

The Meaning Composition of Chinese Calligraphy Sign^{*}

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This paper clarifies the composition of meaning in the art of Chinese calligraphy on the basis of American semiotician Charles Morris's three divisions of sign, namely, "Syntactics, Semantics, Pragmatics". The syntactical dimension of Chinese calligraphy sign is the artistic meaning of the form of Chinese character. "Semantical dimension" refers to semantic referents of linguistic signs and their literary significance, "pragmatical dimension" refers to the use and interpretation of calligraphy. The study of the three dimensions of meaning in Chinese calligraphy reveals a complex and unique composition of sign meaning. Chinese calligraphy deforms the structure and form of Chinese characters while retaining their semantic invariance. In this way, calligraphy acquires more practical semantic and symbolic meanings through the carrier of Chinese characters which are also linguistic symbols at the same time. Chinese calligraphy is dominated by the meaning of sign forms, taking into account the linguistic reference and the use of sign, and the three dimensions of meaning interact and promote each other, building a dynamic and multidimensional space of sign meaning.

Keywords: Chinese calligraphy, semiotics, syntactics, semantics, pragmatics

Introduction

The meaning of the Chinese calligraphy is quite complex. First of all, the formal aesthetic meaning of the calligraphy is abstract; in addition, Chinese calligraphy signs are at the same time linguistic signs, which still have the function of the linguistic meaning of the Chinese characters; and lastly, Chinese calligraphy is not purely "art of beauty" in the context of the traditional Chinese culture, but it always has many dimensions of practical meaning, such as social, cultural, historical, political, etc. This paper attempts to analyze the complex and unique composition of meaning in the art of Chinese calligraphy according to the three divisions of sign meaning: syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics, as defined by the American semiotician Charles William Morris.

"Meaning" is a rather difficult term to explain, but semiotics is the study of meaning, which tries to talk about this difficult problem. The American semiotician Charles William Morris, in his 1938 book *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, divided the process of the meaning of sign into three divisions: syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics, which provides us with an important theoretical approach to understanding the "generation of sign meaning". Morris (1938, p. 6) argues that all meaning activity involves three basic aspects: sign vehicle, designatum, and interpreter. Syntactics is the study of "the formal relation of signs to one another". Semantics is the study of "the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable". Pragmatics is the study of "the relation of signs to interpreters".

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From Morris's three divisions of sign, we will find that the syntactical dimension of calligraphy sign is the formal composition of calligraphy and the abstract beauty of the form of lines. The semantical dimension of calligraphy sign mainly refers to the linguistic meaning of Chinese characters. The pragmatism dimension of calligraphy sign refers to the relationship between the calligraphy sign and the users. In the following, we will analyze the dominant tendency of the meaning of Chinese calligraphy sign. The topological resemblance of calligraphy brings about a balance of the three dimensions of sign meaning, as well as the mutually reinforcing relationship between the three dimensions. Finally, we will elucidate the contemporary significance of the unique sign meaning construction of calligraphy.

The Meaning of Calligraphy Is Rooted in the Formal Dimension of Sign

Calligraphy is the art of writing Chinese characters, and in the process of writing them, the aesthetic meaning of the lines of Chinese characters gradually grows. Throughout the history of calligraphy, there is a tendency to move towards the beauty of the form of calligraphic lines. Syntactics is the study of the formal relation of signs to one another. Morris argues that "Syntactics is, then, the consideration of signs and sign combinations in so far as they are subject to syntactical rules" (1938, p. 14). Similarly, the form of calligraphy must be subject to historically established rules of writing.

Chinese Calligraphy Is a Combination and Recreation of Historical Stylistic Forms

For calligraphy, Chinese calligraphy is the art of form creation, which is the product of the combination and re-creation of historical style modules. Calligraphy is the "law of writing", and it pays great attention to the observance and inheritance of the historical law of writing. Calligraphy is the only artistic discipline in the world that elevates the writing of words to the level of art. Compared with other arts, the uniqueness of the meaning-generating mechanism of Chinese calligraphy is the "historicity" of calligraphic images, that is to say, there are traces of historical stylistic images behind any calligraphic image, and the artistic images and formal modelling of calligraphy cannot be separated from the "historicity" (Established Writing Standards and Calligraphy Models of Masters of Calligraphy). According to Zhu Yunming (1460-1526), Ming Dynasty calligrapher, "Su Shi (苏轼) learnt from Yan Zhenqing for the backbone of his calligraphy, from Li Yong for the upper arm, and from Wang Xianzhi for the outer arm, and finally achieved a revitalised, physical calligraphy" ("子瞻骨干平原, 股肱北海, 被服大令, 以成完躯。") (2012, p. 276). Even though Su Shi's "Shangyi" calligraphy is an expression of personal emotion, we can still get a glimpse of the historical cluster of calligraphy behind his works.

The "historicity" of calligraphy is not exactly the same as a kind of "historical resource" that can be chosen, referred to, and learnt from, but is deeply integrated into the base of the meaning generation mechanism of the art of calligraphy. Any writing work is an "intertext" of the classic calligraphic styles of history, and "historicity" is not an "optional" but a "mandatory" item in the art of calligraphy. The presence of "traces" of calligraphy classics' style has become a crucial criterion for evaluating whether a particular calligraphy work qualifies as calligraphy art. Chinese calligraphy is the product of the syntactic combination and recreation of historical forms. Chinese calligraphy must start from copying the works of ancient classical masters, and calligraphy is the reorganization and recreation of existing writing styles. The meaning of calligraphy centres on the "sign vehicle" of Chinese characters. The distinction between Chinese calligraphy, Western English calligraphy, and Arabic calligraphy lies in their different meaning-dominating tendencies.

The “Calligraphic Form” Can Independently Represent Meaning

The Irish Island Script, Spanish Visigothic Script, French Merovingian Script, Gothic Script, and other decorative fonts have developed many writing styles. However, these English calligraphies are still considered “Artistic Text”. The sign vehicle and the sign designata complement each other, and the focus of its meaning ultimately falls on the linguistic reference, and the form of the sign is only a decorative pattern. Arabic calligraphy originated from the handwritten copy of the Qur’an, mainly originated from the needs of religion, and the meaning of Arabic calligraphy sign is mainly focused on the content of the Qur’an. The most important thing is that Arabic calligraphy must not be wrong about the content of the Qur’anic verses, and the “form” of the artistic symbols of Arabic calligraphy is of secondary importance compared to the content of the written verses. Artistic characters such as English calligraphy and Arabic calligraphy, the formal meaning of their words is inextricably linked to the linguistic meaning of the words. The meaning of the form has not acquired an independent status and often serves the designata of lansign.

The syntactical (form) and the semantical dimension of the Chinese calligraphy are independent each other. Sometimes, the syntactical (form) dimension does not serve the meaning of linguistic reference and the use of signs.

The literacy of the characters in Chinese calligraphy is separate and independent from the meaning of calligraphic images. The difference between the two allows the writing trace (the calligraphic image) to represent itself independently. For this reason, writing as art is possible. (Zhao, 2021a)

The “Calligraphic Image” is a transcendence of the “characters image”, which can represent meaning independently, not being completely bound by the linguistic meaning of Chinese characters. Chinese calligraphy has developed an extremely complex and diverse artistic language over the past thousands of years, including formal factors such as of Brushwork Methods (笔法), Chinese Character Architecture Methods (字法), and Spatial Layout Methods (章法). The artistic language in Chinese calligraphy allows for free expression of meaning due to its well-developed double-layered independent structure of syntactical and semantical elements. This structure gives form (syntactical) dominance over meaning, distinguishing the sign meaning of Chinese calligraphy from that of Art Characters (美术字).

There has always been an inherent tendency within the art of calligraphy to towards “form itself”. Even the actual ideographic function of the Chinese character can be “weakened”, as evidenced by the large number of variant characters that appeared in the calligraphy of the late Ming Dynasty in China. The emergence of a large number of variant and archaic characters in the calligraphy of the late Ming period was not a case, but rather a fairly common phenomenon. “Late Ming calligraphy heavyweights, such as Wang Duo, Ni Yuanlu, Huang Daozhou, and Chen Hongshou, all favoured the use of variant characters in their works” (Bai, 2006, p. 71). Many famous calligraphers of the Late Ming era sought out cold variant characters from bell and tripod inscriptions of the pre-Qin period, heirloom ancient books, ancient seals, and ancient character dictionaries, and then distorted them. In Wang Duo’s calligraphy (Figure 1), variant characters are not only numerous, and it is difficult to trace their origins. They are written in a completely different way from the prevailing archaic characters.

Fu Shan’s *Selu’s Exquisite Calligraphy* (畵庐妙翰卷) (Figure 2) even exhibits the phenomenon of “intentionally write the wrong word”; the word “pin” (簪) in “Dong Shi Xiao Pin” (东施效颦) is deliberately misspelled. Fu Shan arbitrarily collaged the construction of Chinese characters according to his own ideas, or moved the radicals of Chinese characters, or changed the original left-right structure of the characters into an up-

down structure. From the point of view of semiotics, variant characters weaken the practical ideographic function of language, and thus reduce the meaning of the entire sign to an artistic meaning at the level of “the form of sign”. The emergence of variant character calligraphy partly stems from the internal driving force of “form-led” in the historical development of calligraphy.

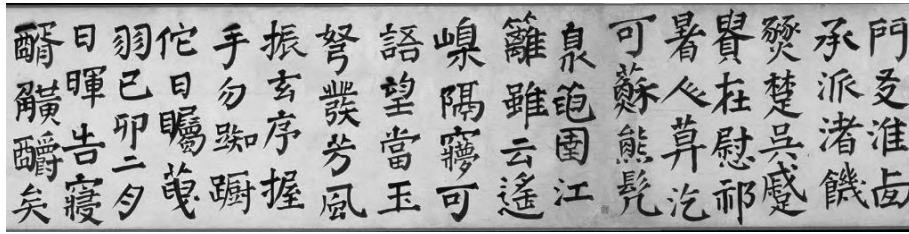


Figure 1. Wang Duo, *Large Regular Scroll Presented to Wang Siren* (贈王思任的大楷卷), 1650 CE.

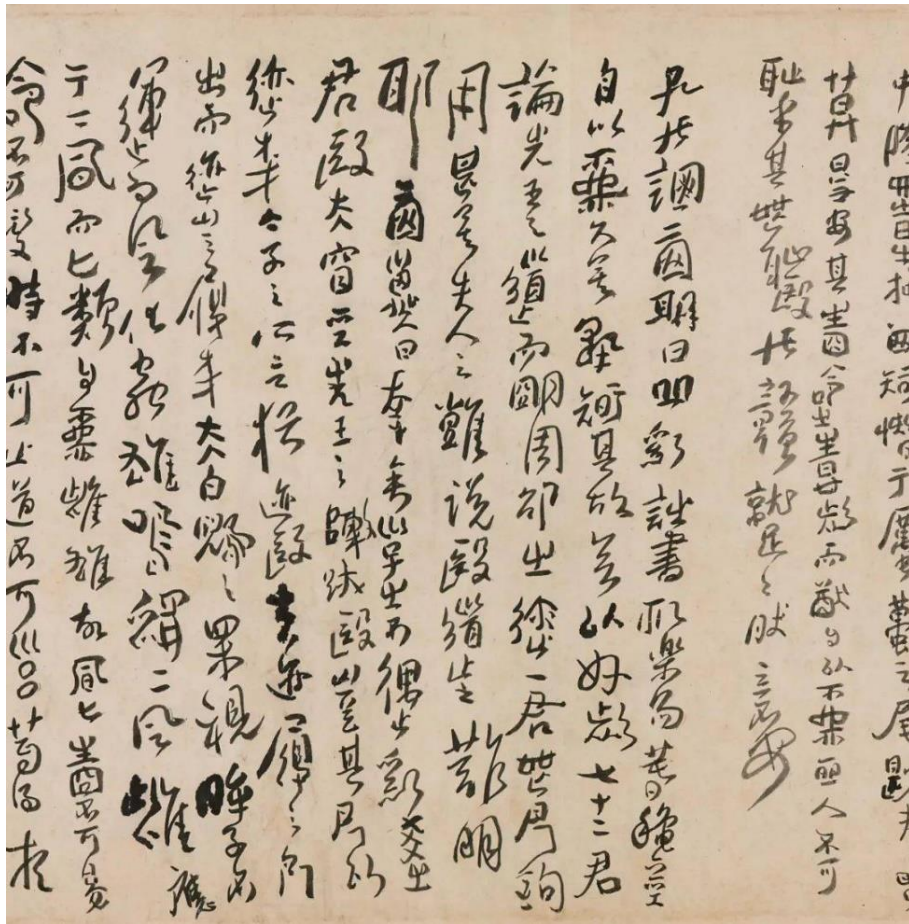


Figure 2. Fu Shan, *Selu's Exquisite Calligraphy* (嵩廬妙翰卷), around 1650 CE.

Topological Deformation of Chinese Character Structure

Chinese calligraphy is a unique art form of the Chinese people based on writing. Its significance lies in the visual and pictorial aspects of the forms of Chinese character. However, no matter how exaggerated and deformed the calligraphic lines are, the image of calligraphy is still a “word”. Compared with other graphic arts, Chinese calligraphy has a clear linguistic meaning. It originates from the writing of Chinese characters, and even in its

most mature stage of development, has not been separated from the symbolic semantic system of Chinese characters.

Chinese calligraphy is a unique art that explores the problem of “how to change the shape of Chinese characters”, while at the same time keeping the meaning of the linguistic references unchanged. Calligraphy, as a unique art, explores the artistic problem of “how to deform Chinese characters” (Figure 3). This experimentation with the “morphing of Chinese characters” reminds us of the mathematical concept of “topology”. Topology is the study of the properties of a geometric figure or space that remain unchanged after successive changes of shape. A topological property is one that remains unchanged during transformations that do not alter its topological nature. For example, a square piece of Play-Doh can be kneaded into a round piece of Play-Doh, but a sphere of Play-Doh cannot be continuously deformed into a teacup without a handle, because the topological process cannot open holes, tear, or merge. For topology, there is also a topological connection between cups and donuts, which seem to be extremely unrelated in our daily life. The central task of topology is to study the invariance in topological properties, which is very inspiring for exploring the mechanism of generating meanings in the art of Chinese calligraphy.



Figure 3. The standard way to write “飛” and various variations of “飛”.

Although calligraphy has evolved from being a mere “Chinese character sign” to an “art sign”, it still retains the linguistic attributes of the Chinese character. Chinese calligraphy is a topological deformation of the structure of the Chinese character, but it still preserves the linguistic meaning of the character as an “invariant”. The degree of variation allowed in a Chinese character is so great that various ways of writing the same character can be completely different. However, due to the character’s basic architecture being a “topological constant”, the viewer still perceives them as the same character. In Chinese calligraphy, the “topological deformation” of the character’s architecture is the central mechanism for creating artistic meaning.

Chinese Calligraphy Takes Into Account the Semantical and the Pragmatical Dimensions of Chinese Character Sign

The art of calligraphy emphasizes the formal meaning of the symbolic vehicle while also taking into account the linguistic referential meaning dimension of the runic meaning. “Unlike other arts, from the inception

of calligraphy to its high level of maturity, it has always been closely linked to practical writing” (Qiu, 2011, p. 268). “Topological invariants” of calligraphy are “linguistic referents”, yet language is the most fundamental and widely used symbol system of human beings. Calligraphy, through the use of “Chinese characters”, is linked to the wide field of meaning of the Chinese nation, permeating many of the meaningful activities of human beings, and acquiring many practical meanings. Chinese traditional art is “comprehensive” in terms of artistic aesthetics and daily practicality, which is different from Western concepts of art such as “art of beauty”, “artistic self-discipline”, and “aesthetic disinterestedness”. As Liu Yuedi notes: “The ‘quasi-art’ in classical oriental culture has a kind of ‘pan-autonomy’ and ‘comprehensiveness’, and it never became a European-style autonomous art before modernization. In other words, according to ancient Eastern experience, ‘quasi-art’ has not been purified into ‘beaux arts’”. “The art of calligraphy has always maintained a very close relationship with daily life, and has not evolved into a pure art that transcends life, as well as being outside of it” (Liu, 2010, p. 11). Chinese calligraphy is a concentrated manifestation of the “pan-aesthetic tradition” of Chinese aesthetics, and the artistic component of calligraphy is quite “impure”, always associated with linguistic meaning and practical use.

Through topological deformation, Chinese calligraphy transforms “character images” into “calligraphic images”, thus generating artistic creativity while still maintaining the “invariant” of symbolic references and considering the semantical dimension of Chinese character sign. As the art of writing Chinese characters, the ontological meaning of Chinese calligraphy is mainly directed towards the formal aesthetics of Chinese characters. The “calligraphic image” is also mainly rooted in the non-practical graphic meaning of lines beyond the practical ideographic function of language sign. Calligraphy should always go beyond the semantic meaning of Chinese characters.

However, it is worth noting that when we appreciate the lines of Chinese characters, we are also reading “words”. Calligraphy can never be separated from the symbolic and ideological system of Chinese characters, and the closest “domain” of “calligraphic images” is the semantic and literary meanings of the characters. There is no one-to-one correspondence between the meaning of calligraphic images and the meaning of language and literature, but we must not deny the potential correlation between the two, and the meaning of language and literature is also an important part of the construction of the meaning of calligraphic images. “In the process of writing, the meaning of the text never completely disappears from the calligrapher’s mind. The choice of text is therefore not unwarranted and inconsequential” (Cheng, 2006, p. 12). Calligraphic meaning is always intertwined with literary meaning.

The “Shangyi Calligraphy” (尚意书法) of Northern Song Dynasty¹, where the “yi” (meaning) of calligraphy does not only refer to the formal beauty of the calligraphic art, but is closely associated with literature, philosophy, and moral cultivation, and the style paradigm of the writer/literary creator. Chinese calligraphy attempts to unite the content of the text with the style of calligraphy, and together they construct “calligraphy as the expression of the heart” (书为心画). “Calligraphic image meaning and literary meaning are in a ‘shadow-following’ relationship, although this relationship may be quite subtle and complex” (Zhao, 2021b, p. 87). From a semiotic point of view, “calligraphic image” is the tension formed by the superimposition of meanings between syntactics

¹ During the Northern Song Dynasty in China, a unique style of calligraphy developed. Calligraphers (who were also literary figures) such as Su Shi (苏轼) and Huang Tingjian (黄庭坚) tended to break away from previous calligraphic norms and viewed the art of calligraphy as a way of expressing individual emotions. They tended to create calligraphy according to their own moods and their own understandings, honouring the spirit of originality.

(the beauty of calligraphic lines) and semantics (the literary connotations of words). The literary connotations are actively involved in the construction of the meanings of calligraphic images.

The “practical use” of calligraphy is primarily expressed through the semantic meaning of the Chinese characters. The semantical and the pragmatical dimensions of calligraphy sign are mostly associated with each other. The vast majority of the calligraphic classics handed down from Wang Xizhi (王羲之) and Wang Xianzhi (王献之) are letters they wrote to communicate with their friends and family. *Zhang Manglong Tombstone* (张猛龙碑) (Figure 4) from the Northern Wei Dynasty in China serves both documentary and folkloric purposes. It records the life of the deceased (semantics of sign) and is also used in funerals and burials (pragmatics of sign). Liu Gongquan’s (柳公权) *Stele of the Army of Shence* (神策军碑) (Figure 5) serves to record historical events of the fall of the Huihu (回鹘) khanate and its surrender to the Tang Dynasty (semantics of sign), as well as political functions such as glorifying the Emperor’s virtue (pragmatics of sign). The artistic meaning of calligraphy is not purely directed towards abstract formal beauty, but also takes into account the many “utilitarian” dimensions of practical meaning in the life world.

Language is the most basic and widely used sign system of human beings. The calligraphy art, through the “Chinese characters”, is related to the broad field of traditional Chinese society. The aesthetics of calligraphy permeates many meaningful activities in traditional Chinese society. Calligraphy’s artistic meaning is generated without erasing the practical meaning. For example, Mi Fu’s *Coral Letter* (珊瑚帖) (Figure 6) serves as an epistolary communication tool, while Dunhuang Scripture Calligraphy (敦煌写经体书法) (Figure 7) is used for religious missionary purposes, and so on.



Figure 4. Zhang Manglong Tombstone (张猛龙碑), 522 CE.



Figure 5. Liu Gongquan, Stele of the Army of Shence (神策軍碑), 843 CE.

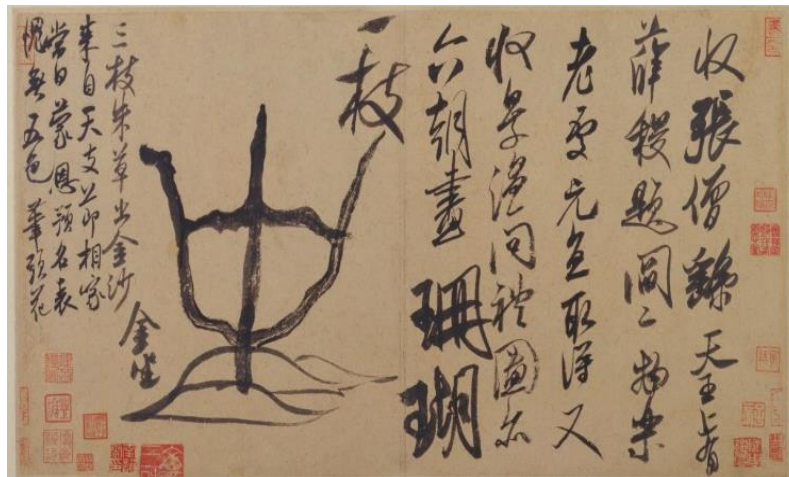


Figure 6. Mi Fu, Coral Letter (珊瑚帖), 1107 CE.



Figure 7. Amitabha Sutras (佛說阿彌陀佛經) (Dunhuang Scripture Calligraphy).

The Interaction of the Three Dimensions of Chinese Calligraphy Sign

Calligraphy's Semantical and Pragmatical Dimension Reversely Influence the Syntactical Dimension

The semantical and pragmatical dimensions of calligraphy signs also have a reverse effect on the syntactical dimension. Tombstones, inscriptions, tablets, official documents, etc., are created to record historical facts, songs of praise, religious rituals, political ethics, morality, or other practical functions; therefore, the font used should be mostly in Regular Script, with dignified and solemn styles. Most of the letters of Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi were written in Regular Script to avoid affecting semantic communication. If a writing work mainly aims at a “calligraphy art display”, “entertainment”, or “social engagement” function, then the content of the written text is often not important, and the calligrapher can write in cursive script, leaving more space for the creation of calligraphy art form.

During the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties in China, calligraphers such as Wang Duo and Fu Shan created a large number of “social engagement calligraphy”.

As we all know, Chinese culture is characterised by a strong emphasis on social engagement. With people frequently helping and visiting each other, courtesy demands reciprocity. In Chinese literati art, artworks used as gifts far outnumbered commodities. For example, Wei Yi'ao (魏一鳌) saved Fu Shan (傅山)'s life², and Fu Shan's letters to him were framed into hand-scrolled calligraphy works. Gift exchange is different from money transactions. In the Chinese cultural context, gift-giving is largely aimed at cultivating interpersonal relationships and fostering long-term interactions. When the social service industry is not very developed, favor investment is a way for ancient Chinese people to maintain their lives and also brings warmth to the world. It is for these reasons that China is often referred to as a society that values human relationships.

Xue Longchun's statistics show that 83% of Wang Duo's social engagement calligraphy works are in running script and cursive script fonts, while 52% are in vertical scroll fonts (Xue, 2008, p. 264). Under the creative purposes of “social engagement” and “art display”, Wang Duo adopted the “vertical scroll” form to facilitate the display of calligraphy works, and used the cursive writing method that has a more prominent visual effect. In terms of the writing textual content, Wang Duo imitated a large number of ancient classics and then gifted them to friends. His friends would typically hang Wang Duo's calligraphy works in the central room, and then appreciated the beauty of the formal lines of the works, with the written content often not important. Under the contextual pressure of social engagement and art exhibitions, the textual content of Wang Duo's Lin Tie (临帖) gradually became less important. For example, Wang Duo's *Copying the Calligraphy of the Er Wang* (临二王帖) used cursive script to copy Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi (Er Wang)'s calligraphy, and composed the three works of “Er Wang” into a coherent vertical cursive script work. There is no segmentation, and removes some of “Er Wang”'s characters; there are missing words and unclear sentences. In the context of calligraphy art display purposes, the text content is weakened, leaving ample room for innovation in calligraphy form.

Calligraphy Classics: A Perfect Mixture of the Three Dimensions of Sign

In the history of Chinese calligraphy, there have been some classic works in which the meaning of the calligraphy images and the meaning of the text sing in harmony with each other. Syntactics, semantics, pragmatics,

² Wei Yi-ao was a scholar (举人) at the end of the Ming Dynasty, after entering the Qing Dynasty, he was sent to Shanxi Province by the new government to be an official, and gave Fu Shan a lot of help during his term as an official, especially when Fu Shan was suspected of being involved in activities against the Qing Dynasty government and was arrested and sent to prison, and Wei Yi-ao risked his life to testify for Fu Shan, and enabled Fu Shan to get out of danger.

these three dimensions of the meanings of calligraphy sign are mutually reinforcing and complementary. For example, Wang Xizhi's *Preface to the Lanting Collection* (兰亭集序) (Figure 8) takes into account the beauty of the calligraphic form (syntactics), the literary meaning (semantics), and the preface function of the poetic collection (pragmatics). Wang Xizhi's calm and natural penmanship, euphemistic and implicit strokes, and fluent literary connotations, together, have constructed a model of "Wei-Jin Demeanor" (魏晋风度) that is straightforward, handsome, and uninhibited. In Yan Zhenqing's *Manuscript of a Tribute to My Nephew* (祭侄文稿) (Figure 9), the brushwork fluctuates with his inner emotions, the calligraphic style matches Yan Zhenqing's mournful emotions, and the process of language flow is highly consistent with the process of calligraphic writing. At the same time, this manuscript still serves the practical purpose of an offering as a funeral procession. These calligraphic classics are an even and perfect mixture of the three-dimensional meanings of calligraphic sign.

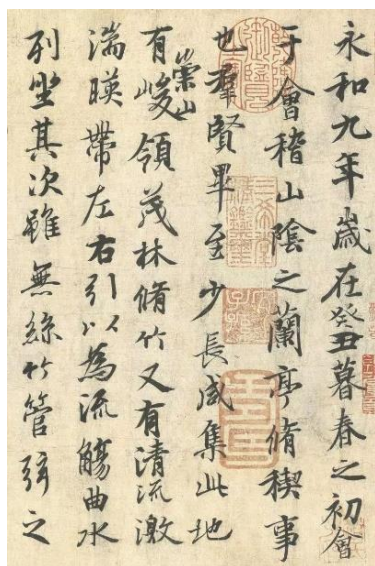


Figure 8. Wang Xizhi, *Preface to the Lanting Collection* (兰亭集序), 758 CE.



Figure 9. Yan Zhenqing, *Manuscript of a Tribute to My Nephew* (祭侄文稿), 758 CE.

Chinese Calligraphy: The Art With the Most Complex Relationship Between the Three-Dimensions of Art Sign

The topological deformity of the sign vehicle of calligraphy points to its artistic creativity, while still retaining the topological invariance of the “semantic” meaning of Chinese characters, so that calligraphy is able to take into account the three dimensions of meaning: the form of the sign (syntactics), the reference of the sign (semantics), the use of the sign (pragmatics). While the formal meaning of calligraphy sign is generated, the linguistic function of the Chinese characters, as well as other symbolic meanings of calligraphy, such as political, moral, historical, and social identities, still exists.

The plaque “Great Light” (正大光明) (Figure 10), inscribed by Emperor Shunzhi of the Qing Dynasty, which hangs above the main hall of the Qianqing Palace (乾清宫), has the political intention of imperial power also indicating the toponymic meaning of the language sign. “Wei Stele” (魏碑)³ (Figure 11) has three kinds of sign meanings: semantic dimension of sign: record the tomb owner’s life and related historical things; practical use dimension of sign: tombstone and epitaph as one of the funeral ritual system procedures. *Record Construction of Buddha Statues* (造像记) is used for wishing, praying, and blessing; formal and syntactic dimension of sign: aesthetic significance of calligraphy. “Wei Stele” is an important artistic genre of Chinese calligraphy. The linguistic meaning of Guo Moruo’s inscription “The Palace Museum” (故宫博物院) (Figure 12) can be appreciated alongside its calligraphic form. The artistry of calligraphy does not dissolve the semantic and other practical meanings of the Chinese characters; the artistic meaning of calligraphy has always interfered and intermingled with the meanings of language, literature, status symbol, and social etiquette system.

The artistic meaning of calligraphy is somewhat “unsaturated”. When a pragmatically orientated Chinese character text slides into an artistic text (calligraphy), it still carries a large number of non-linear formal elements, that are compatible with the semantic and literary meanings of the character, as well as the social identity, cultural, historical, political, and other dimensions of meaning. The result is that many qualities of meaning coexist in the same text; the calligraphic art sign is giving consideration to three dimensions: the combination and reinvention of calligraphy historical style modules (syntactics), the linguistic reference meaning (semantics), the use of calligraphy art sign (pragmatics).

Chinese calligraphy is the art of writing Chinese characters, and it is only the extra “flavour” of the process of expressing the semantic meaning of Chinese characters. Unlike other art disciplines, calligraphy does not unilaterally point to the beauty of the form of Chinese characters. Instead, it emphasises the dynamic mixture of the three dimensions of the sign meaning, condensing those different meanings into the simplest lines, as the saying goes, “The greatest truths are the simplest” (大道至简). This is the uniqueness of the art of Chinese calligraphy. Charles Sanders Peirce proposed that

Quality appears to me to be the total unanalyzable impression of reasonableness that has expressed itself in a creation.

It is a fine feeling, but a feeling that is image of a Reasonableness that creates. It is the Firstness that truly belongs to a Thirdness in its achievement of Secondness. (1933, p. 448)

³ “Wei Stele” refers to the calligraphic works of the Northern Wei Dynasty (368-534). These inscriptions are mainly in the form of “stone tablets”, “epitaphs”, “cliffs”, and “statues”. “Wei Stele” is a kind of Regular Script, which is one of the three major Regular Script fonts along with Jin Dynasty Regular Script and Tang Dynasty Regular Script. The “Wei Stele” shows some transitional factors in the development of the clerical script (隶书) to the typical Regular Script (楷书).

The passage by Peirce is a bit obscure, but it effectively outlines the characteristics of an artistic text and the art of calligraphy is the product of an even and perfect fusion of three-dimensional meaning of sign.



Figure 10. Shunzhi Emperor of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1662), "Great Light" (正大光明).

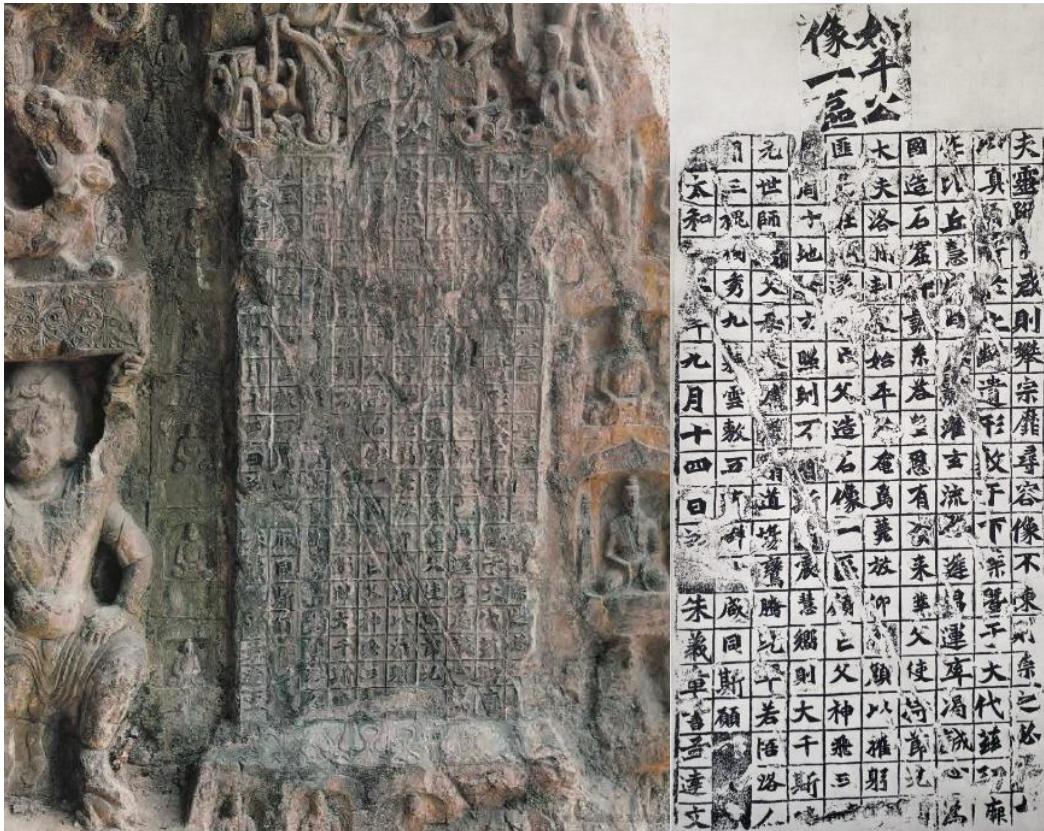


Figure 11. Inscription on a Statue of Buddha Made by Bhikkhu Hui-Cheng for His Late Father, Lord Shih-Ping, Governor of Luoyang City (比丘慧成为亡父洛州刺史始平公造像题记), 498 CE.



Figure 12. Guo Moruo, “The Palace Museum” (故宫博物院), 1971 CE.

Conclusion

Compared with other arts, the composition of meaning in calligraphy is not “pure”, and the meaning of calligraphy has always been interpenetrated with language, literature, history, social identity, and other dimensions. While achieving artistic significance, Calligraphy also has semantic and symbolic significance. In the dynamic flow and interpenetration of line form, semantics, literary meaning, and practical meaning, we finally gain a sense of transcendence from the commonplace through “art form”.

The semantic and other meanings of the art of calligraphy are ultimately “wrapped” by the “beauty of form”. By the form of calligraphy lines that permeated by the semantical dimension and the pragmatism dimension of Calligraphy sign, the receiver obtains an aesthetic feeling that is beyond the commonplace. The ontology of the meaning of calligraphy is the “deformation” of the daily writing norms, the “removal” and “clarification” of the “existence” that is obscured by the daily routine. Calligraphy takes into account the three-dimensional meaning of sign; it’s a meaning space where different elements of meaning are evenly mixed, waiting for and calling for the entry of the appreciator’s mind, providing an opportunity to enter the “realm” (境界).

In the process of daily use of Chinese characters, the Chinese give part of the artistic meaning to practical writing, and “partially slide” the practical Chinese character sign into artistic sign. The art of calligraphy originates from the process of the use of Chinese characters, and is naturally situated between art and everyday practicality. If necessary, the Chinese character can be partially slid into “works of art”, so that we can achieve artistic significance while still retaining their practical significance. The art of calligraphy establishes a triad of sliding channels between the meaning of the use of Chinese characters—the meaning of practical symbols—and the meaning of art, and this unique mechanism for generating artistic meaning is of great significance nowadays.

The phenomenon of the “aestheticization of everyday life” has emerged in our society, blurring the relationship between everyday objects and art. Current art theories have been decoupled from the theory of the commodity economy, and the relationship between artistry and practicality has been a challenge to current art theories. However, the art of calligraphy has long since provided an answer. The practice of calligraphy art elucidates that there is no clear-cut distinction between the daily use and the art, and that any practical writing has the potential to become a work of art. The Chinese people have given artistic beauty to the everyday use of Chinese characters, giving artistic care to the life-world; this suggests that behind the usability of Chinese

characters there is also the beauty of the formal lines and metaphysical philosophies such as “Tao”, “sublime”, “lively spirit and charm”, and so on. The viewer is given the opportunity to break away from the commonplace in the intervals of daily life. The three-dimensional meaning of calligraphic art sign may provide some enlightenment to our understanding of cultural issues such as the aestheticization of daily life in the present day.

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