

Most abstract of ^{Dawn 29.1}

Calligraphy is one of the most popular art forms in China. Millions enjoy practising calligraphy either as a means of creative art or just as a hobby

By Abdul Majeed

the earliest written characters. Another story says that Cangjie saw the footprints of birds and beasts, which inspired him to create the written characters.

Inscriptions from the Shang Dynasty on turtle shells and animal bones are similar to the present day Chinese characters, which have gradually evolved into the art of calligraphy.

Today, Chinese calligraphy is a unique Oriental art of expression and a branch of learning. As a discipline, it is rich in content, wide-ranging and profound, an important

and most condensed of abstract arts.

They praise this form of Chinese art as having the beauty of an image in painting, the beauty of dynamism in dance and the beauty of rhythm in music. Thus, abstract art - the ultramodern art of the West - takes cognizance of the most ancient art - calligraphy - of the East, establishing an intimate relationship between the two. Chinese calligraphy uses special tools such as Chinese ink, Chinese ink stone, Chinese brush and paper.

The ink employed in calligraphy is usually made from

Eventually the ink cakes and the ink sticks have themselves become a decorative art form. Many well-known artists have created designs and patterns for their molds.

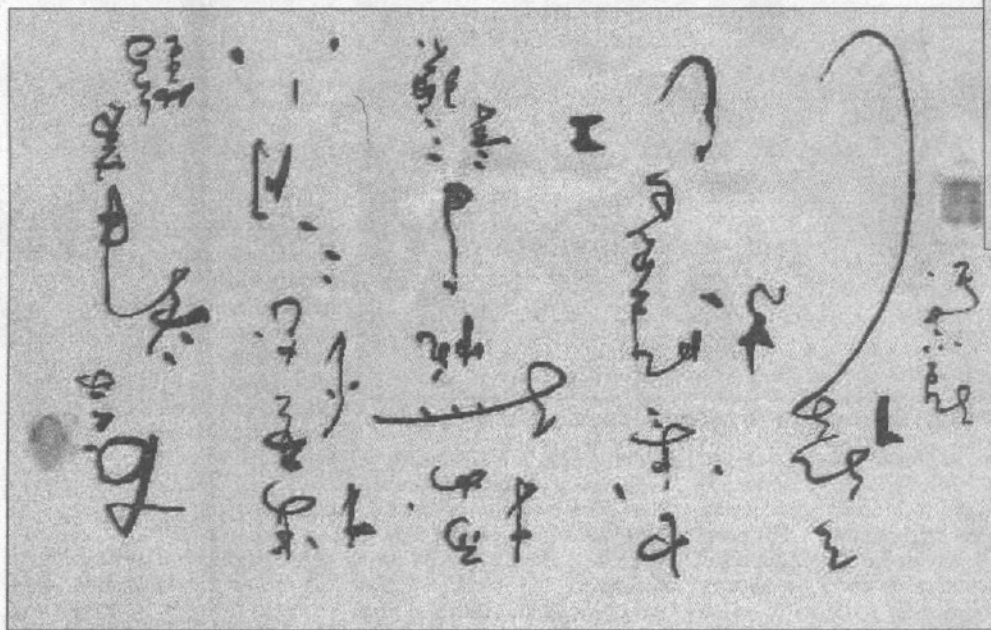
Archaeological evidence confirms that brushes were known in China at a much earlier date, it was during the Hans period that their use became widespread. A typical brush consists of a bundle of animal hairs (black rabbit, white goat hair, and yellow weasel hair were all very popular) pushed inside a tube of bamboo or wood. The hair are not all of the same length; rather, an inner core has

THE word "calligraphy" is originally a Greek word that means "beautiful writing". Chinese calligraphy is globally appreciated for its unique style, beauty and presentation. In fact, it is a gem in the world's art treasury.

Calligraphy, the writing of characters, is an art, which has developed over many centuries in China. Through the medium of Chinese characters an artist conveys moral integrity, emotions and aesthetic feelings. He pours forth his emotions like silent music through the soaring and dancing strokes of the characters.

Chinese characters are one of the earliest written languages in the world with a history of 6,000 years. The prototype and development of Chinese characters can be traced from inscriptions on primitive painted pottery.

There have been various stories about the origin of the Chinese script. Ancient writers attribute it to a man named Cangjie. Caddie, who according to one legend, saw a divine being whose face had unusual features, which looked like a picture of writing. In imitation of his image, Cangjie created



part of Chinese culture.

Calligraphy is an abstract art. In recent times, Western lovers of calligraphy have discovered the unique beauty of "Chinese Calligraphy". They say every character is written like a beautiful flower.

Western scholars visiting China developed a keen interest in "Chinese Calligraphy". They believed that Chinese calligraphy is the most ancient

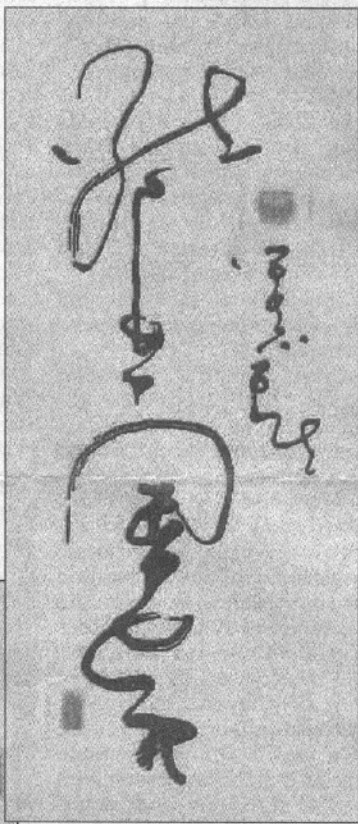
lampblack, a sooty residue created by burning pine resin or oil underneath a hood. After being collected, the lampblack is mixed with glue and then pressed into molds. The resulting hardened cakes or sticks can then be ground against a stone and mixed with water, a process that allows the calligrapher to control the thickness of the ink and the density of the pigment.

shorter hair around it, which in turn is covered by an outer layer that tapers to a point. Brushes come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes that determine the type of line produced. What all such brushes have in common, however, is their flexibility.

It is this feature more than any other that allows the calligraphic line to be so fluid and expressive.

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of arts



The invention of paper is widely appreciated as one of China's major technological contributions to the world. Tradition credits the discovery of the process to Cai Lun. Paper was made from various fibers, such as mulberry, hemp, and bamboo, and provided an inexpensive alternative to silk as a ground material for calligraphy and painting.

Together with ink stone - a carved stone slab with a reservoir for grinding ink and mixing it with water brush, ink, and paper are known in China as the Four Treasures of Chinese Calligraphy.

These Four Treasures are the same materials employed by traditional Chinese painters. Some critics have pointed to this as a way of explaining why calligraphy has a higher status in China than elsewhere. The argument goes : In Europe, for instance, paint-

ing is a high art; calligraphy does not use the same materials as painting; therefore, calligraphy is not accorded the same status as painting. In China painting and calligraphy use the same materials; therefore, calligraphy is considered a high art akin to painting.

Chinese calligraphy as a fine art has many styles. But the major ones are Zuanshu (seal script), Lishu (official or clerical script), Xingshu (running script), Kaishu (standard script) and Caoshu (cursive script). Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, for almost 30 years onward calligraphy basically was not encouraged by the government while Mao Zedong was in power. Chinese calligraphy was regarded at that time as representing the old tradition by the Chinese people who were enthusiastic on building a new China. But it is interesting to note that Chairman Mao himself was an excellent calligrapher. He was especially excellent in the cursive style of calligraphy influenced by Monk Huaisu of the Tang Dynasty.

Many old calligraphers suffered during the "Cultural Revolution" (1966-76~). The veteran calligrapher Shen Yinmo in Shanghai, for instance, was forced to burn a lot of his excellent calligraphy work as well as manuscripts on the theory of calligraphy with his own hands.

Calligraphy became the most popular art in China after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Millions of people, ranging from government leaders to intellectuals to ordinary people, now enjoy practicing calligraphy either as a means of creative art or just as a hobby.

A lot of calligraphers appeared in the early 1980s when the chaos in the country ended and it turned to economic and cultural development.

After the 1989 Tian'anmen Square incident the modern period of Chinese calligraphy begins. Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu Province and former capital of China, has long been famous for its profound cultural heritage. It is believed to be an important centre in the artistic movement of modern calligraphy. ■