

Spring, 2001

## The Written Word in Chinese Culture

Humanities 596 A, HSTAS 490 A, SISEA 490B, Art History 511  
Thursday, 1:30-3:20, ART 312

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This course will examine Chinese calligraphy in its artistic and historical context. It is offered this term to take advantage of the exhibition at the Seattle Asian Art Museum on "The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection," on display from March 1 to May 27 at Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park. This exhibition includes 55 pieces of calligraphy, many of them long handscrolls, ranging in date from about 200 to 1900 CE. Students thus will have the opportunity to examine closely original pieces of calligraphy while discussing in class the central role of writing in Chinese culture. The seminar will tack back and forth between all the ways in which writing functions in Chinese culture and specific examples of writing preserved as aesthetic objects.

### Books to Purchase:

*The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*  
*Character and Context in Chinese Calligraphy*

\* Assigned reading items below marked by an asterisk will be available in a reading packet, which should be purchased at Ram's Copy Center, on University Way near 42<sup>nd</sup> Avenue.

Most of the required and recommended reading items, together with an additional variety of valuable publications, will be found on reserve in the Art Library or the East Asia Library. Where reproductions of art objects are concerned, you will find it useful to refer to original publications, rather than to reading packet reproductions, for clarity and greater aesthetic accuracy.

### Assignments:

Students are expected to attend regularly and to have done the required reading before coming to class. Each of you will write one short and one long paper. The short paper (4-6 pages, due May 3) will be either: a) a review of some of the literature on calligraphy, either a book review or a review of two or more related articles, preferably ones listed below under "Recommended further reading"; or b) an analysis of a work in the exhibition, with attention to the elements of style, stylistic reference, context and content, as appropriate. A brief (5 minute) report will be made, during the relevant class session in the case of the former option or as scheduled in the case of the latter option.

Students will be given considerable leeway on the longer paper (target length 12-20 pages), due May 31 for those presenting in class on May 24 (all Ebrey students and some Silbergeld students) and June 4 for those presenting in class on May 31. This paper can range from a study of one object or one artist represented in the exhibition to a research paper on a social or cultural history topic related to writing or calligraphy. Some of the topics that would make good papers include calligraphy and the art of the book; calligraphy as an element in painting and painting style; calligraphy as a signifier of social expectations and moral values; the publishing of calligraphy and letter-writing as a social and artistic act; comparisons between calligraphy and painting as commodities; comparisons between the social functions of calligraphy in China and the Islamic world or China and Japan; and calligraphy in the modern world and as a medium of political and/or artistic dissent. These are just examples. Students are encouraged to be creative and come up with distinctly different topics for papers.

Grading:

Short paper	25%
Long paper	50%
Class participation	25%

## Course Schedule

### Week One: March 29 **Introduction.**

An introduction to the different script types and their history. Discussion of the central role of writing in Chinese culture.

### Week Two: April 5 **The Magic Power of Words.**

The early history of writing in China. The use of written words in divination, magic, and scripture. Daoist elements in calligraphy.

#### Assignments:

Visit museum for an overview of the exhibition

Read: Michael Nylan, "Calligraphy, the Sacred Text, and the Test of Culture," in Cary Liu, Dora Ching, and Judith Smith, eds., *Character and Context in Chinese Calligraphy*, pp. 16-77.

\*William Boltz, "Early Chinese Writing," *World Archaeology* 17 (1986), 420-36.

\*Lothar Ledderose, "Some Daoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties Calligraphy," *T'oung Pao* 70 (1984), 246-78.

\*Tseng Yu-ho, *A History of Chinese Calligraphy*, pp. 75-96.

#### Recommended further reading:

Tseng Yu-ho, *A History of Chinese Calligraphy*, scan remaining chapters.

Amy McNair, "Texts of Taoism and Buddhism and the Power of Calligraphic Style," in Robert Harrist and Wen Fong, eds., *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*, pp. 224-39.

William Boltz. *The Origin and Development of the Chinese Writing System.*

David Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*

### Week Three: April 12 **Calligraphy, Amateur Art, and Individual Expression**

Chinese theory of calligraphy as an art. Issues of individualism and personal style. The case of the Six Dynasties and Tang periods. Comparison with other cultures.

#### Assignments:

Read: \*John Hay, "The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy," in Susan Bush and Christian Murck, eds., *Theories of the Arts in China*, pp. 74-102.

\*Liu Xie, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, pp. 154-74 (chapters on spiritual thought, style and nature, wind and bone, flexible adaptability, choice of style)

Robert Harrist, "Reading Chinese Calligraphy," in *The Embodied Image*, pp. 2-27.

Wen C. Fong, "Chinese Calligraphy: Theory and History," in *The Embodied Image*, 28-84.

#### Recommended further reading:

Shen C. Y. Fu, *Traces of the Brush: Studies in Chinese Calligraphy.*

Shen C. Y. Fu, "Huang T'ien-chien's Cursive Script and its Influence," in Alfreda Murck and Wen Fong, eds., *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Painting and Calligraphy*, pp. 107-22.

Robert E. Harrist, "A Letter from Wang Hsi-chih and the Culture of Chinese Calligraphy," in *The Embodied Image*, pp. 240-59.

Jay Xu, "Opposite Paths to Originality: Huang T'ing-chien and Mi Fu," in *The Embodied Image*, pp. 260-79.

**Week Four: April 19 Whose Writing is Worth Treasuring?**

The social and political processes shaping artistic preference. Taste as a disputed matter: court versus literati taste. The case of the Song and Yuan periods.

Guest Speaker: Amy McNair, Associate Professor of Art History, University of Kansas

Assignments:

Revisit exhibition, with special attention to the calligraphy by Wang Xizhi, Yan Zhenqing, Huang Tingjian, Mi Fu, and Zhao Mengfu.

Attend Saturday April 21 symposium at Seattle Asian Art Museum.

Read: \*Ronald Egan, "Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49 (1989), 365-419.

\*Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing's Calligraphy and Song Literati Politics*, chapters 1, 2, 4, 7.

\*Richard Barnhart, review of Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush*, *CAA Reviews* [online].

Eugene Wang, "The Taming of the Shrew: Wang Hsi-chih (303-361) and Calligraphic Gentrification in the Seventh Century," in *Character and Context*, 132-73.

Recommended further reading:

Peter Sturman, *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China*.

Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*.

Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush* (remaining chapters).

Stephen J. Goldberg, "Court Calligraphy of the Early T'ang Dynasty," *Artibus Asiae* 49 (1988-89), 189-237.

**Week Five: April 24 Calligraphy and the Literati Arts (Session on TUESDAY)**

Literati as calligraphers, connoisseurs, and collectors. Access issues: Who gets to see what forms of calligraphy? The market for calligraphy. Calligraphy compared to painting as a literati art form. Book arts and the impact of printing on calligraphy. The case of the Ming period.

Guest Speaker: Qianshen Bai, Assistant Professor of Art History, Boston University. Talk on **Late Ming Cultural Life and Calligraphy:**

**Handscroll/Album in Assorted Scripts**

Assignments:

- Revisit exhibit, paying particular attention to the Ming dynasty calligraphy  
Read: \*Qianshen Bai, "Calligraphy for Negotiating Everyday Life: The Case of  
Fu Shan (1607-1684)," *Asia Major*, 12 (1999), 67-125.  
Chuan-hsing Ho, "Ming Dynasty Soochow and the Golden Age of Literati  
Culture," in *The Embodied Image*, pp. 320-41.  
\*Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chamber*, pp. 31-41.  
\*Jerome Silbergeld, *Chinese Painting Style*, pp. 11-15.

Recommended further reading:

- \*Shane McCausland, "Private Lives, Relics of Calligraphy by Zhao Mengfu,  
Guan Daosheng, and their Children," *Oriental Art* 46 (2000), 38-47.

**Week Six: May 3 Review and synthesis**

- Short papers due.  
Proposals for long papers due.

**Week Seven: May 10 The Visual Culture of Inscription**

The history of making words a part of the landscape by erecting inscribed stelea at historic spots, temples, and other sites. The political uses of imperial calligraphy. Inscribing paintings, ceramics, books, and other valued objects.

Guest Speaker: Robert Harrist, Associate Professor of Art History, Columbia University.

Assignments:

- Read: \*Robert Harrist, "Reading Chinese Mountains: Landscape and  
Calligraphy in China," *Oriental Art*, December 2000, 64-9.  
\*Robert Harrist, "Record of the Eulogy on Mt. Tai and Imperial Autographic  
Monuments of the Tang Dynasty," *Oriental Art* 46.2 (2000), 68-79.  
\*"Qin Stone Inscriptions and Han Steles," and "Stone Inscriptions of the Six  
Dynasties," in Yujiro Nakata, ed. *Chinese Calligraphy*, pp. 111-15, 119-  
122.  
\*Lothar Ledderose, "Calligraphy at the Close of the Chinese Empire," in *Art at  
the Close of China's Empire*, ed. Ju-hsi Chou. pp. 189-208.

Recommended further reading:

- Zhixin Sun, "A Quest for the Imperishable: Chao Meng-fu's Calligraphy for  
Stele Inscriptions," in *The Embodied Image*, pp. 302-319.  
Cary Y. Liu, "Calligraphic Couplets as Manifestations of Deities and Markers of  
Buildings," in *The Embodied Image*, pp. 360-379.  
Patricia Ebrey, "Later Han Stone Inscriptions," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic  
Studies*, 49 (1980), 325-53.  
"Copybook and Stele Studies of the Qing Dynasty," in Yujiro Nakata, ed. *Chinese  
Calligraphy*, pp. 150-58.  
Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang*.

Week Eight: May 17 **Calligraphy Today**

An examination of all the themes covered in the course in the context of contemporary Chinese culture in both the PRC and Taiwan. Calligraphy as an art form today. Calligraphy and political dissent.

Assignments:

Read: \*Richard Kraus, *Brushes with Power*, chapters 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10.

\*Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Across Trans-Chinese Landscapes: Reflections on Contemporary Chinese Cultures," in *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, pp. 41-49.

\*Wu Hung, "Ruins, Fragmentation, and the Chinese Modern/Postmodern," in *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, pp. 59-66.

\*Zhang Yiguo, *Brushed Voices: Calligraphy in Contemporary China*, "The New Culture of Calligraphy," 1-25, and catalog entries for Bai Di, 29-32, Han Tianheng, 33-5, Liu Tianwei, 45-7, Luo Qi, 55-8, Shao Yan, 61-5, Wang dongling, 84-90.

Recommended further reading:

Richard Kraus, *Brushes with Power* (remaining chapters).

Xue Yongnian, "Chinese Calligraphy in the Modern Era," in Julia Andrews, *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China*, pp. 132-45.

Zhang Yiguo, *Brushed Voices*, remaining catalog entries.

Week Nine: May 24 **Student presentations** (all Ebrey students; some Silbergeld students)

Week Ten: May 31 **Student presentations** (Silbergeld students)