

# The Inspiration of Wang Duo's Calligraphy to the Modernization of Calligraphy Culture

XiaoHuang<sup>1</sup>, Nor Azlin Hamidon<sup>2\*</sup>, Salwa Binti Ayob<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

## ARTICLE INFO

Received: 18 Dec 2024

Revised: 10 Feb 2025

Accepted: 28 Feb 2025

## ABSTRACT

In the era of rapid development of informatization and digitalization, calligraphy faces the challenges of inheritance and innovation. This paper analyzes the artistic characteristics of Wang Duo's calligraphy, explores its value in the history of calligraphy, and further studies the inheritance and development path of calligraphy culture in modern society. This paper explores new trends such as calligraphy digitization, artificial intelligence creation, and cross-media communication, analyzes how modern technology promotes the development of calligraphy art, and at the same time warns of the problem of weakening the essence of calligraphy art that may be brought about by the application of technology. The innovative spirit of Wang Duo's calligraphy provides important inspiration for the modernization of calligraphy. The combination of traditional techniques and personalized innovation makes calligraphy still vibrant in the contemporary era. This paper proposes that the modernization of calligraphy should be based on respect for tradition, combined with science and technology, international communication and diversified art forms, so as to promote this ancient art to glow with new vitality in the new era.

**Keywords:** calligraphy. wang duo. Tradition. innovation

## INTRODUCTION

In the history of Chinese calligraphy, Wang Duo of the Ming and Qing Dynasties was known as the "first calligrapher in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties" for his unique artistic style and outstanding calligraphy achievements. His calligraphy was deeply influenced by the "Two Wangs" (Wang Xizhi, Wang Xianzhi) and calligraphers such as Yan Zhenqing and Mi Fu, and he integrated them on this basis to form a vigorous, powerful and majestic writing style (Tian, 2024). His regular script is stable and vigorous, while his cursive script is like a storm, galloping and full of momentum and appeal (Pang, 2024). Wang Duo is not only unique in technique but also shows a strong personality and innovative spirit in calligraphy aesthetics, pen and ink application, and has a far-reaching influence on the calligraphy world of later generations.

As an important carrier of Chinese culture, calligraphy not only carries the cultural accumulation of thousands of years but also displays the unique charm of Chinese character art (Peng & Zhang, 2022). However, in the modern society with rapid development of informatization and digitalization, the inheritance and development of calligraphy faces unprecedented challenges. People's writing habits are changing. Electronic office and keyboard input have gradually replaced traditional brush writing, which has weakened the practical function of calligraphy. At the same time, with the deepening of cultural globalization, calligraphy can maintain its vitality in modern society and expand its influence internationally has also become a question worth exploring. However, technological progress has also provided new opportunities for calligraphy art. The rise of digitalization, artificial intelligence and cross-media communication has enabled calligraphy to be promoted and innovated in a completely new way (Huai, 2024).

This paper intends to explore the value of Wang Duo's calligraphy in the history of calligraphy by analyzing his brushwork, ink method, structure and composition, and to think about the inheritance and development path of calligraphy culture in modern society based on his artistic spirit. Through the combination of traditional calligraphy and modern technology, we explore new trends such as calligraphy digitization, artificial intelligence creation, and

cross-media communication, seek the development direction of calligraphy culture modernization, and give this ancient art form new vitality in the contemporary era.

## OBJECTIVES

### The Artistic Characteristics of Wang Duo's Calligraphy

Wang Duo is a famous calligrapher in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. His calligraphy inherited the styles of Yan Zhenqing, Su Shi, Huang Tingjian and other predecessors, and at the same time formed his own unique "style" calligraphy (Tian, 2024). His calligraphy style is vigorous and powerful, with unrestrained brushstrokes and strong visual impact. In terms of brushwork, he alternates between square and round brushes, showing a unique sense of rhythm; in terms of ink method, he uses the "ink swelling method" to create a very tense writing effect through changes in thickness; in terms of structure and composition, he is good at using spatial layout to make his works dynamic and beautiful in rigor (Li, 2025).

When talking about calligraphy, we have to talk about brushwork. "Brushwork", literally means the method of using a brush, which refers to the extremely broad and universal rules and essentials. This rule and essentials can basically be used in various styles of calligraphy, such as seal, official, regular, running, and cursive, and has extremely strong principles and regularity (Xu et al., 2018). However, regularity and universality are not the same as being the same. There are differences in brushwork, which can lead to different shapes of strokes. In general, there are square brushes and round brushes, and the use of brushes also includes various techniques such as hiding the tip of the brush, revealing the tip of the brush, reversing the tip of the brush, centering the tip of the brush, folding the tip of the brush, and returning the tip of the brush. Square brushes and round brushes are the core of calligraphy learning. Calligraphers of all dynasties have their own choices in these two brushworks. Wang Duo's calligraphy brushwork is very individual. On the basis of inheriting traditional calligraphy techniques, he creatively combines the use of "square brushes" and "round brushes", making his works present a very rhythmic style. Traditional calligraphy is mostly based on square brushes or round brushes. For example, Yan Zhenqing's regular script tends to be square, and Mi Fu's running script tends to be round. Wang Duo uses them alternately in writing, making the strokes both powerful and fluid. This feature makes his running and cursive lines have a lot of tension, forming a unique writing rhythm (Li, 2025).

After using the brush, we have to talk about Wang Duo's most praised use of ink. The changes in the thickness and depth of the ink make the work show infinite charm and express the writer's emotions (Zhao, 2024). Wang Duo's innovation in ink method is reflected in his unique ink application skills, especially the use of "ink expansion method", which brings richer visual effects to calligraphy art. Wang Duo's works use the "ink expansion method", that is, the technique of using ink penetration on specific strokes, so that the edges of the characters show a smudge effect, enhancing the visual impact of the work (Li, 2025).

Chinese calligraphy art has its own "shape-similar" tendency, and even the actual meaning function of Chinese characters will be "weakened" (Zhao, 2021a). The structure of calligraphy is its skeleton, supporting the brushwork and ink method. The structure of regular script has certain rules. The writer needs to follow the stroke order and combination rules when creating, and make artistic adjustments to the overall layout. Wang Duo's calligraphy structure (character formation) is different from the rigor of traditional regular script or the balance of general running and cursive scripts, but deliberately pursues the beauty of change, irregularity and danger (Zhang, 2023). In his works, the size of characters is obviously different. Sometimes some characters are particularly large, and some characters are particularly small, forming a strong visual conflict. This unconventional way of forming characters breaks the balanced aesthetics of traditional calligraphy, enhances the expressiveness of calligraphy, and makes his works have a strong personality and artistic appeal.

The layout of calligraphy is the rule for the overall arrangement of calligraphy works. Wang Duo's innovation in the layout (overall layout) is reflected in his free arrangement of character spacing and line spacing, which makes the work visually present a dynamic rhythm (Zhang, 2023). In traditional calligraphy, the line spacing and character spacing are generally kept relatively uniform to ensure the overall coordination of the work. Wang Duo broke this rule. The spacing between characters is sometimes dense, sometimes sparse, and the spacing between lines is sometimes compact and sometimes loose, making the work more rhythmic. He pays attention to the overall momentum in the layout. Although the spacing between characters and lines is irregular, the whole work can still maintain an inner sense of rhythm. Wang Duo's approach to the layout of the chapter has a unique aesthetic. His

innovation inspired the layout of the Qing Dynasty and modern calligraphers, giving calligraphy greater freedom at the visual art level.

In summary, Wang Duo broke the shackles of traditional calligraphy and created a new style of calligraphy through innovations in brushwork, ink method, structure and chapter, which had a profound impact on the development of Chinese calligraphy art. His innovative spirit and artistic practice provide valuable reference and inspiration for later calligraphers

### **The Necessity and Challenge of Calligraphy Culture Modernization**

In contemporary times, although calligraphy is still valued in modern society, its development also faces many challenges. First, how traditional calligraphy techniques can adapt to the digital age has become a key issue. Traditional calligraphy requires students to write on paper with a brush, and students' writing tools are part of traditional culture (Peng & Zhang, 2022). Modern people are already accustomed to digital writing. Therefore, how to use digital technology to lower the learning threshold while retaining the core value of calligraphy art has become an important topic. For example, some calligraphy apps allow users to experience the charm of traditional writing on electronic devices by simulating pen strokes and ink color changes. This innovative method helps to attract the younger generation, but whether it can truly replace traditional brush practice is still controversial.

Secondly, the change in calligraphy learning methods and the impact of new media are also a major challenge. The development of information technology has provided new platforms and means for the dissemination and exchange of calligraphy. Digital calligraphy works and online calligraphy learning software have provided convenience for calligraphy learners (Huai, 2024). Modern communication methods such as short videos and live teaching make calligraphy learning more convenient, but they may also weaken its depth and systematicity. Calligraphy is a beautiful art. In the history of calligraphy development, we can see many calligraphers with different styles of calligraphy (Peng & Zhang, 2022). The intervention of artificial intelligence allows machines to simulate calligraphy styles and even automatically generate works, which to a certain extent challenges the originality of calligraphy and the unique value of handwriting. How to maintain the artistic essence of calligraphy in a new technological environment and promote its development with the help of technology is a problem that must be faced in the modernization of contemporary calligraphy culture.

Finally, in the context of internationalization, the promotion and acceptance of calligraphy is also a topic that cannot be ignored. Research shows that calligraphy is the inheritance of China's thousands of years of aesthetic concepts and the inheritance of the pursuit of beauty. It is carried out on the basis of continuing Chinese traditional culture (Peng & Zhang, 2022). Although calligraphy, as part of oriental art, has had a certain impact on the world, due to differences in cultural background and writing habits, how to make international audiences understand the aesthetics and spiritual connotation of calligraphy more deeply still requires more exploration. Some attempts include combining calligraphy with modern art, or using cross-border cooperation such as film, television, design, and animation to enhance the international influence of calligraphy. However, how to maintain the traditional characteristics of calligraphy while adapting to the exchange of multiple cultures in the process of global communication is still a topic worth pondering.

Wang Duo's calligraphy is not only a treasure of Chinese calligraphy art, but also has a profound impact on the development of modern calligraphy. The digitization, cross-media integration, and diversified expression of calligraphy have made calligraphy art more open and inclusive. Therefore, we should not only learn Wang Duo's brushwork, ink method, structure and composition, but also combine modern technology to make calligraphy shine in the new era. Through artificial intelligence, digital design, interactive art and other means, we can make calligraphy break through the limitations of traditional media, make it more widely disseminated and applied, and thus promote the innovative development of calligraphy art in the new era.

### **The combination of tradition and innovation from Wang Duo's calligraphy**

#### **1) Inheriting traditional calligraphy techniques**

The textual attributes of Chinese calligraphy and the artistic nature of calligraphy images are independent of each other. The difference between the two makes the traces of writing, that is, calligraphy images, an independent form of artistic expression. Therefore, the possibility of writing as an artistic creation is established (Zhao, 2021a). It can

be seen that calligraphy works can transcend the semantic constraints of Chinese characters themselves and independently present their unique artistic language. One of the biggest characteristics of Wang Duo's calligraphy is the free and easy and free "cursive" style. His works not only pursue formal beauty, but also express personal emotions and thoughts (Shen, 2021). In modern society, calligraphy is no longer a simple practical writing tool, but more inclined to a way of artistic expression. Therefore, Wang Duo's artistic spirit has a far-reaching impact on the innovation of modern calligraphy. That is, calligraphy creation should pay more attention to personalization, not only to reproduce traditional techniques, but also to become a carrier of the creator's thoughts and emotions.

In the thousands of years of historical development, Chinese calligraphy has shown a rich and diverse artistic language, including various forms of aesthetics such as brushwork, calligraphy, and composition (Guanghua, 2024, P297). As a famous calligrapher in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, Wang Duo is known for his profound traditional skills and bold innovative spirit. His calligraphy not only inherited the brushwork style of predecessors such as Yan Zhenqing and Huaisu, but also integrated the rules of the Jin and Tang dynasties, showing a unique artistic appearance in regular script, running script, and cursive script (Zhang, 2018, P7). His calligraphy learning path embodies the spirit of "learning from the best", that is, creating a personal style on the basis of in-depth study of the classics of predecessors. This method has important reference significance for the modernization of calligraphy culture. The development of contemporary calligraphy art cannot be separated from tradition, but should be innovative in inheritance to ensure the artistic value and cultural inheritance of calligraphy (Huai, 2024). Based on this, we should deeply study Wang Duo's brushwork, ink method, structure and composition, and combine these unique artistic languages with modern technology to make calligraphy glow with new vitality in the new era and show a broader artistic charm.

## **2)The style of writing and ink adapts to modern aesthetic needs**

Wang Duo's calligraphy works are known for their "high-ancient and vigorous" brushwork, "pure and ancient" ink method, "clumsy and solemn" structure, and "majestic and vivid" composition. His cursive script is vigorous and has great visual impact (Zhao, 2024). Compared with the dignified norms of traditional calligraphy, his brushstrokes are freer, his lines are full of tension, and even have a certain "wild" beauty. This breakthrough in style is precisely the manifestation of his adaptation to the aesthetic needs of time. For modern calligraphy, this breakthrough spirit is also worth learning from - the modernization of calligraphy culture should explore expressions that conform to contemporary aesthetic trends on the basis of respecting tradition, such as more personalized brushwork, more dynamic layout, and more suitable presentation forms for modern art exhibitions.

Traditional brushwork has been reinterpreted with the application of digital writing tools (such as electronic calligraphy boards, smart pens, etc.). Nowadays, many calligraphy enthusiasts use digital devices to simulate traditional brushwork, making calligraphy creation more convenient, and also making the study of calligraphy brushwork more in-depth (Vermeeren, 2017). With the development of the times, the expression of ink method is also changing. The emergence of digital calligraphy software allows the changes in ink density to be precisely adjusted. At the same time, AI technology can also simulate the changes in ink color of different calligraphers, helping learners to master the essence of traditional calligraphy more quickly (Lin et al., 2025). In addition, in modern calligraphy creation, the use of ink color has become more diversified, and even innovative methods such as color ink and mixed media have been combined.

The study of calligraphy structure has also made new developments in modern calligraphy teaching and communication. Through 3D modeling and dynamic calligraphy animation, calligraphy learners can more intuitively understand the structural characteristics of characters (Chia, 2020). In digital calligraphy works, many artists have begun to explore applications in font design, graphic typesetting and other fields, so that calligraphy art not only stays in the traditional writing form but also integrates into modern visual communication. The layout of calligraphy is also adapting to new media. In terms of calligraphy poster design, digital screen display, etc., the arrangement of calligraphy is no longer limited to traditional paper media, but incorporates digital interactive technology, making the viewing experience of calligraphy richer. Many calligraphers have also begun to try to create in the form of dynamic calligraphy, video calligraphy and other forms, making the dissemination of calligraphy more diverse.

Wang Duo's calligraphy not only occupies an important position in the history of Chinese calligraphy, but also has a profound impact on the international calligraphy community, especially in Japan, where Wang Duo's cursive script is considered to surpass Wang Xizhi's. This shows that calligraphy is not limited to Chinese culture, but can become

a part of world culture. The international development of modern calligraphy needs to draw on the characteristics of Wang Duo's calligraphy in terms of aesthetics and expressiveness to make it more internationally communicative. For example, in international cultural exchanges, combined with modern exhibitions, interactive media and other forms, calligraphy works can be more easily accepted by people from different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, it is also possible to explore the integration between calligraphy and Western art (such as abstract expressionism and minimalism) to make calligraphy a more globally attractive art form.

## RESULTS

The intersection of tradition and modernity is a compelling theme, especially in the field of art. Wang Duo's calligraphy style and innovative spirit provide important inspiration for the modernization of calligraphy culture. He found a balance between tradition and innovation, showing the infinite possibilities of calligraphy art with his unique brushwork and layout. The fusion of traditional calligraphy and modern elements opens up exciting opportunities for artistic innovation, cultural preservation, and functional design. This fusion not only preserves the legacy of ancient customs but also redefines their meaning in a rapidly changing, technology-driven world. The development of modern calligraphy culture should inherit the innovative spirit represented by Wang Duo, combining contemporary art, technology, and international communication to revitalize calligraphy in modern society. Through continuous exploration and practice, calligraphy can not only survive in modern society but also occupy a place in the global cultural context, becoming an important cultural symbol connecting tradition and the future, East and West.

## DISCUSSION

Although calligraphy combines tradition and modernity, providing exciting creative and aesthetic possibilities, there are still several disadvantages to consider when integrating modern elements for innovation. One major disadvantage is that the essence and authenticity of traditional calligraphy may be lost. When classical calligraphy techniques are adapted to modern design needs, the meaning and philosophy behind these calligraphic forms are often reduced or even altered. Traditional calligraphy often holds deep symbolic value, with each stroke and curve carrying cultural and spiritual significance. In today's society, where speed and efficiency are prioritized, this essence may be overlooked in favor of more functional and practical aesthetics. Additionally, the use of digital tools to create calligraphy may weaken the physical involvement and intimacy inherent in the handwritten process of calligraphy creation. Handwriting, whether with a brush, pen, or other writing instrument, provides a personal style that is difficult to replicate in the digital realm, where modern electronic calligraphy often relies on tools such as tablets or graphic software. This can reduce the quality of artistic expression, making calligraphy appear more mechanical and lacking in emotion.

Moreover, while modern digital calligraphy offers flexibility and creative freedom, there is a tendency to commercialize this art form, viewing it as a functional design product rather than a serious artistic creation. This can lead to a loss of quality and depth, with calligraphy being used more as a decorative element in commercial environments rather than as a true medium for artistic expression. Another important concern is that the fusion of tradition and modernity can cause confusion among viewers, who may not fully understand or appreciate the traditional values embodied in calligraphy. When combined with modern elements, some may perceive calligraphy as a mere visual style rather than a cultural practice with historical significance. This can result in a loss of meaning, particularly when calligraphy is seen as part of a fleeting trend rather than a deep-rooted art form. The process of innovation may also create challenges in accurately interpreting the original characteristics of traditional calligraphy. For example, transforming a traditional writing style into a geometric or abstract modern graphic work can result in a mismatch between letterforms and their design context, leading to a lack of harmony between calligraphic art and modern functionality. In some cases, excessive focus on visual experimentation and final aesthetics can overshadow the technical skills and disciplines inherent in calligraphy, causing a diminished understanding of its tradition. Ultimately, this shift from cultural value to accessible visual aesthetics presents a risk. While the fusion of tradition and modernity in calligraphy holds great potential for innovation, it also poses challenges regarding the loss of meaning, essence, and authenticity as an art form.

## CONCLUSION

The development of calligraphy culture modernization is not only the inheritance of traditional calligraphy skills, but also the exploration of its innovation and development in the context of the new era. Through digital technology,

artificial intelligence, new media communication and cross-border integration, calligraphy is integrating into modern society in a more diversified way and playing a more important role in global cultural exchanges. In the future, how to maintain the traditional charm of calligraphy in the process of modernization, while rejuvenating it with the help of technology and innovation, will be an important topic that needs to be continuously explored in the modernization of calligraphy culture.

In order to meet the challenge of modernizing traditional calligraphy, a thoughtful and respectful attitude must be adopted so that the essence and authenticity of the art form can be preserved while embracing innovation. Both creators and audiences need to deepen their understanding and appreciation of the cultural and historical significance of calligraphy. Creators should strive to understand the origins, meanings and techniques behind traditional calligraphy styles and ensure that these elements are cleverly integrated into their works. By respecting the basic principles of calligraphy, authors can innovate without compromising its authenticity.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.
- [2] Ipsum dolor sit amet consectetur adipiscing elit pellentesque. Orci eu lobortis elementum nibh. Faucibus a pellentesque sit amet porttitor.
- [3] Egestas tellus rutrum tellus pellentesque eu tincidunt tortor. Sagittis orci a scelerisque purus semper eget. Vitae purus faucibus ornare suspendisse sed nisi lacus sed viverra.
- [4] Augue interdum velit euismod in pellentesque massa placerat dui ultricies. Metus aliquam eleifend mi in nulla posuere sollicitudin aliquam ultrices.
- [5] Velit laoreet id donec ultrices tincidunt arcu non sodales neque. Non curabitur gravida arcu ac tortor dignissim convallis aenean et.
- [6] Tian Q. (2024). Research on font design based on Wang Duo's calligraphy aesthetics (Master's thesis, Jilin Jianzhu University). Master's degree <https://link.cnki.net/doi/10.27714/d.cnki.gjljs.2024.000477doi:10.27714/d.cnki.gjljs.2024.000477>.
- [7] Pang Y. (2024). The history of Wang Duo's calligraphy reception and its inspiration to his creation (Master's thesis, Beihua University). Master's degree <https://cnki2.699wx.cn/kns8s/defaultresult/index>
- [8] Xu, P., Wang, L., Guan, Z., Zheng, X., Chen, X., Tang, Z., ... & Wang, Z. (2018, July). Evaluating Brush Movements for Chinese Calligraphy: A Computer Vision Based Approach. In IJCAI (pp. 1050-1056).
- [9] Guanghua, Y. U (2024) . The Meaning Composition of Chinese Calligraphy Sign.
- [10] Zhang, Z. (2018). Writing Diversity, Interplaying Difference: Wang Duo's Assorted Scripts for Yugu. University of California, Davis.
- [11] Peng, M., & Zhang, H. (2022). New challenges and countermeasures of calligraphy education in colleges and universities in the new era. *Creative Education*, 13(8), 2544-2552.
- [12] Huai, L. (2024) Research on the Inheritance Value of Calligraphy Art in Modern Society Based on Big Data Analysis.
- [13] Lin, T. T., She, J., Wang, Y. A., & Zhang, K. (2025). Future Ink: The Collision of AI and Chinese Calligraphy. *ACM Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage*, 18(1), 1-17.
- [14] Vermeeren, L. (2017). Chinese Calligraphy in the digital realm: Aesthetic perfection and remediation of the authentic. *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 43(2), 163-191.
- [15] Chen Jindu. (2019). A brief analysis of the formation of Wang Duo's calligraphy style. *Chinese Character Culture*, (08), 53+62. doi:10.14014/j.cnki.cn11-2597/g2.2019.08.029.
- [16] Li Xinyu. (2025-01-08). On the Calligraphy Form and Ink Method of Wang Duo, *Calligraphy News*, 018. doi:10.28689/n.cnki.nsfz.2025.000010.
- [17] Zhao Guodong. (2024). A study on the aesthetics of lines and ink in Wang Duo's cursive calligraphy. *Western Literature and Art Studies*, (05), 154-159.
- [18] Zhang Shuqin. (2023). Research on the composition of Wang Duo's cursive script. *Beauty and Times (Chinese)*, (10), 133-135. doi:10.16129/j.cnki.mysdz.2023.10.030.
- [19] Shen Haiting. (2021). A brief analysis of the style characteristics of Wang Duo's cursive script. *Cultural Monthly*, (04), 216-217.
- [20] Chia, W. T. (2020). Calligraphic brushwork for 3D space.