

**CHINESE**  
CULTURE

**ART**

**LIU QIANGONG**



China Intercontinental Press



**CHINESE**  
*CULTURE*

**ART**

**LIU QIANGONG**



图书在版编目 (C I P) 数据

中国文化·艺术: 英文 / 刘谦功著; 译谷译. -- 北京: 五洲传播出版社, 2014.12

ISBN 978-7-5085-2811-3

I. ①中… II. ①刘… ②译… III. ①文化史—中国—英文②艺术史—中国—英文 IV. ①K203 ②J120.9

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2014) 第 143110 号

---

### 中国文化系列丛书

主 编: 王岳川  
出 版 人: 荆孝敏  
统 筹: 付 平

### 中国文化·艺术

著 者: 刘谦功  
责任编辑: 苏 谦  
图片提供: FOTOE CFP 东方 IC  
装帧设计: 丰饶文化传播有限责任公司  
出版发行: 五洲传播出版社  
地 址: 北京市海淀区北三环中路 31 号生产力大楼 B 座 7 层  
邮 编: 100088  
电 话: 010-82005927, 82007837  
网 址: [www.cicc.org.cn](http://www.cicc.org.cn)  
承 印 者: 北京光之彩印刷有限公司  
版 次: 2015 年 5 月第 1 版第 1 次印刷  
开 本: 889×1194mm 1/16  
印 张: 12  
字 数: 180 千字  
定 价: 128.00 元

# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	6	Expressing Feelings through Mountains and Rivers	52
<b>Calligraphy: Writing as Art</b>	8	Flowers and Birds	59
Unique Chinese Characters	10	<i>Along the River During the Qingming Festival</i>	66
The Four Treasures of the Study	16	Changing with the Times	70
The Sage of Calligraphy and the Best Running Script Work in the World	19	<b>Sculpture: Three-dimensional Art</b>	76
The Four Regular Script Masters	23	Oriental Charm	78
Unrestrained Cursive Script	28	Ancient Bronze Sculptures	81
Traditional Calligraphy and Modern Life	32	The Terracotta Army	85
<b>Painting: Silent Poems in Praise of Nature and People</b>	36	Buddhist Statues in China	89
Unique Chinese Painting	38	Public Sculpture	99
Depicting Both Ancient and Contemporary Figures	41		
Elegant Ladies	49		

<b>Music: Sound for the Soul</b>	102
Music and the Mind	104
Traditional Stringed and Woodwind Instruments	107
Ancient Tunes	113
Ethnic Music	117
Singing Aloud: Popular Songs	123
Chinese Musicians in the Modern Age	129

<b>Dance: The Beat of Life</b>	134
When Singing Is not Enough, People Dance	136
Ceremonial Dance	140
The Golden Age of Dance	144
Folk Dance	149
Dances from Nature	152
Dance that Celebrates Life	157

<b>Drama:</b>	
<b>A Big World on a Small Stage</b>	160
An Ancient Art	162
Chinese Drama: from Birth to Maturity	167
The Elegance of Kun Opera	171
Beijing Opera	174
From Greek Drama to Chinese <i>Huaju</i>	180



**CHINESE**  
CULTURE

**ART**

**LIU QIANGONG**



China Intercontinental Press

图书在版编目 (C I P) 数据

中国文化·艺术:英文/刘谦功著;译谷译.--北京:五洲传播出版社,2014.12

ISBN 978-7-5085-2811-3

I. ①中… II. ①刘… ②译… III. ①文化史—中国—英文②艺术史—中国—英文 IV. ① K203 ② J120.9

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2014) 第 143110 号

---

### 中国文化系列丛书

主 编 : 王岳川

出 版 人 : 荆孝敏

统 筹 : 付 平

### 中国文化·艺术

著 者 : 刘谦功

责任编辑 : 苏 谦

图片提供 : FOTOE CFP 东方 IC

装帧设计 : 丰饶文化传播有限责任公司

出版发行 : 五洲传播出版社

地 址 : 北京市海淀区北三环中路 31 号生产力大楼 B 座 7 层

邮 编 : 100088

电 话 : 010-82005927, 82007837

网 址 : [www.cicc.org.cn](http://www.cicc.org.cn)

承 印 者 : 北京光之彩印刷有限公司

版 次 : 2015 年 5 月第 1 版第 1 次印刷

开 本 : 889×1194mm 1/16

印 张 : 12

字 数 : 180 千字

定 价 : 128.00 元

# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	6	Expressing Feelings through Mountains and Rivers	52
<b>Calligraphy: Writing as Art</b>	8	Flowers and Birds	59
Unique Chinese Characters	10	<i>Along the River During the Qingming Festival</i>	66
The Four Treasures of the Study	16	Changing with the Times	70
The Sage of Calligraphy and the Best Running Script Work in the World	19	<b>Sculpture: Three-dimensional Art</b>	76
The Four Regular Script Masters	23	Oriental Charm	78
Unrestrained Cursive Script	28	Ancient Bronze Sculptures	81
Traditional Calligraphy and Modern Life	32	The Terracotta Army	85
<b>Painting: Silent Poems in Praise of Nature and People</b>	36	Buddhist Statues in China	89
Unique Chinese Painting	38	Public Sculpture	99
Depicting Both Ancient and Contemporary Figures	41		
Elegant Ladies	49		



■ **Music: Sound for the Soul** ————— 102

Music and the Mind ————— 104

Traditional Stringed  
and Woodwind Instruments ————— 107

Ancient Tunes ————— 113

Ethnic Music ————— 117

Singing Aloud: Popular Songs ————— 123

Chinese Musicians in the Modern Age ————— 129

■ **Dance: The Beat of Life** ————— 134

When Singing Is not Enough, People Dance — 136

Ceremonial Dance ————— 140

The Golden Age of Dance ————— 144

Folk Dance ————— 149

Dances from Nature ————— 152

Dance that Celebrates Life ————— 157

■ **Drama:**

**A Big World on a Small Stage** ————— 160

An Ancient Art ————— 162

Chinese Drama: from Birth to Maturity ————— 167

The Elegance of Kun Opera ————— 171

Beijing Opera ————— 174

From Greek Drama to Chinese *Huaju* ————— 180

# Preface

Art appeared along with people and has been developing ever since. Chinese art is unique, with distinctive features. The essence of these features can be explained using the “vigor of style” theory put forward by the Chinese literary critic Liu Xie (c. 465–520). But how do we define vigor of style?

Firstly, vigor of style harmoniously combines movement and stillness.

Nature is constantly on the move—it is always evolving, always bringing new life into being. The sculptures created by the French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) essentially manifest all kinds of movement. His view on art was: “‘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 Han Dynasty bronze sculpture *Galloping Horse Treading on a Flying Swallow* shows extraordinary “movement” alongside extraordinary “stillness”. This dialectical relationship between movement and stillness is present in many aspects of Chinese culture—for example, the cursive script and regular script of calligraphy, landscape painting and flower-bird painting, continuous music and silence in music, flying movements and stillness in dance, and the parallels between the martial arts and Chinese traditional opera—all of these art forms feature relationships between movement and stillness. Movement and stillness co-exist: mountains tower in a storm—there is no absolute movement or absolute stillness.

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

Chinese calligraphy, painting, sculpture, music, dance and traditional opera all attach great importance to blank, or empty space. But blank space is not actually empty—it is space where art can breathe. Both poetry and painting use emptiness to emphasize the vigor of style that exists between real and virtual worlds. For example, the Tang poet Cen Shen (c. 715–770) describes snow in the following way: [It] “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*).

The people of the Jin Dynasty were the most accomplished at representing reality as a state of mysterious philosophy. This is particularly obvious in their landscape paintings. In *Ode to the Goddess of the Luo River* by Gu Kaizhi (348–409), the Goddess of the Luo River and poet Cao Zhi (192–232) appear repeatedly, and important visual references can be seen in the background: people are bigger than mountains, and water flows on riverbanks. The virtual and the real appear alternately in Chinese art: flowers, birds, fish and worms in Chinese flower-bird paintings seem lost in a vast universe.

When speaking of the virtual and the real, Chinese traditional opera must be mentioned. In Chinese traditional opera performances, movement and props represent things larger and more significant than themselves: three or five steps represent a long distance, seven or eight people represent one million mighty soldiers, a horse is symbolized by a whip, a boat by an oar. Performers in Chinese opera pay attention to beauty of movement instead of the reality of imitation on stage. The audience enjoys these conventions of performance and do not insist on realism in actors’ performances, leaving this to their own imaginations.

Thirdly, vigor of style combines flexibility and rigidity, also known as the “wind and bone” theory of art.

The wind is flexible and possesses sound but no form; bone is rigid—it has form but no sound. The combined and contrasting rigidity and flexibility that typifies vigor of style—“wind and bone”—can be seen in Chinese calligraphy, painting, sculpture, music, dance and traditional opera.

In calligraphy, the use of the writing brush best demonstrates the opposition and unity between rigidity and flexibility. There is a vivid description of this practice in *Treatise on Calligraphy* written by Sun Guoting (646–691) during 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 the

results of effort.” This means that before the writing brush touches the paper, rigidity and flexibility do not exist; when the writing brush touches the paper, rigidity and flexibility coexist with each other, rely on each other and transform each other. Tilting in the composition, black and white in the layout, unsmooth and stable stroke structures: these are all results of the combination of flexibility and rigidity. For example, Chinese characters written by Wang Xianzhi (344–386) in the Eastern Jin Dynasty are deemed to be “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*, and *Ode to the Goddess of the Luo River* by Wang Xianzhi, combine flexibility and rigidity, and this sensibility has been handed down from ancient times.

Rigidity and flexibility are also prominent in Chinese dance. For example, Tang dance is classified into vigorous dances and soft dances.

Vigorous dances with clear rhythms and big movements show a dynamic style, e.g. the *Sword Dance*, *Zhezhi Dance* and the *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, giving a whole view of Tang dance that combines flexibility and rigidity.

In summary, vigor of style combines movement and stillness, the virtual and the real, and flexibility and rigidity, and can be seen in all fields of Chinese art.

晉王珣伯遠帖



伯遠帖

期月送之實自

志在優游始獲此

不烈申公別以昨

古遠第嶺高不相



# Calligraphy: Writing as Art

Calligraphy, a type of art particular to China, can display spiritual and artistic concepts as well as the personality of the calligrapher. These artistic features are unique to Chinese writing—Chinese pictographic characters made the emergence of Chinese calligraphic art possible. Over the centuries Chinese calligraphy has absorbed aspects of its surrounding culture and has taken them forward for new generations to enjoy.

# Unique Chinese Characters

Early Chinese characters appear on various objects. Pottery provides some of the earliest utensils used by ancient Chinese people. Archeologists have discovered pottery carved with Chinese characters from 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 “旦” has been found on one pottery vessel. It translates to: the sun is above the clouds and mountain peaks; so this character means “dawn”. This shows that Chinese characters evolved from pictures, to pictographs, and later to ideograms.

Inscriptions on tortoise shells and bones form relatively complete characters in the known system of the ancient Chinese language, and have tremendous significance for the history of Chinese character development. Character inscriptions on tortoise shells and bones inherited the character formation methods used on pottery. These inscriptions were carved or written on tortoise shells and animal bones by the people of the Shang Dynasty (1600 BC–1046 BC) for the purposes of divination and recording. Up till now, about 150,000 inscribed tortoise shells and bones have been unearthed, displaying more than 5,000 single characters. Inscriptions on tortoise shells and bones laid the foundation for the later development of Chinese characters. The inscriptions on tortoise shells and bones display the three basic elements of calligraphic art: use of a writing brush, stroke structures, and composition. Therefore, we can say that calligraphic art began with these artifacts.

*A Brief Introduction to Philology* by Mr. Qiu Xigui briefly summarizes the development of Chinese characters: “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 important changes in both forms and structures. In terms of forms, Chinese characters mainly underwent

the change from complicated forms to simple ones, which is manifested in character styles and character patterns... In terms of structures, Chinese characters mainly underwent three changes: 1. the proportion of phonograms rose gradually; 2. the majority of the ideographs used changed from pictographs to [contain] meaning[ful] elements, and; 3. sign characters and semi-sign characters increased gradually.” Today’s Chinese characters have evolved to become a grapheme-syllable language or meaning-phonetic language, though it is different from real alphabetic languages in phonographic modes.

Chinese calligraphic art evolved as the meanings of Chinese characters changed, and these changes in calligraphic style are important and distinct—there are five main Chinese calligraphic styles.

The first one is seal script, the style of ancient Chinese characters, which includes the larger seal script and the lesser seal script. The larger seal script originated in the late Western Zhou Dynasty (1046–771 BC), and was popular in the Qin State during the Warring States Period (475–221 BC).



Pottery of the Dawenkou Culture carved with the Chinese character for “dawn”. These marks are recognized as the earliest Chinese characters.



Inscriptions on tortoise shells and bones show a system of relatively mature Chinese characters. They have thin and straight strokes and lines and are primitive yet vigorous.





A lesser seal script inscription on a bronze tiger-shaped tally (Qin Dynasty). The script consists of neat and beautiful Chinese characters executed with smooth strokes.

The lesser seal script is also known as the Qin seal script. After establishing China as a united country, the First Emperor of China (on the throne from 221–210 BC) required the whole country to use this calligraphic style so that “the same written language” was used throughout China. This calligraphic style continued to be used throughout the Han Dynasty (206–220 AD). In later ages references to the seal script usually meant the lesser seal script, which can be seen on carved stones on Taishan Mountain, Langya Mountain and Kuaiji Mountain and on a lot of surviving Qin measuring vessels, weights and edict boards. During the Qin period the written Chinese language was standardized with fixed forms and positions and the empty parts of characters in vertical rectangular forms were filled in with strokes as much as possible.

The second calligraphic style is the official script, which originated in the Warring States Period and was also popular during the Han Dynasty. The official script broke with the curved forms and structures of the seal script because straight strokes were more convenient for writing. The artistic achievements of the official script made during the Western Han Dynasty and the Eastern Han Dynasty were of the highest order. What remain today are mostly tablet inscriptions and bamboo writing slips. The official script seen on tablet inscriptions shows changeable structures and styles. The structures show different features and layouts: some are square and neat, some are loose and