

Seal script (*chuan-shu* or *chou-wen*) was developed from oracle-bone writing and was incorporated with other designs. Usually cast onto bronze, it has two distinct styles: great-seal (*ta-chuan*) and small-seal (*hsiao-chuan*). Great-seal was associated with the Shang and Zhou dynasties (ca.1600-256 B.C.E.). The latter was created by the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty (221-206 B.C.E.) and is characterized as being more thin and abstract from its older form.



Another change in writing design occurred during the Qin and Han dynasties (221 B.C.E.-220 C.E.) when seal script had been altered into clerical script (*li-shu*), which had originally been seal script swiftly scribed with ink and brush on pieces of wood and bamboo. It was then written on silk and paper. Allowing for more fluid strokes, unlike previously iron cast or carved inscriptions, clerical script's use of brush and ink was the beginning of calligraphy as an artistic medium of expression.



Cursive script (*ts'ao-shu*) began as a shorthand method for writing personal notes and letters, which were often only comprehensible to the writer and close colleagues. It was created in the second century B.C.E. and reached its peak in the third and fourth centuries C.E. Because it allowed for more personalization, cursive script became an outlet for "individual expression that sometimes transcended the contents of the text" (Harrist, 1999, XVII).



In an attempt to improve clerical script, which was predominantly used in official writing and monumental engravings, standard script (*k'ai-shu*) was created. Beginning in the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.), it developed strokes for legibility. Calligraphy masters of the Tang dynasty modified standard script from the Six Dynasties (222-589 C.E.) to "create a bold yet elegant standard-type script" that was able to balance between brush movement and the composition of the character (Harrist, 1999, XVII).



Running script (*hsing-shu*) is a freehand method and simplified version of standard script. Its development used standard script as a model but matured earlier than its predecessor. Harmonizing between the unrestricted informality of cursive script and the legibility of standard script, this type of calligraphy became popular during the Sung dynasty (960-1279 C.E.) as the ideal form of expression.



THE THREE PERFECTIONS: CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY FROM THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

"The Three Perfections" (*Sanjue*), poetry, calligraphy and painting are considered the outstanding achievements of Chinese culture. *Shufa* ("Method of Writing") is the Chinese term for calligraphy demonstrating that technique is a fundamental element of the art of writing with ink and brush. As an art form, calligraphy reflects personal expression and self cultivation for the educated elite, and is related to other means of artistic expression, especially poetry and painting. In China, the written word was regarded as the legitimate means to moral and political authority.

Chinese is a character-based writing system with each character containing a series of brushstrokes executed from top to bottom and left to right. Characters are written in descending columns from right to left. Occasionally, some inscriptions are written horizontally.

The characters of the Chinese script are written in a number of style. They are divided into five major groupings. Seal script (*Zhuan shu*) was the earliest form to appear (1200BC) and was systematized around 200 BC under the Qin dynasty. Used chiefly for seals and other formal contexts. Seal script was revived as an artistic medium in the eighteenth century. Clerical script (*Li shu*) developed after 200BC and was used for bureaucratic record-keeping, enjoying a revival for artistic purpose from roughly 1700. Regular script (*Kai shu*, *Zhen shu* or *Zheng shu*) developed around 200-400 AD, this is the most widely used script today, and the basis for printed characters. Cursive script (*Xing shu*) developed in the fourth century, this is one of the major scripts used for artistic expression. Finally, Running or Drafting script (*Cao shu*) is the most rapidly written of the scripts and was the last to develop in the seventh century. Calligraphers continue to use it as a popular form for artistic expression.

The long tradition of the practice of adding seals and inscriptions to an object in China makes it possible to trace individual pieces over a very long period. The earliest paintings often included texts identifying the subjects portrayed. Written records suggest that by the eighth century AD some murals may have lengthy inscriptions by the artists. However, it was only in the eleventh century that poems and paintings were first created as integrated works of art. Artists often composed poems to record their moments of inspiration while others chose to use poetry to commemorate an old friend or an occasion.

The special practice of adding "colophons", inscriptions by fellow artists and collectors were widespread by the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). It was common for artists to compose poems to praise the works of other artists and record them on the paintings using calligraphy that reflects their skills and personalities. Handscrolls could be considerably extended by the addition of further sections of paper or silk to make room for more colophons.

Seals, usually impressed in red, were added in the seventh century as a mark of ownership. From the eleventh century, seals could be placed on the surface by the artist at the time of creation or by subsequent connoisseurs and collectors.

On the other hand, the titles of Chinese paintings have several origins. They may be written as part of a larger inscription or written on separate slips of paper then pasted onto the scroll. Such titles are often not original, but arise from the need of collectors and curators to identify individual works.

It was common for artists to sign their names beginning with the place of birth or residence, following with time and season. It was also typical for artists to have many pen names which were given to them by their teachers. Pen names are followed by student names that are descriptive titles given to them to reflect their personalities.