Research Article

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The Influence of historical scripts on contemporary calligraphy and type design

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opis-2020-0119>

received August 18, 2020; accepted July 6, 2021.

Abstract: Traditionally, calligraphers and palaeographers seldom co-operate or collaborate. This is somewhat surprising considering both disciplines deal with the written texts in one form or another. One could argue that if we learn from each other's respective fields, it would be mutually beneficial and enrich each other's practice.

This paper discusses the relationship between calligraphy, palaeography, and type design. It focuses on the question of how a calligrapher might approach and analyse a manuscript and how historical scripts have been an inspirational area for contemporary calligraphy and type design. This paper is written from a practitioner's perspective in describing the processes of how calligraphy is analysed. From looking at manuscripts and documents, what elements can be obtained to develop ideas into design and artwork? What are the processes involved in using both traditional and digital methods? In contemporary calligraphy, what cross-cultural elements can we learn to enrich our traditions? This paper will use examples of my work and that of others as models for discussion.

Keywords: Calligraphy; Cross-Cultural; Digital Media; Palaeography; Type Design.

1 Contexts

Palaeographers, calligraphers and type designers study or use letterforms as part of their practice, but their approaches and perspectives to their disciplines are quite different. In general terms, palaeographers would develop methods in understanding the contexts and the dating of historical documents and scripts. In contrast, calligraphers would study how these historical scripts are written and to replicate these letterforms with an aesthetic sensibility for their artistic interpretations. A type designer would find inspirations from historical scripts and develop digital fonts based on these scripts for the use of typed documents or other aspects of graphic communication. One could perhaps summarise these observations that palaeographers are generally more interested in the 'content' and 'contexts' of historical documents. Calligraphers, on the other hand, are interested in the 'aesthetics', 'tools', 'processes' and 'materials', and type designers are concerned with the 'functionality' and 'communication' contexts when designing fonts. In reality, all these approaches are inter-connected between each respective discipline. For example, a calligrapher would find it challenging to write a piece of text that they do not understand. Sometimes, by understanding the meaning and context of the words would inspire the calligrapher's creative interpretation of the text. Alternatively, a palaeographer might find it useful to understand how the script was written and with what tools or technology to add context to their research. A type designer will have a better understanding of the letter shapes if one is to practice how the letterforms are written. One could say all three disciplines are exploring the past in order to enlighten the present, and if we are to understand each discipline better, it will enrich our practice as well.

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2 Calligraphy is more than beautiful writing

In the Western tradition, calligraphy is interpreted as ‘beautiful writing’, from the Greek “kalós”, meaning “beautiful” and “graphia”, meaning “writing” or “script”. This suggests writing that is finely executed with a sense of “aesthetic beauty” (Gürtler, 1997, p.83). In the Arabic tradition, however, calligraphy is described as the ‘linear graphic’ (Khatibi and Sijelmassi, 1994). This adds to the suggestion that calligraphy is shaped by lines and spatial elements, which become graphic forms. The strokes, forms of letters, and the interlinear spaces are considered essential components that contribute to the overall look of the script. From this perspective, western calligraphy can also convey meanings and emotions through graphic forms. This definition places less importance to the words but more on the expressive qualities of the lines and graphic forms.

However, the term ‘beautiful writing’ can be misleading, as ‘beauty’ is a subjective term. What might be beautiful in one culture can be distasteful in another. For example, in the Japanese practice of “Wabi-Sabi” (Koren, 1994), ‘beauty’ can be found and appreciated in natural ugliness, as in a rusty nail or a scribbled letterform.

In Chinese, calligraphy is “Sho fa” meaning the “method of writing” and in Japanese, “Sho do” meaning the “way of writing” (Davey, 1999, p.15). These two definitions imply that there is an intrinsic link between the calligrapher and the created word. “Method” or the “Way” suggest calligraphy that embraces the spiritual and philosophical contexts.

In this respect, calligraphy has both external and internal aspects. The external describes the skill, the graphic, the form, the line, the mark, the visual aesthetics, etc. The internal interpretation describes the ‘inner’ processes of calligraphy: the development of the self, the cultivation of the self-being and the “mind and body harmony” (ibid, p.7).

It could be argued that only by developing internal and external approaches can calligraphy be fully developed, and becomes personal and expressive, where it is imbued with the spirit, emotions and energy from the calligrapher.

The American calligrapher and writer Skaggs (2007, p.35), suggests, “The skill to make legible letters is not calligraphy. It is only in revealing the moving hand that calligraphy becomes calligraphy.” He further explains, “The accidental nicks in form caused by the paper fibre, the running and splashing of ink, the carefree and graceful swashing and buckling – these are the calligraphy. The calligraphy is found in those aspects of form that reveal the hand’s freedom, the gesture, the dance, the tool’s scraping and flowing, the intersection of mind and nature that occurs when hand and heart move as one. In short, the instantaneous character of the living mark is the calligraphy.” (ibid)

The study of letterforms is the key to a calligrapher’s training. Once a particular script is mastered, the scribe is then able to add their personality and idiosyncrasies into the writing. Similar to handwriting, the calligraphy is individual to the scribe, and their work can be identified and traced. There is a recent palaeographical trend on scribal identification to link specific calligraphy writing to named scribes. The connection between the author and the scribe can be established via this method. In some manuscripts, it is possible to distinguish the contribution from different scribes where one has taken over another. The identification helps to establish a useful timeline for the production of the manuscript. In contrast, the originator of a piece of typed script (typography) would be challenging to identify.

By adding personal interpretations to the proportions, scale, ductus, and the speed of writing would add a layer of character and ‘voice’ to the work. The calligrapher Brody Neuenschwander (2000, p.15) suggests, “a line of writing, to be calligraphy rather than handwriting or typography, needs to show the right combination of contrasting and harmonious forms. That is to say, long and short lines, curved or straight lines, vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines, must be arranged to produce dramatic tensions within an overall stylistic harmony.”

An experienced calligrapher should, therefore, be able to write naturally, and the artwork should show a sense of aesthetic integrity between the written forms, tools, materials and the processes used. This sense of authenticity and individuality can be traced back to the teaching of Edward Johnston, where many considered him to be the founder of the modern Western calligraphy (particularly in Britain) during the 20th Century. Johnston believed that “work that is honest and straight-forward has a beauty and freshness of its own” (ed. Child, 1971, p.18) and that the “broad nib, ‘honestly’ used, is an inexhaustible suggester of variety proper to itself” (ibid, p.123). Furthermore, Edward Johnston’s notion of “sharpness, freedom and unity” is one of the guiding principles for the development of western calligraphy during the last century. For ‘sharpness’ suggests a particular requirement of aesthetic standard and sensibility, ‘freedom’ a certain degree of practiced discipline and ‘unity’ to bring together the calligrapher’s whole being to create the calligraphy. These are all elements that are essential to a calligrapher’s practise. In 1948, the American calligrapher Alfred Fairbank commented on Edward Johnston’s principles for formal penmanship in that the sharpness of letterform is one of the essential aesthetic standards by which Western calligraphy is judged (Fairbank, 1948, p.17).

3 What do calligraphers look for in a manuscript?

When viewing a manuscript, a calligrapher is normally drawn to the following elements (not necessarily in this sequence):

- First impressions—Aesthetic beauty,
- Analysis of the script
- The materials and processes used and
- The ‘spirit’ of calligraphy—the essence, energy and persona of the writing.

Palaeographers talked about how they would study the details beyond the texts. They are interested in the author, the scribe, the script, the authenticity of the manuscript to add a story and meaning to a piece of text. Modern-day calligraphers are generally not trained to read ancient texts (assuming one is not familiar with the language on the manuscript). Therefore, they are more interested in the aesthetic qualities of the script, rather than the literary content or meaning.

The calligrapher would examine the ductus of the script and other components such as the pen angle, slant of the pen strokes, pen manipulation and the proportion of the letters. Additional elements such as illuminations, marginalia, quirky illustrations (where the scribe is seemingly having fun) and other surprises—such as mistakes and cover-ups (see figures 1 and 2).

Another aspect that a calligrapher might be interested in is the materiality of a manuscript. The materials used to create the manuscript imbues the work with a sense of human quality that digitally produced work sometimes lack. Furthermore, manuscripts written on materials such as vellum would often contain organic features from the animal such as hair follicles or holes. These features can sometimes add to the general aesthetic of the page, where the scribe would work around defects of the skin and make it into an integrated feature on the page (see figure 3).

Another element that is often ignored when viewing a manuscript is the ink and pigment used in writing (see figure 4). These fundamental elements can add a richness to the manuscript in terms of its aesthetic qualities and impact. Furthermore, the natural deterioration or fading of the ink and pigment can add to the authenticity and materiality of the manuscript.

Figure 1: Marginalia found on the margins of a piece of manuscript. Photography taken by the author in 2020 at the Newcastle University Library, Special Collections GB 186. Petrarch, Trionfi, 15th Century. Medieval Manuscripts, Medieval MS 4. The image is of folio 6. Used with permission from the Newcastle University Library.

Figure 2: Quirky illustration in a manuscript. Photography taken by the author in 2020 at the Newcastle University Library, Special Collections GB 186. Petrarch, Trionfi, 15th Century. Medieval Manuscripts, Medieval MS 4. The image is of folio 1. Used with permission from the Newcastle University Library.

Figure 3: An example of how the scribe would work around defects. Photography taken by the author in 2020 at Newcastle University Library, Special Collections GB 186. Peter Lombard, Bishop of Paris, The Sentences: Books 2 and 4, 13th Century. Medieval Manuscripts, Medieval MS 3. The image is of folio 61, verso. Used with permission from the Newcastle University Library.

Figure 4: Pigments being used in a manuscript, in this example we see fine hairlines being created by a small brush or stylus. Photograph taken by the author in 2020 at Newcastle University Library, Special Collections GB 186. Anonymous, [Missale ad usum Sarum], c.1420-1430. Medieval Manuscripts, Medieval MS 2. The image is of folio 34, verso. Used with permission from the Newcastle University Library.

4 The spirit of calligraphy

As discussed earlier, the embodied movement or the ‘spirit’ of writing, is an important element of calligraphy. Lloyd Reynolds (1965) first used the term “rhythmic vitality” (p.200), to describe this phenomenon, where the spontaneous gestural movement and energy are apparent in calligraphy. He talks about the importance of writing involving the whole body and mind. Reynolds says that the sense of “touch” and gestural movement will inevitably give “rhythmic vitality” to writing (p.204). He further explains that the aims “would be to make us [Western calligraphers] more intensely aware at all times of every aspect of our act of writing. Sometimes the right relation of movements involving the touch of the pen may open our eyes to the inner meaning of the word ‘calligraphy’” (p.205).

Skaggs develops from Reynold’s ideas in his essay *The New Calligraphic Renaissance* (2000). He stresses that calligraphy is about the “tactile moment” (p.144) and that modern calligraphy is about “revealing the touch” (p.145) and does not necessarily have to be totally legible. Calligraphy is more about the process, rather than letterform making. He went on further to explain that the “...unselfconscious gestural mark communicates a gracefulness that flows directly from the spiritual center of the artist. It is a kind of honest and truthful expression of what the Asians called *chi*, the creative life spirit”. He makes an analogy of the calligrapher being in “the zone” during the act of writing, where the calligraphy is made effortlessly and that “the marks breathe with life spirit”. This describes the directness in the making of the strokes, without hesitation and deliberation, which ultimately leads to a “sense of grace and authority” (see figure 5). His reference to the “truthful expression” above refers to the integrity of the work, where the marks made are not superfluous or unintended. He suggests that the approach of integrity in the mark-making process is universal and that there is a “cross-cultural appreciation” of these qualities (p.146).

This notion of *chi* is rarely mentioned in Western calligraphy, but in the Chinese tradition, this is a common phenomenon. *Chi* is considered to be the ‘breath’, ‘energy’ and ‘essence’ of all things. These elements are personified

Figure 5: Calligraphy showing the directness and spontaneity of writing. ‘Content’, calligraphy by Ewan Clayton, 2004, Special Collection at the Craft Study Centre, UK. Used with Permission from the artist.

when something is created by the human hand. As calligraphy is predominately a discipline that uses the hand, heart and the mind, it is not surprising, therefore, to see that there is a direct connection of the notion of chi and western calligraphy. Once one learns how to recognise it, it would open another layer of scrutiny for the observer when viewing a manuscript or calligraphy artwork.

The notion of chi can be deemed to be an alien concept within the Western tradition. Instead, most Western calligraphy is generally described as a ‘lively’ piece of work, or it is a piece of ‘sensitive’ writing, or the marks are ‘expressive’, or it is simply ‘beautiful writing’. It would seem these adjectives generally describe the external nature and aesthetic qualities of calligraphy but do not reflect the inner qualities of the calligrapher or the work itself.

The general characteristics of chi in calligraphy can be described as ‘energy’, ‘rhythmic’, ‘vitality’ and ‘movement’. These characteristics suggest processes that are by nature external and internal. Although Western calligraphy is often deemed as an external process, it can be argued that these inner qualities already exist but are not readily apparent because the vocabulary being used is not a recognised part of its tradition. By analysing the different theoretical writings from Western calligraphers (particularly Johnston and Reynolds), similarities between the two traditions can often be identified.

5 The transformation

Society and culture continuously need to invent things, and each new major invention would enviably change the fabric of society. We can chart the change visually in the speed of writing as technology advances. We can sense the speed of writing of the Roman Majuscules is much slower than the Rustic Capitals and one can denote the Carolingian script leant itself to be written more quickly. The inclusion of minuscules also has aided legibility and the speed of reading. It would seem “the shapes of letterforms are largely controlled by convention (the need, usually, to be legible), and also affected by practice and fashion.” (Harvey, 2002, p.91).

Figure 6: Calligraphy showing the expressive qualities of writing. ‘Peace, Strength, Love’, calligraphy by Ewan Clayton, 2004, Special Collection at the Craft Study Centre, UK. Used with permission from the artist.

Furthermore, the invention of printing text using moveable type by Johannes Gutenberg in ca.1439 has made a significant impact on the speed in which information can be disseminated and has also made a profound impact on the evolution of calligraphy, the printed text (typography) and font designs. Over time, one can see a clear distinction between the roles of calligraphy and typography. In *The Order of Books*, French historian Roger Chartier advocates that we have to develop new structures and processes to deal with printed texts. Elements “such as title pages, cataloguing schemes, copyright, and the modern notion of authorship” (Levy, 2002, p.76) are part of the production for book designers. One could argue that typography replaces the function of calligraphy where the use of fonts for printed texts allows for greater functionality and legibility. Calligraphy, on the other hand can be made more personal, expressive and decorative in nature.

Fast-forwarding to the present, with contemporary calligraphy practices, there is a shift towards a more embodied approach towards calligraphy where personal expressions and abstractions are being explored. This leads to work that might not necessarily be legible, but the power of the marks can be felt and appreciated. This is perhaps akin to someone from the west looking at a piece of Oriental Calligraphy, not needing to understand the language or the meaning of the text but are nevertheless drawn to the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the calligraphic marks made (see figure 6).

6 Cross-Cultural Calligraphy

Cross cultural practices imply the exploration of elements from one culture and applying it to another. In our case as a British Chinese person who practices Western calligraphy, the work that is illustrated here explores whether influences from East Asia can be applied to Western calligraphy. The main motivation for this body of work is to develop new approaches and theories of calligraphic expressions using ‘cross-cultural’ principles.

The main focus of the work is in the exploration of ‘chi’ or the ‘energy’ or ‘essence’ of calligraphy. As this notion has yet to be formally documented and practised in Western calligraphy, this paper hopes to identify the characteristics of chi and analyses the similarities and differences between the two traditions. An example of how chi can be adapted into a historical hand is illustrated in figures 7 and 8. In the first illustration, we can see in the first set of strokes there

Figure 7: Illustration showing the different sets of strokes. Calligraphy by the author, (Ling, 2020).

Figure 8: Comparison of the Italic script (top) and the new style (below). Calligraphy by the author, (Ling, 2020).

are no embellishments. The second set of strokes are based on the Italics Script, where the beginning and the ending of the strokes contain terminals (or serifs in typography). The final set of strokes show how the ending of the strokes are written differently. The ending of these strokes is created by pen-angle manipulation techniques.

By simplifying the strokes, the rhythm and the speed of the script have changed. This way of writing allows for greater fluency and improvisation with the act of writing. It also allows for greater spontaneity and improvisation in writing and helps to promote the cultivation of *chi* in calligraphy. In figure 9, we can see how the character and personality of the script change between the normal italics and the new one.

The Chinese tradition also believes in the harmony of opposites: the *yin* and the *yang*. East Asian calligraphers and artists believe by balancing these opposing elements correctly, it would lead to a harmonious whole. An example of this in Western calligraphy is to look at the balance between the black and the white elements. The black elements being the calligraphic marks, and the white elements are the negative and interlinear spaces (see fig 9).

In Chinese calligraphy, one would describe this phenomenon as the ‘unity of opposites’ ( ). In this instance the contrasts of the black and white elements, restrict and complement each other, achieving balance and harmony.

In a Western calligraphy context, one can adapted the principle of ‘unity of opposites’ into ‘contrasts and contradictions’ and it is a central theme for the development of a body of calligraphic artwork that spanned over thirty years. This approach has promoted a philosophical journey in which different ideas are explored: complexity and simplicity; fast and slow; handmade and digital; east and west; old and new; energy and stillness; control and spontaneity (Ling, 2018).

In the Far East, calligraphy is regarded as the highest form of art and personal expression. It is, therefore, refreshing to approach western calligraphy in the same way (see figure 10).

The exploration of cross-cultural calligraphy was carried out in the *Wordsworth and Basho: Walking Poets* exhibition in 2016. One was able to work with historical, written and palaeographical material from Britain and Japan. Original manuscripts from the William Wordsworth archive at the Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere, England and the artwork and writing of Basho from the Kakimori Bunko in Itami, Japan were used as sources for inspiration. By integrating eastern elements into western calligraphy, new forms and visual language can be developed. The ‘Bamboo Script’ was

Figure 9: Calligraphy showing the balance of the black and white elements. Calligraphy by the author (Ling, 2014).

Figure 10: 'Words are not like other creatures: they have demarcations unique to themselves. They have dark carnalities of their own, inscapes of beauty eyed inward', Calligraphy by the author, words by John Strachan. (Ling, 2013).

Figure 11: ‘Everyday is a journey and the journey itself is home’. Part of the scroll showing the use of vertical writing. Calligraphy by the author, words by Basho, (Ling, 2016).

developed from this research and the scrolls *Everyday is a journey, and the journey is home* was created for the ‘Walking Poets’ exhibition (2016). The scrolls were created with the collaboration of a Japanese Sumi ink artist Christine Flint Sato who created the background for the scrolls. For the first time, a personal attempt at writing Western calligraphy vertically with a broad-edged steel nib where made. The pen strokes mimic that of the Oriental brush. These pen strokes were inspired by nature—the shapes of leaves bending and fluttering in the wind. At first glance, the calligraphy looks abstract, but the words can be read once certain letters are identified (see figure 11). This particular approach to the letterforms can only be achieved with a deep understanding of the letter shapes and the interconnection of spaces. The other aspects that are equally important are the understanding of processes and materials. Inherent knowledge of how the ink, pen and paper can work together is all an important part of the equation (see figure 12).

7 Developing calligraphic forms for font design

The Roman Capitals found on the Trajan Column (AD113) is perhaps the most monumental piece of inscription for the development of calligraphy and font design (see figure 13). The proportion and the designs of the letterforms are considered to be very elegant and complete. The majority of typefaces we use today are based on the letter proportion of these Roman Capitals. For a long time, it was a mystery as to how these beautiful capitals are formed. Some believe they were geometrically constructed with ruler and compass. It was not until the publication *The Origin of the Serif* (1962) that Edward Catich, demonstrated that Roman Capitals were most likely ‘constructed’ by using a chisel-edged brush. The lettering was written directly onto the stones before being carved. This conjecture made much sense to a calligrapher. For someone who is familiar with writing calligraphy, the proportion of letters can be determined naturally by the width of the broad-edged nib or brush. Any variation in height, width or pen angle would produce letters that are different in look and feel. Realistically, it would also be very impractical and time-consuming to have to construct each letter with a compass and ruler.

During 1989, Adobe launched a series of successful fonts inspired by classic letterforms based on historical scripts. *Trajan Pro*, *Charlemagne* and *Litho* were designed by Carol Twombly, who was working as a type designer for Adobe at the time. *Trajan Pro* was designed based on the Roman Capitals found on the Trajan Column. *Charlemagne* was inspired

Figure 12: ‘Every day is a journey...’, showing detail of the scrolls with calligraphy by the author and background painting by Christine Flint Sato (Ling, 2016).

Figure 13: Roman inscription from the Trajan Column (plater cast at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London). Photograph by the author (Ling, 2019).

TRAJAN PRO

LITHOS

CHARLEMAGNE

Figure 14: Trajan Pro, Lithos and Charlemagne, fonts designed by Carol Twombly (1989). Typographic illustration by the author (Ling, 2020).

Figure 15: The font Trajan Pro laid on top of the original Trajan capitals showing the difference in the thickness of the strokes. Typographic illustration by the author (Ling, 2020).

by the 10th Century Carolingian Script and Versals from that period and *Lithos* was inspired by Greek inscriptions from the 4th Century BC (see figure14).

When designing a font, adjustments to the letter shapes or general proportions are necessary to promote legibility and consistency across the alphabet. With *Trajan Pro*, we can see that the font is truthful to the original source, but it is not a direct copy from the original inscription. In figure 15, we can see the width of the strokes is generally thicker compare to the original inscription, but the general proportions and shapes remain the same. The font *Trajan Pro* projects a sense of authority and clarity.

The font *Cataneo* is another notable example of a font design inspired by historical script, but the design has to be adjusted for the purpose of font production. In 1545, the Italian calligrapher Bernardino Cataneo developed a copybook of Italic writing (see figure 16). Using the script found in this copybook, Richard Lipton and Jacqueline Sakwa created *Cataneo* in 1991 for the Bitstream Font Foundry. The typeface has a variety of styles, weights and extended characters to reflect the calligraphic origin of the font. We can see in figure 17 that the font design has to be adapted in order to make it more legible and suitable for reading. The font design shows that the letter strokes are thicker, and the general proportion of letters are also wider compared to the original script found in the copybook.

From these examples, we can see that the transference of a calligraphy hand into typefaces is not so straight forward. There are instances where shapes or proportions of letters need to be altered in order to fit specific criteria (legibility, the regularity of design, etc). This is particularly important if the font is designed as a text font (e.g. *Cataneo*), rather than a display font (e.g. *Trajan Pro*). There are, however, exceptions where font designs would reflect faithfully the original hand script. The typeface *Zapfino* was designed by Herman Zapf in 1998 and was produced by Linotype. The font was inspired by the original script written by Zapf himself back in 1944. Using the OpenType technology, *Zapfino* was designed to have a vast range of alternate characters and ligatures, such that with a trained eye and the appropriate printing method, one can produce a piece of typography that looks like calligraphy (see figure 18).

There are other examples of calligraphic fonts where they aim to capture the roughness and the energy of a handwritten script. *ITC Kendo* designed by Phil Grimshaw in 1997 for ITC is a very good example where the font is deliberately designed to reflect the handmade elements with framed capital letters, energetic strokes and splatters of ink. With a glance, the font looks like it was written with a pen, rather than typed (see figure 19).

Figure 16: Bernardino Cataneo's copybook of Italic writing in 1545. Image taken from Harvard University, Houghton Library website: https://digitalcollections.library.harvard.edu/catalog/990096166220203941_FHCL.HOUGH:4678751

Cataneo Light

The quick and brown standard flea jumps over the especially lazy frog eating difficult hamburgerfonts

Cataneo Light Extended & Swash

The quick & brown standard flea jumps over the especially lazy frog eating difficult hamburgerfonts

Figure 17: The fonts 'Cataneo' designed by Lipton and Sakwa in 1991. Note the use of extended and alternate characters to create typography that imitates calligraphy. The proportion of the letters have to be adjusted accordingly to aid legibility. Typographic illustration by the author, (Ling, 2020).

Figure 18: The font ‘Zapfino’, designed by Herman Zapf in 1998. With the correct use of alternate characters, the typography could be made to look like calligraphy. Typographic design by the author, (Ling, 2020).

Figure 19: The font ITC Kendo, designed by Phil Grimshaw in 1997. This font shows innovative features such as ink splatter to add texture to the page. Typographic design by the author (Ling, 2020).

Quite often, technology, fashion or trend can dictate the design of a font. It is also imperative that type designers have a sensitivity to letter shapes and what ‘emotions’ or ‘feelings’ that fonts might portray. The essence of this knowledge can be acquired through the practice of calligraphy. This sentiment is echoed by Michael Harvey, where he writes “anyone who designs, draws or carve letters, or creates them digitally, needs to understand their shapes, how each character arrived at its particular form. Without such understanding, their rendering of the alphabet will lack conviction, and the essential practice here is writing with the broad-edged pen” (Harvey, 2002, p. 95).

Figure 20: 'He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven', font and typographic design by the author, Texts by W. B. Yeats, 1899 (Ling, 1998).

Figure 21: Illustration showing the various stages of layering involved to create 'He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven'. Strictly speaking, this is a piece of typographic design, not calligraphy (Ling, 1998).

8 Digital media and calligraphy

The font *Impetuous Italics* (Ling, 1998) was conceived to explore how calligraphy can be assimilated into typography and whether the chi of calligraphy can be translated into type design. A type design software *Fontographer* was used to design the font with the main focus of mirroring the essence of calligraphy into the font. The strokes of the letters are deliberately made inconsistent and that there are alternate characters to ensure there is an irregular look to the text. Once the font is designed, experimentations with Photoshop was carried out to see how the font can be used

Figure 22: 'The Spirit of Calligraphy' showing the final composited artwork. Calligraphy by the author, (Ling, 2008).

Figure 23: Image showing the various elements that are pieced together to create the final outcome. Calligraphy by the author, (Ling, 2008).

in a calligraphic way. The work *He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven* shows the use of 'layering' and that the letters are typed rather than written on the page (see figure 20). Although the finished artwork looks like calligraphy, it is in fact a piece of typographic design. Using the 'layering' technique, various scanned elements were used to compose a piece of artwork (see figure 21). This approach involving digital media brings another set of tools and different possibilities to calligraphy making. The convergence of digital media and calligraphy to create 'serious' work is a relatively new phenomenon, except perhaps for commercial lettering or for print reproduction purposes.

The use of digital media adds 'flexibility', 'reusability', 'permanence' and 'transference' (Ling, 2008) to the creation of calligraphy artwork. In figure 22 we have a piece of calligraphy that is seemingly written and composed naturally. In reality, the calligraphy is made up of multiple elements to form the final composition (figure 23). Unlike calligraphy, where there is no room for error, with digital media, the sense of the 'permanence' is different in that elements can be deleted or 're-do' and 'un-do' by a press of a key. In figure 24, we see the same piece of writing being laser etched on to the plywood showing the 'transference' of the artwork to different materials, technologies and processes.

Figure 24: The same calligraphy from figure 22 being laser etched onto plywood. Showing the ‘transference’ of materials, processes and technology of calligraphy (Ling 2019).

Despite the ease of use and the versatility of digital media, there is one key element that is missing, and that is the sense of touch that Reynolds and Skaggs mentioned before. From experience, calligraphy with digital media can produce new and innovative work. However, the process or the act of making can lack soul. The sense of touch, materiality and the tacit experience are so different to creating something by hand.

9 Conclusion

This paper shows the interconnections between palaeographers, calligraphers and type designers. We also see how a western calligrapher can look into the East Asian tradition to inform and develop his practice.

For this development to take place, it is asserted that the definition of calligraphy needs to be adapted for the modern age. The traditional definition of ‘beautiful writing’ no longer reflects what calligraphy is and how it is used. We see calligraphy has become a more personal and expressive medium rather than a scribal activity.

With the globalised world, Western calligraphers begin to explore ideas and influences from other cultures and contexts. Artistic endeavours are continually shifting and changing and we see how elements from the East can be adapted and integrated into Western calligraphy. The primary element mentioned here is the phenomenon known as ‘chi’. It can be described as the ‘energy’ or the ‘spirit’ of writing, where the calligraphic marks made have an honest and intuitive quality. The calligraphy work shown here demonstrates that it is possible to develop a ‘cross-cultural’ approach to calligraphy, where the essence of the self-being is imbued and reflected in the writing.

The influence of calligraphy on font design has long historical importance. We understand that calligraphic writing can be interpreted into font designs but the proportion and details of the letterforms have to be adjusted to aid legibility and functionality. It shows by having a deep understanding of calligraphic forms and their historical context would help to inform the font designer's practice.

The disciplines of palaeography, calligraphy and type design should no longer be a singular activity and that by bringing across a team of people from different disciplines to work together would enhance and contribute to existing knowledge and push the boundaries in what we do.

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