

Some Problems about Calligraphy

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Abstract: A work of calligraphy is an objective presentation of the creator's mind and emotions. It reflects the calligrapher's cultivation and aspirations. Calligraphy serves an educational purpose and is linked to nature. Those who learn calligraphy should understand the methods and means of learning calligraphy, have a clear orientation of the style, and improve their aesthetic skills in calligraphy so that they can objectively appreciate and evaluate a work of calligraphy, and thus enhance the meaning and realm of the work in their creation.

Keywords: Calligraphy; Function; Approach; Style; Mood; Evaluation

In teaching, students frequently inquire about what calligraphy is, what the purpose of learning calligraphy is, how to appreciate and evaluate a work of calligraphy, what style it has, how to understand the artistic mood of the work, and how to learn calligraphy properly, and so on. These questions will be discussed in the following.

1. What is calligraphy?

Although Yang Xiong of the Han Dynasty said, "Language and words are pictures of the mind," this statement does not apply to calligraphy, but we can interpret calligraphy in this way, that is, calligraphy is an objective presentation of the calligrapher's mind's trajectory. "Calligraphy should be straightforward," Cai Yong of the Han Dynasty said. According to Qing Dynasty official Liu Xizai, a good piece of calligraphy expresses the calligrapher's scholarship, talent, and aspirations. "A work of calligraphy is like a man, which must have spirit, breath, bones, blood, and flesh, one of which is indispensable," Su Shi of the Song Dynasty said. The concept of calligraphy is explained in simple anthropomorphic terms, and it includes elements such as brush strokes, the structure of Chinese characters, the method of inking, and the layout of the work. Its language is not only concise, but its meaning is infinite, "forming a very hierarchical system, one that suggests that the beauty of calligraphy is also the objectification of the beauty of the human form and the beauty of the spirit."

1.1 What is the purpose of learning calligraphy?

First, calligraphy has an educational function. According to Sun Guoting of the Tang Dynasty, the educational function of calligraphy is similar to those of music in which the state focuses on rites and rituals. The creator's morality and cultivation, on the other hand, are reflected in the calligraphic work. Calligraphy inspires people to strive for truth, goodness, and beauty. Second, there are parallels between calligraphy and nature. The Tang Dynasty's Zhang Huaiguan argued for the artistic attribute that calligraphy and nature are similar. Calligraphy is carried by Chinese characters, and Chinese characters are "abstracted, symbolic nature"; thus, calligraphy and Chinese characters are both abstracted, symbolic nature. Third, calligraphic works can convey the temperament of the calligrapher. In the Tang Dynasty, Han Yu praised Zhang Xu's calligraphy is meant to illustrate. Calligraphy has the ability to "express the creator's character, sentiments, sadness, and happiness." Fourth, calligraphy allows for experiencing the laws of the universe. Calligraphy, according to modern aesthete Xiong Bingming, is at the heart of Chinese culture. Anyone who studies calligraphy will encounter contradictory relationships between large and small, coarse and fine, sparse and dense, thick and light, fast and slow, and so on. I believe that good calligraphers must be masters at dealing with calligraphic contradictions. One can reflect the laws of the universe in one's calligraphic works by being able to harmonize yin and yang and thus achieve harmony.

1.2 What are the methods and means to learn calligraphy?

"The first step is to achieve smoothness and neatness by studying the layout of calligraphic works as well as the structure of Chinese characters; the second is to pursue rich variations; and the third is to return to smoothness and neatness", Sun Guoting of the Tang Dynasty summarized. It is critical to follow the steps. The third step is not a repetition of the first, but rather a sublimation and improvement of the first. When the calligrapher reaches the third step, the work becomes even more beautiful. The Book of Changes states that "if you choose the highest level of model to imitate and learn, you can only reach the middle level; if you choose the middle level of model to learn, you can only reach the lower level." There have been many discussions on the method of writing throughout the ages, especially by Tang Dynasty calligraphy critics, so I will not dwell on them here, but in any case, we should focus on the variation of techniques. It is also important to pay attention to the proper use of calligraphy fonts. According to Zhao Mengfu, "To learn calligraphy, two things must be considered: first, the method of brush strokes, and second, the structural shape of the Chinese

characters. “ Even if the structure of the Chinese character is good, if the brush stroke technique is not fine enough, the character cannot be called good; if the structure and shape of the character are not good, even with skillful brush strokes, it looks as clumsy as a beginner. To learn calligraphy, first master the rich technique of brush strokes, and then diligently practice the structure and shape of Chinese characters. These are the two most crucial aspects of learning calligraphy.

2. What is the style of calligraphy?

Calligraphers of the Jin Dynasty were said to value the rhythm of their works, calligraphers of the Tang Dynasty were said to value the skill of their works, and calligraphers of the Song Dynasty were said to value the interest of their works. To begin discussing a work’s style, one must first situate it within the context of its time. Second, one first looks at the creator’s teacher and succession, and then, one considers the creator’s personal style. As a result, no work can be divorced from its era’s fashion. When it comes to calligraphic style in general, it all comes down to rusticity and beauty. Third, the stele and post style, or the distinction between the flavor of carving and writing in the work. Furthermore, the works of lesser-known calligraphers in ancient times displayed a variety of styles such as antiquity, frankness, and childishness. The distinctive calligraphic language is used to present calligraphic styles, and there are good and bad distinctions. To avoid becoming disoriented while learning calligraphy, it is critical to be clear about the orientation of one’s style from the start.

3. How to taste and evaluate a work of calligraphy?

Evaluating (Ping) is a discussion of the calligrapher’s or work’s strengths and weaknesses, whereas tasting (Pin) is a judgment of the calligrapher’s or work’s highs and lows.” In general, outstanding calligraphic works can be divided into four categories. Exceptional Art (Yi Pin) is the highest category. Exceptional Art is a work of art that is in harmony with the heart and the hand, achieving a rare state of unity between heaven and human since ancient times. The second is Superb Art (Shen Pin). Being a Superb Art is inextricably linked to the calligrapher’s superhuman talent. Exquisite Art (Miao Pin) is the third. Exquisite Art refers to the use of a technique that is well suited to the calligrapher and is associated with an unexpected technique. The fourth category is Fine Art (Neng Pin), which can be called Fine Art if the artist is skilled and follows the rules. Of course, other works do not fall into these four categories.

4. What is the artistic mood (Yi and Jing)?

“If I create with a playful mind, not only will there be a lot of interest in my work, but I will also feel satisfied,” Mi Fu explained. “Yi” is interest and charm. “Jing” is the realm. The transformation from the real to the imaginary state is represented by “drawing on the sand with an awl and printing on the clay with a seal.” It feels like a seal on clay at first, then a seal in water, and finally a seal in air. Calligraphy, which is influenced by the Confucian tradition, is concerned with the method of neutralization. This means that the relationship between masculinity and femininity, the aura of metal and stone and the aura of calligraphy, individuality and the ancient method must be handled carefully. Not only should each stroke be based on the works of the ancients, and each character have its own origin, but there should also be variations, i.e., “there is no calligrapher who learns from his forefathers but does not change and innovate.” Of course, the highest state is “the unity of heaven and man,” which includes not only Tao practice through literature and art, but also a connection with the laws of nature.

5. Conclusion

In summary, a work of calligraphy is an objective presentation of the creator’s mind and emotions. It reflects the calligrapher’s cultivation and aspirations. To learn calligraphy, first master the rich technique of brush strokes, and then diligently practice the structure and shape of Chinese characters. To avoid becoming disoriented while learning calligraphy, it is critical to be clear about the orientation of one’s style from the start. Furthermore, it is critical to focus on accumulation outside of calligraphy. The first is cultivation. The second factor is scholarship. Why are Su Shi’s calligraphy works so awe-inspiring, according to Huang Tingjian? It’s because he had a solid academic foundation and “the grace of learning and writing flowed under the tip of the brush.”

References

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