

Promotion of spiritual development: exploration of the self and spiritualism through the practice of Chinese calligraphy

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Promotion of students' spiritual development is one of the goals of pastoral care in schools. The heritage of Chinese calligraphy is traditionally used as a way to enhance an individual's self-reflection and cultivation, and has an educational value in spiritual development. This study aims to examine the cultural meaning of Chinese calligraphy and its practices in general, and specifically its connection to spiritualism. The methodologies of narrative approach and textual analysis were employed. Accordingly, the narratives of five practitioners' personal experiences, including the researcher's, captured in unstructured interviews, plus selected historical texts on calligraphy will be examined. This article suggests that calligraphy serves more than a utilitarian function. The value of spiritualism underlying this art has also been used as a practice of personal development and spiritual discipline, which leads practitioners to reflect in their mind and heart. This value is universal, and can be agreed upon in a pluralistic society and applied to all schools with different cultural backgrounds and also outside of religious traditions. Lastly this article draws school practitioners' attention to the importance of calligraphy for spiritual development of students and its implications for the promotion of pastoral care and spiritual education.

Keywords: *spiritual development; Chinese calligraphy; Daoism*

Introduction

Pastoral care, known as school guidance in Hong Kong schools, seeks to promote the whole person growth of students (Marland, 1974; Hamblin, 1978; Best *et al.*, 1983; Watkins & Wagner, 1987, 2000; Watkins, 1992, 1995, 2001), and is aimed at

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encouraging the students' self-esteem and the development of various aspects of their 'self', especially personal, academic and emotional. The discussion of pastoral care is also extended to suggest that students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development should be promoted (Best, 1996, 2000). Specifically, spirituality is regarded as a significant component of human beings (Burke *et al.*, 1999; Thorsen, 1999; Helminiak, 2001) and an integral part of human development (Worthington, 1989; Burke & Miranti, 1996; Stanard *et al.*, 2000). Schools are responsible for helping students to deal with fundamental questions of human life, and to enhance the growth of inner-self and the internal ability of self-awareness so that they are able to foster an inner life and a non-materialistic well-being as well as connect their heart and mind to a spiritual higher power (Best, 1996, 2000; Talbot, 2000).

In Chinese society, calligraphy is not only the art of beautiful handwriting but also a spiritual practice for promoting an individual's self-cultivation, self-awareness and self-reflection. Traditionally, it is regarded as a crucial way to promote an individual's spiritual development. The aim of this article is to examine the meaning of the practice of Chinese calligraphy from a cultural perspective and to draw school practitioners' attention to the importance of calligraphy education in the promotion of the personal and spiritual growth of students. Relevant literature on western and Chinese calligraphy will be reviewed and an explanation will be given on the methods of narrative analysis approach to personal experience and textual analysis that were adopted to analyse the data. The article argues that calligraphy serves as more than a utilitarian function. The calligraphy of brushwork is not only delightful to the eye, but also an inspiration to the spirit and a practice of spiritual discipline. Specifically, it is a practice of mindfulness for promoting self-reflection and self-cultivation, which leads calligraphy practitioners to reflect with their mind and heart, and thus lead them to a harmonious relationship with others and the natural world. It hence has great potential to be included into pastoral care programmes in schools.

Literature review

In the United Kingdom and Hong Kong, many schools are concerned with students' social and personal development and how the students could be better supported through pastoral care (Gillborn *et al.*, 1993; Daniels *et al.*, 1998; Foster *et al.*, 2002; Ofsted, 2005; Steer Report, 2005; Gitten, 2006; Martin, 2006). While a large variety of students' behavioural problems have been reported, and the students' behaviour has distressed others and affected the climate of the learning community, including interrupting their own and others' progress (Foster *et al.*, 2002; Ofsted, 2005), school practitioners have become aware that there are some crucial elements missing in current caring programmes in schools. In order to address these elements, the programmes have extended the coverage of their caring work to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. However, the literature has not informed us on ways this pastoral care could be carried out using various practices of art, such as calligraphy.

In western societies, calligraphy is rarely considered a practice of spiritual discipline. Over the past 100 years, however, it has been rediscovered and re-learned (Johnston, 1946; Knight, 1998; Uyehara, 2004). Knight pointed out that the heritage and traditions of calligraphy have not been properly addressed and inherited in western societies. Uyehara further suggested that calligraphy has been basically re-studied and re-learned in Europe and the USA up until the end of World War II. Edward Johnston (1872–1944) attempted to rediscover the art of western calligraphy, lettering and illuminating. In his study of ancient inscriptions and old manuscripts, three essential qualities of calligraphy were identified: ‘legibility’, ‘beauty’ and ‘character’ (Johnston, 1946, p. xvi). Similarly, Knight highlighted the essential qualities of ‘legibility’ and ‘beauty’. Further, Johnston stressed that the ‘creativity’ of calligraphy should be imposed upon the tradition and cultural heritage of ancient manuscripts (Johnston, 1946).

In China, the tradition of calligraphy has been inherited and constantly valued for over 2000 years (Chiang, 1973; Tregear, 1980; Mote & Chu, 1988; Chang, 1992; Lee, 1996; Chung, 2004, 2006; Shen, 2004). The art of calligraphy still serves as a central component of Chinese culture as it did in ancient times. It takes the form of lines to express its aesthetic value (Mote & Chu, 1988; Kneib, 1992; Lee, 1996) and to explore poetic and allusive forms of the emotional and spiritual aspects of human life (Chiang, 1973; Tregear, 1980). When comparing western calligraphy with Chinese calligraphy, it appears that western calligraphy is missing its connection with spiritual practices that lead to the cultivation of an individual’s inner-self (Chiang, 1973; Chang, 1992; Chung, 2004, 2006; Shen, 2004; Terayama, 2004). Chung claimed that Chinese calligraphy is constructed to mean aestheticism, utilitarianism and spiritualism. It has been deeply influenced by the philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism and the Buddhism of *Ch’an* (禪), known as *Zen* in Japan. One of its essential qualities is the expression of *qi* (氣) energy, or inner-strength, drawn from the philosophy of Daoism. Similarly, Lee (1996) suggested that calligraphy is regarded as a symbol of traditional Chinese culture, and that it is commonly practiced as a spiritual exercise or meditation. Furthermore, Chang (1992) suggested that calligraphy is more than a form of art. Practitioners always practice it as an aesthetic and reflective way to express their personal thoughts on life. Chiang (1973) made the same point and stressed that the purpose of Chinese calligraphy is not merely to convey thought, but also to express the beauty of the calligrapher’s personal characters in a peculiarly visual way. Hence, it could be concluded that the practice of Chinese calligraphy is a spiritual and psychological process of self-expression, self-cultivation and self-improvement.

However, it has been rare in the literature and for western calligraphers to pay attention to the spiritual aspects of the practice of Chinese calligraphy and to clarify the philosophical values underlying this form of art. So far, no studies have shown how Chinese calligraphy is practiced as a spiritual discipline and how it is used to endow the characters with individual life. Therefore, this article aims to look at the essential elements of the spirit embodied in the practices of Chinese calligraphy and its connection with aestheticism and spiritualism. Implications for the promotion of pastoral care and spiritual education will be identified.

Methodology

This study considered the practice of calligraphy as a narrative or story-telling process, through which its relevant knowledge was constructed and reproduced. Methodologically, the research approaches of narrative analysis (Denzin, 1978, 1998; Anderson, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) and textual analysis (Atkinson, 1990; Dowling, 1999) were employed. Correspondently, two sources of data were collected, and these were the narratives of five calligraphy practitioners' personal experiences, including those of the author of this article, and the historical texts on calligraphy. One of the themes generated from the data was the connection of its aesthetic practices with spirituality, which in turn became the main theme of this article.

Personal narrative

The writing of this article was inspired by my calligraphy tutor, Mr Yuan Hong-Shu (袁鴻樞), from whom I learnt Chinese calligraphy for 16 years. Master Yuan, aged 100, was born in Dongguang, one of the richest towns in Guangdong province, and immigrated to Hong Kong in 1940s. He has been devoted to this form of art since he was a child. Throughout the time I learnt from him, I found that the learning process could be described as a narrative process in which there was a dialogue between myself and my tutor, between myself and my calligraphy classmates, and between myself and the masters of the past. Under my tutor's guidance, a dialogue was further developed between each individual's mind and heart, and this initiated a deep conversation with one's spiritual self.

To explore the narrative of my experience of practicing Chinese calligraphy, and that of four other calligraphy practitioners who learnt from Master Yuan for approximately 15 years, the methodological approach suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (1995) was used. Three dimensions of our personal narrative were examined: the change of the 'space' from the East to the West; in the 'place' where we learnt the Chinese calligraphy with our calligraphy tutor; and throughout 'time', from the past to the present. Furthermore, the analytical framework of moving 'inward', 'outward', 'backward' and 'forward' was adopted. By 'inward', I attempted to examine the inner feelings we experienced when practicing calligraphy, whereas by 'outward' the focus of analysis was on our perception towards this form of art. Regarding 'backward' and 'forward', I tried to see how we made sense of the relevant narrative of movement from the 'past' to 'the present' and how it related to our perception of the 'future' development of Chinese calligraphy, especially in the context of spiritual development.

Furthermore, I closely cross-checked our experiences with the calligraphy texts chosen for this study, and examined how we made sense of the meanings of them. I constantly went back and forth between the historical texts and our personal experience. I examined how I made sense of the meanings of these texts, which formed part of our cultural narrative of the spiritual practices of Chinese calligraphy.

Textual narrative

Apart from the narrative of my personal experience, this study adopted a textual analysis approach for exploring the reality between writers and readers (Atkinson, 1990; Dowling, 1999), and specifically how calligraphy masters of the past, across various dynasties throughout Chinese history, textually constructed a narrative account for readers. The Chinese produced many theoretical texts on calligraphy, starting in the second century AD (Tregear, 1980; Chin & Li, 2004). This study intended to explore the surface (denotative) meanings and examine the more implicit (connotative) cultural meanings of Chinese calligraphy and how the narrative of Chinese calligraphy connected to the aesthetic practices and spiritual disciplines within schools.

In this study, seven influential texts were specifically chosen for analysis, most of which were mentioned by the calligrapher practitioners involved in this study. They were written by well-known calligraphy masters and theorists, and published at different times across various dynasties of China. Nowadays, these texts are still studied and used as basic references for the learning of calligraphy in Chinese societies. The seven chosen texts include:

- *The Movement of the Brush* (筆勢論), and *Discussion on Calligraphy* (書論), by Wang Xi-Zhi (王羲之) (303–379 AD)
- *The Illumination of the Brush* (筆陣圖), by Wei Shou (衛鑠) (272–394 AD)
- *The Pith of Brushes* (筆髓論), by Yu Shi-Nan (虞世南) (558–638 AD)
- *Treatises on Calligraphy* (書譜), by Sun Guo-Ting (孫過庭) (648–702 AD)
- *Sequel to the ‘Treatises on Calligraphy’* (續書譜), by Jiang Kui (姜夔) (1163–1203 AD)
- *Few Words about Calligraphy* (書法約言), by Song Cao (宋曹) (1620–1701 AD)
- *The Outlines of Art* (藝概), by Lui Xi-Zai (劉熙載) (1813–1881 AD)

When the narratives of these texts were analysed and interpreted for this study, the focus was on the contexts of Chinese calligraphy and how they connected to practices at the present time. Specifically, the study intended to find out how we made sense of these texts and used them as a reference for our current practices of calligraphy. Therefore, it was not the intention of this study to seek a correct interpretation of the narratives as it had been for the authors of the chosen texts. Rather, the study attempted to ensure that the texts were interpreted based on the contexts of the current practices of Chinese calligraphy and the experience of the five calligraphy practitioners’ personal engagement in this form of art. It aimed to interpret the texts so they could represent the reality associated with the present and reach a consensus of understanding about the cultural practices of calligraphy that are commonly shared as part of the cultural tradition inherited from the calligraphy masters of ancient times.

Connecting calligraphy to spirituality

Chinese calligraphy took the form of lines to express aesthetic values. The essential elements of its spirit were largely embodied in the process of creating these lines as

much as in the final product of the brushwork. When engaging in calligraphy, we always had to be very mindful of engaging in these aesthetic practices. Calligraphy was a way to help us enrich our aesthetic experience in a much broader sense and intensify our ability for self-awareness, and so lead us to gain insight into the nature of human existence, and experience the flow of *qi* (氣) energy running freely through our body. By engaging with brush, ink and paper, our sense of *qi* energy spreading through our inner self could be developed, enhanced and brought into a harmonious relationship with the pure essence of our heart and mind and with the world around us. In the following sections, the themes that were generated from the constructs of personal narrative and textual analysis will be elaborated under the four headings of ‘Calligraphy of mindfulness’, ‘Calligraphy of the heart’, ‘Holistic approaches of the *Dao*’ and ‘Unification with Nature’.

Calligraphy of mindfulness

Throughout the process of doing calligraphy, spiritualism was embedded in every moment of practice. All procedures for preparation and practice were regarded just as important as the final product of the brushwork. We were led to develop a sense of mindfulness throughout every moment of practice. This included flattening the rice paper, ruling lines on the rice paper, dripping water onto an ink stone, grinding an ink stick, softening a brush with ink using a gentle force, gripping the brush properly and washing calligraphy implements. There were many guidelines for each of these practices so as to promote our sense of mindfulness. For example, when grinding an ink stick we were taught to do it unhurriedly in a circular motion in one direction, either clockwise or anti-clockwise. The ink stick had to be grinded against an ink stone with minimal pressure. Explicit force should never be exerted from the wrist, so that the *qi* energy can be transmitted smoothly and gently from the central part of the body onto the tip of the ink stick. In the circular grinding movement, we should mindfully feel the slight touch between the ink stick and the ink stone and the flow of the energy passing through the feet and *dan tian* (丹田) (an acupunctural point three inches below the navel) and eventually to the finger tips.

Moreover, we were encouraged to coordinate every brushstroke unhurriedly with the gentle flow of *qi* energy by practicing breathing exercises. Consequently, the practice of calligraphy was commonly constructed as if doing ‘Tai-Chi’ and ‘Qi-Gong’ (a kind of meditation combined with breathing exercise that directs the circulation of *qi* energy to run through the human body). We were constantly reminded to ‘slow down’ and ‘concentrate’. As the texts suggested, this breathing exercise could be done with the writing of a stroke, which comprised three parts: attack, development and ending. Before the beginning, or attack, of a stroke, we learnt to get ready and breathe in deeply and gently. When the stroke was developed, we were to breathe out evenly, continuously and very slowly, like a silk worm releasing a line of silk thread with no interruption or hesitation. When the writing of a stroke ended, breathing out could stop. Every part of a stroke should be written mindfully while the breathing exercise was practiced.

Calligraphy of the heart

Chinese calligraphy is an art inextricably linked to the practice of mindfulness. As the personal and textual constructs suggested, it helped to unlock our minds to see the inner-self and regulate the flow of *qi* energy, or the inner strength in our lives. This was regarded as a crucial practice for self-cultivation and self-reflection because it was very easy for our hearts and minds to be preoccupied with false perceptions of the external world, with material things and with negative messages. If we were not aware of these negative effects upon our spiritual selves, the images in our minds and hearts could be clouded with the impurities of ‘dust’ and ‘dirt’, which could make the ‘eye’ of our inner-self dimmed and blurred. If this was so, a proper perception of reality would rarely be developed. This psychological phenomenon was described metaphorically as a pond in which water was stirred up with muddy sediment, and so an image’s reflection could hardly be seen on the surface of the water.

Because of this, when practicing calligraphy, we were taught to keep away from the disturbing influences of our daily lives, to keep our minds tranquil and concentrated on every moment of the aesthetic practices. In this way, we could keep all the impurities of ‘dust’ and ‘dirt’ settled and make the water in the pond crystal clear. Only then could the ‘eye’ of our inner-self have a clear vision of reality and in our heart we could truly embrace peace, like a bird that had rested safely on a hanging branch of a tree perched on a rough cliff beside a running waterfall. By doing this, we were then more able to enjoy the place to which the spiritual process brought us.

With this personal and textual construct in mind, the emphasis of calligraphy practice was on the spiritual exercise of ‘presentism’, which kept our heart and mind on whatever we did and thought in the here-and-now. It was an exercise in keeping our minds calm and tranquil, to become highly aware of what we were doing and to enjoy every moment of our spiritual activity, and ultimately detach ourselves from the burden of the past and the stresses of daily life that made for a turbulent inner-self. To integrate both aesthetic and spiritual practices, we must develop a sense of sensitivity, so as to live with the moment of each tiny slide and touch, and enjoy the delightfulness of the delicate touch of the rice paper that registered in our hand. Even when the brush was used at high speed, we should be able to feel the movement of the brush, the stability of the hand and the mindfulness of the heart.

Furthermore, we were required to develop an ability for inner dialogue that helped us evaluate the quality of the brushwork produced, so that we could work to an internal standard. This was how we experienced our instincts of sincerity and honesty and enjoyed being in the present moment. When we kept practicing this over time, we were able to feel the sensation of our being and the flow of our breath, and eventually to return to the bodily awareness of our existence and the pureness of our heart and mind.

While we were able to keep our mind and heart resting peacefully, revealing our inner-self in the present moment, and experiencing the flow of *qi* energy spreading from the heart to the hand, we could then capture the nature of reality, and accordingly reproduce it through the movement of the brush and the visual effects of

calligraphic lines and dots. There was a very popular, but unexamined, principle commonly applied by the Chinese: ‘If you are good, the handwriting of characters will be good (人正字正). The human nature of a person resembles his or her handwriting (人如其字).’ This principle was revealed in the personal and textual constructs, suggesting that our handwriting could reflect our character and the purity of our mind and heart. Therefore, the spiritual practice of ‘presentism’ was commonly considered as a prerequisite condition leading to the promotion of our calligraphic skills and ability for aesthetic appreciation. It was strongly believed that, without engaging in this practice, we would hardly be able to master this form of art and reach an advanced skill level.

Holistic approaches of the Dao

To reveal our spiritual self in a piece of brushwork, it was necessary to recognise that calligraphy was a holistic activity. In practice, we learnt to involve sincerity of mind, sensitivity of heart, the flow of *qi* energy and the mastering of calligraphic skills. If our whole being was merged with the practice, we could develop a sense of rhythm, a sensitivity of touch between the brush and the paper, and an ability to visualise the form of the characters in space. By applying this principle, we allowed the form of the characters to change in relation to our changing understanding of the inner-self and the outer world, without worrying too much about right and wrong.

The basic idea was to put the emphasis on our holistic involvement in the practices rather than on the quality of the final product of the brushwork, even though these two were inevitably interrelated. A great master of calligraphy, Yu Shi-Nan (558–638 AD), used a metaphor of *an army* to explain the adoption of a holistic approach to calligraphy. He wrote in the article *The Pith of Brushes* that when we practiced calligraphy the relationship between our body, our mind and the writing implements should be coordinated into a seamless whole. As he said: ‘The heart is like the emperor ... the hand is like the minister ... the brush stick is like the commander ... the brush hair is like the soldiers (Pan, 2007a, p. 102).

Similarly, another calligraphy master, Sun Guo-Ting (648–702 AD), in his work *Treatises on Calligraphy* suggested that our spiritual self and physical body should be merged into one. As such, a piece of calligraphy work should be created and based upon the experiential understanding derived from our heart and mind. It was regarded as a way of spiritual discipline that revealed our consciousness of being, and thus was depicted as a gateway to the state of enlightenment. This was how an unlimited source of creativity could be initiated and generated. The calligraphy master Song Cao (1620–1701 AD) made the same point in his book *Few Words about Calligraphy*:

The method of learning calligraphy is fastened only with the mind, because the mind can direct the wrist and then the hand (fingers) direct the brush. It can be said roughly that the brush should be held tightly, but when it moves, it should go with liveliness. The hand (fingers) does not direct the brush application, the wrist does. Although the wrist directs the brush application, it is actually dominated by the mind. This is what Wang Xi-Zhi

means by ‘the intention is raised before the brush is applied, and these are words of the Dao. (Adapted from Huang, 2004, pp. 563–564)

While our hearts and minds were holistically merged with our practices of calligraphy, it was considered an application of the *Dao* (道), known as the *Nature of Heaven and Earth*. While doing this, it could be possible to reveal our inner-self through the movement of the brush just as the beauty of *Nature* (自然) revealed itself through the *Dao*. Therefore, in practice, it was not always necessary to have a piece of brushwork completed with an explicit intention. Even drafts of writing and letters to friends that we did roughly in our daily lives could become masterpieces of brushwork. Also, any alterations and correction marks could have potential for creating aesthetic effects. Sun Guo-Ting suggested that the origins of calligraphy were rooted in our understanding of the *Dao* and derived from something within us, not something outside. As he said:

They do not know that as emotions stir, so words are shaped ... They do not know that the associations of brightness with joy and of darkness with sorrow are rooted in the basic nature of Heaven and Earth. If you miss these emotional and cosmic connections, your reasoning is at variance with the real substance. Considering the origins of calligraphy, how can there then be a good style? (Chang & Frankel, 1995, p. 11)

Unification with Nature

With the holistic approach in mind, as revealed from the personal and textual constructs, we could realise the aestheticism of calligraphy by observing objects in the natural world. This was regarded as the strategy of *learning from Nature* (取法自然) and commonly adopted for the practice of Chinese calligraphy. When learning to write Chinese characters with a brush, we were led to observe living and non-living things in the natural world and identify how they resembled the various components of characters. For example, when discussing how to learn calligraphy, Lui Xi-Zai (1813–1881) said in his essay *The Outlines of Art*:

The most important thing about learning calligraphy is to learn from Nature and the past. By learning from Nature, one can learn the various forms (of characters), whereas by learning from the past, one can learn the changes (in calligraphy styles). (Huang, 2004, p. 682)

Based upon this rationale, the criterion for the evaluation of the aesthetic quality of calligraphy, including a stroke, a line, a character and the composition of a whole piece of work, was met if it complied with the aestheticism of *Nature*, or the *Dao*; that is, balance and harmony. When this criterion was achieved, the *qi* energy could be seen flowing spontaneously. Correspondingly, the rhythm of its movement through the inner-self of the calligraphers could be expressed profoundly without any disruption. To capture the vivid sense of balance and harmony, many calligraphy masters from the past used a large number of metaphors to specifically denote how this principle could be applied to writing different types of strokes. For example, Wei Shou (272–394 AD) stated in his article *The Illumination of the Brush* that individual strokes were classified into six types. Each of them must evoke the following qualities of Nature:

The horizontal stroke is likened to a narrow cloud stretching across the sky; the dot is like a stone dropped from a high peak which hits the ground with a sharp retort; the left slash is as bold as a rhinoceros horn; the right slash is an arrow ready to leave the taut bow string; the horizontal turning hook is like the bow itself, pulled to its farthest position; and the diagonal hook is like the crashing of an incoming ocean breaker. (Pan, 2007a, p. 34)

Wang Xi-Zhi even went further by specifying some detailed components of a character, such as a dot and a vertical line. For example, it was amusing to see how he used different living and non-living things from Nature to explain the various visual forms of a dot and its style. As he wrote in *The Movement of the Brush*:

A dot could be like a big stone in the middle of a road. It could also be like a small bird, or a little frog, or a cucumber, or a chestnut. The circular part resembles the open mouth of a bird, whereas its sharp component is like the excrement of a mouse ... (Huang, 2004, p. 32)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the ultimate goal of Chinese calligraphy was to unify a calligraphy practitioner's spiritual self with the *Dao*, wherein the dynamics of various components were kept in balance and functioned interdependently and in harmony. This goal became an essential criterion upon which the quality of brushwork was evaluated. Brushwork could be highly valued provided that various elements of aestheticism, such as the flow of *qi* energy and the skills of handwriting, were perfectly merged into a seamless whole and represented the spiritual self of the calligraphers as naturally as the aestheticism of the *Dao* revealed itself. To achieve this, calligraphy practitioners have to pay attention to the visual effects of every line upon the whole piece of brushwork they intend to create, and hopefully attain the notion of balance and harmony. More than that, its emphasis is simultaneously imposed on an individual's spiritual experience. The process one engages in is as important as the final product of the calligraphy work. With this cultural belief in mind, this article argues, calligraphy is not merely a form of art that could be practiced by those who have already equipped themselves with professional skills, but also by those who want to take it as a spiritual discipline to promote self-reflection and self-cultivation.

This article suggests that the spiritualism underlying the practices of Chinese calligraphy could be taught through formal curriculum, especially the learning of different forms of fine arts, such as calligraphy, painting, ceramics and music. It also has potential to be included into whole-school pastoral care programmes and the programmes of spiritual education, aimed at enhancing students' abilities of self-awareness and emotional awareness. To put it into practice, it would be a challenge for teachers to help students develop the ability of mindfulness and attentionally focus on what they are doing at the present moment. Students should also be aware of engaging in a cyclic process in which they learn to focus attentionally on the learning object; and once they fail to do so, they should demonstrate an ability to regain it non-judgementally.

Regarding the promotion of spiritualism, there are two implications in this study for the development of pastoral care and spiritual education. Firstly, this study suggests that the practice of calligraphy is involved with the cultivation of qualities of the heart and mind of the practitioners. As shown in this study, when Chinese calligraphy is practiced, apart from the philosophical aspect of this art, it provides a creative outlet for practitioners to enjoy every moment of 'presentism'. They engage in it as it takes them on a journey to experience the spiritual dimension of their heart and mind. Hence the practice of calligraphy can be used for promoting the spiritual development of students, and leading students to appreciate their own cultural heritage of culture and that of others while offering a rationale of spiritualism that may be different from their own. These spiritual qualities are cultivated through calligraphy practice, and can be developed in whole-school pastoral care programmes and in all areas of learning. For example, calligraphy can be integrated into specific education programmes, through which students' abilities of self-cultivation, self-reflection and 'presentism' can be promoted. Furthermore, the practice of calligraphy can be integrated as a part of the whole school programme, aimed at promoting the cultural and aesthetic development of students and the quality of their minds and hearts. Teachers can also lead their students to practice English writing in a calligraphy style, using the practices of mindfulness and the different visual effects of balance and rhythm. This experience will certainly broaden students' perspectives towards spiritualism and caring. More importantly, it will deepen their understanding of their inner-self and Nature.

Secondly, this study suggests that the spiritual practice of Chinese calligraphy has potential to encourage some of our spiritual sensibilities, such as that of self-reflexivity, self-awareness, experience of unity and wholeness, and feelings of peace, tranquillity and love. The quality of these spiritual sensibilities can be best illustrated by a famous poem composed by William Blake, in which he demonstrates the power of spiritual insight to connect his heart and mind to the awesomeness of Nature and the eternity of the universe:

To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour. (Blake, 2008)

It is believed that these aspects of human sensibility are important and enriching, as part of what it is to be effective human beings, and certainly they can be included in pastoral care programmes. What make the spiritualism underlying the practices of calligraphy distinctive is that it does not have any close adjunction with the traditions of any religion. Its main aim is to lead practitioners to see the transcendent and eternity in the immanent, and see the immanent as an expression of the transcendent and eternity. It is, hence, something universal that can be agreed upon in a pluralistic society and applied to all schools with different cultural backgrounds and even outside religious traditions.

This article has shown that calligraphy is a form of art that is deeply rooted in the history of Chinese society and can never be separate from that culture as it reflects the

rationale of spiritualism underlying the practice of calligraphy that practitioners commonly constructed and reproduced. Although modernised letterings are now digitally produced by computer and other advanced technology and may deviate from how it is traditionally and culturally approached, nevertheless traditional Chinese calligraphy has been continually retained and inherited just as it was in Chinese society over many centuries. When the history of the development of calligraphy across different races and nations is examined, it can be seen that the tradition of calligraphy is never a fixed and immovable force, but always a living resource capable of developing in new ways. The spiritual elements of Chinese calligraphy, such as the emphasis on mindfulness, the unification with Nature and the revelation of the *Dao*, could bring new meaning to the ethos of spiritual education, and direct new ways for the development of pastoral care programmes and the practices of western calligraphy.

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