

From Learning Calligraphy and Painting to Women's Research on Art – Feng Wenfeng¹

Translated by Wenying Pan

這是二十年前的事了。

It was twenty years ago.

記得在一天的下午，我剛從學校下課回到家裡的時候，父親在書房裡，拿了一大卷宣紙預備寫字，我站在書臺邊，看他一張一張的寫。當中有的是對子，有的是屏幅，有的是橫披，字體呢，篆書隸書楷書都有，足足寫了兩個多鐘頭。我正看得出神，橫的直的，一筆一筆的寫，母親三番四覆，叫我去吃飯，我都不肯去，一直等到父親把這些字寫完，才一同吃完飯。在吃飯的時候，父親說：『阿鳳，看我寫字，看的津津有味，飯也不願意先吃，可見得你的留心了。』我說：『爸爸。你教我寫字好嗎？等我把字寫好的時候，人家請你寫字，由我代筆好了。』父親母親聽著。都哈哈的笑起來。父親就說：『好罷，從明天起，待你放學歸來，我就教你寫字吧。』

One afternoon when I returned home after school, my father took many rolls of Xuan paper (*xuanzhi* 宣紙)² and was going to draw calligraphy in the study. I stood by the desk and watched him draw piece by piece. Some were couplets (*duizi* 對子), some were hanging scrolls (*pingfu* 屏幅); some were horizontal inscriptions (*hengpi* 橫披). Styles varied from seal script (*zhuan shu* 篆書), clerical script (*li shu* 隸書) to regular script (*kaishu* 楷書). I was obsessed with my father's straight and horizontal strokes for more than two hours, even though my mother asked me to dinner again and again until my father finished. At dinner, he said: "Feng, you so relished calligraphy you don't even want to have dinner. I can really see that you are interested." I asked: "Dad, would you please teach me calligraphy? If you do so, when people ask you to do calligraphy, I can write it for you." They all laughed, and dad answered: "Well, I will teach you to write after school starting from tomorrow."

從此我每天放學歸家的時候，父親也下了公事房回來教我寫字了。

¹ Feng Wenfeng 馮文鳳, "Cong xuexi shuhua tandao funü yanjiu yishu" 從學習書畫談到婦女研究藝術 [From Learning Calligraphy and Painting to Women's Research on Art], in *Dangdai Funü* 當代婦女, October 1936, 170 - 75.

² Translator's note: Xuan paper is a kind of paper originating in ancient China used for writing and painting.

Since then, my father started to teach me how to write calligraphy every day after school when he was off work.

原來中國的字，想寫得好，除了讀書之外，便要靠有天資與工力了。天資是不能夠強求，工力是靠自己的努力，尤其是有良好的指導者。若果只靠天資，沒有工力，那他所寫的字輕浮飄忽，缺乏根底，反轉說來，只有工力，而沒有天資，那他所寫的字拙滯呆板，沒有一點神韻，所以天資和工力，都不能偏廢的。

Writing Chinese calligraphy well only relies on talent (*tianzi* 天資) and hard-work (*gongli* 工力), in addition to a large amount of reading. Talent cannot compel while hard-work is based on one's efforts, especially with a good mentor. If one rely solely on talent without hard-work, then the characters he writes are frivolous with no roots and reversing. On the other hand, if one only work hard but have no talent, the calligraphy will be dull with no spirit (*shenyun* 神韻). Both talent and hard-work cannot be neglected.

寫字是從篆隸兩體入手，都要下過一番苦功，因為寫篆書，可以練習圓筆，寫隸書，可以練習方筆，把圓筆方筆的基礎弄好之後，那就無論寫那一體的字，都事半功倍了。如果學字，不從篆隸入手，而先寫行書草書。那就任你埋頭埋腦寫字幾十年，也無所成就。

Calligraphy should start from seal script and clerical script with hard-work because through seal script one can practice round strokes while through clerical script one can practice straight strokes. Once one has acquired the basic skills of both round and straight strokes, one will be many times more adept in writing any kind of script. Otherwise, if one start with the cursive or semi-cursive script, one will not achieve anything no matter how hard you have been writing for decades.

當我起手習字的幾天，父親就是這樣的教訓我。父親是金石家，珍藏古代碑帖很多，故我幼年學書的時候關於範本一層，是沒有什麼問題。況且許多親友常常請父親寫字，父親邊寫邊講給我聽，尤其是執筆用筆的方法。我年紀雖然只有八九歲，但是天天聽父親的講解指導。得了門徑，心領神會，不到半年的時候，所寫的字，居然有點像樣了。

Father told me this when I start learning for a few days. As my father is an epigraphy scholar (*jinchijia* 金石家) who has collected many ancient stele rubbings (*beitie* 碑帖), I had a large number of calligraphy models (*fanben* 範本) for my childhood study. Moreover, relatives and father's friends often asked him to write, so he took this opportunity to teach me calligraphy skills, especially the

method of holding and wielding the pen. Although I was only eight or nine years old, with my father's explanation and guide every day, I was able to understand the way of writing calligraphy, and the characters I wrote were a bit decent in less than half a year.

想著某一件事的成就，便要下過一番苦功，學書自然也不能例外。因此臨摹碑帖，多則十幾年，少則三數年，天天有相當時候來學習一種碑帖，才能夠有進境，如果今天學篆書，明天寫隸書，後天又改寫魏碑，過了幾天，又寫行書，見異思遷，這樣子絕對沒有成功的可能。而且學書雖小道，但立志不可不堅，同時也不可不高，須知取法乎上，僅得乎中。比如要學何子貞的字，要從顏真卿入手，想學趙撝叔的字，要從六朝造像入手。若果你拿何子貞趙撝叔的字做範本，那就趣味過低，太不長進了。其實學書對於古今碑帖，應該博覽，使之融會貫通，取各家之長，而自成一體，那是最上的。有些人見了康有為的字，便學康字，見了沈子培的字，便學沈字，那是不必的。因為他們對於書法都不過幾十年苦工，總能夠自成一家，你如果學他，充其量也不過如康沈一樣，但是他們已經成功，你的字便不為人所重視。況且你的不容易寫到他們的境地，就退一步說，要是你有相當的天資和工力，何不另辟途徑，自樹一幟，又何必去做他人的奴隸呢？

Any achievement requires a lot of hard work, and of course, studying calligraphy is no exception. You only can see the improvement after imitating stele rubbings for about a dozen years or no less than three years and taking an amount of time every day to only practice one style. There's no achievement if you write seal script today, semi-cursive script tomorrow, and regular script of the North Wei Dynasty (*wei bei* 魏碑) on the next day. Moreover, it is said that "shoot for the moon, even if you miss, you'll land among the stars (*qufahushang, jindehuzhong* 取法乎上，僅得乎中)." Even though calligraphy is a niche culture, it still requires a strong mind and a high standard. For example, if you prefer the style of He Zizhen (何子貞 1799-1873), you should practice the works of Yan Zhenqing (顏真卿 709-785). If you want to write like Zhao Huishu (趙撝叔 1829-1884), you should start with statue style from the Six Dynasties (*liuchao zaoxiang* 六朝造像). There will be a few improvements without interest if you select the works of He and Zhao as practice models. The best way of writing calligraphy is to view the stele rubbings extensively, no matter ancient or modern, to take the strength of each style and integrate it so that one's own calligraphy style will form. The way that some people like the calligraphy of Kang Youwei (康有為 1858-1927) and practice in Kang's style, and copy Shen Zipei's (沈子培 1850-1922), calligraphy when they see Shen's works is invalid. Because they have worked hard on calligraphy for decades so they can always form their own calligraphy styles, if you follow them, you are as good as them at best. However, they have already been famous. As a consequence, people do not value your calligraphy. Besides, it is not easy for you to achieve their

level in calligraphy. To say the least, if it is true that you have considerable talent and quality, why not create a different style with your unique features instead of being a slave of others?

這是我學習的經過和對於寫字的見解。

These are my learning experiences and understanding of writing calligraphy.

每天寫一個多鐘頭的字，有名的學篆碑本，都寫過數十通，經過了五年的辰光，所寫的字，許多老前輩評閱，都承他們的獎許。我年紀還輕，不敢自滿，還是天天用功，恰值有一次籌振水災的賣物會開會，會中主事的聞得我懂得寫字，就和父親商量，請我到會場裡即席揮毫，寫些屏聯，賣了港幣六百多元，這是我頭一次公開寫字，也是我服務社會的起點，那時我只有十三歲哩。

I wrote calligraphy for more than one hour every day, copying those famous seal script stele rubbings dozens of times. My calligraphy works in the following five years were reviewed and praised by many senior artists. But I remain too young to be complacent, so I still practice hard every day. Once, the principal of a charity for raising funds for the floods heard that I write calligraphy quite well and invited me through my father to write calligraphy at the venue. At that time, the screen couplets (*pinglian* 屏聯) I wrote had sold for more than HK\$ 600. This was my first time writing calligraphy publicly, and it was also the starting point for me to serve the community during which time I was only 13 years old.

父親見我嗜好藝術，就努力的培養我的藝術成功。除了教我寫字之外，更教我繪畫。並請些中西名畫家切磋指導，因此一來，每天除了寫字之外，兼畫起畫來。好在中國的書畫是同源，很容易上手。在寫字繪畫的時候，又學習作詩撰文，天天在文藝圈子裡翻跟斗，覺得十分有趣。到了十六歲的時候，因為有許多親友的慫恿，就設立女子書畫學校，公開招生，教授書畫和刺繡了。廣告登了兩天，報名來學的，竟有數十人，分班教授，不到半年的功夫，各生都有相當的成績。因此我覺得女子對於藝術，是比較接近的。當中有些固然富有藝術天才，成就比較容易，就是資質差一點的，因為性情所近，也容易入門。經過半年的試驗，就繼續辦了四年多，雖然不敢說有什麼驚人的成績，但見他們後來在學校擔任教員，或者升學再求深造，與乎自己繼續用功，而成為名家，也有不少。在我個人呢，二十年來，始終是一個藝術的嗜好者，從事藝術運動，如中國女子書畫會的組織，但是一例。

My father tried to develop my artistic achievements when he observed my interest in art. In addition to teaching me to write, he also taught me to draw and invited some famous painters of Chinese and Western-style paintings to guide me. As a result, I started to paint every day as well as writing calligraphy. Fortunately, painting and calligraphy are homologous and easy for me to learn. In

addition to writing and drawing, I also learned to write poems and essays. I found it very interesting when I immersed myself in literature and art day by day. With the encouragement of relatives and friends, I established a school of calligraphy and painting school for women when I was sixteen years old. The school with open enrolment taught calligraphy, painting, and embroidery. The advertisement attracted dozens of people after being posted for two days. The students were taught in separate classes, and in less than half a year, all students had considerable improvement. Therefore, I believe women are relatively close to art. Some of them who are rich in artistic genius find it easier to be successful, but even women whose talents are not as strong find it easy to get started because of their similar temperament with art. After half a year of trial operation, the school continued for more than four years. Although I dare not say I achieved fantastic success, I saw that some students later worked as teachers in the school, or went on to study for further education, or just continued to study hard by themselves, and many of them even became masters. Personally, I have always been an art addict for two decades, engaged in art movements such as the organization of the Chinese Women's Calligraphy and Painting Society (*zhongguo nüzi shuhua hui* 中國女子書畫會).³

現在我要談談婦女對於研究藝術的旨趣了。

Next, I will discuss women's interest in researching art.

藝術是注重真美善的，提高人們的精神，使人有崇高偉大的人格，發揮個人的旨趣，充分表現作者獨創的境界，抒寫個人的胸臆，目空千古，神遊六合，而已造化為師，宇宙為物件，這些都是真的，美的，善的，和平的，優越的，清潔的，偉大的，光明的，和愛的，惟藝術才能夠表現。最適合婦女的個性。有了藝術修養的人，他的一言一行，都是詩意，而有含蓄，與那些魯莽咩裂粗笨愚呆，自然有很大的分際。婦女在國家法律上，是和男子平等，但我們在社會所擔任的責任，實際說起來，和男子略有不同。要是我們父女引其性之所近，從事文藝的研討，那他所成就的，不只關係他的本人，簡直影響整個的社會，是無疑義的。

Art emphasizes truth, beauty, and goodness (*zhenmeishan* 真美善). Art is able to strengthen people's mentality, develop a noble personality and personal intentions, fully express the author's unique state, and individual opinions. Artists ignore (*mukong* 目空) the entity and view the world (*liuhe* 六合) spiritually (*shenyou* 神遊), regard the nature (*zaohua* 造化) as the guide and the universe as the subject. Those true, beautiful, kind, peace, excellent, clean, grand, bright, and loving natures which are the most suitable for the female personalities only can be expressed by art. Every word and action

³ Translator's note: Chinese Women's Calligraphy and Painting Association (*zhongguo nüzi shuhuahui* 中國女子書畫會) was the first women art association of China established in Shanghai in 1943.

of the person with artistic accomplishment is poetic and implicit, which is very different from those reckless and clumsy and stupid people. Women are equal to men in national laws, but our responsibilities in society are slightly different from those of men. If we promote women like my father did to develop their interests in exploring literature and art, which are close to women's nature, what women have accomplished is not only related to themselves but even undoubtedly affects the entire society.

記得我在中國女子書畫會第三次特刊中，對於女子書畫會的展望，曾舉出幾種要素，如組織研究班，切磋琢磨，以求深造。廣征會員，以求人才的集中。在各地舉行展覽會，以資觀摩。春秋佳日，集約會友旅行名勝古跡，以期廣拓心胸，增加見聞。編印定期刊物，以通消息，而供研究。這都是和研究藝術最有密切關係，不可偏廢的。

In the third special issue of the Chinese Women's Calligraphy and Painting Association, I mentioned several elements for the prospect of the Women's Calligraphy and Painting Society. Such as organizing research classes to study for further education; recruiting members widely for discovering talent; holding exhibitions in various places for providing channels of communication; gathering friends to visit places of interest when the weather is good to broaden minds and increase knowledge, and compiling and printing periodicals to inform people of recent research. These are the most closely related and crucial elements to the study of art.

末了，有些人估量藝術是貴族式的自娛，是中等階級以上的消遣品，這種觀念，是錯誤的。其實藝術，國際界限都沒有，怎能有階級性呢？比如吃飯。什麼飯都是一樣，只有吃的方式不同，猶之乎藝術是一般的，普遍的，只看你運用與欣賞的方式怎樣罷了。在我個人的經驗說來，人人都要有欣賞藝術的趣味，尤其是我們婦女要研究藝術，這是和個人修養有密切關聯，因為藝術能改變人的性情，生活與思想的，他能給人們一種有力的感動，他的價值，是永遠不變，值得人紀念而不能忘卻的呀。

In the end, some people claimed that art is an aristocratic self-entertainment and a pastime for the people above the middle class (*zhongdengjieji* 中等階級). This idea is wrong. Even national boundaries do not apply to art. How can it be class-oriented (*jiejixing* 階級性)? We can compare this to eating rice. Rice is the same everywhere, but the way one eats it is different. Art is general and universal and the way one use and appreciate art is different. In my personal experience, everyone needs an interest in appreciating art, especially women. Because art is closely related to personal cultivation (*xiuyang* 修養), which can change people's temperament, life, and thought. The value of the strong touch that art gives is eternal, which is unforgettable and memorable.