

Chapter 3 Arts

Lesson 1 Chinese Calligraphy and Painting

Introduction

When thinking about China's influence around the world many people immediately think of different kinds of arts. As China's influence steadily expands around the globe, interest in the country's culture and art is growing in kind. The treasures of China's theatrical arts are being taken abroad more often than ever. For the artists, it may be a daunting task to step out of their comfort zones and try to connect with an international audience. But Chinese artists are stepping up their game, not only competing in the fierce global theatre market; they're also sharing their love of Chinese culture with the world's contemporary art scene.

Part 1 Chinese Calligraphy 中国书法



王羲之 《兰亭序》

Four Treasures of Study 文房四宝

In China calligraphy occupies a distinguished position in the field of traditional art. It is not only a means of communication, but also a means of expressing a person's inner world in an aesthetic sense.

Ancient people paid great attention to calligraphy. It was the essential whereby a candidate could manifest his literary talent in the Imperial Examination, for it gave a first impression to the examiners. Children of high officials had to learn and try to write a good hand; even emperors themselves were good at calligraphy, for example, the versatile Emperor Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911) has left us many examples of his handwriting on steles in temples and palaces.

Reading books requires studies and writing brushes, ink sticks, paper and ink stones are called the Four Treasures of Study because they are indispensable in the studies. Among the high-quality treasures, the writing brush produced in Huzhou, the *xuan* paper made in Xuancheng and the inkstone made in Duanxi are the most renowned.

Writing Brush 笔

The writing brushes were produced in the Neolithic Age and can be used to draw the pictures on painted potteries. They are mainly made of the hair of animals.

Those made of wool are called *yanghao* and those made of the hair with the tail of weasel are called *langhao*. Today's popular pencils, pens, ballpoint pens and even computers which are able to write and paint cannot replace writing brushes whose unique artistic effects in writing and painting cannot be imitated by any other pens.



Writing Brush 毛笔

Ink Stick 墨

The ink stick is the pigment used in writing and painting and it is produced in different places with various kinds. The ink stick produced in Huizhou is of high quality. A story goes like this, Xi Chao and his son Xi Tinggui, two craftsmen famous for making ink sticks in the Southern Tang Dynasty in the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period, were greatly appreciated by the Emperor Li Yu in the Southern Tang Dynasty who granted their whole family the surname “Li” because they produced a kind of high-quality ink stick. From then on, the fame of the Li Ink Stick was widespread. In the Song Dynasty, after the name of Shenxian, the

producing area of Li Ink Stick, was changed into Huizhou, and the Li Ink Stick was then referred to as the Hui Ink Stick(the ink stick produced in Huizhou).

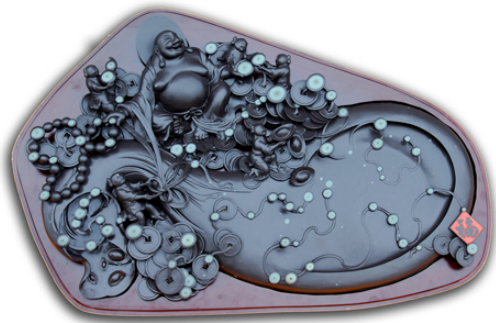
Paper 纸

Paper is among the four great inventions in ancient China. It was first made in the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) and then it was greatly refined by Cai Lun. The famous *xuan* paper came into existence in the Sui and Tang dynasties (581-907). In Xuanzhou, Anhui Province where the *xuan* paper is produced, it is said that Cai Lun's apprentice Kong Dan took the job of producing paper but failed in his attempts in making ideal white paper. Later he happened to see that the ebony falling on the mountain stream was soaked by the water and turned white. Then he used the bark to produce *xuan* paper which is reputed worldwide as "paper that can last for one thousand years" due to its flexible texture, white color, good water-absorbing quality and smoothness.

Ink Stone 砚

As the tool used for grinding the pigment in writing and painting, ink stone was already very popular in the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220). The Ming and Qing dynasties(1368-1911) witnessed the great variety of ink stones as well as the appearance of the Four Famous Ink Stones—Duan Ink Stone, She Ink Stone, Tao Ink Stone and Chengni Ink Stone. They can not only be used in writing and

painting but also for admiration due to their exquisite workmanship and attractive appearance.



Ink Stone 砚

The Four Treasures of Study are not only stationery with use value but also works of art combining painting, calligraphy and carving. The Palace Museum in Beijing has collected many precious and imperial Four treasures of Study made with selected materials and exquisite workmanship, representing the highest quality of stationery during the thousands of years in Chinese history.

Formation of Chinese Characters 字体

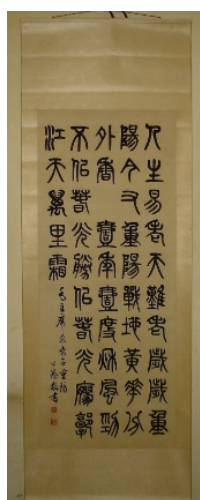
There are five general styles that are traditionally used in Chinese calligraphy, which are zhuan shu, kai shu, xing shu, li shu, and cao shu. Each of these have their own special characteristics, and are derived from different origins dating back to different dynasties.

Seal Characters (篆书 zhuan shu /jwann shoo/)

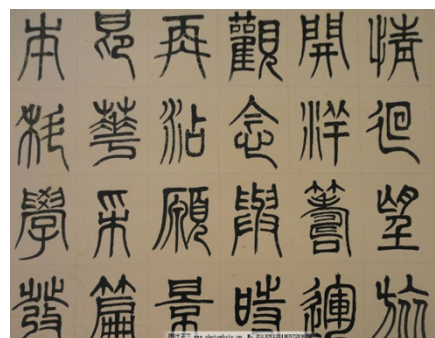
This style gets its name from the ancient form of characters used in official seals.

Seal characters are very popular with calligraphy artists for their elegant style and are divided into both small seal and big seal characters.

- Small seal characters are also known as Qin Seal, so named because they go back to the Qin Dynasty (221 - 206 BC). Small seal characters are more simple and standard than big seal.
- Big seal characters have their foundation in oracle bone inscriptions and date back to the Zhou Dynasty (1046 - 256 BC).



Big seal character 大篆



Small seal character 小篆

Formal Script (楷书 kai shu /keye shoo/)

Kai Shu, otherwise known as Zheng Shu script, evolved from seal characters. Kai Shu is known for its squareness, and horizontally and vertically standardized

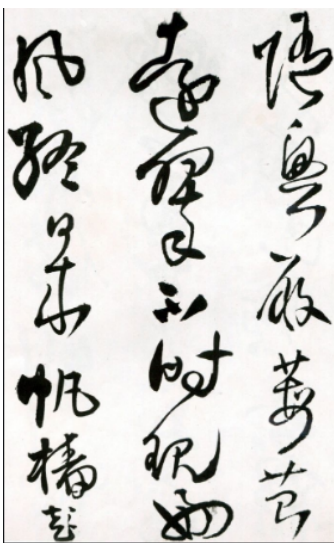
structure. Its simplicity makes it a neat and orderly way of writing, which is possibly why it is also very popular with calligraphers.

Running Script (行书 xing shu /sshing shoo/)

Xing shu is the cursive form of kai shu, thereby making it a very quick, convenient, and practical way of writing. However, if xing shu is written carefully and deliberately it looks very much like kai shu. Xing shu comes from the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD).

Cursive Hand (草书 cao shu/tsaoww shoo/)

Another cursive form of calligraphy, cao shu also goes back to the Han Dynasty. Although it had its origins with the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC - 8 AD), it did not become popular until the Eastern Han Dynasty, between 25 and 220 AD. Cursive hand is very simple, irregular and sketchy, yet highly artistic.



王铎《草书诗卷》

Official Script (隶书 li shu /lee shoo/)

The strongest characteristic of li shu is its diversity. Although it has a neat look, it is a more complex type of writing with its different variations. Li shu became the writing which eventually transitioned into formal script. Once again the Eastern Han Dynasty is credited with this style of writing.

An interesting story goes like this: Wang Xizhi stressed getting inspiration from nature and said that goose "is the hero of poultry because it is spotless, as white as snow and as clean as jade". Therefore, he loved to observe the movements of goose to think about how to wield his writing brush. One morning when Wang enjoyed the landscape scenery on a boat, he was unconsciously absorbed in watching the white geese on the opposite bank and wanted to buy these geese. The owner of the geese was a Taoist priest who said that "if you want to get the geese, please write for me The Yellow Court Classic as for Taoists to keep in good health!" Wang Xizhi was so desperate to get the geese that he agreed and exchanged his calligraphy for the white geese.

Even to this day, Chinese people still love and use calligraphy. The old calligraphy does not lose its charm but attracts many foreigners. Calligraphy display, explanation and practice are seen both in international education courses of

Chinese characters and in cultural events in Confucius Institutes overseas. Nowadays calligraphy has become an important medium of cultural communication between China and other countries.

Part 2 Traditional Chinese Painting 国画

Guohua (Traditional Chinese Painting) refers to paintings drawn on silk and paper by writing brush in water, ink or color. The subjects include human figures, landscapes and flowers and birds. In fact, they are categorized based on their artistic expression concepts and thoughts although they seem to be classified according to their subjects. Human Figure paintings reveal everything in the world as well as interpersonal relationships; landscape paintings combine humans and nature and reveal the harmony between them; flowers and birds paintings depict all creatures in nature and demonstrate the vigor and vitality of the universe. The techniques can be divided into fine brushwork, freehand brushwork and so on. The traditional Chinese paintings reflect Chinese people's understanding of nature and human society in a representational way.

The interesting thing is the symbolism used in the painting that often puzzles the westerners' eye. Mountains, rivers, plants, animals, birds, flowers, etc., can all be chosen for their traditional association as much as for their inherent beauty.

In Chinese people's minds, the plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum are known as four gentlemen in Chinese classic literature. They are not only four plants, but also present the four seasons and the personality and conduct Chinese people appreciate with. The plum blossom, stands for bravery and the messenger of spring, the symbol of grace and nobility in Chinese culture; orchid, a modest flower, stands as the symbol of secluded charm because it is often found in a deserted shady valley; bamboo symbolizes integrity and simplicity; chrysanthemum, for elegance, righteousness and longevity. Besides, there are another three kinds of plants are used as themes of Chinese painting, they are: pine tree, peony and lotus. The pine tree stands for the uprightness and immortality. The peony presents wealthy and honors. The lotus, coming out of the mire without being smeared, stands for kindness, harmony, purity and both the blooming lotus and the luxuriant lotus leaves symbolize prosperity and continuity.



写意山水画

Notable painters of traditional Chinese painting 知名画家

Gu Kaizhi (顾恺之) - An outstanding calligrapher and painter in East Jin

Dnasty, he was good at figure painting, animal painting and landscape painting, with representative works like Ode to the Goddess of the Luo River Painting (洛神赋图) and Admonitions Scroll (女史箴图).



顾恺之 《女史箴图》

Zhan Ziqian (展子虔) - Living through North Qi, North Zhou and Sui dynasties, Zhan Ziqian painted many murals in Luoyang, Chang'an (today's Xian) and Yangzhou. Among them, the murals of landscape painting take the highest achievement. MadamGou's Spring Outing (虢国夫人游春图) is a representative works of Zhan Ziqian, and the oldest existing scroll landscape painting of China.

Yan Liben (阎立本) - Another master of traditional Chinese painting, Yan Liben was born in a family of painters and roamed widely in painting and calligraphy. His representative works are Thirteen Portraits for Emperors (历代帝王图) and Bunian Tu (步辇图)

Wu Daozi (吴道子) - He is known as the Sage Wu in Chinese painting history, with representative works like Born of Gautama Buddha (天王送子图) and Portrait of Confucius When Teaching (孔子行教像).



吴道子 《天王送子图》

Zhang Zeduan (张择端) - Good at drawing architectures, woods and trees, and figures, Zhang Zeduan used to work at the Imperial Painting Academy, and created the famous Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival (清明上河图).

Li Gonglin (李公麟) - He was especially good at painting horses.

Shen Zhou (沈周) - One of the outstanding painters in Ming Dynasty, he was of

great learning in literature, poetry and painting.



沈周 《伧立远眺》

Zheng Banqiao (郑板桥) - A famous painter in Qing Dynasty, he was skilled in drawing plants like orchids, bamboo, chrysanthemum and pine.



郑板桥 《竹子》