
The International Dissemination of Chinese Cursive Script Art

Zhu Lei Gang, Loy Chee Luen, Lee Keok Cheong

*City University Malaysia, Sultan Idris Education University & City University Malaysia
City University Malaysia*

Abstract:

This article aims to introduce the development of cursive script and its dissemination and influence overseas. It clarifies that cursive script is a unique style of Chinese calligraphy, initially serving as a tool for conveying information and rapid writing. Over time, it has evolved into a visually expressive art form. In China, the influence of cursive script has been relatively limited, primarily appealing to literati and scholars. Traditional and conservative literati often criticize the "eccentric" aspects of cursive script. However, this has not hindered the development of cursive script. In fact, cursive script has been internationally influential and widely disseminated throughout history.

As one of the traditional visual arts in China, cursive script holds a wealth of information and the potential to collide with the world. As a young generation with innovative consciousness, we have a wide range of materials to confidently utilize. However, we often lack inspiration due to insufficient depth of understanding regarding these materials. Therefore, we should enhance our learning and understanding of cursive script, its history, and cultural background to better explore its potential and integrate it with innovation in global artistic exchanges. In doing so, we will be able to express our creativity in a more enriching way and contribute to the development and international dissemination of cursive script.

Keywords: *Cursive script, Development of cursive script, Spread of cursive script, Abstract art, Shared emotions.*

The Development of Cursive Calligraphy Art in China

During the Western Han period in China, pure cursive calligraphy began to emerge. By the end of the Eastern Han period, cursive calligraphy became extremely popular, and the number of cursive calligraphy masters and admirers reached an unprecedented level. Several emperors of the Eastern Han period had a particular fondness for cursive calligraphy and frequently commissioned renowned cursive calligraphy artists to create works for both official documents and appreciation. At that time, there were also specialized articles dedicated to cursive calligraphy. For example, Cui Yuan's "The Momentum of Cursive Calligraphy" compared cursive calligraphy to a string of pearls, stating that even if the string is broken, the pearls remain connected. The charm of cursive calligraphy is self-evident.

Regarding people's love for cursive calligraphy, Zhao Yi described in "Non-Cursive Calligraphy" that although cursive calligraphy is not commonly used in recruitment and examinations, many people devote themselves wholeheartedly to cursive calligraphy creation. They even continue their work after nightfall, seemingly forgetting about eating and fatigue. They consume a large amount of ink every month, and their clothes, mouths, and teeth are stained black, yet they are unconcerned. Although Zhang Zhi was merely a hermit in the mountains, he became an object of admiration for countless cursive calligraphy enthusiasts, marking the first wave of cursive calligraphy craze in the history of Chinese calligraphy. (East China Normal University Ancient Texts Research and Compilation Office, 2019)

The period of the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties was a crucial period for the self-improvement and development of cursive calligraphy art, with Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi being the main representatives. In the Tang Dynasty, wild cursive calligraphy became a magnificent scenery. Emperor Tang Wenzong even issued an edict to acclaim Zhang Xu's cursive calligraphy, Li Bai's poetry, and Pei Min's sword dance as the "Three Unsurpassables," highlighting their exceptional qualities. During the Tang Dynasty, regular script reached its peak, and numerous masters emerged, including Ouyang Xun, Yu Shinan, Chu Suiliang, Yan Zhenqing, and Liu Gongquan, among others. However, Tang Wenzong uniquely elevated Zhang Xu's cursive calligraphy to the highest level of art, listing it as one of the Three Unsurpassables, showcasing the openness, self-confidence, and tolerance of the era. Zhang Xu's cursive calligraphy broke the tradition of the Tang Dynasty's exclusive reverence for regular script, and his artistic achievements were so remarkable that Yan Zhenqing even resigned from office twice to seek his guidance in brushwork.

Furthermore, there are countless poems in the "Complete Tang Poems" that praise wild cursive calligraphy, including outstanding works by renowned poets such as Du Fu, Wang Wei, Han Yu, Dou Ji, Li Linfu, and Ren Hua. These poems fully demonstrate the poets' love for wild cursive calligraphy and reveal the charm and aesthetic value of wild cursive. Wild cursive calligraphy can express emotions and possesses a rich Chinese-style romanticism, which has also garnered international influence.

The International Dissemination of Cursive Script Art

Chinese calligraphy first had international influence among East Asian countries in history. In Japan, the calligraphic style of Wang Xizhi prevailed during the Nara period. In modern times, Yang Shoujing is revered as the "father of modern Japanese calligraphy." According to a survey by the Japanese Ministry of Education in the 1980s, there were thousands of calligraphy groups in Japan with a membership of 15.6 million, accounting for 13.3% of the total population. In ancient Japan, due to the absence of a writing system, scholars believe that kana, the Japanese syllabary, may have originated from Chinese cursive script and Tang dynasty musical notation symbols. Hiragana, derived from regular script (kaishu) Chinese characters, and katakana, simplified from cursive script (caoshu), were developed.

The powerful and magnificent Tang dynasty demonstrated a high level of confidence and

openness in its external exchanges. With the frequent visits of the envoy to Tang China, the finest works of Chinese calligraphy were intentionally selected and introduced to Japanese nobility for study and appreciation. Similarly, Korean calligraphy was deeply influenced by China. Ancient Korean calligraphy was widespread, and the royal court often sent people to China to purchase valuable ink treasures. During the Baekje period, Koreans spared no expense in obtaining the works of Xiao Ziyun, spending large sums of money and goods.

During the Tang dynasty, the Chinese people were open-minded, tolerant, and constantly seeking progress (Herbert , 2007). They played a crucial role in the development of overseas cursive script. Especially in Japan, the cursive scripts of influential calligraphers such as Daigo Emperor, Ono no Michikaze, Fujiwara no Sukemasa, and Ryōkan were all influenced by the calligraphic styles of Zhang Xu and Huaisu. Even today, Japan still preserves ink rubbings and fragments of Huaisu's cursive script work, "Self-Introduction Scroll." It is evident that the most representative cursive script works in the history of Japanese calligraphy have largely developed through the study of traditional Chinese cursive script. Among them, the most famous are the "Three Brushes and Three Traces," known as the "saints of calligraphy" in Japan. The "Three Brushes" refer to Kūkai, Kibi no Makibi, and Emperor Saga of the early Heian period, while the "Three Traces" are represented by Ono no Michikaze, Fujiwara no Sukemasa, and Fujiwara no Yukinari of the mid-Heian period. Kūkai came to Chang'an, China, in the 20th year of the Zhenyuan era to study Buddhism, calligraphy, and other arts. He was not only a high-ranking monk but also a prominent figure in Japanese cultural history, making outstanding contributions in various fields. Kūkai's representative cursive script work, "Introduction to the Diamond Sutra," was written when he was about forty years old, clearly showing his study of Huaisu's "Thousand-Character Cursive" (Wang , 2010). Afterwards, his cursive script directly influenced the later "Three Traces." Ono no Michikaze's "Yūsen Scroll" intertwined regular script and cursive script, with varying sizes, forming a unified whole and bringing new changes based on the influence of Huaisu's "Self-Introduction Scroll." Fujiwara no Sukemasa's cursive script built upon the predecessors and created a new style, with "Grace and Command Scroll" being particularly outstanding. Its smooth and elastic lines evoke Wang Xianzhi's "One-Stroke Script" and the later "Wandering Silk Script," displaying a refined and versatile charm.

The influence of Chinese cursive script on modern Japanese calligraphy is more pronounced (Chen, 2018). In the 1950s and 1960s, modern Japanese calligraphy prospered and had a significant impact on the Chinese calligraphy community, especially during the early stages of China's reform and opening-up. In modern Japanese calligraphy, the minimalist approach formed a unique style. They used very few elements, sometimes even just a single Chinese character as the content, while preserving traditional brushwork and ink techniques. They also drew inspiration from the stylistic approach of Western modern art, pursuing the aesthetic beauty and abstract meaning of the character forms. One of the most famous masters of the minimalist approach is Handa Yūkyō, renowned for his cursive script work "Collapse." According to Handa Yūkyō himself, some Western observers felt as if they saw a scene of objects collapsing when viewing this artwork. The piece incorporates the rich artistic language of Chinese cursive script and is full of charm. Furthermore, his cursive script work "Swallow" is also a typical piece that fully showcases the allure of Chinese cursive script.

Cursive script is not only popular in East Asia but also greatly admired by many Westerners. The lines of cursive script possess inherent abstraction, making its abstract characteristics undoubtedly prominent. Abstraction is the sole form we collectively share, and thus, it resonates with Western abstract art (Antonio, 2016). Here's an interesting example: a staff member at a foreign embassy befriended a Chinese calligrapher. Out of friendship, the calligrapher gifted them a vertical scroll of cursive script, which the staff member enthusiastically mounted and hung in their office. Several days later, the Chinese friend visited again and burst into laughter upon seeing the cursive script hung horizontally on the wall. It turned out that they had hung the artwork upside down; it should have been displayed vertically, but they hung it horizontally instead. Faced with the calligrapher's awkward smile, they replied, "Even though it's hung upside down, I still find it beautiful. The lines and rhythm are beautiful." This story reveals a truth: the aesthetic value and significance of cursive script extend beyond the mere understanding of the cursive characters themselves. In many Confucius Institutes around the world, calligraphy is an indispensable part of teaching Chinese traditional culture. There are often examples that prompt deeper contemplation of cursive script. Interestingly, a peculiar phenomenon has emerged among students abroad who study seal script, clerical script, cursive script, regular script, and running script: they exhibit remarkable sensitivity towards both seal script and cursive script, particularly in cursive script. Their achievements in copying classic cursive script are no less impressive than undergraduate Chinese calligraphy students; they can adeptly express the natural and flowing lines, sometimes even surpassing their Chinese counterparts. The reason for this phenomenon may lie in foreign students breaking free from the constraints of understanding cursive characters, focusing on the movement of lines and the relationships between dots, lines, and surfaces.

The French sculptor Rodin once said to the German female painter Rostitz: "A prescribed line (text) runs through the entire universe and endows all created things. As long as they move freely in this line, there will be no ugly things." The Greeks studied nature deeply, and their perfection came from here, not abstract 'ideas'. The human body is a temple, with a sacred form." He also said: "In shaping statues, the key is to find that unique Lines. Few mediocre artists have the courage to emphasize that important line alone, which requires decisiveness, which only a few people can have." The important difference between cursive script and other calligraphy styles is that cursive script has unpredictable line changes. Even if the lines are random or a little weird, they will not produce ugly things, and they will change in one stroke. As Mr. Zong Baihua said: "Rodin saw the 'line' that runs through everything in many sculpture images, Chinese painters saw this stroke in many painting images, and the great calligrapher used this stroke to construct the ever-changing Artistic images, this is the rich calligraphy of the past dynasties in China." When Zhang Yanyuan talked about the use of brushes, he particularly emphasized the characteristics of "one stroke, and the spirit runs through", which is consistent with the lines that run through the universe that Rodin said. Over the past millennium, Eastern and Western artists have reflected each other and complemented each other. It can be seen that Chinese calligraphers and painters use this "one-stroke" stippling to create unique and rich artistic images, which is based on their artistic principles.

As long as it is active, it is always simultaneous with each present moment. (Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1999) In the mid-1950s, when Picasso saw a Chinese friend writing Chinese characters on the beach at the beach, he was attracted by the abstract lines that were wonderfully

combined into Chinese characters. Said: "If I was born in China, I think I would be a calligrapher instead of a painter. I hope to use words to draw my pictures." He also said: "Art is universal, if you use words to draw a picture A picture, you can also draw a poem with a paintbrush." After that, he hung

Calligraphic work was hung to show his admiration for oriental abstract line art. "Man and Woman on the Beach" shows the essence of cursive lines. When drawing lines, the painter is not only free and easy like a calligrapher, but also full of emotion. The painter's complex and changeable emotions are fully expressed through these smooth lines. In addition, Kandinsky, Klee, Miró, Ma Song, Hartung, Mathieu, de Gautay, Michaux and many other modern Western artists were influenced by Chinese cursive art to varying degrees. Writings to pursue the spirit and form of Chinese cursive art. (Chen , 2021)

The Shared Emotions of Cursive Script Art

Life is the most abundant existence in the world, containing infinite possibilities. The "vitality" conveyed by cursive script is not limited to a certain concept of right or wrong or the confines of dogma. The essence of life lies in its being a natural "holistic system," following specific principles and laws regardless of its diversity and constant change. Once these natural laws are lost or violated, it becomes a deviation from and harm to life. From this perspective, the "vitality" of cursive script also receives certain support and basis.

Zhuangzi's description of "short feathers, long wings" and "four legs for oxen and horses" showcases the various adaptive ways of specific life forms, without any concept of superiority or inferiority. However, if the inherent principles of life are violated, such as "cutting the long and extending the short" or "beheading the horse and piercing the cow's nose," it is a departure from the essence of life. The ancient scholars often mentioned "no fixed rules" when discussing the path of art, emphasizing this viewpoint. Art has no fixed standards and rules; it can express the diversity and richness of life through free creation.

Cursive script is considered one of the most challenging calligraphic styles to master and manipulate, which indicates that art provides creators with greater creative space and power, but also demands a higher level of immersion and self-organization. If calligraphy aims to express a sense of vitality, only objects that possess vitality can move those appreciators who also possess a sense of vitality. The "freedom" and "deviation" of cursive script pose the most daunting challenge to the creator's consciousness of life and their ability to organize life, perhaps explaining why cursive script is considered so "difficult." The difficulties of cursive script lie in the need for creators to overcome various challenges brought about by free creation in order to showcase the power and rhythm of life.

Cursive script is not only a means of emotional expression, immersing in solemn and dignified emotions, (Wassily, 2019) but it also displays various images of natural changes. It is abstract, unpredictable, and elusive, providing contemporary art with more space for re-creation and further enhancement. The elements of cursive script can be applied to music, dance, sculpture, painting, integrated into the international environment, incorporated into domestic public facilities, and even become part of popular culture or personal design sketches and logos. However, if we truly apply the elements of cursive script to the modern era, we should also return to the essence of cursive script.

"Attaining the true nature, shaping sorrow and joy." By enhancing aesthetic experiences and seeking inspiration, perhaps we can create works that resonate with the international community and the era. Mr. Zong Baihua expressed this point in relation to cursive script: "When people are joyful, their faces show a smile; when they are sad, they emit a mournful sound. These inner emotions can also be expressed in Chinese calligraphy, just like in poetry and music. No other ethnic group's writing has reached this level." Why does Chinese calligraphy possess this characteristic? Zhang Xu's calligraphy not only expresses his own emotions but also reflects or metaphorically expresses various images of the natural world through his emotional experiences. In his calligraphy, (chen, 2021) these images are not just depictions of objects but also the fusion of emotional scenes and the embodiment of beautiful structures.

Through the density of structure, the weight of strokes, the speed of brushwork, and the variations in rhythm, cursive script expresses the author's emotions towards the images and conveys their thoughts, just like the elements of pitch, length, weight, fusion, and emotion in music. Without these factors, it is impossible to create harmonious and moving melodies.

Cursive script and music have similarities in resonance and rhythm, with elements such as speed, continuity, strength, looseness, contraction, and expansion complementing each other, akin to symphonies or concertos. (zong, 2020) Each reading brings new discoveries. The calligraphy master Zhang Xu gained insight into the connection between music, dance, and cursive script through watching Lady Gongsun's sword dance. Similarly, in the 1980s, the combination of cursive script and dance received great acclaim in performances of "Ink Dance" in the United States and China. These creative ideas originated from cursive script, and we believe that more inspiration will be derived from it.

Summarize

Cursive script, as one of the traditional Chinese visual arts, has vast potential for development in international dissemination. It not only carries rich cultural connotations but also has the potential to intersect and blend with other art forms. However, to achieve the international dissemination and collision of cursive script, the younger generation needs to have a deep understanding of its essence and the cultural values behind it. (zhu, 2016)

Firstly, the younger generation should explore the rich information contained in cursive script. As a form of calligraphy, cursive script is not merely a writing style but also an expression of art and emotion. Through in-depth research and understanding of the history, techniques, philosophical ideas, and other aspects of cursive script, we can better explore the cultural connotations and humanistic spirit embodied in it, providing a solid foundation for its international dissemination.

Secondly, the younger generation should seek points of collision between cursive script and other art forms. Cursive script possesses characteristics such as abstraction, freedom, and dynamism, which have similarities with music, dance, painting, and other art forms. By incorporating cursive script elements into other artistic expressions, unique art forms can be created to attract the attention and interest of international audiences. This interdisciplinary fusion not only expands the creative scope of cursive script but also provides more opportunities and possibilities for its international dissemination.

However, to achieve such international dissemination, the younger generation needs to strengthen their deep understanding of cursive script. Merely staying at surface-level imitation and performance cannot truly showcase the essence and uniqueness of cursive script. Through in-depth study and practice, the younger generation can gain a profound understanding of cursive script, thereby demonstrating more innovation and individuality in their creations, allowing cursive script to receive broader recognition and appreciation on the international stage.

In conclusion, as one of the traditional Chinese visual arts, cursive script has tremendous potential in international dissemination. The younger generation should have a deep understanding of the cultural connotations of cursive script, seek points of collision with other art forms, and contribute their efforts to the international dissemination of cursive script through deep understanding and innovative practice, making cursive script a cultural gem that collides with the world.

References:

- Antonio Negri.(2016). Art and the Many: Nine Letters on Art, translated by Wei Guangji, Chongqing University Press, 29.
- Chen Zhenlian.(2018). History of Japanese Calligraphy [M]. Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Publishing House, 435-437
- Chen Bohai.(2021) . Towards Experiential Aesthetics[J]. Jianghai Academic Journal, (1)
- East China Normal University Ancient Books Compilation and Research Office. (2019) Selected Papers on Calligraphy of Past Dynasties, Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Publishing House, 111.
- Herbert George Wells.(2007). The Rise of the Great Power, Shaanxi Normal University Press, ,118-119.
- Hans-Georg Gadamer, Gesammelte Werke, Bd.(1999). 1, Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,165
- Kandinsky.(2019). On the Spirit of Art, translated by Zha Li, proofread by Teng Shouyao, China Social Science Press, 48-49
- Wang Yong.(2010). A Brief History of Chinese Calligraphy [M] Higher Education Press. 89
- Zhu Leigang. (2016). New Theory of Cursive Script, Chinese Calligraphy, 286 (07), 33-35
- Zong Baihua.(2020). Art Realm [M]. Peking University Press, 185