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Preface

Art appeared with the appearance of man, and has been continuing and developing since ancient times. Chinese art is unique in the world of art, showing very salient features. In essence, these features can be explained with the "vigor of style" (wind and bone) theory put forward by the Chinese ancient literary critic Liu Xie (c. 465–520). "Vigor of style" can be called the essence of Chinese art.

First, "vigor of style" combines movement and stillness harmoniously.

Nature is on the move anytime and anywhere, and life is also on the move anytime and anywhere. Movement shows the evolution of nature and also marks the existence of life. The seemingly silent sculptural art created by French sculptor Rodin essentially manifests all kinds of movement. His view on art is: "'Movement' is the truth of the universe, and only 'signs of movement' can show life, spirit and the incredible things hidden behind nature." (On Rodin's Art) Chinese sculpture is also like this. The bronze sculpture of the Han Dynasty "Galloping Horse Treading on a Flying Swallow" shows extraordinary "movement" with extraordinary "stillness". This dialectical relationship between movement and stillness is manifested in many aspects of Chinese art—for example, the cursive script and regular script of calligraphy, landscape painting and flower-bird painting, continuation and pausing of music, flying and silence in dances, and martial arts and stage appearance in Chinese traditional opera all manifest the relationship between movement and stillness. Actually movement and stillness always exist in harmony. There is

movement in stillness, and vice versa. Mountains tower in a storm, and kite eagles breathe in spring. There is no absolute movement or absolute stillness in either nature or the biosphere.

Speaking of the specific movement and stillness of "vigor of style" in Chinese art, calligraphy and painting with a very long history are both good supporting evidence. In a certain sense, calligraphy and painting are similar to dancing in nature, and their structures, momentum and effect of writing with great efforts to infiltrate the paper are all results of vigor of style and effects of coordination between movement and stillness. "Movement" gives people a lively and dynamic aesthetic feeling, while "stillness" gives people a steady and still aesthetic feeling. Only by combining "movement" and "stillness" appropriately can we create a unique beautiful state.

Secondly, "vigor of style" combines the virtual and the real.

Chinese calligraphy, painting, sculpture, music, dancing and traditional opera all attach great importance to blanks. Actually blanks are not empty but places where the wind of nature and the air of life flow. The virtual air shows charm; the real strength shows thoughts. Poetry and painting can both combine the virtual and the real to depict the sun and moon with smoke and glow, depict spring and autumn with grass and trees, show vigor of style between the real and the virtual, and manifest infinity with finiteness. For example, the description of snow by Tang poet Cen Sen (c. 715–770) "Is like a spring gale, come up in the night, Blowing open the petals of ten thousand pear trees" (A Song of White Snow in Farewell to Field-clerk Wu Going Home) manifests painting in poetry and stillness in movement.

In view of China's history, people of the Jin Dynasty were the most romantic and best at turning reality into a virtual state of mysterious philosophy in enjoying landscapes. This is prominently manifested in painting especially. For example, in *Ode to the Goddess of the Luo River* by Gu Kaizhi (348–409), the Goddess of the Luo River and Cao Zhi appear repeatedly, and many relatively independent pictures are united in the landscape background. "People are bigger than mountains", and "water flow on riverbanks". The virtual and the real appear alternately and quite appropriately. Besides, flowers, birds, fishes and worms in Chinese flower-bird paintings also seem lost in the vast universe, experiencing nature and life with empty minds and mysterious philosophies and achieving a perfect stage of emptiness, brightness and clarity. The virtual and the real can set each other off and form a pleasing contrast. Actually, the virtual is vaster and deeper

reality, and the real is more thought-provoking emptiness. The artistic conception of combination of the virtual and the real is more fascinating.

Speaking of the virtual and the real, Chinese traditional opera must be mentioned. In Chinese traditional opera performances, "three or five steps represent a long distance, and seven or eight people represent one million mighty soldiers". This is the best manifestation of combination of the virtual and the real. Replacement of a horse with a whip and a boat with an oar is replacement of the real with the virtual. Virtual performances led to the gradual formation of the feature that performers gave attention to the beauty of body movement instead of the reality of imitation on the stage of Chinese traditional opera. Viewers enjoy performance procedures more and do not insist on the reality of performers' performances, thus reality is naturally in their minds.

Thirdly, "vigor of style" combines flexibility and rigidity.

"Winds" are very flexible, making sounds but having no form; "bones" are rigid, making no sound but having forms. The rigidity and flexibility of "vigor of style" are thoroughly manifested in Chinese calligraphy, painting, sculpture, music, dancing and traditional opera.

As to flexibility and rigidity in calligraphy, there is a vivid description in *Treatise on Calligraphy* written by Sun Guoting (646–691) in the Tang Dynasty: "Thin like the crescent moon in the sky and graceful like stars in the Milky Way, they are wonderful creations of nature instead of results of efforts." Specifically, use of the writing brush can best manifest the opposition and unity between rigidity and flexibility. Before the writing brush touches paper, rigidity and flexibility do not exist; when the writing brush touches paper, rigidity and flexibility coexist with each other, rely on each other and transform into each other. Tilting in the composition, black and white in the layout, flexible styles, unsmooth and stable stroke structures... are all results of combination of flexibility and rigidity. For example, Chinese characters written by Wang Xianzhi (344–386) in the Eastern Jin Dynasty are deemed as "majestic but enchanting": "majestic" means rigid and absolutely still like jagged rocks; "enchanting" means flexible, gentle and touching like rippling water. *Medicine Pill in the Shape of a Duck Head, Ode to the Goddess of the Luo River*, etc. by Wang Xianzhi combining flexibility and rigidity have been handed down from ancient times.

Rigidity and flexibility are also very prominently manifested in Chinese dances. For example, Tang dances are classified into vigorous dances and soft dances. Vigorous dances with clear

rhythms and big movements show a vigorous style, e.g. *Sword Dance*, *Zhezhi Dance* and *Huxuan Dance*; soft dances with slow rhythms and soft movements show a graceful style, e.g. *Green Waist Dance*, *Liangzhou Dance* and *The Singing of Spring Orioles*. The rigid style of vigorous dances and the flexible style of soft dances form a sharp contrast, showing a picture of Tang dances combining flexibility and rigidity.

To sum up, "vigor of style" combining movement and stillness, the virtual and the real, and flexibility and rigidity is manifested in all fields of Chinese art and is a unique character of Chinese art. In a certain sense, art is closest to philosophy. Its description of nature and life penetrates the surface and goes deep into the core. It is just because of the highly dialectical relationship that can be elevated to the level of philosophy that the concept of "vigor of style" can last for long and become the essence of Chinese art.

がなる。一般は一般なる。一般は一般ない。 事。法泛性 小孩孩孩 相以以此 ノムは

Calligraphy: Writing as Art

Calligraphy, a kind of art particular to China, can show spirit, create artistic conceptions and manifest personalities. This artistic feature originated from Chinese characters' unique nature—Chinese pictographic characters made the emergence of Chinese calligraphic art possible. Moreover, in the long course of historical development, Chinese calligraphic art absorbed numerous elements of material civilization and spiritual civilization and kept carrying them forward.



Unique Chinese Characters

Early Chinese characters appear on various objects. According to today's archeological discoveries, pottery is among the earliest utensils used by ancient Chinese people to write Chinese characters. Archeologists discovered pottery carved with Chinese characters from the site of the Dawenkou Culture in Shandong dating back to about 3000 BC. These pottery characters and ancient Chinese characters are similar—for example, the associative compound-character "炅" is on one pottery vessel: the sun is above the clouds, and five mountain peaks tower under the clouds. Its meaning is "hot". This shows that Chinese characters evolved from pictures on the basis of pictographs, and later became ideograms after processing and arrangement.

Inscriptions on tortoise shells and bones are relatively complete characters in the known system of ancient Chinese language with epoch-marking significance in the history of Chinese characters' development. As the name implies, inscriptions on tortoise and bones shells are characters carved on tortoise shells and animal bones. Inheriting the pottery character formation methods, they were carved or written on tortoise shells and animal bones by Chinese people of the Shang Dynasty (1600 BC–1046 BC) for divination and recording. Up till now, about 150,000 tortoise shells and bones carved with Chinese characters have been unearthed with more than 5,000 single characters. Inscriptions on tortoise shells and bones laid a foundation for later development of Chinese characters. Meanwhile, inscriptions on tortoise shells and bones have the three basic elements of calligraphic art: use of the writing brush, stroke structures and composition. Therefore, we can say that calligraphic art took shape preliminarily.

A Brief Introduction to Philology by Mr. Qiu Xigui briefly summarizes the history of Chinese characters' development: "Even if we calculate from the late Shang Dynasty, Chinese characters have a history of 3,300 years. In this long period, Chinese characters underwent some very