

The Development of Chinese Calligraphy

Chinese calligraphy went through a series of stages in the long history of its development. Initially, functional requirements determined the style of writing, while artistic concerns played a pivotal role during later stages. Chinese calligraphy came to be a medium of artistic expression, celebrated in terms of aesthetic values.

Period	Stylistic Development	Seal Script	Clerical Script	Regular Script	Running / Cursive Script
Shang (ca. 1600 – 1100 BC) and Zhou Dynasty (ca. 1100 – 256 BC)	<p><i>Greater Seal Script – Early Stage of Chinese Calligraphy</i></p> <p>According to legend, Chinese characters were first invented by Cang Jie under the instruction of Huangdi (the legendary Yellow Emperor). However, evidence of the most ancient form of systematic writing can be dated to the Shang dynasty. <i>Jiaguwen</i>, or oracle bone script, is named for the materials on which it was carved.</p> <p>During the Zhou dynasty, the writing found on bronze vessels is referred to as <i>jinwen</i> or bronze script. These scripts were grouped under the term <i>da</i></p>	<p>Inscriptions on <i>Bianzhong</i> Bell</p> <p>Oracle Bone Script</p> <p>Inscriptions on <i>Maogong Ding</i></p> <p>Troves of tortoise shells or animal bones inscribed with long passages of ancient script were first discovered in the ruins in Xiaotun village at Anyang in Henan Province in 1899. These inscriptions on tortoise shells or animal bones are a record of divination by oracles, or of ceremonial sacrifices. As the characters are engraved by awl, the strokes are usually characterized by long, sharp lines.</p>			

	<p><i>zhuan</i>, or greater seal script, since varied styles of the script were used in different regions in China. Until the 3rd century BC, the use of greater seal script remained dominant over a large area of China.</p>	<p>Bronze script found on bronze wares of the Zhou dynasty, Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, is usually a record of important political events or wars.</p>			
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Qin Dynasty (221 – 206 BC)	<p><i>Lesser Seal Script – Standardization of Seal Script Characters</i></p> <p>The Warring States period came to an end when the Qin Emperor, Shi Huangdi (259 – 210 BC), conquered all other states and established a central authority to govern China. The Emperor ordered his minister, Li Si (? – 208 BC) to standardize the different systems of writing that had been prevalent in the former six States. This new script is known as <i>xiao zhuan</i> or lesser seal script and is characterized by simplified and standardized forms.</p>	<p>Stone Inscriptions on Mount Tai</p> <p>Inscriptions on Stone Drums</p> <p>In the Qin dynasty, seal script was generally engraved on stelae.</p>	<p>Bamboo Strips of Qin at Yunmeng</p> <p>Qin clerical script was used only for writing office documents and for correspondence on daily matters.</p>		

	<p>Using seal script writing was time consuming for the tremendous workload and large numbers of government orders, so government scribes developed a more easily written script by further simplifying seal script. This new script is known as <i>lishu</i> or clerical script in remembrance of its founder, Cheng Miao (dates unknown), who was a prison warden (literally, “//” corresponds to a prison officer or a prison office).</p>				
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<p>Han Dynasty (206 BC – AD 220)</p>	<p><i>Clerical Script and Wooden and Bamboo strips of the Han Dynasty – Inscriptions on Stones and Strips</i></p> <p>Clerical script became the official writing script in the Han dynasty. It was widely used for engraving monumental stelae, replacing the former seal script. The popular use of the Chinese brush</p>		<p><i>Ritual Vessels Stele</i></p> <p><i>Stele for Zhang Qian</i></p> <p><i>Stele for Cao Quan</i></p> <p>The prevalent styles of the Han clerical script appear mainly in the rubbings of</p>		<p>Silk Writings from a Han Tomb at Mawangdui</p> <p>Wooden Strips of the Han Dynasty at Juyan</p> <p>Inscriptions on strips and silk are written by brush and convey a vivid and naturalistic flavour.</p>

	<p>led to the transformation of writing styles. A more convenient and cursive style of clerical script was then devised and widely adopted.</p> <p>This type of cursive clerical script is found mostly on excavated wooden and bamboo strips or silk fragments.</p>		<p>stelae. The weathered and somewhat eroded characters on the staele convey an archaic and primitive flavour.</p>		
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Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties (220 – 589)	<p><i>The Development of Regular Script, Running Script and Cursive Script – Stelae Style of the Northern Dynasties and Manuscript Style of the Southern Dynasties</i></p> <p>The regular script used today, square in form with a balanced structure, was modified from the clerical script of the Late Eastern Han period and commonly used in the Wei and Jin Dynasties.</p> <p>During the Northern and Southern</p>		<p><i>Stele for Wang Ji (broken)</i></p> <p><i>Stele for Cuan Baozi</i></p>	<p><i>Stele for Zhang Menglong</i></p> <p><i>Stele for Gao Zheng</i></p> <p><i>Memorial Recommending Jizhi</i> in regular script by Zhong You (151 – 230)</p>	<p><i>Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Gathering</i> by Wang Xizhi</p> <p><i>Sangluan Letter</i> by Wang Xizhi</p> <p><i>Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Gathering</i> by Wang Xizhi is one of the most important masterpieces of Chinese calligraphy.</p> <p>The energetic and dynamic form of running script allows the</p>

	<p>Dynasties, people in the North adopted the regular script for engraving stelae, yet the flat structure and angular strokes of the Han style script may still be identified. This transitional style of script is known as the “stelae style”. In the south, the great calligrapher Wang Xizhi (303 – 361) of the Eastern Jin Dynasty treated calligraphy as a means for artistic creation/expression rather than simply as a tool for communication. In later times, manuscripts and writings of literati calligraphers were often engraved on wood or stone so that rubbings and copies could be made to preserve and make use of the stylistic essence of these masters.</p>				<p>calligrapher to express his sentiments freely with a vivid manipulation of brushwork and ink tones.</p>
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<p>Sui, (581 – 618) Tang,</p>	<p><i>The Cradle of Regular Script and Cursive Script</i></p>	<p><i>Sanfenji Stele</i> by Li Yangbing (ca. 721 – 785)</p>	<p><i>Queteiqin Stele</i> by Emperor Xuanzong (685 – 762) of the</p>	<p><i>Mengdian Letter</i> by Ouyang Xun</p>	<p><i>The Manual on Calligraphy</i> by Sun Guoting (648 – 703)</p>

<p>(618 – 907) and Five Dynasties (907 – 960)</p>	<p>With the full maturity of the regular script style in the Tang dynasty, calligraphers succeeded in establishing their own creative styles. Among the calligraphers of the Tang period, Ouyang Xun (557 – 641), Yu Shinan (558 – 638), Chu Suiliang (596 – 658), Yan Zhenqing (709 – 785) and Liu Gongquan (778 – 865) were the most acclaimed. The principles of regular script gradually became basic rules in learning and practicing calligraphy.</p> <p>Representative works in cursive script by Zhang Xu (act. ca. 700 – 750) and Huaisu (ca. 736 – ca. 799) of the Tang dynasty are written in an extremely expressive manner. The structures of their characters and brush manner are modulated and abstracted to show the unrestrained freedom of calligraphic art.</p>		<p>Tang dynasty</p>	<p><i>Wild Goose Pagoda Stele</i> by Chu Suiliang</p> <p><i>Record of the Duobao Pagoda</i> by Yan Zhenqing</p> <p>Anonymous (Tang dynasty), <i>Avadana-sutra, volume 6 in small regular script</i></p> <p>“The Eight Basic Brushstrokes of the Character ‘Yong” which are fundamental to writing regular script, have been attributed to Wang Xizhi. These strokes include the “dot”, “horizontal stroke”, “vertical stroke”, “hook”, “short right-rising stroke”, “short left-falling stroke”, “long left-falling stroke”, and “right-falling knife-shape stroke”.</p>	<p><i>Autobiographical Essay</i> by Huaisu</p> <p>It is always claimed that Tang calligraphy is imbued with a classical sense and solemnity, revealing that the Tang calligraphers paid close attention to building up standard rules of writing.</p>
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Song Dynasty (960 – 1279)	<p><i>Emergence of Personal Creative Styles</i></p> <p>Commentaries on calligraphy of the Song dynasty often describe it as a “romantic and liberated style”. In other words, Song calligraphers always tried to free themselves from the restricted modes of the Tang calligraphic styles and venture beyond to create individual styles. It is no surprise to find that the most influential Song calligraphers, such as Su Shi (1036 – 1101), Huang Tingjian (1045 – 1105) and Mi Fu (1051 – 1107) established their own personal style with superb creativity. The “slender-gold style” of the Emperor Huizong (1082 – 1135) marks yet another successful pursuit of personal character in the art of calligraphy.</p>			<p><i>Poem in Slender-Gold Style</i> by Emperor Huizong of the Song dynasty</p> <p>Some common characteristics shared by the Song calligraphic works include significant modulation of characters (such as oblique structures) and transformation of calligraphic forms (such as the</p>	<p><i>Verse in running script</i> by Su Shi</p> <p><i>Poem in running script</i> by Huang Tingjian</p> <p><i>Poem in running script</i> by Mi Fu</p>

				elongated and elastic brushstrokes) that convey a vibrant and dynamic flavour.	
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Yuan (1271 – 1368) and Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644)	<i>Revival of Ancient Styles</i> Various masters like Zhao Mengfu (1254 – 1322) of the Yuan dynasty and Wen Zhengming (1470 – 1559) and Dong Qichang (1555 – 1636) of the Ming dynasty [greatly respected]/revered and studied the classical Jin and Tang calligraphic styles, in particular those of Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi. As there was a rich collection of calligraphic works extant in the Jiangnan region, calligraphers were able to study the treasures of old masters and themselves achieve great	<i>Essay of a Thousand Characters in seal script</i> by Xu Lin (1473 – 1549)	<i>Palace poems on Zhao Boju's painting in clerical script</i> by Yu Ji (1272 – 1348)	<i>Daodejing</i> by Zhao Mengfu <i>Poems on Fallen Flowers in small regular script</i> by Wen Zhengming	<i>Eulogy on the Restoration of the Great Tang Dynasty in running script</i> by Dong Qichang <i>Poem in cursive script</i> by Zhang Ruitu In the late Ming period, certain calligraphers were discontented with the trend of “reviving the past” and turned to new artistic pursuits by distorting and exaggerating the structures of characters, and manipulating brushwork and ink tones.

	<p>artistic advances in their writing. A “return to tradition” movement was in vogue and soon spread nationwide. Calligraphers favoured learning from original works as well as wood-block rubbings (<i>tie</i>), marking the golden age of so-called “<i>tie</i> school”.</p>				<p>Accomplished masters who practiced calligraphy in these new styles include Huang Daozhou (1585 – 1646), Ni Yuanlu (1593 – 1644) and Zhang Ruitu (1570 – 1644).</p>
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<p>Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911)</p>	<p><i>Rise and Development of the Stelae School of Calligraphy</i></p> <p>From the late Ming Dynasty to the early Qing period, some calligraphers gradually lost interest in learning from wood-block rubbings and turned to study the archaic Han stelae and bronze wares directly. Influenced by the fervent studies in the mid-Qing period, calligraphers began to draw inspiration from the more ancient seal script styles. Writing of seal and clerical scripts was thus rejuvenated and calligraphers</p>	<p><i>Couplet of characters from the Stone Drums in seal script</i> by Wu Changshuo (1844 – 1927)</p> <p>Various calligraphers practiced seal and clerical scripts by incorporating the stylistic essence</p>	<p><i>Poem in clerical script</i> by Jin Nong (1687 – 1763)</p>	<p><i>Song of Righteousness in running-regular script</i> by Ye Gongchuo (1881 – 1968)</p>	<p><i>Couplet in running script</i> by Kang Youwei (1858 – 1927)</p>

	further adopted the characteristics of the seal and clerical scripts in writing regular and running scripts. This new tendency in calligraphic art is known as "the stelae school of calligraphy" or "bronze and stelae styles".	of the inscriptions on bronze wares and stelae to evolve their own personal styles instead of just copying from the past.			
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20 th Century	<p data-bbox="365 188 1608 225"><i>Assimilation of the Past for a New Rendition – The Development of Chinese Calligraphy in the 20th Century</i></p> <p data-bbox="365 296 2107 863">In the early 20th century, the intrusion of Western culture culminated in unprecedented and drastic changes socially and culturally. After experiencing turmoil and the influx of new ideas, people began to review and re-interpret Chinese culture, reinvigorating it in the second half of the 20th century. The art of Chinese calligraphy underwent a similar course of development in the modern era in overcoming difficulties and producing a breakthrough. In our modern age, the founding of museums, the increase in published materials and significant archaeological finds facilitates the broadening of perspective and vision for artists and the public. The spread of information not only stimulates further studies on the history of Chinese calligraphy, but also provides inspiration for artistic creation. Recent archaeological findings such as Han bamboo strips, silk writings and the Dunhuang sutras, the publication of works of various major masters such as Huang Daozhou and Ni Yuanlu of the Ming dynasty, Zheng Xie (1693 – 1765), Deng Shiru (1743 – 1805), Yi Bingshou (1754 – 1815), Zhao Zhiqian (1829 – 1884) and Wu Changshuo of the Qing Dynasty and Lin Sanzhi (1897 – 1989), Shen Yinmo (1883 – 1971), Yu Youren (1879 – 1964) and Sha Menghai (1900 – 1992) of the modern period have made a considerable impact on the development of modern Chinese calligraphy. With such a grand heritage we shall proceed to new stages of assimilating the essence of the past to attain a new realm of broader vision and creative experimentation.</p>				