normal circumstances, when we hear cars' sounds or read business letters, we have some perceptions but no emotions. Hearing a piece of music by Beethoven and reading a famous poem by Du Fu, however, result in both perceptions and feelings. Perceptual forms that arouse feelings can be divided into two types:

(1) Feelings that are irrelevant, or extrinsic to perceptual forms. These feelings are not aroused by the internal quality of perceptual forms, but by another entirely different experience that is casually related to such perceptual forms. The relationship between the two is liable to shifts. Feelings aroused by a perceptual form A could also be evoked by another perceptual form B, even though A and B are distinctly different in nature. Besides that, the relationship between the two lacks universality. Different people have different views on whether a perceptual

<sup>28</sup> These headings have been added by the translator.

<sup>29</sup> The term *juexiang* (覺相) is a Buddhist term where *jue* means 'perception' and *xiang* means 'appearance or posture or form'.

<sup>30</sup> Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) was a prominent Chinese poet of the Tang dynasty.

form can arouse feelings and on the nature of such feelings. For example, if one is pleased by dinner bells, what pleases him is not the bell, but the fact that an adequate diet is ready; if the sound of a bell is replaced by the sound of a drum, he will be pleased by the drum rather than the bell. Those who are waiting for a bell's call will be pleased, but those on their journeys won't be. As another example, [Bai Juyi, in a ninth-century poem, wrote that]<sup>31</sup>, 'travelling along, the very brightness of the moon saddens the emperor's heart, and the sound of a bell through the evening rain severs his viscera in twain.'<sup>32</sup> The emperor's broken heart and sorrow did not result from the moon and the bell; they were caused by the fact that: 'the soldiers refuse to advance; nothing remains to be done until his beloved concubine of the moth-eyebrows perishes in sight of all.'<sup>33</sup> The emperor's feelings were not evoked by the moon and the bell, but by another scene: 'in the hibiscus he sees her face, in the willow he sees her eyebrows, and how in the presence of these should tears not flow.'<sup>34</sup> Those soldiers who escorted the emperor also saw the moon and heard the bell, but maybe no one felt sad and shed tears.

(2) Feelings that are relevant and intrinsic to perceptual forms. Such feelings lodge in perceptual forms and are dominated by the characteristics and regular patterns of them; these feelings come directly from specific perceptual forms, and only these perceptual forms engender such feelings. The relationship between the feelings and perceptual forms cannot be changed or reversed. Hence anyone who perceives the second type of perceptual form is bound to experience feelings, and such feelings can be described to others. But, exposed to identical things, different people do not necessarily grasp similar perceptual forms, for an individual's cognition of external objects is influenced by previous experiences as well as the present situation. Thus, people's feelings towards the same thing don't necessarily have to be similar; this fact, however, is not detrimental to the universality of the relationship between perceptual forms and feelings. The second type of perceptual form can be further divided into two sub-types:

(2-1) Simple and pure perceptual forms do not allow complexity in organization and variation in sequence, although there are various types of them. Thus feelings

<sup>31</sup> Zhang Yinlin here cites Bai Juyi's famous narrative poem 'The Song of Everlasting Regret' (*Changhen ge* 長恨歌) to explain the nature of feelings. Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) was a renowned Tang-Dynasty poet, and 'The Song of Everlasting Regret' is probably the best known of all his works.

<sup>32</sup> Based on Herbert Giles's translation with some modifications. John Minford, Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, 886.

<sup>33</sup> Based on Herbert Giles's translation with some modifications. John Minford, Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, 885-6.

<sup>34</sup> Based on Herbert Giles's translation. John Minford, Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, 887.

lodged in this sub-type are also monotonous and weak, such as gustatory and olfactory forms. Tasty foods and pleasant odours can bring us wonderful sensations. But with a number of tasty foods or pleasant odours, we cannot blend them into a layered structure. If one takes a mixture of several tasty foods at one time, one only experiences a unitary feeling and can't distinguish one from another. If one takes them one after another, the pleasures gained won't change much no matter what one decides to take first and what next.

(2-2) Visual and auditory forms are different. For example, musical tones are diverse for their different pitches, intensities, durations and placements. Visual shapes and colours, because of their differences in arrangement, sequence, proportion and dynamism, can create countless combined forms, and the qualities of the feelings that are lodged in each of the combined forms differ greatly.

The latter perceptual forms that contain structure and can evoke relevant feelings, whether they exist in nature or are human-made, generally engender two kinds of feelings, namely 'positive feeling' and 'negative feeling'.

(1) Positive feeling brings us a cheerful state of mind. With this positive feeling, the restrained can be liberated, and repressed feelings can be vented. To this positive feeling, our spirit and mind feel attached, and we are reluctant to part with it. Most, but not necessarily all, of the positive feelings are pleasurable feelings. Some might be so miserable as to make us weep, some might be so melancholy as to make us hesitate, and some might be so incomprehensible that they provoke a sense of solemnity and mystique. Perceptual forms that internalise these positive feelings can be called 'beautiful', and if these perceptual forms are the result of human endeavour, we call them artworks. Works of Chinese calligraphy have structured perceptual forms, and in appreciating calligraphic works, we can always experience the positive feelings that are dominated by the internal laws of perceptual forms. Therefore, we can come to a conclusion that Chinese calligraphy is an art.

(2) Negative feelings depress and constrain our minds. It is as if that the constraint cannot be liberated and the pent-up emotion cannot find a vent; we are eager to get rid of these feelings and should not halt there and get lost. Perceptual forms that harbour negative feelings can be called 'ugly'.

According to the above-mentioned definition of beauty, one knows that 'beauty' in this paper in fact consists of 'the beautiful' and 'the sublime'. What is the beautiful, and what is the sublime? Scholars of different ages have offered numerous answers. But I believe that no answer is as profound and vivid as the following two verses written by Du Fu who ridiculed the poets of his time:

The writings of some may be comparable to a kingfisher atop the  
epidendrum,

None of them can harness the giant whale in the deep blue sea.<sup>35</sup>

Du Fu held that poets of his day had only reached the realm of beauty, but had not yet reached the realm of the sublime. Regardless of what Du Fu meant precisely, I wonder if there are subtler phrases than 'a kingfisher atop the epidendrum' to symbolise 'the beauty', and 'giant whale in the deep blue sea' to symbolise 'the sublime'. To put it bluntly, if perceptual forms – which have structures that arouse relevant feelings – generate fierce and forceful powers (spiritual or physical) that overwhelm the heart and meanwhile coexist in harmony with the heart, we call them 'the sublime' while perceptual forms that do not produce such an effect can be called 'the beautiful'. Both 'the beauty' and 'the sublime' exist in the art of Chinese writing.

The above narrowly defined aesthetic experience, or the experience of beauty, actually includes the experience of creation and the experience of appreciation. The two actually have no essential distinction, and only differ in their sources. During the recent modern period, one of the most popular schools of aesthetic theories believed that art is the expression of feelings. It is a shallow argument that creators first have a kind of rootless feeling in mind and then express it through artworks. If so, experience of beauty in creation must be fundamentally different from that in appreciation. The feelings of viewers are generally evoked in the course of appreciation; we can appreciate artworks at any moment, but we cannot pre-store in the heart a kind of emotion homogenous to that inspired in appreciation. This 'expression theory', in fact, has no basis. British aesthetician Bernard Bosanquet once wrote, 'We must not suppose that we first have a disembodied feeling, and then set out to find an embodiment adequate to it. In a word, imaginative expression creates the feeling in creating its embodiment, and the feeling so created not merely cannot be otherwise expressed, but cannot otherwise exist, than in and through the embodiment which imagination has found for it.'<sup>36</sup> If so, when a special feeling exists in its embodied perceptual form, the former would no longer be dominated by the patterns of the latter.<sup>37</sup> There is no 'relevant' connection between feeling and perceptual forms, and according to the above definition of beauty, what we sense here is not the experience of beauty. Thus, for the experience of beauty, the expression of feeling is nothing more than the emergence of feeling. In this regard, creation and appreciation are the same. When examining the art of writing, we should pay attention to this point. Zeng Guofan (1811-1872) once wrote, 'generally before we practice calligraphy, write poems or essays, we should store in our mind some kind of force or vital energy, and then express it through brush and ink.'<sup>38</sup> I personally believe that Zeng's

<sup>35</sup> English translation based on Shirleen Wong, 'The Quatrains of Du Fu', *Monumenta Serica*, Vol. 29, 1970, 153-154.

<sup>36</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, London: Macmillan, 1923, 34.

<sup>37</sup> It is unclear about what Zhang Yinlin means by this.

<sup>38</sup> Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811-1872) was a Chinese official as well as a Confucian scholar of

opinion is fallacious.

## II.

None of the existing classifications of art are satisfactory; all cannot attend to one thing without neglecting the other, or include one point without excluding another. This section tries to enumerate the existing classifications, and examine which category Chinese calligraphy falls under. And in this way, we can explicate the characteristics of Chinese calligraphy and its status among the arts.

(1) By the sensory organs involved in aesthetic experience, we can classify the arts into visual art and auditory art. Visual art includes painting, sculpture, architecture, dancing, etc. Auditory art includes music, poetry, etc. The most obvious inadequacy of this classification lies in that it fails to categorise some multi-sensory arts, such as drama and music-accompanied dance. Poetry also resorts to non-auditory imagery aroused by language. According to this classification, Chinese calligraphy should be classified as visual art.

(2) By the state of movement or stillness of aesthetic objects, we can classify arts into spatial art and temporal art. With its various parts existing simultaneously, the aesthetic object of spatial art is stable, such as painting, sculpture, and architecture. The aesthetic object of temporal art is subject to continuous changes; its constituent parts occur one after another, such as music, poetry, drama, dancing, etc. According to this classification, Chinese calligraphy falls under the heading of spatial art.

(3) By the means or tools used in artistic practice, we can classify arts into graphic art (such as painting), plastic art (such as sculpture and architecture), and linguistic art (such as poetry and the novel). A flaw in this classification is that many arts are omitted or can fall under various categories. According to this classification, Chinese calligraphy should be included as a graphic art (rather than a linguistic art and this point will be discussed later).

(4) In discussing artistic forms, Bosanquet differentiated *a priori* form (or 'directly expressive' form) and representative form. *A priori* forms are types of perceptual forms whose 'outward appearance' embodies properties of emotions, and the revelation of these emotions does not rely on meanings of the perceptual forms. Only a sight of the following forms stirs up our feelings before we examine their denotations: the stability and vigour of a square, the grace and ease of a curve, the lightness and liveliness of dance moves, and the openness and brightness of plain colours. The expressiveness of representative forms, however, has to rely on their meanings that can only be acquired with the aid of knowledge and past experience. Thus, the relationship between representative forms and the feelings they evoke is indirect. 'For instance, a man's laughing might be the expression of pain or anger, if we had not learned by experience that it is otherwise. Green trees might be the withering ones, and brown trees the flourishing ones; without special

experience of human bodies you could not know how or when their appearance indicates vitality or character; without experience of animals you could not know that the drawing of the bull hunt indicates activity, courage, ferocity. You cannot read these things off from the patterns or the colour-combinations; you have ultimately to arrive at them by virtue of the knowledge of facts. When you come to human portraiture, the reading of the human countenance, geometrical properties of lines and shapes helps you not at all, or hardly at all. You have to rely upon special lessons, learned in the school of life.<sup>39</sup> But, even for representative forms, the perceptual forms and the feelings aroused by them are not utterly irrelevant. For example, 'it is not a mere dead fact of my experience that a man's body in a certain position indicates a certain sort or phase of vitality. It is true that I must know something about a man's body before I can live myself into it at all; but when I can do so, the attitude of the disc-thrower's body is after all necessary in relation to my feeling, and not a bare disconnected fact. It has, to use my former phrase, *something of a priori* expressiveness. When you know its structure, its position does become inevitable.'<sup>40</sup> In the realm of art, there are pure 'directly expressive' forms, and meanwhile, representative forms may also incorporate some 'directly expressive' forms. Art that relies on directly expressive form as its primary component is called 'direct expressive art', such as music and architecture. Musical expression is the closest to pure or *a priori* expression, followed by architecture. Art that relies on representative form as its primary component is called 'representative art', such as painting, sculpture and literature.

So, according to the above classification, under which category will Chinese calligraphy fall? The answer is 'directly expressive art'. Although Chinese calligraphy uses meaningful symbols as its tool, the beauty of this art lies solely in the forms of the symbols, and is irrelevant to the meanings of the symbols. What actually constitutes the beauty of Chinese calligraphy are the lustre of the brushstrokes and ink variations, the structural patterns, and the arrangement of space; [its beauty] does not depend on any other meanings.

Some say that Chinese characters derive from pictographs. Although Chinese characters have multiplied and evolved, and the character-scripts changed, the characters we use today still maintain the imprint of pictographs. Why would we identify Chinese calligraphy as a directly expressive art? My answer is that, as a result of symbolisation, the relationship between the pure pictographic characters and the objects they represent could by no means be perceived by instinct. If one is not well versed in Chinese characters, he or she can by no means understand that the following two Chinese characters are representations of two natural objects: the character 馬 (meaning 'horse') and a real horse, the character 魚 (meaning 'fish') and a real fish. In terms of sensation, the function of pictographic elements has vanished in Chinese characters. Even if the pictographic

<sup>39</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, London: Macmillan, 1923, 44-45.

<sup>40</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, London: Macmillan, 1923, 47.

elements had not vanished, the art of calligraphy still would not resort to them. The reason the two characters of 馬 and 魚 contain aesthetic properties is not that they embody a certain emotion we experience in viewing the postures of the real horse or fish. This is an extremely obvious fact. In the preface to the poem *A Song of Sword-Dancing to a Girl-Pupil of Lady Gongsun*, Du Fu wrote:<sup>41</sup>

Zhang Xu of Wu County was adept in cursive script.<sup>42</sup> In Yexian, he had seen Lady Gongsun performing western-region sword dances several times, and thereafter [his] cursive script had been refined.

In his *Supplement to the State History of the Tang*, Li Zhao (active 806-825 A.D) also recorded that,

Zhang Xu once said that I got the intent and will of the brushwork after seeing a princess's porter struggling to make his way on the road and I got its spirit after watching Lady Gongsun performing swords.

Stories of this type abound in the history of calligraphy, and they are not necessarily absurd. If the subtlety of calligraphic art is brought about by the imitation of nature (in a broad sense), there is no doubt that Chinese calligraphy is a representative art. Imitation and representation are not identical. There is abstract imitation, and as well there is detailed or exact imitation. The moon has the property of roundness; [if one] draws a circle by roughly sketching the contour of the moon, this circle could be called an abstract imitation of the moon rather than a representation of it, because there are many round-shaped objects besides the moon. [If the] circle bears the colour and lustre of the moon, the distribution of the light and dark, which is exclusive to the moon, then it is a representation of the moon and this type is what we call exact imitation. Abstract imitations neither take on meanings of the objects they imitate nor stir up emotions by virtue of such meanings; thus they can yet be regarded as directly expressive. Music is the most directly expressive of all arts. However, Aristotle characterised music as the most imitative, for music directly simulates emotions of human beings. Emotions cannot exist independently; they have to be attached to a sort of imagery (*shi xiang*).<sup>43</sup> Those which directly imitate emotions are actually imitating the imageries that harbour such emotions. There is no exact detailed imitation in Chinese calligraphy; it employs abstract imitation instead. Vigorous actions and the contours of objects (including the human body) are all that Chinese calligraphy is imitating.

(5) We can divide art into pure art and utilitarian art through analysing

<sup>41</sup> Lady Gongsun was one of the most prominent dancers in the Tang Dynasty.

<sup>42</sup> Zhang Xu 張旭 (675-759) was an eighth-century Chinese calligrapher, poet, and scholar-official. He is best remembered as a calligrapher.

<sup>43</sup> The term *shi xiang* 事象, literally meaning 'object image', often appeared in the works of China's Republican Period.

whether the structures of perceptual forms are restricted by practical purposes and whether an art is created to cater for implemental properties. Generally speaking, the distinction between pure art and utilitarian art lies in whether the expressions of feelings are ends in themselves, or means to other ends, whether the expression is influenced by other non-artistic purposes. Based on this classification, many arts can be both pure and utilitarian. Paintings can be used to express emotions, but can also work as advertisements; poetry and novels can express feeling, but can also be didactic. Whether an artwork is pure depends on the choice of its creator. An art may be dominated by non-artistic purposes, which does not mean that it's indispensable to instrumental properties. [Thus,] the distinction between pure art and utilitarian art needs to be modified. All arts, no matter whether they could serve non-artistic functions or not, can be called pure art if they are in essence not fit for non-artistic purposes, such as the above mentioned painting and literature; otherwise, they are utilitarian art, such as architecture and Chinese calligraphy. The production of utilitarian artistic tools, in the very beginning, does not intend to satisfy a kind of artistic desire. The buildings, instruments (including weapons) and clothes of the ancient people are simple and unadorned, as they seek only practical utility. After their surviving needs are satisfied, they have spare time to attach pleasing forms to their living tools; they either polish them and organise them in order, or carve and embellish them. As a result, such implements or artefacts fulfil two purposes at the same time: (1) utility and (2) beauty. The possibility of the latter was actually restrained by the former. However, there are artefacts which contain great artistic possibilities within this limit; they gradually display their artistic purposes, develop their artistic functions, and can then rival pure artworks. Architecture serves as an example, and the art of calligraphy another. Chinese writing started as signs to preserve the memory of things, replacing knotted cords.<sup>44</sup> When Chinese characters were beautified [in later times], their basic forms were almost stabilised by practical purposes and blind chance. Thereafter, although the shapes of Chinese scripts had evolved and changed several times, the guiding principle [behind the characters] still seemed to be practical and habitual rather than artistic. In *Shuowen guangyi* (An Analysis of *Shuowen*)<sup>45</sup>, Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) repeatedly referred to the cases in which calligraphers in the Six Dynasties (222-589) changed the forms of characters for the sake of beauty. For instance, [calligraphers then] increased or decreased some characters' strokes and inverted their positions, but it seems that there are not

<sup>44</sup> *Yi Jing*, or the *Book of Changes* has the earliest record of the function of knotted cords and the origin of Chinese writing: 上古結繩而治，後世聖人易之以書，which means that 'in the highest antiquity, government was carried on successfully by the use of knotted cords (to preserve the memory of things), and in subsequent ages the sages substituted for these written characters and bonds.' Translation is based on James Legge, *The I Ching*, New York: Dover Publications, 1963, 385.

<sup>45</sup> *Shuowen* 說文 is a shortened term for *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (An Explanation of Written Characters), an early second-century Chinese dictionary. The book *Shuowen guangyi* 說文廣義 is a pioneer study of *Shuowen jiezi* in the early Qing Dynasty.

many such cases. Thus, what I have said needs to be modified. Chinese calligraphy is not an art in which calligraphers can draw the lines of their own free will; the structure of lines has mostly been standardised by non-artistic factors, and calligraphers must be bounded by this framework. For this reason, the art of Chinese calligraphy has the lowest freedom in creation among all arts. Nevertheless, there remains space for expression of emotions.

Some people would raise the following question. Since both Chinese calligraphy and literature employ written characters as tools, are they both utilitarian arts? The answer is no. Although both calligraphy and literature use characters as their tools, meanings of the tools in these two arts are different. Chinese calligraphy truly utilises written characters as its tool, while the tool of literature is actually literary language. The values of literature are attached to the forms of language rather than the forms of linguistic marks or characters. Take the same poem, whether it's transcribed by a famous calligrapher or an unskilled scribe, in 'Zhao style' or 'Song typeface', the value of the poem remains unchanged.<sup>46</sup> After all, we are not concerned with their distinct calligraphic values here.

Painting traditionally has been paired with calligraphy in Chinese art history. It looks as if the art of calligraphy, among all arts, has the closest relation with Chinese painting. This is indeed the case in terms of the materials (these two arts use). First, both calligraphy and painting are visual, spatial arts. Second, both employ linear forms and lines as their materials. However, taking all of this art's properties into consideration, Chinese calligraphy is in fact most similar to architecture. Firstly, both are spatial arts. Secondly, both are direct expressive arts. Thirdly, both are utilitarian arts. But concerning the last, calligraphy and architecture differ significantly. The forms of architecture are relevant to their practical purposes: the position of windows, the length and breadth of halls, the height of walls, all of them cannot be arbitrarily decided. Calligraphy is different. To write a set group of characters, one can choose seal script, clerical script, cursive script, regular script, a certain phonetic alphabet and Roman alphabet, or [he or she] can invent another method. As there is no close connection between the forms [of Chinese characters] and their practical purposes, calligraphers cannot but adopt an arbitrary habitual pattern. Once the pattern [of an art] is set, it cannot be easily transformed, and consequently, there is little freedom in the creation [of this art]. Architectural forms could be closely related to the practical purposes, and the practical purposes don't impose tight restrictions on its forms besides, therefore there is considerable creative freedom in this art.

### III.

Chinese characters are organised by 'brushstrokes'. Geometrically, brushstrokes

<sup>46</sup> 'Zhao style' refers to the style of the prominent Yuan dynasty calligrapher Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254-1322). 'Song typeface' (宋體) is a printing style that developed during the Song Dynasty, and is currently the most common style for printing in China.

are the dividing lines of a plane. Aesthetically, brushstrokes are conducive to displaying a three-dimensional quality, or creating a three-dimensional illusion in a two-dimensional space, which can be manifested in Chinese calligraphy as well as painting. When we appreciate an excellent handwritten Chinese character and forget, for the time being, its two-dimensionality, we feel that the constituent parts of this character are not aligned. Sharing the same plane with its background, some strokes are angular with bones and some thick with flesh.<sup>47</sup> Aesthetically speaking, a brushstroke is in fact a shape, and the contours of shapes are lines. Thus, the main elements of Chinese calligraphy contain not only lines but also shapes. In some sense, brushstrokes can also be called lines, or thick lines; those geometrical lines that have length but no width do not actually exist in aesthetics. As it appears in the following paragraphs, the word 'line' is used in its broad sense and is equivalent to 'brushstroke'. Although Chinese characters have only eight basic strokes, which are usually called the 'eight laws of the character *yong* (eternal)',<sup>48</sup> contours and brush movements for every stroke have infinite variations. Therefore, though the shapes of Chinese characters have already been settled, there remains sufficient room for artistic creation.

Without colour, shape cannot be perceived. Therefore, colour is also an element of the art of calligraphy. To make shapes perceivable, one has to use at least two colours: first, the colour of the shapes, and second, the colour of the background. The use of colour in calligraphic art is restricted to the minimum needs, and this is probably a reason that this art does not resort to a mixture of various colours. It is graphic art that employs lines, colours and their combinations to achieve its beauty. In graphic arts, shape is an alterable element that we can utilise to harness the element of colour, and as a result, we can achieve unity in multiplicity, an important condition of beauty. In Chinese calligraphy, shapes are much restrained by conventions, and calligraphers cannot change them casually to accord with complex colours. So, the simplicity of colours in this art is latent in the natural restrictions of Chinese characters. This could also explain why the art of calligraphy does not resort to the varying shades of colours.

Since the art of calligraphy only uses two colours, selection of them must meet the following two conditions:

<sup>47</sup> Zhang Yinlin here uses the imageries of bone and flesh to explain the three-dimensionality of calligraphic forms. In Chinese calligraphy criticism, using imageries of organism or physiology is a very important method to analyse a piece of calligraphy. For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see John Hay, 'The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy', in Susan Bush, Christian Murck, eds., *Theories of the Arts in China*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, 74-102.

<sup>48</sup> As a calligraphic term, 'eight Laws of the character *yong*', or *yong zi ba fa* 永字八法, means that there are eight basic brushstrokes in Chinese calligraphic practice and these eight strokes happily constitute the character *yong* (eternal). For a brief discussion of the basic strokes in Chinese calligraphy, see Peter Sturman, *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, 15-16.

- (1) One of the two colours should be the most eye-pleasing, or one of the most eye-pleasing.
- (2) The two must be complementary colours.

The juxtaposition of two colours, according to the results of psychological experiments, is the most pleasing when the two are complementary. In fact, it is impossible that both of the two colours are the most pleasing, or that one of them is the most pleasing colour while the other comes second. Therefore, the first condition does not state that 'one has to use the two most pleasing colours'. If stated in that way, the two conditions will contradict each other.

Generally, Chinese calligraphic works use 'white background and black characters', which is decreed for practical purposes and by convention. Luckily, this manner of colouring happens to comply with the above two conditions. Black and white makes a pair of complementary colours, and according to the findings of psychological experiments, white seems to be the most eye-pleasing of all colours. Ethel D. Puffer (1872-1950) once wrote, 'Colour, too, if distinct, not too over-bright, nor too much extended in field, is in itself pleasing. The single colours have been the object of comparatively little study. Experiment seems to show that the colours containing most brightness – white, red, and yellow – are preferred. Baldwin...finds that the colours range themselves in order of attractiveness, blue, white, red, green, brown. Further corrections lay more emphasis upon the white.'<sup>49</sup> White, at least, is one of the most attractive colours, and it's been widely used as the background colour in calligraphic works. Thus, black characters and a white background are surely an optimal match. Therefore, we know that those who write with coloured ink and those who intend to increase beauty with colourful papers, in fact, depart from the normal practice and disorder this genre of art.

Though Chinese calligraphy does not use other colours, a combination of black and white is full of beauty with lustre. A few years ago, in a speech entitled 'A Guide to Chinese Calligraphy' at Tsinghua University, Liang Qichao said:<sup>50</sup>

Chinese handwriting is rather odd. Without variations of colours, without the shades, and with only ink, uniform black ink, one can display beauty. Well-written characters, shining with the ink's lustre on paper, are full of spirit resonance. Sophisticated brushstrokes, superior Chinese inks, after hundreds or thousands of years, are still glittering. This beauty is what we call 'the beauty of light'. Western paintings, with a certain mystique, also stress light. As to paintings, I am a layman who can't tell the good from the bad. But I had been provided with some guidance on the light of Western paintings. Although I did not capture the nuance of them, I can sense that

<sup>49</sup> Ethel D. Puffer, *The Psychology of Beauty*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1905, 94.

<sup>50</sup> Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) was an influential reformist and scholar of late Qing Dynasty and early Republic.

those works that claim to have light are indeed stunning. However, light flowing from Western paintings is probably generated by the combinations of colours or the varying shades of them...Chinese calligraphic works, with the two colours of black and white, are able to bring light, which is probably a rare case in the art world.<sup>51</sup>

Where the painting theory is concerned, the present writer is also a layman and feels ashamed of being unable to contribute more to Liang's speech.

Discussion of colour comes to an end. The next question is: How do 'brushstrokes' or lines express emotions? This question could be further divided into two parts: (1) How does the simple element of a single line express emotions? (2) How do the structures and combinations of lines express emotions? (A single line in itself forms a structure. The beauty of a single line and the beauty of its structure are mutually dependent, and if separated the beauty of the two will be impaired. For the convenience of analysis, this paper treats them separately. It is not the case that the beauty of a character is the sum of the single lines' beauty and the structures' beauty. In fact, if there is no beauty of single lines, there is no beauty of structures, and vice versa.) To some degree, questions of this type are unanswerable, and what we can do is to analyse and expound the expressive factors in the art of calligraphy. It is beyond our capability to answer how these various factors acquire the ability to express emotions.

It can't be denied that lines can express emotions by virtue of their own characteristics. Like colours and tones, lines have a kind of abstract temperament and vitality. [As Dewitt H. Parker wrote:]

Lines give rise to motor impulses and make one feel and dream, as music does...The life of lines is more allied to that of tones than of colours because it possesses a dynamic movement quality which is absent from the latter. This life is, in fact, twofold: on the one hand it is a career, with a beginning, middle, and end, something to be willed or enacted; on the other hand it is a temperament or character, a property of the line as a whole, to be felt. These two aspects of aesthetic lines are closely related; they stand to one another much as the temperament or character of a man stands to his life history, of which it is at once the cause and the result. Just as we get a total impression of a man's nature by following the story of his life, so we get the temperamental quality of lines by following them with the eye; and just as all of our knowledge of a man's acts enters into our intuition of his nature, so we discover the character of the total line by a synthesis of its successive elements.

Lines are infinite in their possible variations, and the fine shades of feeling

<sup>51</sup> Liang Qichao, 'Shufa zhidao' (A Guide to Chinese Calligraphy), *Tsinghua Weekly*, Vol. 26, No.9, December 1926.

which they may express exceed the number of words in the emotional vocabulary of any language. Moreover, in any drawing, the character of each line is partly determined through the context of other lines; you cannot take it abstractly with entire truth. It is, however, possible to find verbal equivalents for the character of the main types of lines. Horizontal lines convey a feeling of repose, of quiet...vertical lines, of solemnity, dignity, aspiration...crooked lines of conflict and activity...while curved lines have always been recognized as soft and voluptuous and tender...<sup>52</sup>

Putting aside, for the moment, the issue of lines' structures and combinations, I believe that the expressiveness of individual lines is determined by four factors.<sup>53</sup>

(1) The perception of lines is an active process. In order to perceive a line we have to follow it with the eye. Besides that, this process of the perception of a line requires of us an energy of attention to the successive elements of the line as we pass over them and a further expenditure of energy in remembering and synthesising them into a whole. This energy, since it is evoked by the line and is not connected with any definite inner striving of the self, is felt by us to belong to the line, to be an element in its life, as clearly its own as its shape. For example, a line with many sudden turns or changes of direction is an energetic and exciting line because it demands in perception a constant and difficult and shifting attention; a straight line, on the contrary, because it is simple and unvarying in its demands upon the attention, is monotonous and reposeful; while the curved line, with its lawful and continuous changes, at once stimulating yet never distracting attention, possesses the character of progressive and happy action.<sup>54</sup>

(2) The above-mentioned psycho-physical response to lines will be further reinforced and enriched by the function of 'bodily resonance'. As I have said earlier in this section, brushstrokes or lines not only divide a two-dimensional plane, but also create a three-dimensional illusion. In fact, we have experienced in material objects forms that are homogenous to that of the brushstrokes. This experience does not only resort to 'demands of the eye', but also to the touch of hands. To put it in another way, the shapes of the material objects emulate the traces of bodily movements. Hereafter, when we behold similar forms, our body will have a sense of *déjà vu* if we can touch them and follow their traces with the eye. This is what is called the function of 'bodily resonance'. While viewing the artworks by famous calligraphers, I have diverse experiences: the toughness of

<sup>52</sup> DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 259-61.

<sup>53</sup> In summarizing these four factors, as Zhang Yinlin wrote in the footnote, he consulted the following two books: DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 261-63; Ethel D. Puffer, *The Psychology of Beauty*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1905, 103-04.

<sup>54</sup> Several points of this paragraph are based on DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 261-62.

steep mountains, a feeling of gentleness and tenderness, the chill of a cutting edge, soul-stirring cadence, and perceptions of imagery such as craggy cliffs or birds flapping in the high sky. Most probably, they result from the 'bodily resonance'.

(3) Lines also suggest to us the attitudes of our bodies. The locus of a line triggers our bodies' movement towards a homogeneous position, resulting in corresponding feelings that we will have in a certain similar posture. This could be called 'body mimesis'. Lines may be straight and rising, rigid or dignified or joyously expanding; they may be horizontal and lie down and rest; they may be falling and sorrowful.<sup>55</sup> The *shi* of lines may be tense or relaxed, steady or lithe.<sup>56</sup>

(4) The sight of a line suggests the drawing of it, the sweep of the brush that made it. When I appreciate calligraphic artworks, I do not simply stare at them impassively. I try to reproduce in my mind the actions of dots and strokes, to capture the energy or tension (*shi*) between the opposing strokes, twists and turns, and to apprehend the intonation within all the strokes. Viewers recreate while tracing the creative process of the artists. We ourselves, in the imagination once more, may recreate the line after the artist, and feel, just as he must have felt, the mastery, ease, vigour, or delicacy of the execution into the line itself.<sup>57</sup>

In order to acquire this kind of experience, a viewer must have a considerable understanding of the calligraphic skills. The viewer must at least: (1) be capable of following the 'brushstroke tracks' of individual characters, (the perception described in the first factor also necessitates this condition), (2) understand the relationship between brushstroke techniques and shapes of calligraphic lines, and is able to roughly reproduce a line's creation after viewing its shape.

Up to this point, the present writer has tried to evade an issue, with which this paragraph intends to deal. This issue is as follows. All arts must have universality, which means ordinary individuals should be able to grasp the feelings expressed in an artwork, and the feelings they grasp should be roughly similar. At a minimum level, the appeal of an artwork's beauty should have no borders. But this seems to be not the case for the art of calligraphy. People from the Western world have come to appreciate Chinese painting. But when it comes to Chinese calligraphy, although the Westerners have come into contact with Chinese artefacts for more than three hundred years, hardly anyone can recognise its beauty. Even in today's China, there are very few who can appreciate this art. Is it because of a traditional prejudice resulting from the bitter legacy of the Chinese

<sup>55</sup> DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 262.

<sup>56</sup> *Shi* 勢 is an important aesthetic category in Chinese aesthetics, meaning 'disposition or circumstance, power or potential'. The same term *shi* denotes different concepts in different contexts, and accordingly the translator, in the rest of the Preface, chooses different English concepts to translate this term. For a discussion of the term in Chinese art, and culture at large, see Francois Jullien, *The Propensity of Things: Towards a History of Efficacy in China*, New York: Zone Books, 1995.

<sup>57</sup> DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 262.

imperial examination system that people do not regard calligraphy as a genuine art? I predict that a fair number of people would voice such doubts, and my response is as follows: the universality of art means that ordinary individuals can appreciate a specific art genre after receiving proper training. Generally speaking, all normal people have the potential to appreciate art, but they may not obtain the faculty to do that. Technically speaking, the more intelligence and experience an art requires in its appreciation, the fewer the people who can appreciate it. Thus, a lot of famous works in the history of music, architecture and painting have 'aristocratic features'. As pointed out above, [understanding how] the factors influence calligraphic expressiveness requires a knowledge of technical skills. And since there is hardly a Westerner who has studied calligraphic skills, it is not surprising that Westerners cannot see its beauty. For the same reason, few contemporary Chinese can appreciate the art of calligraphy.

In the above-cited speech 'A Guide to Chinese Calligraphy', Mr. Liang Qichao said:

Writing Chinese characters completely relies on the force of the brush. The presence or absence of vigour within the strokes distinguishes the good characters from the bad ones. Viewing a writer setting a single stroke on paper, we can tell at once. With regard to other arts, one can add and change. For instance, while drawing, we can prepare a draft in the beginning, and then paint, and we can modify the painting if it's not right. This is especially the case for oil painting. [A painter who] originally paints figures can change the subject into landscapes. Carving, for example, attaches importance to the force of wrists, but this does not mean that carving is not subject to change once a line is carved. Even more alterable is architecture. Buildings that are not beautiful can be demolished and rebuilt. For all of the arts, one can take remedial actions, like tracing, adding or modifying.

With regard to Chinese writing, once a brushstroke is put on paper, it is either good or bad. It cannot be replenished or changed, as the more you fill it, the clumsier it becomes, and the more you change it, the uglier it looks. [Brushstrokes that] follow the tendency and are completed without any let-up best embody vital forces. [Calligraphic works] that entail forces are dynamic, vigorous and lively; those that have no forces are stiff, weary and dull. Viewing a work of painting, it's not easy for us to tell the painter's force that is embodied in the lines. Viewing a work of calligraphy, it's very easy to identify whether it contains force or not. Even though you can make copies, you can only imitate the form, and cannot emulate the strength or force in the brushstrokes. It can be said that a copy nearly reproduces [the original work], but it's not easy for one's copy to be as powerful as the

original.<sup>58</sup>

Mr. Liang's speech made two points clear: (1) One of the special restrictions (or special merits) in Chinese calligraphy is that every brushstroke needs to be executed without stopping and cannot be changed; (2) Lines that are completed in one go particularly embody a sense of power or force. Against these two points, we can raise the following two questions: (1) Why do lines that are completed in one go particularly embody a sense of power or force? (2) Why does the art of calligraphy have restrictions that discourage any changes and modifications?

Mr. Liang's second point can't be the cause of the first point. If the first point that Chinese calligraphy discourages any changes is a result of the second point that lines written in one go are particularly expressive, then all the other arts that use lines should have the same restrictions. But why does this only exist in the art of calligraphy? There must be some other reasons that could explain why Chinese calligraphy is the only case.

I'll start with the first question. As pointed out earlier, the complete appreciation of a brushstroke requires of viewers an energy of attention to follow a line's successive elements and synthesise them into a whole. It requires that viewers reproduce the creative actions in their mind. A brushstroke that was modified or changed presents shades of ink colours and inconsistent linear forms, which will leave traces of repairing and swelling. If so, a single brushstroke is actually split into several incongruous parts. It is not easy for viewers to analyse [a line like this] and synthesise [the successive parts of the line into a whole], as it distracts the viewers' attentions from concentrating on the movement of the line. As a result, viewers get slack and can't feel the tension within the line. This is the first reason that modifying and changing undermine the expression of the force and energy. After modifications or changes, several brushstrokes will overlap one another. And with several brushstrokes overlapping and covering one another, no single brushstroke can be viewed in its original appearance. It's like tongues not being able to taste the original flavour when different flavours are blended, and eyes not able to perceive the original colour when various colours are mixed. If one cannot see the original shapes of brushstrokes, it's hard or even impossible to reproduce [in his or her mind] the creative actions. But as I pointed out earlier, the expression of forces largely depends on the mental reproduction of creative activities on the part of the viewers. This is the second reason that modifying and changing impair the expression of the force.

Now I turn to the second question. There are two reasons that could explain why only the art of calligraphy has restrictions that limit modifications and changes. Firstly, although other graphic arts – besides the art of calligraphy – employ lines as a material for expression, they don't regard lines as the sole material; colours, meanings of pictures, and the associations that are triggered by

<sup>58</sup> Liang Qichao, 'Shufa zhidao' (A Guide to Chinese Calligraphy), *Tsinghua Weekly*, Vol. 26, No.9, December 1926.

the meanings are all sources of beauty for other graphic arts. Meanings of a painting are not closely related to its lines, thus when we view a painting, we could ignore the traces of modifications if they are not particularly obvious. The art of calligraphy alone uses lines as its sole material, to which viewers' full attention is devoted, and thus defects caused by any modification [of lines] are especially noticeable. Secondly, with the exception of Chinese calligraphy, it's impossible for the other arts to complete a work with lines drawn in one go, as they are supposed to represent the complexity or looseness of exterior shapes and to depict geometrically correct shapes. If one envisages a painter drawing a desk, a chair, a tree trunk, or the silhouette of a beauty with lines that are all executed in one go, that might be quite an awkward image.

Discussions of the expressive factors of individual lines come to an end. Now I will discuss the expressive factors that are embodied in the structures or combinations of brushstrokes. Zeng Guofan had it that the structure of brushstrokes is composed of two aspects – *ti* and *shi*.<sup>59</sup> [Zeng wrote that] '*ti* is the compositional structure of individual Chinese characters and *shi* means the tension or momentum between the characters and columns.'<sup>60</sup>

(1) The beauty of *ti* lies in two factors.

(1a) Balance.

In a broad sense, balance means that the constituent components of characters, their varied weight and length, coordinate with each other, which enables the 'the centre of gravity' of a characters to lie in its median line. As a result, the force or power on both sides [of the median line] are equal, and there is no disproportion. In a narrow sense, balance is symmetry, meaning two similar parts are evenly matched with each other. If the entirety [of a character] is constituted by two similar or corresponding parts, we call it 'complete symmetry', such as the Chinese characters 門 ('door'), 米 ('rice'), and 田 ('field'). If only a part [of a character] is constituted by two corresponding parts, we call it 'incomplete symmetry', such as the Chinese characters 們 (an adjunct pronoun indicating plural), 氣 ('gas, air, or force'), 畝 (a unit of area in China). Symmetry is conducive to balance in the broad sense, but balance in the broad sense does not necessarily result from symmetry.

Why and how do balanced structures especially evoke pleasant sensations? I believe that the answer lies in the aforementioned theory of 'body mimesis'. Viewing the tendency of a character will arouse our feelings in a homogeneous bodily posture. Our bodies are most physically comfortable in a state of balance (according to the above definition), thus balanced structures can especially evoke

<sup>59</sup> The Chinese term for body, *ti* 體 in calligraphy criticism denotes both 'style' and 'compositional structure.' The combined term *tishi* 體勢 is also used in Chinese calligraphy criticism.

<sup>60</sup> Zeng Guofan, *Zeng Guofan Quanji: Riji* (A Complete Collection of Zeng Guofan: Diary), Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1994, 638.

pleasant sensations. Some people would question the present writer: 'Why have you just used the theory of 'body mimesis' to explain the beauty of individual lines? Isn't it the case that some individual lines have unbalanced shapes?' My response is as follows: our feelings for individual lines are transitional and dynamic, while our feelings for structures are structural, synthetical, and motionless. If the body is in motion, it will not feel uncomfortable even in an unbalanced state; the body feels uncomfortable if it stops in an unbalanced state. A slanted brushstroke will reach a balanced state after being offset by other brushstrokes, however a slanted character, against other characters, can't make us feel balanced.

(1b) Rhythm.

Spatial rhythm means a well-regulated arrangement of similar forms. If the entirety of a Chinese character is composed of similar strokes that are parallel and isometric, we call it a 'complete rhythm', such as the Chinese characters 三 ('three'), 玉 ('jade'), and 冊 ('volume'). If only a part of a character is composed of similar strokes that are parallel and isometric, we call it a 'incomplete rhythm', such as the Chinese characters 鳥 ('bird'), 珍 ('treasure'), and 飛 ('fly').

How can rhythms imply a sense of beauty? Two theories, coexisting and having no interference, could answer this question. The first theory can be named as 'the fulfilment of expectations'. It holds that when we follow a rhythmized form, we expect the emergence of successive similar parts. And if [several successive expectations are] continuously satisfied, pleasant sensations will result from the fulfilment of these expectations. The second theory can be called 'rhythm as the principle of individuation'. This theory not only explains the beauty of rhythm, but also the beauty of symmetry. In symmetrical and rhythmized forms, [what we perceive is] the recurrence of identical structures and the coordination of dissimilar parts. Using the word 'symmetry' to encompass the above-mentioned 'symmetry' and 'rhythm', Santayana said:

Symmetry is here what metaphysicians call a principle of individuation. By the emphasis which it lays upon the recurring elements, it cuts up the field into determinate units; all that lies between the beats is one interval, one individual. If there were no recurrent impressions, no corresponding points, the field of perception would remain a fluid continuum, without defined and recognizable divisions. The outlines of most things are symmetrical because we choose what symmetrical lines we find to be the boundaries of objects. Their symmetry is the condition of their unity, and their unity of their individuality and separate existence...If symmetry, then, is a principle of individuation and helps us to distinguish objects, we cannot wonder that it helps us to enjoy the perception. For our intelligence loves to perceive; water is not more grateful to a parched throat than a principle of comprehension to a confused understanding. Symmetry clarifies, and we

all know that light is sweet.<sup>61</sup>

(2) *Shi*

In order to create *shi* (the momentum or tension between characters and columns), calligraphers sometimes also employ rhythms, such as the alternation of big and small, or light and heavy characters in the running-script and cursive-script [calligraphic works]. But one can't use such alternations frequently and should not make many successive changes each time, as Chinese calligraphic works are also created for utilitarian purposes, such as letters, epitaphs and other kinds of inscriptions. In order to fulfil the expectations for another art, literature for instance, the characters one can use in a calligraphic work are limited. Calligraphers cannot choose characters to create '*shi* or tension between several characters or lines'; they can only rely on the characters they have to use to create *shi*. It is possible, in principle, to choose specific characters purely for calligraphic practice, and it also should be done. But in view of the close relation between characters and literature, and of the fact that those who are adept at Chinese calligraphy are usually fond of literature, it is in fact impossible to completely separate the two.

While creating equidistance between the columns and between the characters within a column, calligraphers also employ rhythm. But the main expressive element of *shi* lies in balance. The balance of *shi* has two aspects:

- (1) A uniform pattern or style. Zeng Guofan once said, 'Recently I often wrote big characters...but the vitality [within each of them] is not really linked together. That's because the structures of every single character are not uniform. Some characters are loose at the top and tense at the bottom, and some tense at the top and loose at the bottom. Some characters are big on the left and small on the right, and some big on the right and small on the left. All should be uniform throughout, and then a style could be formed.'<sup>62</sup> This explains that patterns should not be varied [in a work of calligraphy].
- (2) The 'centres of gravity' of all the characters in a column must roughly fall in a straight line. In his *Diary*, Zeng Guofan once pointed out, 'Some members of the Imperial Academy in Peking are skilled in writing on white accordion-form booklets (*zhezhi*), and tradition has it that there is a thread linking [all the characters] within a column. People who write big characters also need to get this point.'<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896, 93-94.

<sup>62</sup> Zeng Guofan, *Zeng Guofan Quanji: Riji* (A Complete Collection of Zeng Guofan: Diary), Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1994, 390.

<sup>63</sup> Zeng Guofan, *Zeng Guofan Quanji: Riji* (A Complete Collection of Zeng Guofan: Diary), Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1994, 668.

## IV.

Up to now, this article has answered the first three questions raised in the first section. The only remaining question is: what is the aesthetic significance of the art of Chinese calligraphy? I plan to use the following three aesthetic categories to cover all the schools within the art of calligraphy:

- (1) Works that tend towards the beautiful.
- (2) Works that tend towards the sublime.
- (3) Works that contain both the beautiful and sublime.

Based on specific brushstroke techniques, each of these three classes can be further divided into some subclasses, and if it is needed, the subclasses could be separated into many types. After that, the characteristics of every class and every type will be clearly described. Unfortunately, the present writer has not yet done this due to ill health and studying overseas while writing this article means there is no access to rubbings and model calligraphies (*bei-tie*).<sup>64</sup> Besides the books this article cited, I have in hand no other theoretical books on calligraphy, so I can only wait for some future time to start this research. But I heartily wish that scholars in China would commence this research before me.

If what I have said in the above sections is not false, we can come to the following conclusion: Chinese calligraphy is an art with its own peculiarities, and is equally valuable as the other arts.

Thus, Chinese calligraphy should get as much attention as the other arts. The past achievements of this art and the records of calligraphic techniques should be systematically collected and studied. Unfortunately, there has been no one up until now undertaking this research. If scholars in the future can embark on this career, the study of Chinese calligraphy will become a new research field of Chinese Studies. The subjects of this new area are as follows:

- (1) Valuable calligraphic works should be collected and photocopied on the basis of individuals, dynasties, or schools.
- (2) The authenticity of some works needs to be verified, and those works whose dates are unknown or questionable should be investigated and checked.
- (3) Critical biographies of calligraphers should pay special attention to their accomplishments, the chronology of their oeuvre, and the development of their skills.
- (4) Comparative studies of various calligraphic styles and schools should examine their differences, trace their origins and developments, and specify their gains and losses.
- (5) Theoretical writings on and practical manuals of Chinese calligraphy of

<sup>64</sup> In Chinese calligraphy, *bei* refers to the stones that bear inscriptions, and *tie* originally referred to casual handwritten notes. For a discussion of *bei* and *tie*, see Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, 10-11.

Shi Xiongbo (ed. and trans.)

Zhang Yinlin: A Preface to Chinese  
Calligraphy Criticism (1931)

successive dynasties need to be collected and researched.

The results of the above researches could be compiled into two books: *A History of Chinese Calligraphy* and *The Principles and Methods of Chinese Calligraphy*. Only after these two books are published, can the art of Chinese calligraphy thrive.