

On Qi Gong's Philosophy of Calligraphy Education

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Abstract

Chinese calligrapher Qi Gong has always excelled in calligraphy with great appreciation of aesthetic values and a high level of artistic education. He made important contributions to several fields, especially in the philosophy of calligraphy education. His influence has been unique and profound, which shapes today's calligraphy education and gives important guidance to the cultivation of calligraphy talents and the construction of the calligraphy discipline. This paper summarized Qi Gong's expositions on calligraphy and induced his calligraphy educational philosophy, which involves subject construction, learning targets, learning methods, etc. These philosophies will become our latest contemporary calligraphy heritage.

Key words: Qi Gong; Calligraphy education; Tradition; Innovation

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INTRODUCTION

Qi Gong was a famous Chinese educator, a master of traditional Chinese studies, a classical literature scholar, a calligrapher and painter, as well as a cultural relic connoisseur in the 20th century. He wrote "On Ancient Font", "On Chinese Quatrains", "On Poetry and Prose", etc. His academic research was extensive and had many outcomes. Among them, people couldn't stop talking about his far-reaching and unique philosophy of

calligraphy education, it combined superb calligraphy level, appreciation of aesthetic values along with a high level of artistic education. As a professor at Beijing Normal University, President of Chinese Calligraphers Association, and President of Xiling Seal Club, Qi Gong's thinking on calligraphy has great contributions on calligraphy education, it inspires and cultivates a number of outstanding calligraphers and researchers. Qi Gong was against setting up a master's or a doctor's degree in calligraphy, he said that calligraphy shouldn't become a specialized subject. "What grants people a master of calligraphy or a doctor of calligraphy, there is no standard. No one could decide that." However, Qi Gong devoted his entire life to calligraphy; there is a lot to reveal about his philosophy of calligraphy education. As it is significant to draw some lessons from the cultivation of calligraphy talents and the construction of the calligraphy discipline in the current, this paper intends to explore Qi Gong's philosophy of calligraphy education.

CALLIGRAPHY AS CULTURE

Qi Gong once compared calligraphy to a tiger's beard. The image vividly illustrates the particularity of the calligraphy discipline. As "Beard" is precious to a "tiger", calligraphy is a special art, and indeed a distinct discipline. Therefore, it is necessary to view calligraphy not only as an art, but also as a culture. Calligraphy is a part of traditional Chinese culture. If there is no beard (calligraphy), the tiger (traditional culture) is still the tiger. However, long and slender beard (calligraphy) would certainly make the tiger (traditional culture) more powerful. Although this figure of speech may sound a little humorous, even teasing, it reminds us of Qi Gong's attitude towards calligraphy.

One is to simplify calligraphy and strengthen culture. To simplify calligraphy is to write beautiful calligraphy rather than to mystify the techniques. Let alone to

prioritize the technique before the culture and make that a lifelong pursuit. What Qi Gong emphasized is that calligraphy must rely on traditional culture, on its knowledge and research, which means to strengthen the position of traditional culture. The cultivation of cultural literacy seems to be irrelevant to the study of calligraphy art, but it is actually beneficial. Liu Xizai said that calligraphy works reflect the writer's knowledge, talent, and ambition. In short, style is the man himself. Although calligraphy is a trail, it can still reflect the writer's personality. Without adequate study, practice, and thinking, "knowledge", "talent" and "ambition" cannot even be mentioned. In the 1980s, famous calligraphers such as Zhao Puchu, Sha Menghai, and Lin Sanzhi were all men of learning. They did not work hard on techniques, but they had deep attainments in a certain field of academics. When Qi Gong talked about calligraphy, his words were simple and easy to understand. He did not talk much of the technique. For the method of holding a pen, Qi Gong said it was not fixed, people could choose the most relaxing way to do that. On New Year's Day 1995, the programme "Oriental Horizon" had an interview with Qi Gong. Instead of showing calligraphy and painting collections, he only brought academic books to the programme. He admitted that poetry, calligraphy and painting were hobbies, he should be familiar with all those work, and it was nothing remarkable. These stories fully revealed Qi Gong's attitude towards calligraphy --it's a minor thing as long as you don't make obvious mistakes while writing. Furthermore, it means to keep up with both rhetoric and knowledge. What Qi Gong wanted to explain was that calligraphy is not only a technique but also a connotation and style between the words. Zhang Huaiguan, from the Tang Dynasty, said, "It is necessary to read a few sentences in order to understand an article. While in calligraphy, only one word is enough to express what's inside the writer. It is such an easy way." The calligraphy and aesthetic pursuit of the calligrapher can be seen from every single stroke. However, achieving this goal is not the result of hard work in writing and diligent study, but the improvement of academic performance and strengthening of external skills. If you only pay attention to techniques, it is just putting the cart before the horse. People who aim to be a calligrapher should focus on cultural knowledge and studies, which is the only main and the right way.

The second is to make calligraphy as the starting point to the understanding and inheritance of the traditional culture. Qi Gong pointed out in "Discussion on the relationships between poetry, calligraphy and painting" that calligraphy is the symbol of Chinese characters, the foundation of "carrying the ancient doctrine", the "carrier" of Chinese words, even essays and poetry. Calligraphy cannot exist independently of diction. Even if only one character is written, it must be meaningful. First, through calligraphy, appraisal of calligraphy and

paintings could give the information and define the value of ancient documents in rubbings from diverse stone inscription. Calligraphy has "witnessed" 3000 years of history and spread through thousands of miles. It's filled with Chinese cultural elements. Second, through calligraphy, research related to calligraphy, such as philology, exegetics, and philology could make further progress. Qi Gong's "On Ancient Chinese Characters" is an influential work combining philology and calligraphy. Thirdly, the identification and appreciation of calligraphy, the understanding of ancient historical development and aesthetic characteristics, will help us improve the presentation of antique civilizations visually, which is very meaningful. Although calligraphy is a "small part" in Chinese history and culture, it is a symbol to spoken language, conveying the meaning of culture and words, and it is a means to express one's ambition by means of things. Therefore, through calligraphy, we can further understand and study the magnificent traditional culture.

CALLIGRAPHY AS A UNITY OF CHINESE CHARACTERS AND WRITING

In ancient times, the study of Chinese characters and calligraphy was an integrated system. After the classification of modern subjects, the study of Chinese characters is known as philology and it is viewed as distinct from calligraphy. Senior scholars such as Wu Dazheng, Luo Zhenyu, Rong Geng, Guo Moruo and among others, were all great calligraphers. Nowadays, experts and scholars who study ancient Chinese character rarely have studied on calligraphy, which has obstructed the further development of the research on the morphology of Chinese characters and restricted the interpretation of ancient Chinese characters to a certain extent. Chinese characters are written. Without a deep understanding of the writing mechanism of characters, it is difficult to truly learn the evolution of the form of Chinese characters. In recent years, with the establishment of the unique subject of Chinese calligraphy in the art field of undergraduate enrollment, it becomes more urgent to identify the subject of Chinese calligraphy. About 100 universities in our country have offered calligraphy majors, of which nearly seven universities have integrated professional training models for undergraduate, master, and doctoral degrees. However, due to the late start of calligraphy construction, it belongs to the national secondary discipline, and there is no unified calligraphy syllabus and mature training system. The establishment of calligraphy departments also lacks independence. Some are located in the Fine Arts Department of the Academy of Arts, some are in the Department of Chinese Language and Literature, and some independently become the Institute of Calligraphy. Therefore, there is a big difference in the training mechanism of calligraphy in

each university, and the focus is quite different. There are some obvious problems exist especially in the process of development, Chinese calligraphy, under the discipline of fine arts, has been influenced by western aesthetic concepts for decades and has leaned to the painting. This is a potential risk to the inheritance of Chinese calligraphy tradition. Compared with Chinese calligraphy, the discipline setting of Chinese painting is better. The subject setting of Chinese painting has not been absent in colleges and universities, though the subject of Chinese painting tends to be westernized at some level, which also needs to be changed immediately. At present, painting and calligraphy in domestic academies of art generally offer courses on ancient Chinese language, and Chinese philology has set up master and doctoral programme in the direction of calligraphy and painting literature. Southwest University is the only one university to set up an interdisciplinary programme of "Chinese characters and painting art". Cao Baolin mentioned in the interview "Cultivate and strengthen the cultural foundation of higher calligraphy education" that education cannot be an instant success, especially calligraphy education, which is a cultural continuation. Our calligraphy education doesn't aim to train full-time calligraphers. In our society, we have enough people who are good at calligraphy, but we need scholars. There are even fewer people who are good at both calligraphy and study. I think higher education of calligraphy is to cultivate such talents.

In the 1980s, Qi Gong and Jiang Weisong made some achievements in the field of philology, the key was that they gave equal attention to calligraphy and philology. Qi Gong's "On Ancient Chinese Characters" is a prime example for this respect. Jiang Weisong's academic achievement mainly concerned philology and exegesis, which also benefited from his profound study of calligraphy. As scholars in the field of philology, Qi Gong and Jiang Weisong were able to combine calligraphy and their professional study closely and gain complement, rather than divide them from each other. At the same time, it is extremely valuable for them to be able to understand calligraphy dialectically on the basis of traditional literature such as philology and phonology without being influenced by Western aesthetic concepts. Qi Gong felt pity that some people have made calligraphy artistic and graphic at the cost of the original form of Chinese characters. This is in violation of the concept of "the unity of Chinese characters and calligraphy" as a cultural symbol. Therefore, no matter how good the writing is, no matter how big it is, it's just "Book of Heaven" that normal people could never accept.

CALLIGRAPHY AS A TECHNIQUE

Writing methods affect the type and style of Chinese characters. Generally speaking, characters with careful writing and introverted front are seal scripts; Characters

with sloppy writing and extroverted front are official scripts and cursive scripts. In theory, these two types of scripts have coexisted since the characters were invented. Black handwriting on fragments of white pottery unearthed from Yin Ruins, red handwriting on stone, red writing on flaky jade, the Ink writing on bronzes in the early Zhou Dynasty, "Hou Ma Oath" and "Wen County Oath" in the Spring and Autumn Period, and new materials such as Baoshan Bamboo Slips, Guodian Bamboo Slips, Shanghai Museum Bamboo Slips, Tsinghua Bamboo Slips etc. all these excavation gave us an opportunity to see the uninterrupted ink writing of the Yin and Shang Dynasties to the contemporary era, and also enabled us to clarify the Yin and Shang Dynasties to the contemporary calligraphy. Just as Chinese pronunciation could be found in all spoken Chinese, the writing method can connect all Chinese characters (including pottery and oracle bone inscriptions), which provides a commanding height for us to analyze the development and evolution of Chinese characters, namely: "Chinese characters are written." (Qi Gong)

Observing the writing through the marks carved on the stone. Qi Gong put forward his own views on some conventional concepts in history, and he very much agreed with the view that "It is better to have no books than believe in everything books say." In his 74th quatrains Qi Gong put forward his own unique insights on Zhao Mengfu's "In judging the quality of calligraphy, the method of using pen is the first standard, and the structure of font is secondary." He thought that Zhao Mengfu learned from the calligraphers of the Tang Dynasty, such as Ouyang Xun and Liu Gongquan and he had a very reasonable structure, fluent and natural writing, also vigorous and elegant, which was perfect. His words only exaggerated the effect of using pen and ignored the importance of structure. Qi Gong agreed that the beauty of the brushwork should be based on the structure. Then on the choice of copybooks of calligraphy, Qi Gong said, "The calligraphy of Han Dynasty has preserved bamboo slips, the calligraphy of Six Dynasties has Gaochang tomb brick, the calligraphy of Tang Dynasty has Sutra writing and other calligraphy, and a lot of calligraphy writing has survived since Song Dynasty. The structure of the characters and the intention of the strokes can be seen from the stone carvings, but they are different after all" Mr. Qi Gong intended to explain that the authenticity of the stone rubbings is greatly reduced after the procedures of writing and engraving, and the subtle details of the pen cannot be seen. The same is true for the engraved posts, such as Song engraved remittance posts, Huang Tingjing, Le Yi Lun, Praise of Portraits, Yijiao Jing, etc., and the stippling and paintings are all in the vague, yet people still argue on its editions and where it was found. They don't want to admit that they no longer have any value. It was apparent that the engraving is roughly the same as the inscription, and the brushwork tends to be imitation. The

subtleties of the stippling details are blurred, which is far away from the original form of calligraphy.

It is Qi Gong's recommendation that we should study the "ink edition", because for the first part, the calligraphy of ink marks is flexible and attractive, secondly, the authenticity of ink can be used to verify the authenticity of Steles and engravings. Faced with white characters on a black background, there is no change in ink color, which makes it impossible to see the ins and outs of the inscription calligraphy. Then we should "observe the writing through the marks carved on the stone" in order to see the relationship between the strokes, and imagine seeing the ancient people waving the writing brush to receive the spirits and meanings, then gradually comes to steleology. It is true that this dialectical viewpoint of calligraphy can be considered as a practical suggestion for calligraphers to avoid dull stereotype and contrived inscription calligraphy during learning.

Qi Gong dispelled the mystery of writing in past dynasties. He believed that "holding a writing brush is the same as holding chopsticks. The chopsticks realized its value when successfully picking up foods. Same as writing something on the paper with writing brush." Qi Gong has put forward many valuable calligraphy arguments which are reasonable and easy to understand. Moreover, it has a great inspiration for the current basic education of calligraphy.

SUMMARY

Qi Gong never took calligraphy as a job to make a living,

yet his life had all kinds of connections with calligraphy. With more than 70 years of practice in calligraphy and extensive knowledge, He has formed a dialectical calligraphy education philosophy. This dialectical view is no doubt providing the correct guidance that calligraphy learners need and indispensable reference for the current calligraphy education. It provides a good example for the diversified development of calligraphy and improved the cultural accomplishment and academic awareness of calligraphers. Qi Gong's calligraphy education philosophy is a treasure, a banner, and will surely become a gleaming diamond in the history of Chinese calligraphy, shining forever!

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