The Beauty Without Frontiers: the Interartistic-Intersemiotic Value of Chinese Calligraphy in Cross-Cultural Education

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As an intermedia art Chinese calligraphy bridges the visual and verbal arts; its role goes beyond language learning to provide a key to understanding Chinese art as a holistic art. Furthermore, Chinese calligraphy can be used as a model to illustrate the concept of beauty peculiar to Chinese culture and even the entire system of Chinese aesthetics. Chinese calligraphy can be taught most effectively as an intersemiotic and ideogramic art and is best appreciated in a holistic context. Chinese calligraphy education in a cross-cultural context enables students to develop a genuine appreciation of the Chinese aesthetic tradition. It further helps students enhance their aesthetic judgment and sensibilities across cultures and disciplines toward a global vision of beauty. Many students have come to appreciate the beauty and value of this art not merely for art's sake but for their own personal cultivation and fulfillment.

Beauty Across Media

In Chinese language teaching calligraphy is a convenient and necessary tool that provides a visual complement to the *pin-yin* and a verbal reference to the writing system. Involving calligraphy in Chinese language teaching places the learning process in a unique cultural context as well as a verbal-visual frame of reference and thus facilitates this process. It helps to balance the pedagogic emphasis on the phoneticity of the Chinese language with a cognitive attention to the morphology and etymology of this language; a familiarity with the pictographic / ideogramic features of the Chinese written characters facilitates and reinforces proficiency in Chinese. For many native speakers of Chinese, calligraphy is an intermedia language of both verbal and visual communication, and calligraphy education is an essential component in their acquisition of Chinese and particularly written Chinese.

As an intermedia as well as intersemiotic art Chinese calligraphy bridges the visual and verbal arts and features the signifying practices of both; its role goes beyond language learning to provide a key to understanding Chinese art as a holistic art. Furthermore, it epitomizes the essentials of traditional Chinese aesthetics and thus can also be used as a model to illustrate the concept of beauty peculiar to Chinese culture and aesthetics. A Chinese character in calligraphy should not be viewed merely as a linguistic sign but also as an artistic sign capable of interartistic signification. The interartistic and intersemiotic value of Chinese calligraphy in relation to the concept of beauty has constantly engaged scholarly discourses in traditional Chinese culture. A systematic theory of Chinese calligraphy was formulated during the later period of the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220), dating much earlier than theories of poetry and painting and involving some of the fundamental principles applicable to other genres of art and branches of arts. In their study of the history of Han dynasty aesthetics, the modern Chinese aestheticians Li Zehou and Liu Gangji cite three renowned scholars from that period–Cui Yuan (fl. ca. 107), Xu Shen (ca. 58-ca. 147), and Cai Yong (132-192)–to discuss the aesthetic ideas in their respective theories of calligraphy and language (1987, pp. 240-265). According to Li and Liu, the treatise *Caoshu shi* ("The Style of the Cursive Script"), reputedly based on Cui Yuan's lost discourse, not only traces the origin of the cursive script but more importantly describes the viewer's imagistic impression of the script as an aesthetic form (pp. 244-45). Xu Shen's *Shuowen jiezi* ("Disquisition on Writing and Analysis of Characters") indicates that the Chinese writing system embodies in its formative process people's understanding of aesthetic principles as well as aesthetic awareness (p. 252). The various disquisitions attributed to Cai Yong such as *Bi fu* ("Rhymed Prose on Calligraphy")

define the beauty of calligraphy in terms of its social significance as well as its basis in natural philosophy such as expounded in the *Yi jing* (or, the *I ching*; i.e., the *Classic of Change*) (p. 255). Cai's theory reveals from the perspective of calligraphy the common spirit of traditional Chinese aesthetics that integrates natural beauty with moral and spiritual beauty (p. 256).

Chinese calligraphy reached an unprecedented level of sophistication in its flourishing during the succeeding Six Dynasties period (220-589). Thanks to the trend-setting efforts of such great masters as Wang Xizhi (321-379, or 303-361) and his son Wang Xianzhi (344-386), it was elevated to an independent, polite art free of utilitarian functionality. An aesthetic awareness of calligraphy and of the writing system as a whole became so pervasive among scholars at that time that even literary theorists such as Liu Xie (465-520) recognized the importance of the visual aesthetics of characters in a written text. In Chapter Thirty-nine *Lianzi* ("The Choice of Characters") of his treatise *Wenxin diaolong* (*The Literary Mind: Dragon-Carving*) Liu formulates four rules governing the choice of characters in composing a written text: avoiding odd-looking characters, using characters with the same radicals sparingly, weighing the repetition of characters carefully, and balancing characters of simple forms with those of complex forms (Zhao, 1982, pp. 327-28). Liu's views on the visual balance and harmony of characters within a written text reflects his concern of the visual impact of a text on the reader's aesthetic sensibilities (cf., Pan, 1991, p. 195-96). Although most Chinese characters are phonograms rather than pictographs and ideograms, many phonograms still contain pictographic or ideogramic components which can be appreciated independently of a character's phonogramic meaning. In traditional Chinese culture language learning usually begins with calligraphy, and the reader of a written text and particularly a calligraphic text often tends to approach the text in the dual capacity of the reader-viewer, responding holistically to the verbal and visual appeal of the text.

The culture-specific aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy pose a cultural barrier as well as a language barrier in calligraphy education in a cross-cultural context, making it difficult for those who are non-native speakers of Chinese to appreciate and master this art. When first beginning their study of Chinese calligraphy, some students think that they can master the skill in a few weeks. However, with more practice and research they realize that it will probably take them a lifetime to become a competent calligrapher. For them mastering the Chinese language was one obstacle, but viewing each character as an artwork revealing the calligrapher's subjectivity is another obstacle. Having always thought of writing merely as a means of communication, students find it difficult to change their perception of Chinese calligraphy. In their innocent eyes, Chinese calligraphy is hardly an aesthetic object despite the fact that in Western culture calligraphy is also essentially an aesthetic concept.

In view of non-Chinese students' perceptions of Chinese calligraphy, it seems appropriate as a first step to teach them how to appreciate the beauty of calligraphy. Thanks to the holistic nature of Chinese art, this can be achieved through an interartistic and intersemiotic approach by associating calligraphy with other genres of art such as music, dance, and painting, The appreciation of the beauty of calligraphy requires the viewer's interartistic imagination as well as intersemiotic perception. As F. Cheng explains:

> In China, the arts are not compartmentalized; an artist devotes himself to the tripartite practice of poetry-calligraphy-painting as to a complete art, one within which all the spiritual dimensions of his being are exploited: linear song and spatial system, incantatory gesture and visual words (1977, p. 7).

During the Tang dynasty the legendary calligrapher Zhang Xu (n.d.) was said to have received inspiration from the sword performance of a courtesan the Lady Gongsun (n.d.). The monk-poet Jiaoran (730-799) illustrated the synergy of calligraphy, painting, music, and dance

in artistic creation through his poem, whose lengthy title itself indicates the painter's interartistic effort:

Song in Response to Prime Minister Yan Zhenqing [709-785]

Who Watched Xuanzhenzi [i.e., the Taoist recluse Zhang Zhihe, fl. ca. 756-762]

Painting the Three Islets on Lake Dongting while Drinking Wine and

Dancing a Martial Dance Accompanied by Music

This Taoist's oddness amazes everyone;

Imparted to his painting, it makes visible his doctrine.

How can a myriad things emerge from his mind

that remains 'bland' without conceiving?!

He holds his brush in one hand, and beating time with his foot.

Unfolding the silk and splashing ink,

He creates a painting of supreme beauty.

At the urge of rapid music,

he paints rock textures in random strokes.

To the singing of a slow song,

he paints clouds in gradual sweeps.

The music loud, the drinker drunk,

His madness the better for painting;

Like rain sweeping through, he paints the crowded peaks.

[...]

(*Quan Tangshi* 1986, vol 2: p. 2013).

It is said that music is flowing architecture and architecture is frozen music, and that their beauty can be appreciated in terms of each other. In a sense, calligraphy is analogous to both music and architecture, as brushwork takes shape in rhythmic movement that is counterpointed by the calligrapher's mental flow and therefore its beauty can be appreciated by interartistic analogy. An educational film entitled *Ink Dance* (shown on CCTV in 1986) made by Professor Wang Fangyu (1913-1997) shows how the choreographies of dance and calligraphy are mutually interpreting, mutually illustrating, and mutually illuminating. Some of my students tell me that their practice in the martial arts (as well as meditation) provides a significant support to their progress in Chinese calligraphy, as the former helps them control their own action in practicing the latter.

In traditional Chinese aesthetics beauty is rooted in nature and yet its abstract form is larger than nature. Chinese calligraphy certainly embodies natural beauty rewrought through human imagination. When treated as the image of nature, brushwork creates the subtext that embodies the order and pattern of nature, and the balance and harmony of nature. As Cheng explains, "The very formation of ideograms got the Chinese in the habit of grasping concrete

things in terms of the essential strokes that characterize them. Calligraphy then came along and exploited the plastic beauty of these strokes" (1994, p. 66). The monk Huaisu (725-785), a master calligrapher of the cursive script during the Tang dynasty, once told his mentor Yan Zhenqing (709-785): "Seeing that the summer clouds tend to form shapes like fantastic peaks, I often use them as my models. The most spectacular cloud formations are like birds flying out of the woods and snakes startled into the grass. It is also like the cracks in the wall, each and every line naturally formed." Trying to further enlighten his student, Yan responded by asking: "What about the traces of rain leaking into the house?" (Wang, 1708, 9b). In his celebrated masterpiece of calligraphy entitled *Zixu tie* ("Autobiographical Essay") Huaisu used a series of complex images of nature to describe his own style of the cursive script (*caoshu*), which epitomizes the dynamic beauty of calligraphy: light mists floating among ancient pines, a peak towering over ten thousand mountains, a monkey shaking withered vines, a giant removing mountains....(1986).

The beauty of Chinese calligraphy can also be appreciated in terms of the beauty of a spontaneous mind — the brush is the person. The Song dynasty (960-1279) literati artist Mi Youren (1072-1151; son of Mi Fu, 1051-1107) wrote in his inscription on a painting: "Ziyun [the cognomen of the Han dynasty scholar Yang Xiong, 53 BC-18 AD] saw calligraphy as the picture of the mind. Those who do not thoroughly grasp *li* [i.e., the inherent logic and law of things] cannot understand the ultimate truth in his words" (Yu, 1973, p. 685). According to the Tang dynasty scholar Han Yu (768-824) the calligrapher Zhang Xu not only gave expression to his personal sentiments through calligraphy but also imparted his sentiments to the changing images of things in nature and then represented those images in calligraphy. As a result, nature becomes emotionalized and humanized in Zhang's calligraphy. In his essay "Farewell to the Monk Gaoxian [n.d.]," Han wrote,

> ... Zhang Xu was good at the 'grass'-script [i.e., the cursive script] calligraphy.... Happiness, anger, frustration, poverty, worry, grief, joy, leisure, bitterness, longing, intoxication, boredom, and grievance — these sentiments arise from the heart, which necessarily find their expression in the 'grass'-script. He observed things such as mountains, waters, cliffs, and valleys, birds, beasts, insects, and fish, flowers and fruits, the sun, the moon, and the stars, wind, rain, water, and fire, thunder and lightning, singing, dancing, and fighting. [And he found] the changes of things between heaven and earth enjoyable and astonishing and put them all into calligraphy. Therefore, the dynamics of Zhang Xu's calligraphy are like ghosts and deities changing without a clue .... (1997, p. 214).

Traditionally, Chinese calligraphy has been defined as both the image of nature and the image of the mind. Semiotically viewed, it is an interactive image involving the signifying practices of both nature and the mind, and should therefore be appreciated as such. It is important to stress that calligraphy education is essentially an aesthetic education as well as a cultural education. It would be trivializing and oversimplifying to teach students merely to imitate calligraphy in a mechanical fashion without cultivating their aesthetic sensibilities in the particular context of Chinese culture.

Beauty in Abstraction

Throughout Chinese history the aesthetics of calligraphy has varied from period to period, reflecting the changing modes and manners in culture and society. The beauty of Chinese calligraphy should not be defined in rigid, stereotypical terms. As the modern calligrapher Chiang Yee observes, "Beauty is a difficult word to define, especially as applied to Chinese calligraphy" (1973, p. 106). However, Chiang's observation should not be interpreted to mean that the beauty of Chinese calligraphy is elusive beyond recognition or description. According

to him, the beauty of Chinese calligraphy is "the 'abstract' beauty of line," "which more than half conceals itself within or behind Form and is revealed only to the 'informed' and searching eye" (1973, p. 106). Chiang defines the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy this way: "that a beautiful form should be beautifully executed" (1973, p. 110).

An anatomy of the beauty of Chinese calligraphy reveals the beauty of visual as well as conceptual harmony created by the dynamic balance between the individual strokes of a character, between individual characters, between individual columns of characters in a calligraphic text, and ultimately, between brushwork (at the levels of individual brush strokes, characters, and columns of characters) and the empty space (between individual strokes, characters, and columns of characters). These various levels of dynamic balance underlie the choreography of brushwork. The notion of dynamic balance lies at the core of the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy, holding the key to a genuine appreciation of this art. The beauty of harmony in Chinese calligraphy can be defined and appreciated microscopically at the levels of individual brushstrokes of a character, individual characters, and individual columns of characters in a text. It can also be defined and appreciated macroscopically and holistically (and also panoramically in the actual viewing process) in a text.

The dynamic balance of brushwork and the harmony it creates at the various levels defined above should be appreciated in a spatial-temporal context whether at microscopic or macroscopic levels. This is because the movement of the brush introduces a temporal dimension into calligraphy, turning each individual brush stroke, character, and character-text into a space-time continuum. Such a space-time continuum emerges out of the dynamics of brushwork, which echoes the dynamics of the calligrapher's subjectivity and engages the viewer in an empathic, retrospective mode of viewing to trace the formative process of a calligraphic text. The viewer is expected vicariously to relive the calligrapher's working mood and to reconceive each brush stroke, character, and text along with their underlying rhythm and momentum. In this way, the static, photographic totality of brushwork is *reviewed* in terms of cinematographic sequentiality, and the beauty of calligraphy is comprehended in its elegant tranquility as well as the fluid vitality of its formative process as a semiotic process. The dynamic beauty of calligraphy, born out of a balanced and balancing process of creation, thus lies in the semiotic eye of the informed viewer from an ideationally mobile perspective.

Significantly, the notion of harmony acquires moral and spiritual implications in Chinese calligraphy, as the mutuality between the good and the beautiful is central to traditional Chinese aesthetic and ethical thinking. The dynamic balance and harmony of brushwork can be understood in terms of the relationship between yin and yang, or between their conceptual derivatives of "empty" (*xu*) and "full' (*shi*), in the Taoist paradigm, which represents the inner law and order of the body (including the mind), nature, and the universe. For example, the dynamic balance between the brushwork and empty space within or between individual characters in a text can be interpreted as embodying the complementary, harmonious relationship between emptiness and fullness, or, nonbeing and being, in Taoist ontology (Cheng, 1994, p. 43). Another example is the so-called round brushwork, i.e., brushstrokes executed without exposing the trace of the brush tip. It is considered beautiful not only at the technical but also at the moral level, as it can be interpreted to embody the Confucian virtues of modesty and moderation. As W. Fong explains in discussing calligraphy as "the picture of the mind," "A round brushstroke is strong, deep, and restrained; it is smooth, calm, and self-contained, and hides its own brilliance; 'roundness' suggests a graceful appearance and spiritual harmony" (1984, p. 79).

The abstraction of the beauty of Chinese calligraphy poses a pedagogical challenge to us. This is especially the case in cross-cultural education. To help students appreciate the abstract beauty of calligraphy, we need to define it in a concrete, visual way. Based on my own

research specialty in comparative arts, I personally teach American students calligraphy by associating it with Chinese and Western art and particularly with Chinese painting at two levels: (a) the "visible" (i.e., visual) and "invisible" (i.e., conceptual) levels of comparability between Chinese calligraphy and Western art; and (b) the "visible" and "invisible" roles of calligraphy in painting, and especially in the two genres of *shiyitu* (paintings representing the ideas of poems) and *tishihua* (paintings inscribed with poems), in terms of brushwork style, pictorial composition, and mode of signification. Any genre of art which defines beauty in terms of harmony created by dynamic balance can be compared with Chinese calligraphy. A case in point was provided by a student of mine, who identified a level of comparability between Chinese calligraphy and American graffiti mainly in terms of balance. As she wrote:

> Both are concerned with composition, balance within composition, line and character of line, and relationships between the images of the text and other images within the composition.... Chinese calligraphy and graffiti are especially in common because they both involve directly stylizing words or characters, and creating compositions and balance within these words or characters (Major, 1997, p. 1).

Exploring the "visible" and "invisible" roles of Chinese calligraphy in painting is the focus of my calligraphy instruction. In traditional Chinese aesthetics theories of the four arts — poetry, painting, calligraphy, and seal-engraving — are used interchangeably, and the mutual applicability of theory justifies verbal-visual mutuality and communality in creative practice. Endowed with interartistic versatility both in theory and in practice, many Chinese calligraphers are also poets, painters, and/or seal-engravers. This is especially the case with literati artists, who emphasize the complementarity and unity of the four arts. The paradoxical mode of "writing" and "reading" paintings, peculiar to Chinese aesthetics, fosters an awareness of verbal-visual mutuality and inter-transferability on the part of the artist as well as the audience. The "invisible" role of calligraphy in painting in terms of brushwork style, pictorial composition, and mode of signification can be seen in the paintings of such literati artists as Mi Fu, Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), Ni Zan (1306-1374), Shitao (1640-ca.1718), and Wu Changshi (1884-1927). Individualistic and idiosyncratic as they are, their respective creation represents literati artists' common effort to bring the elements and principles of calligraphy into painting (cf. Pan, 1991, 184-194).

In Chinese literati art the aesthetic quality and value of painting is commonly judged in terms of calligraphy as well as poetry. Conversely, the aesthetic quality and value of calligraphy can be judged in terms of painting so that it can be taught in a concrete, visual way. According to the Yuan dynasty artist Zhao Mengfu, every brushstroke in painting is supposed to be a calligraphic stroke. As each brushstroke in calligraphy incarnates the artist, so does each brushstroke in painting. Through a poetic inscription on his painting entitled "Elegant Rocks and Sparse Wood" Zhao thus illustrates the concept of calligraphized painting:

> Rocks are like the 'flying-white,' trees like the great-seal scripts;
>
> 'Writing' bamboo should follow the 'Eight Methods' [of brushwork].
>
> If someone else can also understand this,
>
> He will know that calligraphy and painting are the same (Shi, 1994, p. 995).

Zhao's brushwork style as exemplified in his paintings indicates the active participation of calligraphy, as he "sought through calligraphic brushwork to merge self and object" (Fong, 1984, p. 105). His pursuit in this respect inaugurated a new phase of literati painting toward a poetic status. Later, the Ming dynasty scholar Dong Qichang (1555-1636) attributed *shiqi* ("scholarly spirit") to literati painting, proposing that the application of calligraphy to painting be a criterion for judging literati painting (Yu, 1973, p. 720). Both Zhao and Dong assigned to

calligraphy an aesthetic value higher than that of painting. In their eyes, painting cannot be appreciated on a par with calligraphy without its calligraphization. Later, their aesthetics were fully implemented and further developed by the early modern artist Wu Changshi, who started his painterly career as a well-accomplished, innovative calligrapher and seal-engraver. Wu applied the principles of calligraphy and seal-engraving to the structure and brushwork of pictorial images and the composition of the painting that incorporates calligraphic inscriptions and seals. In many of Wu's paintings, the patterns of plants and particularly convoluted vines strongly suggest the brushwork and structure of the seal script (*zhuanshu*) in which he specialized. In one of his inscriptions he thus defined the beauty of a calligraphized painting: "There is a subtle flavor of variegation in painting in the manner of writing the seal script" (Wu, 1984, pl. 137).

As the enhancer of painting calligraphy itself also absorbs the aesthetics of painting. A case in point is the so-called six-and-half script (*liufenban shu*) invented by the Qing dynasty scholar Zheng Xie (1693-1765), one of the "Eight Eccentrics from Yangzhou" famous in the history of Chinese art. This script is a stylistic blending as well as variation of the regular script (*kaishu*) and the clerical script (*lishu*), which also incorporates the elements of the cursive and seal scripts. It lends to brushwork a unique quality that lies between pictorial and calligraphic elegance. The aesthetics underlying Zheng's invention is explained in his poem about painting orchid and bamboo, "Please know that painting and calligraphy share the same principles, / Orchids and bamboo are the same as the cursive and the clerical scripts" (Ding, 1991, p. 251).

Beauty as "the Other"

Chinese calligraphy figures importantly in painting and particularly in the two genres of *tishihua* (paintings inscribed with poems) and *shiyitu* (paintings representing the ideas of poems). Studying the role of calligraphy in paintings from these two genres, therefore, enables students to appreciate the abstract beauty of calligraphy in a concrete and visual way. Calligraphic inscription on painting is an art within art, an intertextual art, that is, bridging poetry and painting. Like calligraphized brushwork, it introduces an ideogramic and poetic mode of signification into painting, enhancing the latter's visual appeal in the process. The entry of calligraphic inscription into painting to form a semiotic partnership with pictorial imagery adds a new dimension to the Chinese poetry-painting analogy and calligraphy-painting analogy. Such symbiosis and synergy of the verbal and visual signs represent the ultimate form of interartistic unity peculiar to Chinese art as a holistic art. If calligraphized painting can be appreciated as the "calligraphic other" calligraphy in painting can also be appreciated as the "pictorial other." By the same token, calligraphy can be appreciated as the "poetic other," as many inscriptions on paintings are poetic in content, and a calligraphic rendition of poetry redoubles the latter's expressive power.

In traditional Chinese art the slogan "more ideas than forms" characterizes the aesthetics of the literati school. To realize this aesthetic in their creation, literati artists of the Song dynasty and particularly Su Shi (1037-1101), Mi Fu (1051-1107), and his son Mi Youren (1072-1151) introduced the practice of inscribing paintings with calligraphic poems, notes, and/or colophons. Paintings bearing calligraphic inscriptions (including seals) represent the artist's attempt to integrate poetry, calligraphy, painting, and seals within the same textual space and signifying economy. Literati artists of the Yuan (1271-1368), and especially Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, made inscriptions on paintings a hallmark of literati art, promoting the tradition of *tishihua* and *shiyitu* with vigor and innovativeness. These artists tried to express more of their mind by "inscribing" it on paintings through calligraphic inscriptions. As W. Fong points out, "In their quest for self-expression, scholar-artists of the fourteenth century and later learned to blend pictorial, calligraphic, and poetic images in single works of art" (1984, p. 6).

A calligraphic inscription is not added to a painting as a mere embellishment or afterthought but communicates and resonates with the painting. It is integral to the painterly text as a preconceived component, balancing and harmonizing with pictorial images and expanding the text's signifying economy. Within such a text various levels of ideogramic significations interact with one another to generate meanings that go beyond the text. At one level, the calligraphic inscription and the pictorial image each signify in the capacity of an ideogram. At another level, the painterly text as a whole signifies as a composite ideogram; this time the calligraphic inscription and the pictorial image each function as a component of the ideogram. This integration of pictorial with calligraphic elements not only enhances the visual appeal of a painting but also enables the painting to gain greater signifying power and higher aesthetic value. As the Qing dynasty scholar Mao Qingzhen (n.d.) explained, "literati painting was felt to have achieved the highest grade through well-conceived inscriptions. Yuan painting excels Song painting because of this" (Fu, 1984, p. 180).

The personal portfolios of *tishihua* and *shiyitu* created by many Chinese literati artists exemplify the semiotic role as well as the abstract beauty of calligraphy in a painterly text. The Ming dynasty artist Guo Xu (1456-1532) created a work of *shiyitu* to represent the theme of the poem "The Song of the *Pipa* [a traditional Chinese stringed instrument]" by the Tang dynasty poet Bai Juyi (772-846). Guo inscribed on his painting the full text of this poem that takes up about two thirds of the painterly space (Rogers and Lee, 1988, p. 45). The overwhelming presence of this inscription written in the running script (*xingshu*) evokes a synesthetic flow of music, making the beauty of the calligraphy (as the pictorial "other") mimic the beauty of *pipa* music in an ideogramic as well as synesthetic way. In his *tishihua* painting entitled "Picture of the Twin Purities of Bamboo and Plum Blossoms," the Qing dynasty artist Shitao ingeniously inscribed his poem on the front face of a rock, which not only highlights the rock's texture but more significantly counterpoints and complements the plum blossoms and bamboo leaves (Li & Zhu, 1991, p. 35; pl. 18). Treating the poetic inscription as part of the natural imagery, such a pictorial composition suggests that calligraphy, like poetry, is an art of nature, by nature, and for nature. In his *tishihua* painting entitled "Cold Beauty," Wu Changshi inscribed two poems to accompany a plum tree on its left (Wu, 1984, pl. 24). The tree is configured in such a way as to suggest a calligraphic character while the flanking inscriptions create the illusion that the characters are plum blossoms. Such mutual evocation and interplay between the pictorial image and calligraphic inscription within the same painterly text reinforces the signifying economy of the painting and reinforces its theme. To some extent, the interactive role of calligraphic inscriptions in Chinese paintings is analogous to the role of Western painters' writing in their works and thus can be better appreciated in comparison with the latter. As S. Spender explains,

> The meeting place of words and painting is those drawings in which painters have scribbled the names of colors as an aide-mémoire. The word 'grey' written against olive trees by van Gogh or Cotman obviously means something different to the artist from that which it suggests to the reader. When one looks at a sketch and sees a written word, there is the suggestion of a leap from the word to the miracle of the paint, and this is itself an effect of poetry…. The writing of painters suggests indeed a kind of borderland which is a meeting between the arts (1988, p. 141).

While Chinese calligraphy itself is appreciated in terms of the visual and conceptual harmony created by the various levels of dynamic balance of the brushwork, the calligraphic inscription (including seals) in a painterly text also creates a dynamic balance with the pictorial image. Such a balance and the harmony it creates constitute a major aspect of the aesthetics of Chinese painting. According to L. King, "Calligraphy ... is one pivotal point around which painting and seal carving interrelate .... Separately, all three art forms strive to achieve equilibrium within themselves; at the same time, they can be observed together as a

complementary set, contrasting yet interconnected with each other" (1986, p. 74). Chinese poetry, painting, calligraphy, and seal-engraving share a common aesthetic-semiotic basis in the Chinese writing system, from which they derive their ideogramic signifying practice, forming a holistic art in the process. As F. Cheng explains, "... such a system of writing, and the conception of sign that underlies it, conditioned in China an ensemble of signifying practices that includes, in addition to poetry, calligraphy, painting, and myth" (1977, p. 7). As the "pictorial other" and the "poetic other" calligraphy always partakes of a painterly as well as poetic beauty. This is true whether it is appreciated in partnership with poetry and painting or independently of this partnership.

Summary

Chinese calligraphy can be taught most effectively as an intersemiotic and ideogramic art and best appreciated in a holistic context. Chinese calligraphy education in a cross-cultural context enables students to develop a genuine appreciation of the Chinese aesthetic tradition and cultural tradition as a whole. It further helps students enhance their aesthetic judgment and sensibilities across cultures and disciplines. While demonstrating the differences and comparability between Chinese and non-Chinese aesthetic traditions, Chinese calligraphy helps students cultivate a global vision of beauty, the beauty without frontiers. Discussing the Chinese aesthetics of calligraphy in relation to Chinese culture, J. F. Billeter cites the work of Wu Changshi as best exemplifying "what calligraphy really means to the Chinese" (1990, p. 263). According to Billeter, "A calligraphic work seems particularly significant to a Chinese viewer because it gives him a feeling that he is able to apprehend in it both the distant beginnings of Chinese civilization and the very heart of his individual subjectivity.... Writing is a rite and, whether he performs it or is merely viewing it, it is to him a celebration of the unique civilization to which he belongs" (p. 263). What Chinese calligraphy means to the Chinese can also be apprehended by the non-Chinese from a comparative perspective through cross-cultural education. Many non-native students of Chinese calligraphy have become aware that this is one of the most refined and skilled arts, and it takes time for them to see its hidden beauty not only in its final display but also in the creative process. Undaunted by the subtle, abstract nature of calligraphic beauty, these students have demonstrated an ardent enthusiasm in exploring such beauty through their own theory and practice. Their painstaking effort has rewarded them with a cross-cultural taste for that beauty, which they learn to value not merely for art's sake but, more importantly, for their personal cultivation and fulfillment.

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