Reinvigorating the Past: Selected Calligraphy Works from the Museum Collection

Xubaizhai Collection of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy

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香港藝術館二樓
虛白齋藏中國書畫館
Xubaizhai Gallery of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy
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自人類懂得以文字表達思想開始，中國文字就經歷多次的蛻變，從而形成了今日的文字體系。文字的發展在經歷不同時代的洗禮仍歷久不衰，關鍵在於其從未間斷的承傳。學書者必須經過臨摹摹寫的過程，並將個人面目滲入古典書法之中，使之達到繼承和變革。

《石鼓文》

關於石鼓文的年代爭論紛紛，大抵是春秋戰國時期秦國的刻石。這些文字都刻在十個鼓形石上，因而得名；由於年代久遠，部分文字已經難以辨認，尤其北周下文。石鼓文的筆畫比較簡練，字形比較勻稱，筆法方正，題材莊重，筆法圓潤，韻律美滿，是中國最早的碑刻文字。

1. 吳昌碩《篆書集石鼓文字五言聯》

在清代詩學的風潮下，吳昌碩（1844－1927）大量臨摹歷代著名碑刻書法，於篆書中博取前人的書法精髓，新創出《石鼓文》的特點。1883年，吳昌碩在大連時期遊歷，以此書字為基礎，臨摹歷代篆書的風格，是吳昌碩七十五歲時所作。書法的書法風格表現於晚年成熟時期的風格，筆畫結構變化，墨色濃淡，字體樸實，圖案形態，體積有始有終的結構。

吳昌碩臨《石鼓文》而不可此得，取其精華而加以變化，筆處入紙如（1743－1865）之書法。《石鼓文》的字形樸實較簡，而吳氏所寫的則博博。此外，吳氏筆下的《石鼓文》特別能夠表現左右上下數字的筆法，再配上以流暢行筆寫成的款識，增添布局的變化和動態感。吳氏曾說：「臨《石鼓文》宜盡書而不書，宜盡序而不序。」反映了吳鴻臨《石鼓文》的風格是超越於兩者之間的書法特色。
碑帖小知識

碑

碑最初的原義是沒有文字，立於地上的石碑，後才成為刻有文字的碑。一般稱方整為碑，圓潤為帖。它廣泛地包含了不同類型和功用的刻石，如墓志、塔銘、造像、摩崖等。其記載的內容也極為廣泛，從個人傳記到歷史事件、地理、風俗、宗教等各個領域都有涉及。其目的為記念、貽謨、表彰等。碑帖的發展歷史也反映了社會文化、思想等的變化。

《石鼓文》

帖

帖的原義為書寫在絲織品上的文字、一種稱為絹書。自漢代及以後，凡屬小字體裁的書冊均稱為帖。由於這些書法多屬名家墨跡或書譜，人們逐漸将其收藏、研究視為一種習慣。後來更是將書法對象擴展為金石、石刻、陶瓷等，以反映其書法藝術的價值目的。和碑一樣，帖也是中國傳統書法的瑰寶。

《黃庭堅（松風閣詩）》

相對而言，碑、帖二者都有著不同的特徵，除上述於功用和文字內容之不同外，碑的書體多採用莊重刻板的篆、隸、正（書）書，而帖則偏於簡約、簡約。故以行、草及小篆居多。在形制上，碑刻以長方為主，而書貼則以四方為主。在基礎上，上則由數字組成的雕填，中的有穿孔，而書貼則為刻字。

李瑞清《行書集王融、隸書季言詩》

近代書法家李瑞清（1887－1920）的書法亦多得益於碑帖。他因能以書氏書體及書法之妙，使之更為轟轟絢麗， <$name> 更見其真意。如「上樓的」「在」、「期」及下聯的「且」「問」等字。李瑞清自少已習習古篆書文字，此外還包括漢、魏碑刻與北朝碑刻，故好用碑刻筆法寫帖。達師所謂「書帖」之境界，可以誇在碑刻的影響下。李瑞清對黃庭堅的書法風格作出了融合不同元素的變奏。
As a vehicle for expressing the thoughts and feelings of humankind, Chinese characters have evolved over time and again to arrive at their present form. Despite the ravages of time, the art of calligraphy has survived mainly on the strength of its heritage since it is a prerequisite for learners of calligraphy to begin with copying and imitating classic exemplars before they can venture to establish their personal style. In turn, the heritage is perpetuated, but not without transformation.

**Stone Drum Inscriptions** (Fig. 1)

Although the exact dating of the Stone Drum inscriptions is still controversial, it is generally believed to be engraved around the Spring and Autumn period to the Warring States period. The inscriptions were engraved on ten drum-shaped stones. Some of the inscriptions are unidentifiable due to weathering of the stone drums. Stone Drum Inscriptions are written in a transitional style preceded by the bronze script of the Western Zhou and succeeded by the small seal script of the Qin. Uniformity and regularity run through the whole text whether in brushwork, character structuring or composition while the characters tend to be broad and rounded.

1. **Wu Changshuo**

**Couplet of characters from the Stone Drums in seal script** (Fig. 2)

Under the trend of the stele school in the Qing dynasty, Wu Changshuo (1844 – 1927)’s calligraphic style was derived from stele inscriptions of previous dynasties. He specialized in studying inscriptions on ancient bronzes and stone steles and rubbings of these, and attained great artistry of his own style. Wu was especially famous for his calligraphy of the Stone Drum inscriptions. In 1886, Wu had received a gift of a rubbing copy of Stone Drum inscriptions and from then, devoted himself to pursuing the essence of Stone Drum inscriptions through repeated imitation. Wu wrote this seal script couplet, an extract from the Stone Drum inscriptions, when he was 75. This work affirms his mastery of the Stone Drum inscriptions style and represents a fine example of his mature style.

Although Wu's style was influenced by the Stone Drum inscriptions, it was unique as he slightly elongated the characters while maintaining an archaic and forceful style. Alongside the two sentences written in seal script is Wu's inscription in running-cursive script. The juxtaposition of the two different scripts provides a strong visual contrast and dynamic rhythm.

![Image of Stone Drum Inscriptions](image-001.jpg)

**Fig. 1: Rubbing of the Stone Drum Inscription Section**
2. Wang Geyi

_Couplet of characters from the Stone Drums in seal script (Fig. 3)_

This couplet by Wang Geyi (1897 – 1988) blends together the charms of two ancient scripts. The form of the characters is borrowed from the archaic stone drum inscriptions while suggestions of the more mature seal script from the Inscription on the Language Terrace Rock. This explains the balanced subtext in the lively execution with slightly elongated characters.

Wang was indebted to Wu Changshuo, his painting teacher, not just in painting but also in calligraphy in his pursuit for nature, and unadorned resonance. In addition to the bronze and stone drum inscriptions, the calligrapher excelled in practically all the scripts.

Huang Tingjian

_Poem on the Laughing Pine Pavilion (Fig. 4)_

The calligraphy was done by the Song dynasty calligrapher in his late years in recognition of his visit to the West Mountain Temple in Wuchang (present-day Ezhou, Hubei). Slow and steady in execution, the lop-sided characters with isolated extended strokes for variation are strongly suggestive of the regular script.

1. Shen Zhou

_Poems in running script (Fig. 5)_

This calligraphy was done in the style of Huang Tingjian (1045 – 1105). Shen Zhou (1427 – 1509) had shown his preference for Huang’s works since his middle years. The preference for calligraphers of the Song dynasty shifted the mainstream of the so-called “chancery style” and opened a new path for the development for calligraphy in Suzhou.

This scroll is a testimony to the strong ties between Shen Zhou and his closest friend Wu Kuan (1435 – 1504). In this undated handscroll, Shen Zhou quoted two of his own poems. The first poem was to bid farewell to Wu Kuan and composed in 1497 when Wu was about to return to Beijing to resume official duties. In the second poem, Shen Zhou expressed his concern for the passage of time during the last years of his life. Although undated, this scroll is likely to have been written around 1497 or later as seen from the context of the two poems.
2. Wen Zhengming

Poems on Two Sounds in running script (Fig. 6)

The piece, comprising two poems on the calls of the cock and the frog respectively, was written by Wen Zhengming (1470 – 1559) at the age of 81 (1550). The resemblance to Huang Tingjian’s style stands out most prominently in the character form and composition, possibly influenced by the calligrapher’s painting teacher Shen Zhou, who was a master of various scripts, among which the large running and regular scripts were modeled on Huang. In this particular exhibit, the calligrapher’s own presence is realized in the forthright naturalness. Wen has had a far-reaching impact on later calligraphers through his many students and his sons Wen Peng (1498 – 1573) and Wen Jia (1501 – 1583).

3. Li Ruiqing

Couplet of verses by Wang Rong and Lu Ji in running script (Fig. 7)

The calligrapher Li Ruiqing (1867 – 1920) was likewise striving to emulate Huang Tingjian to a large extent. He played up on Huang’s tilts and prolonged tremulous strokes with additional pronounced sharpness in individual characters. Conventional in the seal script as well as the Han–Wei calligraphy and the stele of the Northern Dynasties, Li was able to incorporate the merits of the Stele School into the Model–calligraphy School in his attempts to reinterpret Huang’s style.

Notes on Stelae and Model–calligraphy

Stelae and Model–calligraphy

Originally free of inscriptions, the earliest stele was a piece of stone erected on the ground and is known by different names in Chinese according to its shape. The family of stelae is an extended one, encompassing stones of practically any function including tombstones, pagoda stones, Buddhist images and call inscriptions. As for the content of the inscriptions carved on them, they can be biographies, genealogies, histories or accounts of anything from a hunting excursion, a conquest, a construction to an auspicious sighting. In any case, they are meant to endure for the sake of posterity.

(Example: Stone Drum Inscriptions)

Model–calligraphy originally referred to writings on textiles and hence the name silk writing. With the invention of paper, handwritings on small sheets were called model–calligraphy. Since these are mainly letters or compositions by celebrated masters, they came to be collected and cherished as models for studying. As time went by, they were inscribed on wood or stone or made into rubbings to facilitate wider circulation.

(Example: Huang Tingjian – Poem on the Snuggling Pine Pandion)

In addition to function and content, stelae and model–calligraphy are distinguishable by their script forms. The relatively solemn and awe-inspiring seal, clerical and regular scripts dominate the stele while the running, cursive and small regular scripts are preferred for the more personal letters. In terms of format, stelae are mostly rectangular in shape and can extend upward for a dozen of feet from its base. Across its top is the title in large characters. Its length may be perforated and carvings are usually found on all of its four sides. The carved model–calligraphy, on the other hand, is usually in the form of horizontally extending stones that are less than a foot high with only the front carved. While stelae are directly written in red onto the stone for the purpose of carving, model–calligraphy is transferred from flimsy tracing copies of the originals.

The Study of Stelae and Model–calligraphy

With Ru in Yuan (1764 – 1849) and Bao Shichen (1775 – 1855) championing the Northern stele, the study of calligraphy was split into the Stele School of the north and the Model–calligraphy School of the south.

The study of stelae consists in the scholarship of the origins, format, content, authenticity of stelae while that of model–calligraphy the scholarship of the origins, merits of the various versions and authenticity of model–calligraphy.

Incidental to these studies were calligraphic styles that respectively prized the stelae, and Wei–Jin and subsequent masters of model–calligraphy as calligraphic models.