

The Art of Chinese Calligraphy: Educational Protection and Literacy Study of Cultural Heritage

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ABSTRACT

Chinese traditional calligraphy is an important part of Chinese culture, with rich cultural value, historical value, artistic value and educational value. Traditional calligraphy art has shown new characteristics in the current era. This research objectives are: 1) to study the historical development and cultural value of Chinese calligraphy; 2) to analyze the current situation and issues of Chinese calligraphy; 3) to identify the way in which inheritance and literacy of Chinese calligraphy art can be protected. This research adopts qualitative methods, collecting field data through literature document, surveys, interviews, observations, and group discussions. Our results summarize the multiple eras through which the historical development of Chinese calligraphy took place. Our study focused on the content and artistic styles of Chinese calligraphy, categorizing its development into four periods; namely (i) Primitive Society to 2070 BC, which is characterized by pictographic writing and primitive symbols. (ii) 2070 BC to 221 BC, the period of formation of written characters and invention of the writing brush and ink, (iii) 221 BC to 589 AD, characterized by the standardization of Xiaozhuan and the invention of papermaking, and (iv) 589 AD to 1905 AD characterized by development and refinement of the five script styles influenced by the imperial examination system. Our results also depict the current situation and problems of Chinese calligraphy and the problems it faces. Finally, the results also show the multiple ways in which Chinese calligraphy could be preserved. As an excellent cultural heritage, traditional Chinese calligraphy art will shine with new light in modern society.

Key words: Chinese Calligraphy Art, Protection, Inheritance, Literacy, Cultural Heritage

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, Chinese calligraphy, as an ancient art form, is faced with major challenges. Traditional practices, like calligraphy, are increasingly marginalized with the advancements in technology and global cultural shifts. In contemporary society, Chinese calligraphy struggles to maintain its relevance and significance in spite of its profound historical, cultural, and artistic value. The current study addresses a significant research problem, which is the decline in the appreciation, practice, and educational integration of Chinese calligraphy (Xu, 2024). This issue poses a threat to the continued vitality and transmission of Chinese calligraphy as a cultural heritage.

Tracing back thousands of years to the earliest forms of written Chinese characters, Chinese calligraphy has evolved through multiple dynasties. Each of these dynasties contributed distinct styles and techniques to this delicate art. However, from a historical point of view, calligraphy has always been more than an art. Calligraphy plays a significant role in communicating and reflecting one's education and moral character. The significance of Chinese calligraphy was further entrenched by imperial examination when mastery of calligraphy became essential for official and scholarly

purposes (Elman, 2000). Thus, a turning point in Chinese calligraphy was the abolition of the imperial examination system.

In addition, as the modern writing tools and digital technology emerged the landscape of written communication changed significantly in China. Pens and keyboards replaced the brush, which was considered once an indispensable tool. This led to a decline in the regular practice of calligraphy. Furthermore, the focus of modern education systems shifted to technological literacy and pragmatic skills, which led to a neglect of traditional arts and further marginalization of Chinese calligraphy (Hearn & Smith, 2001).

The current study is significant for its holistic approach to investigate the contemporary challenges that Chinese calligraphy faces. Our study highlights the multifaceted contributions of calligraphy to Chinese culture through an examination of the historical development and cultural value of calligraphy. We seek to provide insight into current role and potential future of Chinese calligraphy by examining its evolution and transition from practical to artistic value. Our findings related to the current issues and situation of Chinese calligraphy will illuminate the significant factors that contribute to its decline. We expect our study will underscore

the importance of protection, inheritance, and literacy of Chinese calligraphy and it initiates a concerted effort from diverse sectors of our community, including cultural institutions, educators, and policymakers, to foster an environment where this significant artistic and cultural heritage can thrive.

Research Objectives

1. To study the historical development and artistic value of Chinese calligraphy.
2. To analyze the current situation and problems of contemporary Chinese calligraphy.
3. To identify the way in which inheritance and literacy of Chinese calligraphy art can be protected.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the birth of humanity, there have been many different languages and scripts, such as English, Thai, Mongolian, Arabic, and so on. These languages and scripts have evolved, eventually tending towards a more aesthetically pleasing decoration to facilitate people's reading and communication. The Chinese language similarly possesses this functionality, namely practicality. However, what sets Chinese characters apart is that from their inception, they naturally acquired an artistic function, which became increasingly prominent in their usage over time. "A path based on daily writing as a foundation, to fully express human beings." Chinese calligraphy has a long history, dating back to ancient times, the beginning of human history (Gan, 2020). Although archaeological materials were limited before the Shang Dynasty, early humans left behind many carved symbols - "meaningful forms."

Why can Chinese calligraphy become an art? Scholars have offered many explanations. In summary, there are mainly two points: first, Chinese characters have a complex structure and rich variations, and the evolution has produced various structural features of different script styles, allowing Chinese calligraphy to potentially produce endless variations visually (Harrist Jr, 2004); second, the writing tool for Chinese calligraphy, the brush, is a unique writing instrument in China. Its brush head is made of soft animal hair, and the depth of touching the paper and the twisting in different directions during writing create endless variations in brushstrokes (Da-Wei, 2012). The complexity of the structure brings complexity to writing. In terms of usage, it increases the difficulty of writing, but for an art form, it has a potential for graphic expression (any text can also be seen as graphics) (Vermeeren, 2017). This structural complexity is closely combined with the richness of movement variations in Chinese character writing (Chao et al., 2018).

Chinese calligraphy is an art that expresses Chinese characters with specialized brushstrokes and aesthetics and rich humanistic connotations. Chinese characters are the foundation of calligraphy art, and the transmission of character books and the development of calligraphy art are closely related. In ancient times, literacy and calligraphy enlightenment education went hand in hand, with textbooks combining character education and the aesthetic beauty of Chinese

character writing. During the pre-Qin and Han dynasties, scholars and calligraphers often wrote character books. By the Han and Wei periods, the status of calligraphers rose, marking the division of labor between scholars and calligraphers (Zhu, 2023). During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the formal establishment of the imperial examination system made calligraphy a necessary condition for ancient scholars to obtain official positions. At this time, calligraphy's artistic and practical aspects were intertwined and developed.

After the abolition of the imperial examination system, Chinese society posed a question of life and death for Chinese calligraphy, namely the problem of contemporary paradigm shifts. Before the abolition of the imperial examination system, the writing brush was an indispensable writing tool in Chinese society, recording human history, politics, economics, literature, art, religion, and other aspects. The writing brush was omnipresent. After the abolition of the imperial examination system, the writing brush exited the historical stage, and the popularity of the hard pen and the arrival of the keyboard era brought unprecedented pressure to Chinese calligraphy. In fact, after breaking free from the constraints of practical functions, Chinese calligraphy not only did not disappear but showed strong vitality, flourishing towards the direction of art in contemporary times, leaving exquisite works one after another behind (Kraus, 1991). Why did Chinese calligraphy end up in this situation?

With the modernization and globalization of society, traditional culture has been gradually marginalized in modern society (Shah, 1996). The accelerated pace of people's lives and the popularization of electronic devices and digital communication methods have led to a gradual decrease in handwritten calligraphy, and the daily application scenarios of calligraphy have become fewer and fewer (Moneyhun, 2016). In the modern education system, calligraphy teaching is not given enough attention. In primary and secondary school courses, the time and resources for calligraphy education are limited, and there is a lack of professional calligraphy teachers, which leads to students' lack of contact with and interest in calligraphy (Rahman et al., 2024). At the same time, there are relatively few calligraphy majors in higher education, making it difficult to cultivate enough calligraphy professionals. Calligraphy, as a traditional skill, requires long-term learning and practice. However, for various reasons, modern young people have reduced their interest and investment in calligraphy, resulting in challenges in the inheritance of traditional calligraphy skills (Peng & Zhang, 2022). Many calligraphy masters are old, but there is a lack of sufficient successors to inherit and carry forward their skills and ideas. Traditional Chinese calligraphy art faces many difficulties in modern society, which need to be solved through multi-faceted efforts. By strengthening calligraphy education, increasing social attention, protecting cultural heritage, and promoting calligraphy art, better conditions can be created for the inheritance and development of calligraphy art (Wang & Gunaban, 2023).

In essence, this research not only seeks to preserve a vital aspect of Chinese heritage but also to reimagine its place and value in a rapidly changing world. The protection and promotion of Chinese calligraphy are not merely about

conserving the past; they are about enriching the cultural fabric of the present and future, allowing this ancient art to find new expressions and significance in contemporary life.

METHODOLOGY

Tools

The research methods used in this study include structured interviews and observations, which are tailored to key information related to the research questions and objectives. After obtaining the consent of the interviewees and explaining the objectives of the study in detail, the interviews were conducted face-to-face with the interviewees. During the interview process, the participants maintained autonomy, good communication and flexibility. The researcher may ask new questions or consider further interviews based on the interviewees' answers. The observation method is mainly used to record important information observed during the investigation, respect facts, try not to intervene, be meticulous and patient. The research tools applicable to this article include cameras, video cameras, recording equipment, notebooks and other recording tools.

Data Collection and Analysis

The collection of literature involves three main aspects: first, the gathering of ancient calligraphy literature and works; second, the interpretation and analysis of calligraphy art by aesthetic, philosophical, and literary figures of the Republic of China era; third, the documentation and interview records regarding the current state of Chinese calligraphy. Literature collection takes two forms: historical documents, books, images, audio, video, etc., and visiting calligraphers and theorists or attending contemporary calligraphy exhibitions to gain firsthand insight into calligraphers' daily lives, artistic concepts, and the function of modern calligraphy. Notes should be taken, and recordings should be made during interviews and observations. Table 1 presents the pseudonyms, roles and demographic information of the key informants of the study.

Data analysis follows the paradigm theory throughout the research process and employs formalist aesthetics and iconography to analyze calligraphic styles throughout history in detail. This analysis, combined with recorded calligraphy literature, aims to deduce the developmental patterns of Chinese calligraphy art and speculate on its future trajectory.

RESULTS

The results of the study are presented in this section. The findings have been divided into three sections following the order of the research objectives.

The Historical Development and Artistic Value of Chinese Calligraphy

The first objective addressed the historical development and artistic value of Chinese calligraphy. Before reporting our

Table 1. Key informants

No.	Name	Gender	Role	Age
1	Hu	Male	Government officials/Professor	72
2	Lee	Male	Professor	66
3	Xia	Male	Professor	68
4	Yong	Male	Professor	74
5	Tian	Male	Professor	82

results in detail, we provide an overview. The artistic styles of Chinese calligraphy can be divided into four periods:

1. Primitive Society to 2070 BC
 - Stone inscriptions and rock paintings during the development of early human society
 - Genesis of calligraphy with aesthetic and practical functions
2. 2070 BC to 221 BC
 - Cultural and technological advancements leading to the formation of Chinese calligraphy
 - Emergence of the writing brush and ink
3. 221 BC to 589 AD
 - Creation of five major scripts: Xiaozhuan, Lishu, Xingshu, Caoshu, and Kaishu
 - Foundation for five script styles laid by Qin and Han Dynasties, contributing to aesthetic consciousness
4. 589 AD to 1905 AD
 - Promotion of literacy and official positions owing to the Imperial examination system

What follows is a detailed report of the above findings.

The first era of calligraphy, primitive society to 2070 BC

The origin of Chinese calligraphy can be traced back to the early stages of human social development, namely the period of stone inscription culture in primitive society. During this period, humans relied on stone tools for survival, satisfying their material needs through simple grinding and crafting, such as hunting, fishing, and gathering food. Therefore, this period is also known as the Stone Age. Due to the lack of written records, our understanding of this period is primarily based on archaeological excavations (Bai, 2018).

The most famous site in the Peiligang Culture is the Jiahu site in Wuyang County, Henan Province. The Jiahu site is an important relic of the Central Plains civilization during the Neolithic period. Some of these symbols resemble the oracle bone script of the Yin ruins. Some scholars believe these symbols represent a primitive form of writing, possibly the precursor to Chinese characters. The Huashan Rock Paintings in Guangxi (Figure 1) are also representative achievements of the Neolithic period. It is the largest single-panel rock painting in the world, covering an area of over 8,000 square meters and depicting nearly two thousand images. In the paintings, people hold their hands up high and squat with their legs, their heads are square with a hint of roundness, and their bodies form an inverted triangle. Only three short lines represent five fingers and interspersed

among them are domesticated animals crawling on all fours, varying in size. Several long red lines serve as upper and lower divisions. The multitude of figures demonstrates the strength of the tribe. Some individuals' faces are not purely red; internal spaces are adorned with dots and lines, likely indicating shamans or tribal leaders. In the center of the crowd are some red circles with star-like patterns inside, resembling flags.

These images already possess complete symbolic forms, depicting hunting, horseback riding, archery, bonfires, shamanic dances, and decorations, showcasing a rich and colorful array of shapes. As an early form of human written communication, we can glimpse the cultural scenes of that time. Primitive humans had already mastered the production and skilled application of pigments.

The primitive period was the genesis of calligraphy. In addition to lines and structures, an aesthetic pursuit was evident. Whether it's the inscriptions from the Jiahu site, the "sun, moon, and mountains" from the late Dawenkou culture, or rock paintings like those found at Huashan, ancient people could only express emotions and understand the world through graphics. Thus, these serve as the earliest texts for studying primitive humans. They were preparatory stages before the formation of writing, the prototypes of pictographs during the Shang and Zhou periods, laying the aesthetic foundation for the emergence of oracle bone inscriptions during the Shang and Zhou periods.

The second era of calligraphy, 2070 BC to 221 BC

With written records, Xia, Shang, and Zhou represent the earliest historical stages in China. During this period, society witnessed significant progress in culture, technology, and other aspects, providing several necessary conditions for forming Chinese calligraphy. Firstly, the invention of the writing brush became the writing tool for Chinese calligraphy. Secondly, the emergence of Chinese ink provided a basis for expressing Chinese calligraphy. Thirdly, the presence of writing itself. Oracle Bone Script, as the first complete writing system in Chinese history, possessing the three essential elements of strokes, structure, and composition, laid the artistic foundation of Chinese calligraphy.

The invention of the writing brush was a significant revolution in the history of Chinese calligraphy, transforming the habit of primitive humans carving on rocks into writing. The writing brush from the late Western Zhou period had already reached considerable craftsmanship. One end of the brush handle was often made of materials such as sheep hair, wolf hair, or weasel hair connected to the handle. Sheep hair was used in making the brush because of its softness, allowing for the creation of various line forms. However, excessively soft sheep hair could also cause inconvenience in writing. Therefore, adding wolf or weasel hair became crucial in addressing this issue.

Before the invention of artificial ink, natural or semi-natural ink was commonly used as writing material. The Oracle Bone Inscriptions of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties (Figure 2) marked the beginning of Chinese calligraphy history. During this period, the tradition of carving on tortoise



Figure 1. Patterns of the huashan rock paintings in chongzuo, guangxi
Source: Zhou (2023)



Figure 2. Oracle bone inscriptions of the shang and zhou dynasties
Source: Chen (2023)

shells or animal bones, inherited from primitive human societies, was continued. These inscriptions mainly consisted of divination records of the late Shang royal court. They formed a complete and mature writing system known as the oracle bone script, the earliest known writing system.

Regarding strokes, the oracle bone script was predominantly carved with straight lines due to using knives on hard tortoise shells or animal bones. Even curved lines were composed of short straight lines, presenting a feature of slightly thicker in the middle and somewhat thinner at both ends, appearing lean, robust, upright, sharp, and three-dimensional.

Regarding character structure, oracle bone script mainly featured rectangular shapes, exhibiting symmetric beauty and diverse variations in form. It had a distinctive contrast between square and circular shapes. Some characters retained traces of primitive drawings and pictographic meanings to varying degrees, reflecting the initial stages of writing development with a sense of simplicity and vividness.

From the layout perspective, the inscriptions are evident throughout, with the size of the characters arranged in

a varied and orderly manner. There are changes in density from top to bottom, left to right, with a balance between dense and sparse areas and a sense of coherence between the beginning and end. Longer inscriptions are arranged compactly, giving a sense of lushness, while shorter ones appear ethereal. Overall, they present a rustic yet charming aesthetic (Wolfflin, 2022).

In the formation stage of Chinese calligraphy, besides the oracle bone script, there is another essential form of writing known as bronze inscriptions. It evolved from the oracle bone script and appeared on bronze objects during the Shang and Zhou periods.

According to current archaeological research, bronze artifacts in China date back to the Majiayao culture of the Neolithic period and continued until the Qin and Han dynasties. Initially, they were small tools or ornaments. Bronze containers and weapons appeared during the Xia Dynasty. By the middle of the Shang Dynasty, there was already a wide variety of bronze artifacts, including inscriptions and intricate patterns. The late Shang to early Western Zhou period was the heyday of bronze development, with a diverse range of shapes, thick and solid bodies, and gradually lengthening inscriptions accompanied by elaborate designs. Subsequently, the bodies of bronze artifacts began to thin, and the patterns gradually simplified. From the late Spring and Autumn Period to the Warring States Period, bronze implements became increasingly rare with the widespread use of iron tools.

Bronze inscriptions played an essential role in the development of calligraphy. If primitive drawings and stone carvings were the results of the formation period of writing, then oracle bone script and bronze inscriptions were the results of the formation period of writing. The appearance of the oracle bone script provided ample artistic conditions for bronze inscriptions. As a prelude to the development of calligraphy, bronze inscriptions directly influenced the emergence of the small seal script in the Qin Dynasty; hence, they are also called large seal script.

During the Bronze Age, writers' mindsets changed. They no longer depicted natural phenomena but integrated the physical properties of existing materials into their aesthetic cognition, finely carving jade and smelting bronze artifacts. From primitive stone tools to cast bronze tools, from primitive engraving to brush writing, this process not only marked a tremendous technological advancement but also symbolized the transformation of ancient peoples from savagery to humanity, from unconscious aesthetics to conscious aesthetics, and from divinity (shamanism) to humanity's return.

During primitive drawings and pictographs in Chinese calligraphy, both practical and artistic functions emerged simultaneously—the practical function aimed at facilitating daily life, enabling quick identification and reading of characters. The creative function aimed at serving the upper echelons of society, as bronze ware and inscriptions served the ruling class, requiring uniform rules. During this period, whether in oracle bone inscriptions or bronze inscriptions, the layout of characters was orderly, lines were graceful, and structures were rational.

The third era of calligraphy, 221 BC to 589 AD

The development stages of Chinese calligraphy refer to the formal establishment stages of the five scripts. Generally, Xiaozhuan (Small Seal Script) began in the Qin Dynasty, Lishu (Official Script) started in the Han Dynasty, and during the Wei and Jin Dynasties, Xingshu (Running Script), Caoshu (Cursive Script), and Kaishu (Regular Script) had already appeared. This period spans approximately 800 years from the Qin and Han Dynasties to the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties.

The Qin Dynasty emerged from the state of Qin during the Warring States period, marking the first unified empire in Chinese history. In the early stage of Qin unification, various measures were adopted in politics, economy, and culture based on the original Qin system to consolidate its rule. Regarding writing, the state's script during the Warring States period was standardized into Xiaozhuan (Small Seal Script). According to legend, Xiaozhuan was created by Li Si, the Prime Minister of Qin, and his works include "Inscriptions on Mount Tai" and "Inscriptions on Mount Yi."

Since the Han Dynasty, the Han ethnic group gradually became known as the Han Chinese, and Confucianism was established as the core of Han culture. The inclusiveness and unity of Han culture facilitated exchanges and integration among various ethnic groups, leading to rapid economic development and significant productivity improvements. During this period, one of China's Four Great Inventions, papermaking, brought about a profound revolution in Han society, propelling a leap forward in the development of Chinese calligraphy. Papermaking, which involves writing and calligraphy, is like water to fish.

During the Wei and Jin periods, there were frequent changes in political power and greater freedom of thought, leading to significant cultural development. This period also had a direct influence on the art of calligraphy.

The Qin, Han, and Wei-Jin periods represent a developmental stage in Chinese calligraphy. The Qin Dynasty's seal script, the Han Dynasty's clerical script, and the Wei-Jin period's regular script, cursive script, and running script laid the foundation for the five major script styles. As two unified dynasties, the Qin and Han dynasties provided favorable conditions for forming seals and clerical scripts. Despite the social turmoil and continuous warfare during the Wei-Jin period, it also promoted cultural exchanges and ethnic integration, leading to the emergence of running, cursive, and regular scripts.

During the Qin and Han dynasties, Chinese calligraphy evolved from oracle bone inscriptions and bronze inscriptions (large seal script) to include seal script, clerical script, running script, cursive script, and regular script. The emergence of these five script styles marked the initial establishment of the aesthetic system of Chinese calligraphy. Seal, clerical, and regular scripts are easily readable and recognizable while running and cursive scripts are less. This indicates that the artistic function of Chinese calligraphy gradually gained importance during this period, which also represented a stage of aesthetic consciousness.

The fourth era of calligraphy, 581 AD to 1905 AD

The imperial examination system has been established and continued since the Tang Dynasty until the late Qing Dynasty. For ancient literati, the imperial examination system allowed commoner's children to obtain official positions. The state selected the most outstanding talents to enter the political center, develop the economy, and serve the ruling class. In 1905, Yuan Shikai and Zhang Zhidong requested that the imperial examination system be abolished and modern school education be promoted.

Since the Tang Dynasty, each historical stage has had its own cultural characteristics and writing habits, such as regular script in the Tang Dynasty, running script in the Song Dynasty, semi-cursive script in the Yuan Dynasty, cursive script in the Ming Dynasty, and the stone inscription movement in the Qing Dynasty.

During this period of over a century, political stability and national strength flourished, the economy prospered, relations among different ethnic groups were harmonious, and there was close cultural exchange between China and foreign countries. This was the most significant period in the history of Chinese calligraphy, witnessing the emergence of renowned masters of regular script, such as Ouyang Xun, Chu Suiliang, Yu Shinan, Yan Zhenqing, and Liu Gongquan.

Yan Zhenqing, a renowned calligrapher of the Tang Dynasty, initially studied under Chu Suiliang and later became a disciple of Zhang Xu, from whom he inherited his brushwork. His regular script (Figure 3) developed into a distinctive style known as "Yan Kai," which significantly influenced future generations.



Figure 3. Yan zhenqing's inscription on the many-treasure pagoda
Source: Fu (2023)

Regarding territorial expansion, the Song Dynasty did not rival the earlier Qin and Han dynasties, nor did it compare to the later Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. However, it stood out culturally and, in a sense, reflected the sentiments of the people of the time—an expression of the era's emotions. Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, Mi Fu, and Cai Xiang emerged as masters of running script.

From the Sui and Tang Dynasties to the Qing Dynasty, the development of Chinese calligraphy was based on five script styles, each corresponding to a specific era: regular script in the Tang Dynasty, running script in the Song Dynasty, semi-cursive script in the Yuan Dynasty, cursive script in the Ming Dynasty, and inscriptional script in the Qing Dynasty. Each script style reflects the characteristics of the corresponding period. However, it should be noted that each era was not limited to just one script style. For example, in addition to regular script, the Tang Dynasty also saw the flourishing of cursive script by Zhang Xu, which served as a model for later generations. From the Sui and Tang Dynasties to the Qing Dynasty represent the second historical cycle of Chinese calligraphy.

During this period, with the rapid development of productivity, various techniques became highly sophisticated. The widespread use of papermaking had extensive applications across all sectors of society, including natural sciences, medicine, literature, historiography, poetics, commerce, aristocracy, agriculture, industry, fishing and hunting, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and more. These textual contents provide rich documentary evidence for researchers (Ao & Kritsakorn, 2023).

The Current Situation and Problems of Chinese Calligraphy

The current situation of chinese calligraphy heritage

The invention of papermaking appeared during the Han Dynasty, and paper became widely used during the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. Later, through multiple improvements, Xuan paper became the essential material for calligraphy creation and continues to be used today.

Before the invention of papermaking, during the Qin and Han dynasties, bamboo and silk calligraphy were among the characteristics of this period. Bamboo and silk calligraphy refers to the ink inscriptions written on bamboo slips and silk fabrics from the pre-Qin period to the Wei and Jin dynasties. Bamboo slips and silk books were already widely used during the Spring, Autumn, and Warring States periods. Later, with the emergence, advancement, and improvement of papermaking technology, paper replaced bamboo and silk, becoming more widespread. Therefore, there are significant differences between ancient bamboo and silk calligraphy and contemporary bamboo and silk calligraphy.

The calligraphy of bamboo slips and silk books emerged during the same historical period. Like silk calligraphy, bamboo slip calligraphy was gradually replaced by paper with the advent of papermaking technology.

Modern calligraphy should accept traditional calligraphy, which takes a method and a set of norms. It is a restriction on

creativity. Still, it can effectively help calligraphers eliminate a lot of meaningless and wavering thoughts and discover the thoughts and emotions they want to express and can express. Calligraphy creation should establish an empirical connection with tradition. No matter how exciting and intoxicating it looks, it is empty and unrealistic if you can't find a way to express it or find a specific way to inject emotion into the form.

Entering the 21st century, the two terms that the Chinese calligraphy community has been arguing about are "popular calligraphy" and "artistic calligraphy." Yong is undoubtedly the creator of these two terms. He has raised the artistic level of Chinese calligraphy to an unprecedented height. He believes that exaggeration and deformation are standard techniques in all literary and artistic creations since ancient times, and calligraphy is no exception. Using architecture as an analogy, using the same materials such as beams, columns, bricks, and tiles, two houses with entirely different styles can be created due to other structures. The style of each font is also a history of deformation because when the overall aesthetic pursuit of the work changes, the structure of its characters must also change. This variability and plasticity provide unlimited possibilities for creating new calligraphy styles.

Chinese calligraphy cannot be limited to tradition but should be expanded to modern calligraphy, starting from one's life and closely connected with current feelings and thoughts. This means people beyond calligraphy should engage in abstract ink art and construct their unique artistic language. This is also the beginning of the exploration of modern calligraphy.

The spiritual pursuit of modern calligraphy is richness (Meng & Sithisak, 2024). In contemporary society, where thoughts and emotions are more complex, relying solely on traditional techniques is no longer enough to meet artistic expression's needs fully. Moreover, calligraphers often repeat themselves throughout their lives due to the elegant and leisurely nature of conventional calligraphy. In contrast, due to its strong conceptuality, modern calligraphy will inevitably bring originality, thus promoting the development of form. Like excellent calligraphers and painters, it can express nobility and beauty rather than a single appearance so that the spirit of the times in calligraphy can be more perfectly embodied.

The problems of contemporary chinese calligraphy

As a treasure of Chinese culture, Chinese calligraphy carries a rich historical and cultural heritage and artistic wisdom, playing a significant role in preserving and inheriting traditional Chinese culture. However, with the changes in times and the development of society, Chinese calligraphy faces various challenges and threats, making the tasks of protection and inheritance particularly urgent and crucial.

Art has no distinction between beauty and ugliness. It should not be defined by appearance but by the understanding of beauty. We should pay attention to the work's form, content, and artistic value for calligraphy creation. The creative expression reflects the heart; we cannot equate clutter

with ugliness. Neatness does not represent art. Neatness and art are two concepts. Wang Xizhi of the Wei and Jin Dynasties believed that if the characters were written uniformly, they were not calligraphy. In other words, Wang Xizhi's understanding of calligraphy was that the characters should not be too neat. This cultural wisdom also applies to contemporary Chinese calligraphy.

Art critics should define the judgment of beauty and ugliness. Ordinary people may think that neatness is beauty and elegance is beauty. However, a clumsy style is also an aesthetic for calligraphers and artists. Some people say that my works have a sense of comedy, giving people a feeling that life is like a play. But comedy is also an aesthetic. For example, do you think Chaplin is ugly? On the contrary, vulgarity is the enemy of art (Immanuel, 2022).

Professor Lee has conducted in-depth research on calligraphy practice and provided relevant information on the level of Chinese calligraphy creation, reflecting the low aesthetic level of ordinary people. The Chinese calligraphy tradition can flourish and be recognized in the field of art but needs more support from most people outside the art world. This shows that the protection of contemporary calligraphy art should start from perspective and aesthetics. The protection of Chinese calligraphy is centered on preserving artistic concepts and aesthetics.

The issue of inheriting Chinese calligraphy requires focused research, mainly on transitioning from ancient to contemporary calligraphy. This transition encompasses a shift in educational systems from the imperial examination system to higher education and primary and secondary education.

The inheritance of ancient calligraphy theory faces a linguistic issue: the transition from classical to vernacular Chinese. Because the Republican era marked a transition from ancient to contemporary calligraphy and from classical Chinese to modern language, reinterpreting ancient calligraphy theory using modern aesthetics has become a challenge in the inheritance of Chinese calligraphy art.

Higher calligraphy education began to be promoted during the Republic of China period, and Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts enrolled the first batch of calligraphy master students in 1979. Implementing these policies has dramatically helped the inheritance of Chinese calligraphy art. Although there is policy support, the actual situation could be more optimistic.

According to the general rules of art education, higher calligraphy education should form a discipline system of calligraphy theory, calligraphy history, calligraphy criticism, etc. (Chen, 2019). The three are both interrelated and have independent academic goals. Regarding calligraphy theory, the formalism introduced during the Republic of China period effectively explained calligraphy based on the modern cognitive structure that advocates rationality. According to Kant's statement in "What is Enlightenment," the so-called modernity is an era in which people can use reason freely. However, the rational spirit of calligraphy in the Republic of China has yet to be well inherited. Therefore, an essential topic of contemporary higher calligraphy education is to fully inherit and absorb the theoretical achievements of Eastern

and Western academics and establish a calligraphy theory compatible with modern art disciplines' requirements.

Another crucial academic direction of higher calligraphy education is studying calligraphy history. On the one hand, it inherits the tradition of calligraphy historiography before the Qing Dynasty. On the other hand, as Gong Buli said, it raises valuable questions about tradition. Researchers believe that the status of calligraphy history research in art history depends mainly on the efforts of calligraphy historians. If it only stays at the stage of textual research, without artistic interpretation of the essence of calligraphy and the application of new research methods, calligraphy history research will inevitably fail to achieve significant results.

With the introduction of the modern exhibition system and the formation of the art market, calligraphy criticism has become a topic that needs to be solved urgently. Some new phenomena in the field of calligraphy creation, such as "modern calligraphy," "popular calligraphy style," "ugly calligraphy," etc., need to be interpreted by critics with real academic depth. However, the reality is that calligraphy criticism needs to be improved. In theory, works of art need comments to enter history. Otherwise, contemporary calligraphy will become a chaotic space without order.

According to the requirements of the Ministry of Education, calligraphy courses should be included in educational supervision as unique content. Still, there are no separate exams or proficiency tests for calligraphy. Based on the existing literature, the promotion of higher education in Chinese calligraphy from 1912 to the announcement of calligraphy education policies for primary and secondary schools by the Ministry of Education in 2013 spans 100 years. From a positive perspective, this signifies the improvement and progress of the Chinese calligraphy education system and marks the beginning of its integration into primary and secondary education. From a negative perspective, there has been a significant discontinuity in protecting and inheriting the cultural wisdom of Chinese calligraphy art.

Guidelines to Protect and Inherit Chinese Calligraphy Art

Protection guidelines

In the context of the digital age, establishing a Chinese calligraphy art database is a crucial initiative for protecting and inheriting the treasures of Chinese culture. This study proposes guidelines for establishing a Chinese calligraphy art database to promote the research, safety, and inheritance of calligraphy art, providing more comprehensive and convenient resources for scholars, enthusiasts, and the general public.

Data collection and organization

Collect digital images of calligraphy works and relevant information, including titles, authors, creation periods, and stylistic characteristics. Organize works of calligraphy masters from various dynasties, historical materials, and research achievements to establish a comprehensive calligraphy literature database.

Technical support and platform construction

Utilize advanced digital technology to achieve high-definition scanning, digital processing, and online display of calligraphy works. Construct diverse platforms, including websites, mobile applications, etc., facilitating users' access to and utilization of resources anytime, anywhere.

Knowledge system construction

Establish a comprehensive calligraphy art classification system, including different scripts and schools such as clerical, regular, running, and cursive script. Build a network of interrelated calligraphy works to delve into the historical, stylistic, and school-related relationships among works (Wu, 2023).

Academic research and educational promotion

Provide abundant academic resources to support scholars in calligraphy art research and paper writing. Conduct online training and educational activities for calligraphy art to attract more people to participate in calligraphy learning and inheritance.

Copyright protection and cooperative sharing

Strictly protect the copyright of calligraphy works and enhance awareness of intellectual property protection. The database should establish cooperative relationships with relevant institutions and individuals to share resources and promote cross-border exchanges and cooperation in calligraphy art.

Social engagement and feedback mechanism

Establish a user feedback mechanism to timely understand user needs and opinions and continuously optimize the database's functions and services. Actively organize calligraphy art activities to attract participation and support from various sectors of society, jointly promoting the development of Chinese calligraphy art.

Establishing a Chinese calligraphy art database is a long-term and complex project that requires joint efforts and support from the government, academia, industry institutions, and all sectors of society. Through relentless efforts, the Chinese calligraphy art database will become an essential platform for inheriting Chinese culture, providing vital support and guarantee for future generations to understand, learn, and inherit Chinese calligraphy art.

Heritage inheritance guidelines

As time passes, Chinese calligraphy, a treasure of Chinese culture, needs better protection, inheritance, and research. Establishing specialized heritage organizations is critical in promoting academic research in calligraphy and advancing its development. This study proposes the establishment of a Chinese Calligraphy Art Research Center to promote the research, protection, and inheritance of calligraphy, providing

more comprehensive and convenient resources and services for scholars, enthusiasts, and the general public.

Determining mission and vision

The research center's mission is to promote research, education, and innovation in Chinese calligraphy art. The initial goal is to create an academic platform recognized at the national or regional level. The long-term goal is to establish the Chinese Calligraphy Art Research Center as a nationally influential educational institution in calligraphy art.

Organizational structure and functions

Establish a scientifically reasonable organizational structure, including leadership, research departments, academic committees, etc., to ensure the orderly progress of research work. Determine the functions and tasks of the research center, including scholarly research in calligraphy art, talent cultivation, collection and protection of artworks, academic exchanges, and cooperation.

Recruitment of professional talents

Recruit researchers with backgrounds in calligraphy art and professional knowledge, possessing solid academic foundations and research capabilities. Establish an academic committee and invite renowned calligraphy art experts and scholars from home and abroad to serve as consultants, providing educational guidance and support.

Establishment of rich research resources

Actively collect and organize relevant literature, ancient books, artworks, etc., to build a rich research resource library. Utilize modern technological means to establish digital archives and online resource platforms, facilitating scholars' and enthusiasts' access to calligraphy art materials and research results.

Promotion of academic research and results transformation

Conduct academic research on calligraphy art and delve into its historical, theoretical, and technical aspects to improve the level of academic research. Encourage the transformation and application of academic achievements and promote the application and promotion of calligraphy art research results in education, cultural and creative industries, etc.

Promotion of tradition and innovation

Inherit and promote the essence and spirit of traditional calligraphy art and the integration and innovation of conventional calligraphy art with modern culture and technology. Support and encourage the growth and innovation of young calligraphy artists, cultivate a new generation of talents for calligraphy art inheritance and promote the innovative development of calligraphy art.

Enhancement of academic exchange and cooperation

Actively organize academic exchange conferences, seminars, lectures, etc., to promote in-depth discussions and exchanges on calligraphy art in the educational community. Establish domestic and international academic exchange and cooperation mechanisms, collaborate with relevant institutions and scholarly organizations to conduct joint research projects, and promote international exchanges and cooperation in calligraphy art.

Enhancement of academic influence and social reputation

Publish high-quality academic papers and research results to enhance the research center's influence and status in the educational community. Actively participate in social welfare and cultural exchange activities to establish a good social image and brand reputation.

Diversified funding support

Actively seek government support, increase financial allocations for calligraphy art heritage projects, and ensure the essential operation and implementation of projects. Conduct diversified fundraising activities to attract social capital participation, establish stable funding sources, and provide the sustainability and stability of calligraphy art heritage work.

Establishing the Chinese Calligraphy Art Research Center is essential to promote academic research in calligraphy art and advance its inheritance. It requires the joint efforts and support of the government, society, and relevant organizations. Through the implementation of the above guidelines, the Chinese Calligraphy Art Research Center will be able to play its role better, providing solid academic support and intellectual guarantee for the inheritance and development of Chinese calligraphy art and making positive contributions to the inheritance and development of Chinese calligraphy art for future generations.

Guidelines for conducting teaching activities

Conducting high-quality calligraphy teaching activities is crucial to promoting the inheritance and development of calligraphy art. This study proposes guidelines for conducting Chinese calligraphy art teaching activities to provide effective teaching methods and guidance for teachers and students.

Establishing teaching objectives

Clearly define teaching objectives, including aspects such as students' understanding of calligraphy art, improvement of skill levels, and cultivation of cultural literacy. Based on students' age, level, and interests, develop specific teaching objectives and plans (Xu & Karin, 2024).

Creating a favorable teaching environment

Select teaching materials suitable for students' age and level, covering basic knowledge, skill training, appreciation of

classic works, etc. Teachers can flexibly use various teaching materials and resources according to teaching needs to meet students' diverse learning needs (Qiu & Zuo, 2023).

Designing diverse teaching activities

Integrate theoretical and practical exercises and design diverse teaching activities, including lectures, demonstrations, practice sessions, and artwork creation. Innovate teaching methods and introduce interactive and gamified learning to stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm.

Enhancing technique training

Emphasize training in fundamental techniques, including brush strokes, structure, and proportion, to solidify students' basic calligraphy skills. Conduct staged and progressive technique training, providing personalized guidance based on students' situations.

Encouraging creation and expression

Encourage students to create calligraphy works and guide them in expressing their emotions and thoughts. Organize calligraphy competitions, artwork exhibitions, etc., to showcase students' creative achievements and inspire their enthusiasm and confidence in learning.

Focusing on cultural inheritance and literacy cultivation

Guide students to understand the history, cultural background, and spiritual connotations of calligraphy art, cultivating their artistic confidence and national identity. Foster students' aesthetic taste and humanistic literacy, enhancing their overall quality and humanities cultivation.

Establishing an effective evaluation system

Design scientifically sound evaluation methods and standards to comprehensively assess students' learning achievements and abilities. Conduct regular teaching feedback and evaluation, adjust teaching strategies and methods in a timely manner, and continuously optimize teaching effectiveness (Peng & Sirisuk, 2024).

Expanding teaching resources and collaboration opportunities

Actively expand calligraphy teaching resources and collaboration opportunities, including inviting professional calligraphy artists to lecture, visiting calligraphy exhibitions, etc. Strengthen cooperation between schools and social/cultural institutions, jointly promoting the development and inheritance of calligraphy art education.

Inspiring students' passion for calligraphy art

Every student's goal is to love, understand, and master calligraphy. Through rich and colorful teaching activities and

stimulating students' interest in learning, cultivate students' passion for and persistence in calligraphy art.

Implementing these guidelines will help teachers better organize and conduct Chinese calligraphy art teaching activities, stimulate students' interest in learning and creative potential, and promote the inheritance and development of Chinese calligraphy art.

DISCUSSION

Through the collection from CNKI, Baidu Academic, field surveys, and interviews, a large amount of historical literature, records, books, and significant information regarding Chinese calligraphy has been gathered. This research extensively details the historical development and evolution of Chinese calligraphy, particularly before the abolition of the imperial examination system in 1905. Therefore, there is no need to reiterate it here. This chapter employs qualitative research methodology, focusing on Chinese calligraphy's artistic styles and content.

The artistic styles of Chinese calligraphy are divided into four periods. The first period spans from primitive society to 2070 BC, characterized by pictographic writing and primitive symbols. The second period extends from 2070 BC to 221 BC, marking the formation of written characters. The third period covers the years from 221 BC to 589 AD, representing the maturity of the five major script styles. The fourth period ranges from 589 AD to 1905 AD, signifying the development phase of these five script styles (CASS, 2020).

Chinese calligraphy encompasses two main aspects: textual content and formal content. Textual content typically includes poetry, prose, and articles, while formal content involves strokes, structures, and layout. Formal content considers factors such as stroke thickness, character length, size of structures, and the design of compositions, whether neat or scattered. These two aspects, recording and expressing text, represent distinct research directions. Textual content falls within the domains of literature, history, archaeology, and poetry studies, while formal content falls within the realm of art studies. Strictly speaking, Chinese calligraphy belongs to the field of art studies.

In the current study, we also focused on the current situation and problems of Chinese calligraphy. As it was reported, modern Calligraphy is not merely about adhering to conventions and tradition but also about creatively integrating personal life, thoughts, and feelings into the art. Traditional techniques turn out to be insufficient for modern expression. The pursuit of complexity and richness in modern calligraphy reflects contemporary society's diverse emotions and thoughts. Chinese calligraphy is currently challenged by societal changes which necessitate its preservation.

We proposed some guidelines for protecting Chinese calligraphy. We recommend digitizing calligraphy works and compiling them in comprehensive databases, developing accessible platforms, creating detailed classification systems, providing resources to support calligraphy education and academic research, protecting the copyrights of calligraphy works, and implementing feedback systems to understand user needs. We also proposed Chinese calligraphy

inheritance guidelines, such as establishing an Art Research Center for promoting education, research, and innovation in the area of Chinese calligraphy, cultivating talent, forming academic committees with distinguished experts, building a resource library and digital archives for artworks, integrating calligraphy with technology and modern culture, organizing conferences, and seeking financial allocations and government support.

While Chinese calligraphy with its rich heritage keeps evolving, it faces significant challenges in preservation, education, and public appreciation. Balancing tradition with modern innovation and improving education and criticism are crucial for its continued development and recognition. Spanning several millennia, Chinese calligraphy has a rich history marked by evolving artistic styles. Each development era contributed in its own special way to the growth and refinement of calligraphy, making it a vital cultural heritage of China. Studies have been done on both the textual and formal content of Chinese calligraphy, which highlights its dual role in literature and art.

In the context of globalization, protecting and inheriting traditional Chinese calligraphy is conducive to maintaining cultural diversity. Every culture has its own unique value and charm. As one of the representatives of Chinese culture, calligraphy has enriched the diversity of world culture with its unique form and connotation and promoted the progress of human civilization.

In this article, the paradigm theory serves as the framework for the research topic, incorporating methods from formalist aesthetics analysis and iconology. After a detailed discussion of the three research objectives, the researcher believes that ancient and contemporary calligraphy are forms of calligraphy as aesthetics and art. So, what constitutes the content of calligraphy works? There is a widespread misunderstanding today, where people often consider the textual content of writing as the formal content of calligraphy works. It should be noted that the textual content pertains to literary works or articles created by the text author. In contrast, the formal content of calligraphy refers to the calligrapher's brushwork style, the configuration of blank spaces, and the relationships and contrasts between them.

Contemporary Chinese calligraphy faces enormous challenges and pressures, and how to protect and inherit Chinese calligraphy art is an essential issue in modern times. On the one hand, there are internal challenges within calligraphy art, such as the abolition of the imperial examination system, the advancement of contemporary aesthetics, the complexity of social relations, and the intersection of interdisciplinary research. The emergence of these problems will bring about a thorough baptism to the ancient calligraphy tradition. Chinese calligraphy also faces the issue of transition, and researchers need to reexamine, reinterpret, and redefine calligraphy. Exploring and resolving these issues can lead to new directions and opportunities for the development of Chinese calligraphy.

CONCLUSION

Chinese traditional calligraphy is an important cultural heritage of the Chinese nation, embodying thousands of years

of cultural accumulation, and is an important material for understanding and studying Chinese history, philosophy, literature and art. Calligraphy art carries the spirit and values of the Chinese nation, such as traditional virtues such as loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and righteousness. Through the inheritance of calligraphy, these spirits and values can be continued and carried forward, enhancing people's sense of identity with national culture and promoting social harmony and progress.

Our findings have significant implications for practice, research and pedagogy in this area. Artistic judgment can be highly individual and subjective; individuals' perceptions of beautiful calligraphy may vary. Therefore, rather than relying solely on public or individual opinions, experts should clearly define these judgments. They should develop criteria and standards for evaluating a work's content, form, and artistic value. Related to this concept, our results also showed a gap between ordinary people's aesthetic appreciation and professional calligraphers' artistic standards. Such gaps emphasize the need for educating people in order to preserve calligraphy art.

Currently, policies have been proposed for the promotion of calligraphy education in schools and universities; however, no specific exams or proficiency tests have been developed for calligraphy. Clear learning objectives need to be defined for understanding calligraphy art, cultivating cultural literacy, and improving students' skills. Teaching plans need to be carefully tailored to students' interests, levels, and ages to create favorable learning environments. Suitable learning-teaching materials need to be developed to cover basic skills, knowledge, and appreciation of calligraphy using engaging resources to address students' learning needs through diverse learning activities.

Effective educational transition necessitates changes in educational systems. Calligraphy literacy and education in China faces challenges. Calligraphy theory, history, and criticism need to be better established. Theoretical achievements from both Western and Eastern academics need to be integrated to meet modern art discipline requirements.

An area that can be recommended for further research is calligraphy criticism that remains an underdeveloped area. Traditional historiography must be balanced with new research methods related to calligraphy history and criticism. Solid and theory-based calligraphy criticism is essential for accurate interpretation of modern phenomena; such as 'popular calligraphy style', 'modern calligraphy', and 'ugly calligraphy'.

Calligraphy learning is not only the mastery of skills, but also the cultivation of mind and character. Concentration, patience and perseverance in the process of calligraphy learning can help cultivate personal will quality and aesthetic ability. Especially for young people, calligraphy education can help them improve their cultural literacy and comprehensive quality. Studying calligraphy art can provide theoretical guidance and practical experience for calligraphy education, promote the reform and innovation of calligraphy education, and cultivate more calligraphy art talents.

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