



ART FRONTIER

An International Art Journal / Vol.1, No.3 & No.4 Jul.-Sep., Oct.-Dec., 2023

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Yu Jianshi

To cite this article: Yu Jianshi, "To Go Beyond Imagery is to Attain Truth: A Brief Discussion of the Meaning of Calligraphy," *Art Frontier* 1, no.1 (January 2023): 27-35, <https://doi.org/10.64212/DEUP6950>.

DOI: 10.64212/DEUP6950

ISSN: 2835-5490

EISSN: 2836-841X

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This article has undergone double-blind peer review.

Website: www.artfrontier.org

Email: artfrontier2023@outlook.com

Publishing Frequency: Quarterly (March, June, September, December)



To Go Beyond Imagery is to Attain Truth: A Brief Discussion of the Meaning of Calligraphy

Yu Jianshi

Abstract

“Meaning” is the essence of Chinese calligraphy expression. The unstable shape of the line produced by the brush’s movement makes the expression of meaning in calligraphic works extremely rich. The combination of dots and lines within a Chinese character, as well as the graphic combinations between characters, play an equally important role in the generation of meaning. The expression of meaning is characterized by the ambiguity of feeling and the wholeness of expression. The expression of calligraphic forms is influenced by the expression of meaning, and there are two levels of meaning: active and passive expression. Appreciates or express meaning in the calligraphies, we can focus on synchronic emotional changes, diachronic personality cultivation, the association of textual content, and the active exploration of art forms.

Key Words

Calligraphy morphology, meaning, style, expression

1. The Main Factors in the Expression of the Meaning of Calligraphy

When appreciating and commenting on calligraphy, we often hear people discuss whether a work has “meaning”. How to understand “meaning” will directly affect our understanding of calligraphy works, especially in the process of learning calligraphy, whether we can perceive the meaning of calligraphy and find a way to express this meaning is very important. The more common phenomenon is that no matter how creative or appreciation of calligraphy works, it is on three levels:

First, in the morphological level. That the specific performance of the point and line, the structure, composition, skills, etc., such as the size and circle of the point and the line, the coarse and fine, dry and wet control of the brush during operation.

Second, in the symbolic level. Treatment of imagination and association by the characteristics of the form, that is, related things that are unrelated in reality are associated and discovered their “commonality”, such

as, “when running, it is like a spring gushing, and when it stops, it is as stable as a mountain” or “like a frightened snake quickly burrowing into the grass, and like a bird flying out of the woods”.¹

Third, in the meaning level. With the stimulus of the formation and form of imagery in the mind, the viewer has produced a preliminary aesthetic. How to break through the surface of the image to comprehend the meaning of the image of the work is the key.

What is the meaning? From the viewer’s perspective, meaning is the non-substantial traits that permeate from the images of a calligraphic work. For example, a mood expressed by the work, a temperament revealed by the author, or even a particular perception of life or a certain main idea. From the perspective of the creator, it is not only the exposure of a kind of subject personality spirit and subjective emotions given to the work by the author but also emotion and atmosphere poured into the work. However, the manifestation of the meaning level requires the support of the substantive image morphology. The perception of the meaning of

impression formed when viewing the work, and people often intuitively acquire the basic characteristics of the meaning within the first moment of seeing the work with their eyes. Next, in order to perceive the deeper and more comprehensive meaning implied in calligraphy works, it is necessary to start from the basis of forming calligraphy works and obtain it through a comprehensive grasp of the specific form composition level.

Because the skills of using brushes run through the entire process of writing, the expression of meaning in the line forms resulting from the variations in technique is the most profound and subtle. The importance that the ancients attached to this is fully demonstrated in the classical theory of calligraphy. For example, when describing the intense movement of the brush in the creation of the “cursive script”. Yu Shinan (虞世南, 558-638), a famous calligrapher of the early Tang Dynasty, wrote: “...Stand the brush upright, gather the hairs at the tip, write with a soft stroke, to the left is the outside, to the right is the inside, draw continuous zigzag lines with the brush, and at the end lift the brush, to retrieve the tip backwards. The writing process is both like a dancer skillfully waving her sleeves and like the coiling of ancient vines. The shift in the direction of the brush while writing is like an ape jumping on a tree, like a tadpole swimming in water, like a cavalryman chasing a fleeing soldier, or like a blazing fire burning a grassland. The form of the calligraphy is a full expression of the calligrapher’s intention and is irrepressible, yet, does not violate the principles of technique.” Whether it is “dancer waves long sleeves” “ancient vines coiling” or “cavalry chasing the deserter” and “blazing fire burns the grassland”, it is all about a kind of image, through the imagination and association of this kind of image. We can understand the changes in the shape of the lines on the tip of the undulating pen. If we can properly use this change in the shape of the lines with figurative meaning in the writing process, or in the appreciation process, it will undoubtedly contribute to the generation of the meaning of the lines.

Yu Shinan, “his appearance was refined and cautious, his body was thin, but he was learned and knowledgeable, and he delivered political discourses in an impartial manner, without flattery.”² So some people say that his calligraphy has “the form is clean and soft, with an extremely harmonious blend of meaning and technique”. “The details and the whole are rigid and strong, in line with the aesthetic norms of calligraphy, revealing a softness that nevertheless dares not to be violated.”³ This meaning is directly related to his creative idea of trying to simulate the forms of natural scenery with his strokes. He said that the strokes of the

regular script should have symbolic meaning. “The brush strokes are light and heavy, like floating clouds shading the clear sky; the waves are sketched and cut off, like the breeze shaking the blue sea.”⁴ The variation in the expression of line form is one of the main reasons for the change in meaning. Because Yu Shinnan actively pursued the symbolism of line forms, he was able to contribute to the unique style of meaning in his works. Taking the regular script works of Yu Shinnan, Ouyang Xun (歐陽詢, 557-641), and Yan Zhenqing (顏真卿, 709-784) as examples, they convey different artistic styles with their different linear features: Ouyang Xun’s style is solid and firm without losing implicit, Yu Shinnan’s style is beautiful and elegant without losing forceful, Yan Zhenqing’s style is plain and strong without losing delicate. The meaning is both distinctive and rich in detail, which is why their calligraphy is worthy of carefully taste.

In the Qing Dynasty, Da Chongguang (笪重光, 1623-1692) believed that “the exquisiteness lies in the brushwork, the ingenuity lies in the layout of the picture, and the changes in the body are divided by this”.⁵ This theory can be described as outstanding. Taking a look at the masterpieces of ancient and modern calligraphy, the changes in line shape due to the brush strokes make the meaning of the works wonderful. The morphological changes produced by the combination of dots and lines within the word and the combination of graphics between the words also play an important role in the generation of meaning. In a nutshell, we can interpret it from at least the following two aspects.

First, Zhu Luzhen (朱履貞, 1796-1820) believed that learning calligraphy “must first study the creative intention of ancient calligraphers, and then study the technique, and finally the similarity of the font form”.⁶ Compared with “meaning” and “using a pen”, the shaping of the body obviously belongs to a relatively basic and more visual level. Because of this, grasping the joints here in the process of learning and appreciation can directly reach the height of calligraphy art. In this regard, his contemporary Zhu Hegeng (朱和羹, lived mainly in the Qing dynasty, but his origins remain obscure) was more direct and clearer in his elaboration. He said: “If you copy verbatim, first locate the position, then play and undertake it, follow its expansion and contraction, and carefully recognize it, the writing brush does not jump to conclusions, and you have a well-thought-out plan, the so-called intention is to write first.”⁷ It is evident that he takes the perception of the combination of dots and lines and the changes in form as the beginning stage of learning calligraphy. Only by grasping the changes in position and undertaking caused

by the expansion and contraction of the dots and lines can he accurately control the technique so as to fully reproduce the meaning of the original work. Of course, copying is the same, as is calligraphy creation.

Second, there are the morphological changes of the combination of graphics between words. The change of the dot-line combination graphics solves the shaping of each independently existing glyph. However, in more cases, a calligraphy work is composed of several characters. The existence of a glyph is associated with its front and back, left and right, and the value of its independent existence is not very significant. Only by studying the interrelationship between the words and the lines can it be possible to further grasp the overall meaning of the work. Therefore, Zhu Hegeng also pointed out “to learn calligraphy, one must first know its developmental origin, followed by familiarity with the rules and methods, and then the differences in the transmission of schools. The developmental stream refers to the fact that there are ten, six, five, etc. styles of calligraphy, and who created each style; the rules and methods refer to the structure of the Chinese characters and how the inherent spirituality is conveyed in the brushwork and ink color; and the difference in school heritage refers to the fact that the calligraphy of the Wei and Jin dynasties was very different from that of the Tang and Song dynasties.”⁸ For example, Yang Ningshi’s (楊凝式, 873-954) *Jiuhua Tie* (The Manuscript of “Jiuhua”, 《韭花帖》) is characterized by sparse and free and easy, clear and elegant. However, if we do not change the original dot-line combination of word graphics, the way of combining graphics between words or between lines is slightly changed, then loose and bright becomes scattered, transcendent and free becomes dull, and the original meaning expression is gone. It can be seen that the morphological changes in the combination of graphics between words and between lines are also a key point related to the expression of the meaning of the work.

As we all know, people’s cognition of form not only permeates the accumulation of life, but also has a certain emotional color. For example, when we see a round circle, we not only understand it as a circle in the geometric sense, but also perceive it as a bowl or a sun, feeling a roundness, a smoothness, and a fullness. This is because we have accumulated a lot of image feelings about the characteristics of a circle in our daily lives, and when we write such a circle with a brush, due to the changes in the shape of the handwriting during the writing process, some of the feelings are rapid, some are noisy, and some are more solemn. This makes the emotional color of the circle greatly changed, because its

meaning and expression are different. Liu Xiaoqing has elaborated on this in more detail in his book. He pointed out: “Yang Ningshi’s *Shenxian Qiju Fa Tie* (Technique for Living as an Immortal, 《神仙起居法帖》) is like a slanting wind and drizzle, with green onions and cold, floating in the interest of immortality; his *Lu Hong Caotang Zhi Ba* (A Manuscript about Lu Hong’s Seclusion, 《盧鴻草堂志跋》) is mellow and simple, with the beauty of ancient and majestic, and dense vitality; his *Jiuhua Tie* is a style of Jin Dynasty, elegant and sparse, leaping out of vigor, and living in a natural state of ease; his *Xia Re Tie* (The Theme is the Letter of the Summer too Hot, 《夏熱帖》) is strange and strange, and it is incredible.”⁹ When we taste Yang Ningshi’s above-mentioned works, we will indeed clearly feel the difference in meaning and expression. The concentrated manifestation of meaning expression is the difference in form expression. For example, in terms of the shape of the dots and lines, *Shenxian Qiju Fa Tie* does not overemphasize contrasting changes, but focuses on the graceful roundness of the lines, so it seems that the dots and lines have a long aura and are floating. In contrast, *Xia Re Tie Invitation* is extremely capable of contrasting changes, and it is surprisingly successful. Whether it is the thickness of the shape or the speed of the pen, it is all arbitrary, like a scattered monk entering the holy style. If we look at the graphical relationship between words and lines, we will see again that *Lu Hong Caotang Zhi Ba* is full of vast and heavy meaning because of its airtight nature; the spacing and row spacing of *Jiuhua Tie* are very sparse that it can run horses, which makes its style present fresh, sparse, and beyond the vulgar charm. It can be seen that the expression of form and the expression of meaning are inextricably linked, and different forms of expression will allow the viewer to perceive different meanings from them.

In the Qing Dynasty, Bao Shichen (包世臣, 1775-1855) used dialogue in his writings to discuss the relationship between form and meaning. He writes: “When studying the calligraphy of Su Shi (蘇軾, 1037-1101), one must remove the splendor; when studying the calligraphy of Dong Qichang (董其昌, 1555-1636), it is best to avoid the emptiness. Are splendor and sparseness a matter of composition, or a matter of technique? What is the best way to remove or avoid them? Gorgeousness and sparseness are expressed in the overall state of the image, but are essentially caused by technique. A flower is ‘gorgeous’ when it is fully open, when its internal essence is exhausted and its external color begins to fade; a grass or tree is decaying in late autumn, when its leaves wither and its branches are sparse, and its vitality begins to converge. The splendor of the calligraphic

style is due to weak skills, the brush cannot control the ink, the fingers cannot control the brush, they can only draw at will, so the splendor is more obvious at the end of the work; the sparse style is due to the lack of vigor, the serious degree of skill control, the inability to play chance, the caution, so the sparse fault is more obvious at the beginning of the work. To remove or avoid it, one can only rely on the constant practice of technique. First let solid lines form the form of a Chinese character, then let such characters accumulate into a line before forming a complete calligraphic work. Let skilled technique and confidence fill the work, and both faults are removed.”¹⁰ “Romance and desolation” is actually a kind of meaning that Bao Shichen feels from the form of his works. He believes that the meaning of the meaning is “the final presentation is composition, but the root cause is the use of the brush skills and the form of the point line”. Although Bao’s finally attributed the solution of the problem to “practice skills”, the solid lines form the form of a Chinese character, many characters accumulate in one line, more characters form a complete calligraphy work. In this creation process, the importance of the word and composition design is self-evident.

“When writing coherently, it should flow like a spring, and when it stops, it should be as stable as a mountain.”¹¹ Why does Sun Guoting (孫過庭, 646-691) remind us that when making a smooth and vertical brush movement, both technique and intention should have the momentum of a waterfall rushing down from the top of a mountain? When it comes to making a solid and short movement with the brush, the technique and intention should have a sense of the weight of a boulder pressing on the ground? This is because the author’s subjective meaning, or idea, will also guide the shaping and expression of form composition to a certain extent. As two aspects of a problem, from the viewer’s perspective, it is necessary not only to understand the figurative nature of the form, but also to be able to appreciate and feel the existence of meaning from the expression of the form. From the writer’s point of view, it is necessary to “have an intention before writing”, giving full play to the leading role of the subjective meaning. “If we want to design the form of a Chinese character, we cannot do it without a reference. It should be compared to the form of something, like the pose of a bird, like a bug, like a mountain, like a tree, like a cloud, like a fog. The change of form has a basis and fits the aesthetic, and it can be called calligraphy.”¹² Of course, in more cases this kind of “have an intention before writing” does not require every specific writing behavior to have something to hold, but to have a unified meaning of the idea, mood, or meaning clearly in the mind, so that we can always take the initiative to grasp the shape and expression of the

form in the writing process.

The successful performance of meaning has always been considered to be the advanced stage of calligraphy performance, and the performance of meaning and the capture of it can be carried out from at least two different levels. First, the meaning rhyme of the overall atmosphere, that is, the macro control. In this case, the expression of meaning rhyme often ripples at the metaphysical level and plays a role in unifying the overall situation. For example, Wang Xizhi’s (303-361) *Lanting Ji Xu* (Preface of the Orchid Pavilion, 《蘭亭集序》) and Yan Zhenqing’s *Ji Zhi Wengao* (The Draft Eulogy for Nephew Jiming, 《祭侄文稿》) is a typical example in this regard. Second, the meaning of specific forms, that is, the microscopic use of pen and ink. In this case, the expression of meaning will stay at the level of specific forms, such as house leakage marks, folding hairpin strands, “shocking the sand to sit and fly, the lonely canopy vibrates”,¹³ or “birds out of the forest, snakes into the grass”.¹⁴ The writing experience summed up by these previous people can be said to be a specific expression of meaning.

2. The Characteristics of the Expression of Calligraphy’s Meaning

As seen in classical ancient calligraphy theory, when people describe the meaning of a calligraphic work, the language often exhibits ambiguity, a state that says it cannot be expressed in words yet perceives its true presence. This ambiguity, however, can convey enough information to allow us to derive a near-accurate judgment from it. For example, in the Tang Dynasty, when Li Sizhen (?-696) commented on Wang Xianzhi’s (王獻之, 344-386) cursive script style, he used “like a phoenix dancing, like a dragon and the moon in a clear spring, it is varied. Sometimes it’s like a wave of waves, sometimes it’s like a moving mountain”¹⁵ to describe the language, and the contemporary Zhang Huaiguan (張懷瓘, Living in the Xuanzong period of the Tang Dynasty) uses the language of “like the wind blowing, the falling rain, let the flowers open beautifully”¹⁶ to describe it. What they want to explain is the image tendency they feel from Wang Xianzhi’s cursive works, or the meaning implied in them. Although we cannot correspond the imaginative vocabulary used by Li and Zhang to describe their calligraphy to specific things, but we can sense the rich variety of the forms of dots and lines in Wang Xianzhi’s calligraphy as well as the spiritual state presented by the entire work. In other words, what we perceive is an ambiguous imagery than a concrete object. In simple terms, the ambiguity of

meaning and feeling is mainly reflected in the following two aspects.

First, the ambiguity of characteristics. When we appreciate a classic work, we all get a feeling from it that cannot be expressed by physical image description. Therefore, when people express this feeling, they can only use metaphorical methods. When the ancients commented on their works, they mostly used unspeakable images such as “the dragon jumped into the gate of the Heavenly Palace, and the tiger lay in the palace”¹⁷ which can only be understood in unspeakable terms. I am afraid that no one can tell exactly what specific form is meant in the meantime. However, people can clearly perceive that kind of divine color and grace from it, so the meaning in it is also perceived. In addition, since this psychological feeling is a kind of synaesthesia, it has characteristics that cannot all correspond in terms of characteristics, but can only be a vague correspondence.

Second, the integrity of performance. As mentioned earlier, the sense of meaning focuses on a realm and a taste expressed by the work as a whole. Although these must eventually be implemented on each specific point line, they cannot be fully interpreted from any specific point line. What the author wants to convey or the viewer feels from it can only be the overall characteristics. Of course, from the technical point of view, the treatment of each part is very specific, but the specific part of the technique does not necessarily correspond to the overall meaning performance. In this regard, people who have had copying experience have experienced that the vividness of the technique does not mean that the overall meaning is similar. Because the expression of meaning is to a certain extent the formation of an atmosphere that ripples on the work, it is a kind of revealing of the writer’s overall spiritual world, not just relying on clear technical processing to achieve it, so the grasp of meaning must be from the perspective of integrity.

However, at the same time, we have to admit that the directivity of this kind of meaning and feeling is very clear. If Ouyang Xun’s *Jiucheng Gong* (“Jiucheng Palace” Monument’s inscription, 《九成宮》) and Yan Zhenqing’s *Magu Xian Tan Ji* (Monument inscription of Magu’s altar, 《麻姑仙壇記》), *Lanting Ji Xu* and *Ji Zhi Wengao* are placed together, people will obviously feel the difference in meaning. Similarly, when we watch the works of Yu Shinan and Ouyang Xun, no matter how vague our feelings are, we will not regard the Like a person in a beautiful skirt playing in the bright spring sun, like a wild goose playing in a pool,¹⁸ in future generations’ comments on Yu Shinan, or the “like spears and shields in the arsenal, like sharp swords about to be unsheathed”¹⁹

in Ouyang Xun’s comments; the meaning is mixed up. This is because people have formed a psychological posture towards the above-mentioned semantic images in their life practice, and when they encounter similar images, they will unconsciously produce corresponding feelings. It can be seen that the situational feelings generated in the observation of different objects have a certain degree of psychological commonality. Of course, due to the different environments in which people are located, differences in upbringing and changes in mood will have an impact on the formation of visual perception. However, the difference between them should only be a difference in “degree”, and there is basically no essential difference.

Although the feeling of meaning is vague, when we examine many works, we find that the expression of meaning has a boundary of generation and existence, and once it transcends this boundary, its meaning will change. So, what is this boundary? Kang Youwei (康有為, 1858-1927) listed the 10 aesthetic characteristics of Nanbei and Weibei, that is, it has courage, coherent brushwork, flexible pen use, heavy handwriting, flexible form, spiritual connotation, natural structure and full font. The above-mentioned aesthetic characteristics can be said to define the overall threshold of such Calligraphy, but he went on to make a more detailed evaluation of some works, such as “calligraphy like the Saint Xuanyuan with neat clothes mentioned in *Cuan Longyan’s* (‘Cuan Longyan’ Tombstone Inscription, 《爨龍顏碑》), calligraphy like *Shimen Ming* (‘Shimen’ Memorial Inscription, 《石門銘》) is like immortals, Luan birds and cranes in the realm of immortals, the calligraphy in *Longzang Templ* (‘Longzang’ Temple Monument’s inscription, 《龍藏寺碑》) is like golden flowers blooming everywhere, small and exquisite, the works in the *Buddhist Relics Tower* (Inscription of the Buddhist Relics Tower, 《舍利塔碑》) are like teenagers who have gained fame and fortune, handsome and cheerful”. Although such comments can’t help feel like flowers in the mist, if you want to replace them with each other, you will find that they cannot be replaced. The difference between these is the boundary of meaning, and it is also the reference value of morphological expression.

Because the final expression of calligraphic form directly acts on vision and is very capturing, it forms the most direct and shallow element that constitutes the “first visual impression”. Therefore, although the sense of meaning is vague, it is based on a certain metaphysical plane, and this kind of metaphysical expression is often relatively clear.

First, the performance of the shape of the dots and lines. These include the changes in the graphics and

texture of the dots and lines, the rhythm of movement of the dots and lines, and the connection trajectories. Looking at the good system handed down from generation to generation, it can be found that the forms of all elegant and gentle works are relatively standardized. For example, the changes in dot-line graphics cannot be too far away from the inherent shape (that is, the changes cannot be too obvious and complex), the texture changes cannot be too strong, the rhythm display cannot be too intense. Once this limit is broken, it will affect the performance of meaning. For example, Zhao Mengfu's (趙孟頫, 1254-1322) running script and Wang Pet's cursive script are representatives of this. Watching their works, you will feel a long, bookish aura.

Second, the graphical performance of words. These include word graphics, silhouette shapes, radical radicals, master-slave relationship processing, etc. When every calligrapher seeks his style, he has a clean and clear pursuit of it. Ouyang Xun and Yan Zhenqing showed very clear approximate shapes and morphological orientations in the processing of regular script word graphics, forming their solemn atmosphere; Zheng Xie's works do the opposite, deliberately exaggerating the graphic changes, forming its "stone-paved street" like formal style, and helping to create its quiet and strange atmosphere.

Third, the processing of the relationship between words and lines. These include the connection relationship between the graphics between the words, the relationship between the axis of the glyph and the axis of the line, the correspondence between the graphics between the lines, the echo between the word groups, and the relationship between the remaining whiteness between the lines. According to the different pursuits, the calligrapher sets different psychological thresholds, and in this way controls the degree of difference in the performance space between them, and promotes the performance of meaning. For example, the performance of Wang Xizhi's and Wang Duo's (1592-1652) running script in this regard can be described as a remarkable example. The former shows a peaceful and natural atmosphere, while the latter shows the charm of ups and downs.

Once we understand the constituent elements of morphological performance such as the above, we can inject variables and change them accordingly, which will naturally bring about a variety of morphological manifestations. And the expression of meaning based on this clear and varied form of expression has thus become meaningful.

We already know that the elements which make up the form of calligraphy are the shape and texture of dots and lines, the sense of quantity, the interrelationship

between the local and the local, the whole and the local formed by the combination of dots and lines; that is, how the structure and chapter method are commonly referred to. Similarly, the performance of meaning mainly depends on the above factors. However, in classical calligraphy theory, we can find that the ancients focused more on the formative elements of meaningful expression in terms of the use of technique, and put the role of font form and chapter style more on the back burner. If we carefully compare and observe, we will find that the structure and the chapter are equally significant to the expression of meaning. For example, as mentioned earlier, if all the spacing and line spacing of Yang Ningshi's *Jiuhua Tie* is compressed, its original meaning performance will be seriously affected; it can be seen that the meaning expressed by the sparse chapter method and the tight chapter method with the same brushwork and structure is very different, and the meaning is expressed.

3. The Way of Expressing the Meaning of Calligraphy

Through the account of the creative process of calligraphers of the past dynasties, we can find that the form of calligraphy is reflected in the expression of the meaning of calligraphy, and it has two levels of significance: active performance and passive performance.

Active performance means that the calligrapher can selectively shape the form according to his own wishes in the writing process, so as to achieve the purpose of the established expression of meaning. Passive performance is that the calligrapher is restricted by a specific environment in the writing process and has to operate in a writing method that lacks selectivity or autonomy. Mi Fu (1051-1107) has such an account in *Mi Fu's Art Quotes* (《海嶽名言》). On the one hand, he clearly recognizes that sometimes the form expression cannot be completely transferred in accordance with the subjective will of man, but is subject to the conditions of the font structure itself. This is because "calligraphy fonts are divided into large and small. For example, '太一之殿' is divided into four parts. How can the word '一' be written as full as '殿'?"²⁰ In this case, what is needed is to shape the shape according to the characteristics of the font structure. If it is arbitrarily expressed according to the author's subjective motivation, it is likely to be counterproductive. Therefore, he does not approve of the artificial "the structure of the large characters should be compact, and the structure of the small characters should be stretched".²¹ At the same time, he also said: "I once wrote '天慶之觀'. The words '天' and '之' are all four

strokes. Most of the strokes of ‘慶’ and ‘觀’ are in the second half. They are written in contrast to each other. The strokes are consistent and similar in size. It really has an elegant charm.”²² It can be seen that Mi Fu has a clear understanding of the duality of calligraphy’s formal expression. It is precise because of this that we can appreciate such a varied but natural and random form of calligraphy in his works.

There is an article in ancient Chinese calligraphy theory entitled *Thirty-six Ways to Design the Structure of Chinese Characters* (《三十六法》), which is said to have been written by Ouyang Xun. This article summarizes and elaborates very clearly on the treatment of space within Chinese characters and the relationship between characters from the perspective of formal composition. Although some have questioned the authenticity of this text as being written by Ouyang Xun, this does not negate the fact that it has become a classic in the history of calligraphy theory. The text illustrates thirty-six ways to design the structure of a typeface, showing how to take the initiative in the expression of form under standard conditions. For example, the “concession” “filling in the blanks” “increasing and decreasing”, and so on. Proactive performance similar to this kind is generally achieved by changing the state of time operation, changing the shape of space division, and changing the shape. In order to further explain, Ouyang Xun also listed many examples of words in the text. For example, when talking about “mutual surrender”, he wrote “mutual surrender: Mutual humility meant that both the left and right sides of the word need to leave room for each other to write”. For example, the characters next to “馬” “糸” and “鳥” must be straight on the left, and then the characters on the right, otherwise it will be inconvenient. For example, the word “辯”, draw a short on the central word “言” to let the two “辛” come out. Another example is the words “鷗” “鷗” and “馳”, which are narrow on both sides and wide on the bottom, so they should be allowed to be the same. For example, the words “鳴” and “呼”, if the “口” is on the left, it is advisable to get closer. The words “和” and “扣”, and the “口” should be close to the right so that it does not hinder, and then it is better.²³ Since Ouyang Xun discovered the above-mentioned characteristics of the relationship between the composition of glyphs, he was able to take the initiative to express the morphology. This is also fully reflected in his works.

However, just as the development and change of anything have a limit, once this limit is exceeded, it will develop in the opposite direction. The same is true of the expression of initiative in the form of calligraphy. Once this initiative is emphasized to an inappropriate point, the creation will be unnatural. This is the case with some

calligraphy works by Zheng Xie (鄭燮, 1693-1765) in the Qing Dynasty. Therefore, the restrictive factors in morphological performance have also become an issue that we have to pay attention to. In other words, when the expression of meaning is formed, it is necessary to understand which factors restrict and limit it, so that we can more actively use the formative factors of meaning expression.

The main restrictive factors of morphological performance are as follows. First, the content of writing. The difference in the content of the written text stipulates the way of form expression to a certain extent. For example, “the desert is lonely and the smoke is straight, and the long river is full of sunset” and “the spring breeze and the willow are thousands of miles away” show very different semantic content. This difference obviously restricts the author’s initiative and performance. Second, the calligraphy requirements. The regular script, cursive script, clerical script, seal character, and seal each have their own writing requirements, and Ouyang Xun, Yan Zhenqing, Liu Gongquan (柳公權, 778-865), and Zhao Mengfu each have their own style characteristics. These requirements and characteristics form their own unique expression styles. The expression of forms can only be carried out within the scope allowed by these different styles. The value of existence can be obtained, and it cannot be arbitrarily surpassed or excessively deviated from. Third, the inherent composition of glyphs. The natural composition of a glyph has its basic style. Although calligraphers can change it during the writing process, this change must be carried out without violating the basic composition of the glyph and people’s basic understanding of the inherent composition of the word, otherwise, it will form an isolation in writing, and due to the excessive loss of the inherent composition characteristics of the glyph, people cannot recognize and grasp it. Fourth, the surrounding environment changes. Just as many things can only be displayed under the influence of surrounding things, the performance of form is also affected by the surrounding environment. What is usually referred to as the echo between words and lines is equivalent to the complementary relationship, which refers to the mutual constraints between them. Lacking the overall consideration of looking left and right, looking forward and backward, local morphological changes in isolation are bound to cause overall disharmony.

Although some people believe that the style and charm are formed naturally and are not obtained by deliberate search, the so-called “belly has poetry and calligraphy”. However, we can’t help but admit that rational pursuit and thinking have a certain positive significance for the establishment and expression

of meaning. Through the appreciation of classic calligraphers and classic works of the past generations, it is not difficult to see that the style, experience, cultivation, personality and other factors of the calligrapher will affect the overall pursuit of the meaning of the work, and then form the main aspects of its overall style. At the same time, different works of a calligrapher will also show different meanings, forming individual differences in the overall style. For example, there is a clear difference between Wang Xizhi's *Lanting Ji Xu* and *Sang Luan Tie* (The Theme is mourning letter, 《喪亂帖》). One is rippling with a breeze coming out of the sleeves and the moon is like a bosom, and the other is full of bleak, tangled, and gloomy atmosphere. The different styles in the meantime marked Wang Xizhi's ability to perceive and control the expression of meaning.

4. Conclusion

On the basis of understanding the influence of the dual factors of initiative and passivity on the expression of calligraphy's meaning, we must also be clear about how to capture this. Simply put, the grasp of the meaning of calligraphy can come from the following aspects.

First, immediate emotional changes. People have always regarded *Lanting Ji Xu*, *Ji Zhi Wengao*, and Su Shi's *Hanshi Shi Tie* (The Cold Food Observance, 《寒食詩帖》) as the three classics of running script. In addition to the reasons for their performance skills, there is also the accurate and complete expression of each author's emotional changes at the time in the works, so that the viewer can get emotional resonance from it. "Tears for the withered flowers, heartache for the parting birds" changes in emotions will deeply affect people's aesthetic judgment and aesthetic feelings. If a calligrapher can accurately and completely capture this emotional change, and use the appropriate form of expression to convey it, the expression of the meaning of his work is natural.

Second, diachronic personality cultivation. If immediate emotional changes affect the expression of the meaning of a specific work, then diachronic personality cultivation is related to the expression of the meaning of a work in a period. In fact, among the masterpieces handed down from generation to generation, many works are not works of pleasure in a specific emotional environment as evidenced by the examples above. For example, Mi Fu's *Tiaoxi Tie* (Write poems written in Tiaoxi for friends, 《茗溪帖》) and Huang Tingjian's (黃庭堅, 1045-1105) *Songfeng Ge Tie* (Poem on the Hall of Pines and Wind, 《松風閣帖》) are just copies of the author's poems, without much emotional color. In this case, the meaning revealed in the works is

the comprehensive reflection of the calligrapher's cultivation, temperament, personality, aesthetic ideals and so on at this stage. It is often precisely because the expression of meaning at this time has a certain constancy, it is considered to be more revealing of the author's inner world.

Third, the association of text content. We all seem to have this experience. Reading verses with very different artistic conceptions such as "the smoke on the desert is straight, and the sunset on the long river is round" and "the bright moon shone among the pine trees, and the clear spring water flowed through the stones" will trigger different imaginings and associations. Experienced calligraphers will cleverly use this semantic difference and choose different forms of expression to complete the expression of their meaning. Sun Guoting (646-691) had a long-term understanding of this. In his *Genealogy of Calligraphy* (《書譜》), he once said, "When wrote *Yue Yi Theory* (《樂毅帖》), the mood was uncomfortable and melancholy; when wrote *Dongfang Shuo Huazan* (Stele with Encomium on a Painting of Dongfang Shuo, 《東方朔畫贊碑》), it would stimulate novel feelings; when wrote *Huangting Jing* (《黃庭經》), the spirit was happy, as if entered the realm of nothing-ness; when wrote *Taishi Proverbs* (《太史箴》), he felt shocked and majestic; when it came to write articles in *Lanting*, his feelings were unrestrained and very fun; he swore that he would no longer be an official, but he felt conflicted in his heart and felt that he couldn't realize his ideals. Only laughed when he was happy, and sighed when you talked about sad things. Only when inspiration emerged could soothing music be played; only when the spirit was swimming, could beautiful words and sentences be thought about." "Excited feelings must be revealed through language, expressed the same feelings as *The Book of Poetry* (《詩經》) and *The Songs of Chu* (《楚辭》); when the sun was shining, you would feel comfortable, and when the weather was dull, you would feel depressed. These were all due to the changes in time and order of nature."²⁴

Fourth, the active pursuit of formal expression. When the aesthetic function of calligraphy gradually replaced the practical function, especially when it became an artistic style, the calligrapher's expression of meaning shifted more from the unconscious natural expression to the conscious pursuit. In this case, every calligrapher must combine the forms of expression according to his own subjective settings in order to control the expression of meaning. For example, you can increase the font spacing, weaken the movement of the pen tip, and reduce the contrast of the graphics in order to obtain a clear and peaceful performance, or increase the contrast of lines, graphics, and space to enhance the

visual impact in order to obtain the performance of the arbitrary feeling of vertical and horizontal, and so on. Education and the Education Committee of the China Calligraphers Association, director of the Tianjin Artists Association,

vice chairman of the Tianjin Calligraphers Association.

Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts

YU JIANSHI (1957-), professor, Master's degree of Osaka Kyoiku University in 1996, engaged in the teaching and research of Chinese calligraphy and landscape painting in Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts (TAFA). The academic positions held include: members of the National Administration Committee on Teaching Arts to Majors in Education under the Ministry of

Translator:
Luo Minghui, Graduated from Kunming College of Yunnan Province. Now studying in Hangzhou Normal University. Postgraduate major is Chinese painting and landscape.
Zeng Zhuo (1993-), Graduated from China Academy of Art. Now studying in Hangzhou Normal University, research on Chinese painting theory.

Editor: Liu Kexin

超乎象外，得其環中——淺談書法意蘊之表現

喻建十

摘要：“意蘊”是中國書法表現的精髓所在。由於揮毫而產生的線條形態變化，使作品意蘊表現精彩紛呈。而字內點線組合及字間圖形組合所產生的形態變化，在意蘊生成方面也起著同樣重要的作用。意蘊表現的特徵為感受的模糊性與表現的整體性。書法形態表現在書法意蘊表現的映照下，有其主動性表現和被動性表現兩個層面的意義。可從共時性的情緒變化、歷時性的人格修養、文字內容的聯想、形式表現的主動追求等角度把握意蘊。

關鍵詞：書法形態；意蘊；風格；表現

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