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# A brush with an ancient art

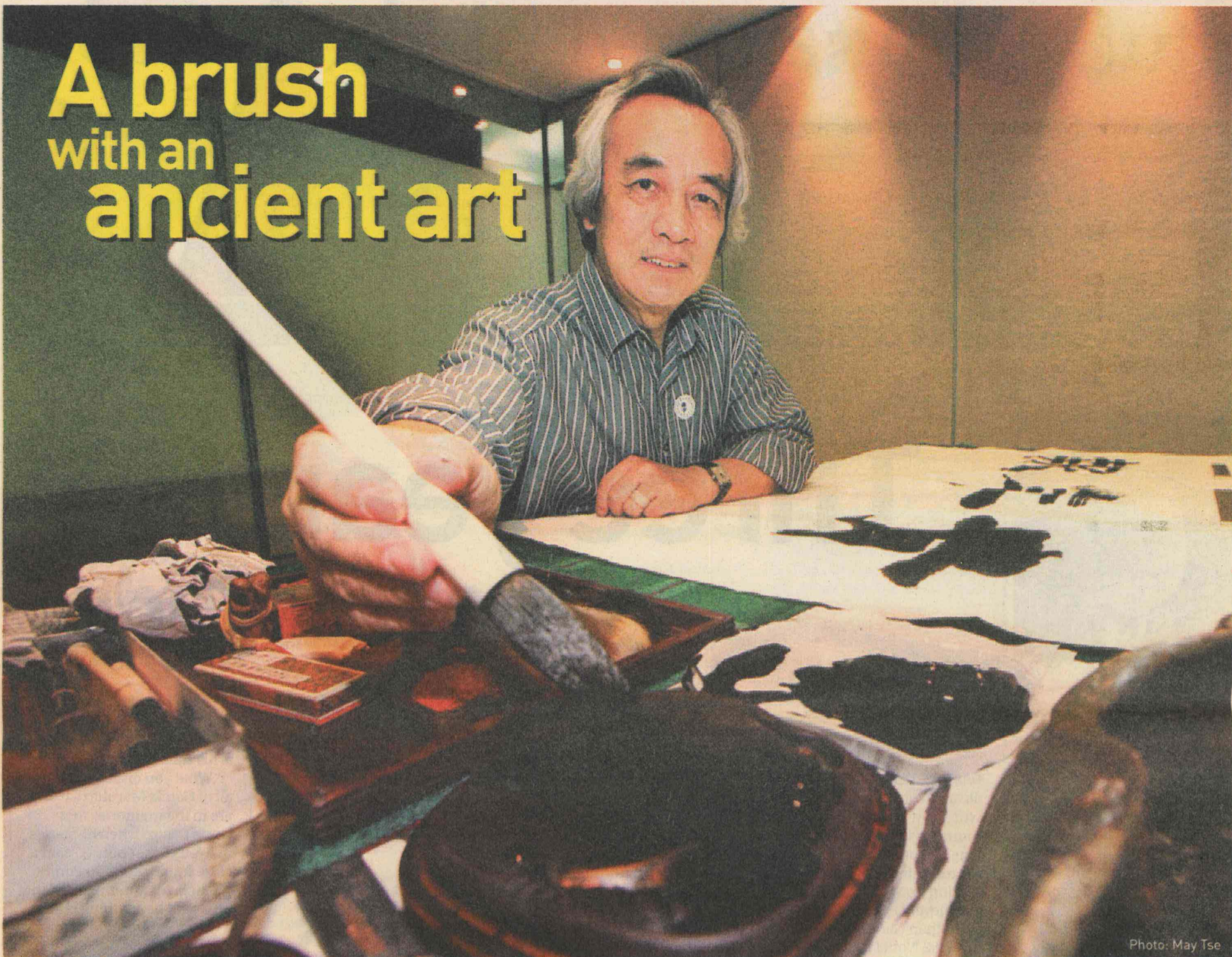


Photo: May Tse

Through wars and unsettling times, calligraphy has given peace of mind to local artist Jat See-yeu

## QUEENIE LAU

**A CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY** brush with a handle made of antelope horn was the first thing that caught my eye.

"Antelope horn is usually expensive and one like this would cost more than \$2,000 in a Chinese medicine shop," said artist Jat See-yeu. "I found this in a junk shop though, so I bought it and made it into a Chinese brush. It makes quite an attractive brush."

Another brush had a jade handle, while a third was made of ivory. There was also a shapely water bowl and container for red seal ink, both made out of jade.

Jat first gained fame for

his Chinese paintings and calligraphy when he was awarded an art prize by the Hong Kong Urban Council in 1975. His career continued to flourish, and in 2001, he received a Medal of Honour from the SAR government.

Although Jat feels that the arts are not as neglected here as many are led to believe, he still hopes that more people will take the time to learn about Chinese art, and in particular, calligraphy.

Jat praises calligraphy because it has a unique quality that no other artistic endeavour can match; it goes back to the Shang Dynasty (1600-1066BC).

Now calligraphy is recognised around the world.

Westerners appreciate its intricacies and the Japanese are also fans.

Jat said that when he was a small boy, Chinese calligraphy was taught in both primary and secondary schools, and was taken seriously. Some parents even made their children finish their calligraphy homework before dinner.

But times have changed.

**Some parents made their children finish their calligraphy homework before dinner**

Chinese calligraphy is rarely taught in schools today.

Although implementation would be a challenge due to a lack of teachers and an already packed curriculum, Jat hopes that calligraphy classes can be reinstated in schools, so that more people can appreciate this art.

Jat became interested in calligraphy at primary school. He was one of the most talented calligraphers in his class, and grew to like the art all the more because it often won him praise from adults.

But it was not until university that Jat truly began to study calligraphy as an art form and learned the philosophy behind it. At that time, Jat worked very hard,

practising calligraphy three to four hours each day.

He says that one's calligraphy never stops evolving and, at the moment, he most favours the cursive style. The other four basic scripts are seal, official, standard and running. In fact, most experienced calligraphers prefer the cursive script, which is far more flexible.

"I've lived through some very unsettling times, including World War II and the struggle between the Nationalists and Communists. Calligraphy has been a platform of expression for me, and it has given me satisfaction and peace of mind," Jat says.