

# Clerical Script of the Han Dynasty as the Foundation of a Convergence of the Stele and Model-book Studies: The Calligraphy of Han Yunshan

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## Introduction

As one of the cultural treasures in China, calligraphy has been held in high esteem, particularly by the intelligentsia and elite culture in traditional society. Calligraphers express their emotions and convey their ideas through the combination of the visual language from under the brush and the meaning of the characters. For nearly a hundred years, despite the impact of western culture on Hong Kong, a number of calligraphers have insisted on embodying the national essence of calligraphy in the city.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a series of political changes in China drew the intelligentsia, calligraphers and painters to Hong Kong, laying a sound and traditionally-rooted foundation for the development of calligraphy in Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup> A few authors have highlighted the Hong Kong calligraphy community's "contribution to the perpetuation and preservation of the tradition" and their significance in the Chinese calligraphy history at the turn of the century.<sup>2</sup> Migrated from China to Hong Kong in the early 1950s, Han Yunshan (1923-2010) was a typical scholar-calligrapher who stressed the importance of traditions and cultivation, keeping alive the development of the traditional art form in Hong Kong in the early 20th century.

Research on major calligraphers from the cultural circles and art communities in Hong Kong, their calligraphic works and activities has always been valued, and there have been a decent amount of research done on the topics.<sup>3</sup> However, for fine calligraphers like Han Yunshan, who worked quietly and had no desire to be famous, the extent of study is minimal. This essay will look into Han Yunshan's artistic journey of calligraphy with the focus on his unique approach to clerical script of the Han Dynasty (206BC-AD220) as the foundation of a convergence of the stele and model-book studies.

## Taking Fame and Fortune Lightly and Safeguarding His Integrity

Originally named Han Guolin, Han Yunshan assumed the courtesy name of Jicang, and adopted the literary names "Lanyun" (Idle Cloud) and "Huyin" (the hermit hidden with a gourd) in his later years.<sup>4</sup> Born in Guangzhou in 1923, his maternal grandfather named him Guolin after the couplet "*guofeng cai minzu; linyu ji cangsheng*" (Folk songs sing the people's life; The beneficent rain relieves the world)<sup>5</sup> and took the first character "guo" and "lin" from each line. His courtesy name "Jicang" comes from the lower line of the same couplet, "*linyu ji cangsheng*". It is a general practice for traditional scholar-calligraphers to

use their literary names and studio names which are suggestive of their persona and aspirations. In old age he always used “Lanyun” as his literary name, of which the character “lan” (懶, literally “idle”) with the radical “nü” (女, literally “female”) is the original character of “lan” (懶, literally “idle”). The choice of the name reflects the influence of the Yuan painter Ni Zan (1301–1374), whose courtesy name and literary name are “Yunlin” (Cloud Forest) and “Lanzan” (as he thought of himself as an “idle person”). Although Han Yunshan and Ni Zan were born into a wealthy family, both of them were happy to live a humble life. Similar to the experience of Ni Zan, the young artist (Plate 1) had no intention of seeking fame and fortune in times of turmoil. He mocked himself as a lazy person, but in fact he devoted all his efforts to literature, calligraphy and painting.

Han Yunshan painted *Wintery Pines by a Quiet Stream after Ni Zan* (Plate 2) in 1960 and it portrays the artistic ideas and philosophy of life in “Ni Yunlin’s manner” that he was going after. Ni Zan explained what painting was for him, “What I call painting is merely the joy of hasty sketching with the brush. I do not seek formal likeness but do it just for my own amusement.”<sup>6</sup> Inspired by Ni Zan’s words, the trees and rocks were done in a few strokes, representing the simplicity of ink and his lofty and profound ideas. The painting is an imitation and yet the grace of his strokes adds the spontaneity of the natural scenery to it, which shows his reclusive state of mind during the stay in Penang. The colophon in small standard script involves refined and untrammelled brushwork, which bears traces of Ni Zan’s lingering tone.

The consciousness of hermitism is constantly found in Han Yunshan’s calligraphy. He had written out his literary name Huyin in large clerical script and inscribed the work with the neat and refined small standard script:

“The biography of Fei Changfang” in the *Hou hanshu* (History of the Later Han): “There was an old man in the marketplace who sold medicine at a stand with a large gourd hanging in front. When the market closed each day, the old man would promptly jump into the gourd. No one in the market could see this, but Fei Changfang could from his second-story vantage point.” Also, *Yunji qiqian* (The Seven Tablets of the Cloudy Satchel), a Daoist encyclopedia, records that Shi Cun was called Lord Hu for he could contain the world in a gourd. Xie Yuan, another Lord Hu, was a native of Liyang. He sold medicine in the marketplace and charged people with the same price of the medicine which was always effective in the cure. I adopt the name Huyin because I admire those ancient hermits and enjoy collecting gourds and purple clay teapots.<sup>7</sup>

Han Yunshan used the metaphor of the gourd to represent his aspiration to a simple life of a hermit, engaging the passion toward his collection. His joy is plain and obvious between the lines. He considered himself to have neither attachment to material desire nor regrets throughout his life so he gave his studio the name “Hall of No Regrets,” which indicates his embrace of simplicity and the adamancy of a literati artist. He requested me to carve a seal for him with the inscription “Hall of No Regret” (Plate 3), and it is one of the seals he often used.



Plate 1 (left)

Han Yunshan as a youth.  
Photo courtesy of Han  
Yunshan Family

Plate 2 (middle)

Han Yunshan, *Wintery  
Pines by a Quiet Stream  
after Ni Zan*, 1960.  
Collection of the Han  
Yunshan Family

Plate 3 (right)

Lau Chak-kwong, *Hall of  
No Regret*, seal carving

### Early Education in Guangzhou<sup>8</sup>

Han Yunshan lived in Zhonghua North Road, Guangzhou, that is the present-day Jiefang North Road, where the third- or fourth-generation members of his family resided. Most of the residents in the district were Manchus. He was also a descendant of the Eight Banner Manchus. His grandfather and father opened a wholesale vegetable market in Guangzhou and sold vegetables to the retailers, making great profits as they had business with nearly every store in the street.

Han Yunshan's maternal grandfather was awarded the title of *Juren* (recommended man) after passing the provincial examinations. Influenced by his intellectual grandfather, Han Yunshan had shown an abiding interest in literary studies since childhood, and learned the *Four Books* and *Five Classics* as well as other classic literature by heart. A sound knowledge of the Confucian classics and literary studies provided him a solid base for studying literature and calligraphy. He believed he would have taken the civil service examination if he had been born in Imperial China. Nevertheless, the imperial examination system was abolished in 1905; therefore, he received modern education and studied in City Number 8 Primary School in his neighborhood.

Disturbed by Japanese invasion of China, Han Yunshan continued his secondary studies intermittently. In 1943, he studied in the Department of Chinese at the Kwangtung University for two years. He chuckled that the university was ridiculed as “the pseudo-Kwangtung University” during the era of the Wang Jingwei puppet regime. Subsequently, he went to the Guangdong Provincial College of Arts and Science (former Guangdong Provincial Rangqin Normal University) in 1945, where he finished his undergraduate studies after two years with a thesis on the “Jiangxi School of Poetry”.

In 1947, Han Yunshan entered the Institute of Chinese Literature and Language of the National Sun Yat-sen University immediately after his graduation. The Institute admitted students from all over the

country at five spots. All of them were required to go to the interview, which was held by the institute professors, and to take the written test, which assessed their composition and knowledge of literature history. Han remembered that there were five departments in the university and each of them recruited one candidate only. It would be more than ten students from the Faculty of Arts and Science to compete for only one candidacy of a master degree. At last his profound knowledge of the Chinese classics earned him the opportunity at the institute where he began his one-on-one postgraduate life. In addition to a scholarship from the university, he got a scholarship from the institute and another scholarship. The institute scholarship was equivalent to the average salary of a secondary school teacher so it was a generous allowance for him at that time. He was living an abundant life as he ran a business besides his studies and he even went to work and school by car.

Nevertheless, affected by the political turmoil of the civil war, Han Yunshan ceased his postgraduate studies after two years. He brought along his books and went to Hong Kong from Guangzhou by ferry via Macau in 1950. The colophon of *Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo in Small Standard script* (Plates 4, 5), a work written in autumn 1949, reflects the melancholy of the calligrapher when he was alone at night: “Deeply troubled by depression, I stayed up late at night. I walked to the yard and looked at the moon and stars; a cricket was chirping mournfully in late autumn. I returned and sat next to the west window, reading the *Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo*. I found myself hearing the sound of jade pendants rattling and seeing a graceful lady. Then I prepared fresh ink and wrote this piece. I was not aware that dawn had broken until I finished writing it.” The structuring of the characters makes reference to *Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo in Small Standard script* by Wang Xianzhi (344-386) of the Eastern Jin dynasty, but the execution is even more agile with clear lifts and presses and connected calligraphic strokes found in semi-cursive script. Hence, the brushwork is refined with graceful bearing (Plates 4, 5).



Plate 4 (left)  
Han Yunshan, *Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo in Small Standard Script*, 1949. Collection of the Han Yunshan Family

Plate 5 (right)  
Han Yunshan, *Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo in Small Standard Script* (detail), 1949. Collection of the Han Yunshan Family

### Exploration into Calligraphy after Moving to Hong Kong<sup>9</sup>

Han Yunshan ran a business as a chemical supplier in Hong Kong in the early 1950s. Leading a relatively lavish life in the politically stable and new environment, he indulged his passion for calligraphy, painting, seal carving and collecting. A 1952 work *An Old Work to the Tune of "Huanxisha" in Semi-cursive script* (Plate 6) is characterized with roundness and strength in the use of the brush, embracing Dong Qichang's (1555-1636) style while revealing the ingenuity of the young artist. The work proves, despite his identity of a businessman, his determined effort in calligraphy in his early years in Hong Kong as the colophon reads, "sojourn in Hong Kong," which expresses the hope of returning to his hometown.

As referred by his teacher Jao Tsung-I,<sup>10</sup> Han Yunshan went to Malaysia in 1957 and worked as a Chinese teacher at Han Chiang High School, a private school in Penang. He recalled that his salary was more generous than an inspector of schools in Hong Kong. During the five years of teaching in Penang, he made friends with the calligrapher and seal carver Lu Dinggong (1904-1979), who came to Nanyang three months earlier than he did. They were all enthusiastic about education and always discussed and studied poetry, calligraphy and seal carving together. Lu Dinggong even made more than 20 seals for him.

In 1962, Malaysia introduced educational reforms. The Malayan government discouraged Chinese education and the development of Chinese schools, and consequently Han Yunshan returned to Hong Kong. In the same year he produced a rather colossal work in small standard script *Haixiao's Discourses on Ci Poetry* (Plate 7) — a book of *ci* poetry by his teacher Chen Shushu (originally named Chen Xun, 1871-1942), of which the 16 sheets of paper were bound as a stitch-bound book. The style of the calligraphy is different from that of the delicate and restrained *Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo in Small Standard script* (Plates 4, 5) written 13 years ago. Clearly influenced by the sutra writing script of the newly-excavated fragmented Buddhist manuscripts of the Wei-Jin period, Han Yunshan adopted the exposed-tip at the beginning for fine strokes and used the concealed-tip with a press of the brush tip at the end of each stroke, adding a sense of rhythm and boldness to the style.

After returning from Nanyang, Han Yunshan had taught at the Government Chinese Middle School,

Plate 6  
Han Yunshan, *An Old Work to the Tune of "Huanxisha" in Semi-cursive Script*, 1952.  
Collection of the Han Yunshan Family





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Plate 7 (top left)  
Han Yunshan, *Haixiao's Discourses on Ci Poetry in Small Standard Script*, 1962. Collection of the Han Yunshan Family

Plate 8 (bottom left)  
Han Yunshan, *Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo in Small Standard Script*, 1967. Collection of the Han Yunshan Family

Plate 9 (bottom right)  
Han Yunshan, *Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo in Small Standard Script (detail)*, 1967. Collection of the Han Yunshan Family

Plate 10 (top right)  
Lau Chak-kwong,  
*Composed by Yunshan after the age of 70, seal craving*

New Method College and Mansfield College, and his passion for calligraphy had never gone away. The 1967 *Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo in Small Standard script* (Plates 8, 9) is one of the most gratifying works of the artist. Compared to the 1949 *Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo in Small Standard script* (Plates 4, 5) of the same contents, the 1967 one is subtler in the use of the brush that he had established his own distinctive style – a mixture of Wang Xianzhi's regular structure, Ni Zan's vigor and untrammelledness, and the strength and intensity of sutra writing script. From the purity of the ink and the crispness of the strokes, it is clear that Han had high standards of stationery – he said that for his calligraphy he would use the ink stick made in the Daoguang reign (1821-1850) and *zihao* (dark purple hair of hares) brushes, which he commissioned the Daiyue Studio in the Liulichang of Beijing to manufacture them and bear the inscription of "made by Han of Cloud Nestling Studio". His friend Feng Kanghou (1901-1983) was so impressed by the 1967 work, and believed he had developed his own style and carved out a new niche for the calligraphy in small standard script after steeping himself in the styles of various ancient masters. As a Chinese teacher, he was dedicated to education and took pleasure in his work from the early 1960s to the late 1980s, and therefore he did not have many works in this period.

Han Yunshan's peak years of productivity began only after the age of 70. In the early 1990s, he retired from the school and took up the posts of the head of the Education Department and consultant at the Ching Chung Koon Temple, where he worked until he was 78 in 2001. The pressure of work had

reduced promptly in those ten years. He enjoyed a leisurely life after his retirement as he could devote more of his time and energy to calligraphy. He often used the seal I made for him, which reads “composed by Yunshan after the age of 70” (Plate 10), to emphasize how pleased he was with the calligraphy of this period.

### Association with Scholars, Calligraphers and Painters, and Connoisseurship of Art as Sources of Inspiration

Indisputably, Han Yunshan’s mature style in his later years is a result of the full exploration for calligraphy throughout his life. Besides exploration into calligraphy, however, the inspiration derived from his association with scholars, calligraphers and painters, and from connoisseurship of art is of crucial importance to the foundation of his calligraphy.

Han Yunshan’s aesthetics were grounded particularly in the close relationship between calligraphy and self-cultivation. He believed that calligraphy learners should have a basic knowledge of the Chinese classics and understand calligraphy thoroughly through studying different subjects. He took Puru’s (Pu Xinyu, 1895–1963) calligraphy as an example, stating that his calligraphy had “scholarly qualities” because he excelled in literature and poetry. Among his teachers he met in his young age, as he recalled, Chen Shushu and Xiong Runtong (1903–1974) from the Kwangtung University left him a rather strong

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Plate 11 (left)  
Shang Chengzuo, *Copy of Shang Oracle Bone Inscription*. Collection of the Han Yunshan Family



Plate 12 (right)  
Lu Zishu, *the Cloister of the Imagery of Dreams*, 1952; Shang Chengzuo, *Frontispiece in Clerical Script for the Cloister of the Imagery of Dreams*; Xiong Runtong, *A Poem in Semi-cursive Script*, 1953. Collection of the Han Yunshan Family

impression. Xiong Runtong was an expert on textual bibliography, specializing in Song-Yuan rare books. With the inspiration of Xiong's teachings, Han Yunshan did not only collect different editions of rare books, but also Xiong's calligraphy, for example, *Seven-character-line Couplet in Semi-cursive script*. Further, he was a student of Shang Chengzuo (1902-1991), an epigrapher of bronzes and stones, and Yang Shuda (1885-1956), a scholar of philology, at the Institute of Chinese Literature and Language of the National Sun Yat-sen University. He admired Yang Shuda enormously since he could deliver lectures without reading his notes. Han Yunshan also collected Yang Shuda's calligraphy *A Poem by Wang Wei in Semi-cursive script*. As for *Copy of Shang Oracle Bone Inscription* (Plate 11), another calligraphy by Shang Chengzuo from his collection, the unconventional style of the oracle bone script and the rigorous examination of the oracle bones in the elegant small-standard-script inscription (including the animal rib that describes king of the Shang awarded the prey to the ministers and made a divination; on the front of the bone there is an engraving of a dragon-like *taotie* mask) had a high impact on Han's oracle bone studies and calligraphy. The above calligraphy is the works Han Yunshan's teachers specially made for him, and thus are the tokens of their warm friendship between teacher and student.

When Han Yunshan moved to Hong Kong, he named his studio "the Cloister of the Imagery of Dreams". In 1952, he requested the painting of the *Cloister of the Imagery of Dreams* from Lu Zishu (1900-1978), and asked Shang Chengzuo to write a frontispiece in clerical script for the painting and Xiong Runtong to write a poem in semi-cursive script (in 1953). Finally the three squares of sheet were mounted on a small horizontal scroll (Plate 12). Shang's assertive style of clerical script is of particular note as it had certain influence on Han Yunshan's calligraphy (Plate 13). Han Yunshan's characters are similar to Shang Chengzuo's in terms of structuring rules. Han Yunshan also applied the use of the brush and character structure of *Eulogy of Xixia* and the *Stele for Zhang Qian* to his calligraphy (for example, he borrowed from the character "jing" (景) in the *Stele for Zhang Qian*) as reflected in the same four characters (Plate 14).

Between 1952 and 1954, many of Han Yunshan's teachers and friends, with whom he was on intimate terms, had added colophons in different script forms, such as Xiong Runtong's semi-cursive script, Feng Kanghou's seal script, Han Suixuan's (1907-1992) draft cursive script and Lu Zishu's semi-cursive script contributed in the winter of 1952 (Plate 15). Among the calligraphy of his teachers and friends, Lu Zishu's running calligraphy renders the styles of Dong Qichang and Wang Xizhi (c.303-c.361) and has a

Plate 13 (left)  
Shang Chengzuo,  
*Frontispiece in Clerical  
Script for the Cloister of  
the Imagery of Dreams*.  
Collection of the Han  
Yunshan Family

Plate 14 (middle)  
Han Yunshan,  
*Frontispiece in Clerical  
Script for the Cloister of  
the Imagery of Dreams*.  
Collection of the Han  
Yunshan Family

Plate 15 (right)  
Lu Zishu, *Frontispiece in  
Semi-cursive Script for the  
Cloister of the Imagery  
of Dreams*, 1952.  
Collection of the Han  
Yunshan Family





Plate 16 (left)

Lu Zishu, *Boating on the Mist-shrouded Lake in Spring*, 1950. Collection of the Han Yunshan Family



Plate 17 (right)

Lu Zishu, *Assembling Nine Poems by Eminent Scholars in Semi-cursive Script* (detail), 1952. Collection of the Han Yunshan Family



powerful influence on Han Yunshan. *An Old Work to the Tune of “Huanxisha” in Semi-cursive script* (Plate 6) was made on the day of the Dragon Boat Festival in 1952. The use of the lines and character structure of the work resemble Lu Zishu’s semi-cursive calligraphy stylistically in many ways (Plate 15) as Han Yunshan had seen many of Lu Zishu’s works in semi-cursive script before writing it. There are Lu Zishu’s poems and colophons in semi-cursive script in the painting scrolls he made for Han Yunshan a while earlier, including *Red Plum Blossoms* in 1948, *Wintersweets and Boating on the Mist-shrouded Lake in Spring* (Plate 16) in 1950, the 1947 album of *Records of Xiqiao’s Famous Sites* and the 1952 handscroll of the same title. The handscroll of *Records of Xiqiao’s Famous Sites* is exceptionally long because at the end of the painting, Lu Zishu copied *Preface to Gazetteer of Mount Xiqiao* and Zhan Ruoshui’s (1466–1560) *Record of the First Time in Xiqiao* in semi-cursive script, and assembled nine poems by eminent scholars (Plate 17). Lu Zishu’s semi-cursive calligraphy from Han Yunshan’s collection is inextricably related to the exploration and development of his early semi-cursive-script calligraphy.

Apart from the aforementioned works of calligraphy, Han Yunshan collected works such as *ci* poems by Chen Shushu, poems by Huang Huiwen (1873-1935),<sup>11</sup> and calligraphy of Puru, Deng Erya (1884–1954), Yi Da’an (1874-1941), Wang Yuan (Wang Qiumei, 1884-1944). One of the most delicate calligraphy from his collection would be *the Dingwu Version of the Orchid Pavilion Preface*, a little album by Chen Xun of Dongguan, a calligrapher, painter and epigrapher of bronzes and stones, in the Jiaqing-Daoguang reign (1796-1850). The size of each character in the album is as small as a grain of rice. The work also carries the colophons by Chen Li (1810-1882), Deng Erya, Lu Zishu, Feng Kanghou, etc. Han Yunshan also had more than 20 calligraphic works of Lin Zhimian (1888-1934), like the couplet which read “*jiangu zhengzhi; bohou gaoming*” (resolution and uprightness; broadness and brilliance). He pointed out that Lin Zhimian’s use of lines of immense volume created the illusion of the strokes protruding from the paper, but it was a bit “affected” for him as Lin Zhimian would use a big brush for thick strokes and change to a small brush for the thin ones within the same piece of work. Yet Han Yunshan spoke frankly in his middle age that he was influenced by Lin Zhimian’s vigor and rawness considerably.

In addition to calligraphy and paintings, Han Yunshan enjoyed collecting seals. The seals he often used were the works of his teachers and close friends mostly created since the 1950s. He had more than 20 seals carved by Lu Dinggong and over 50 by Feng Kanghou. Shang Chengzuo, Zhang Xiangning (1909–1960), Lin Qianshi (1918–1990) and Qiu Siming (1925–1992) also made dozens of seals for him. He had a rich collection of seals and profound knowledge about the art of seal carving. To take one example, he offered an insightful opinion on Lu Dinggong’s seals (Plate 18): “Lu Dinggong models on the Qin and Han seals instead of standing in the ruts of the Ming and Qing seal carvers. Although he is an expert at carving seals in the ancient style, he does not do it very often... One would not be able to distinguish his seals if they are placed among the authentic ancient seals. It is true to say he already captures what lies beyond the images and possesses the central principle.”<sup>12</sup>



Plate 18  
Lu Dinggong, *Yunshan*,  
seal carving. Collection  
of the Han Yunshan  
Family

Moreover, Han Yunshan’s erudition is exemplary in his idea of understanding the interrelationship between literature history and painting history thoroughly. He stated that one’s artistic style of literature or painting was largely related to one’s character and experience when judging his friend Long Ziduo’s (1917–2008)<sup>13</sup> landscape paintings (Plate 19):

For the scholars born in the times of turmoil with no recognition, they tend to express their worry, indignation and anxiety through arts: Qu Yuan in his poem “Encountering Sorrow”, Du Fu in poems, Xin Qiji in *ci* poems, and Bada Shanren and Shitao in paintings. Their purposes are the same in spite of different media.

Graduated from the Department of Chinese Painting at Canton Municipal College of Art, Long Ziduo abandoned the brush and joined the army during the War of Resistance against Japan. He lived on Castle Peak of Tuen Mun, Hong Kong in his late years and spent his time in calligraphy and painting for his amusement... His landscapes done in light ink are free from worldly contamination and are different from those of the time. The disengaged painter captures the essence of the ancient masters. I met him a few times. He is a righteous man that his paintings truly represent who he is.

... When Ziduo worries about the current issues and looks for way to express his worries, he paints to express his thoughts.

When I see paintings by Bada Shanren and Shitao, I can picture what they had been through as they were born at the time the Manchus established the sovereignty

over China and lamented for the loss of their home and country. Their paintings are desolate conveying the melancholy of profound concerns and their sense of hopelessness. It was difficult to refrain myself from viewing the paintings for a while. As quoted from the *Book of Songs*, “A gentleman is able to continue with what the predecessors have accomplished as he is both capable and virtuous.” A calligrapher’s style depends on his mind and thoughts. Ziduo is probably one of them.<sup>14</sup>

With his friends, collection and exploration of art theory and history, Han Yunshan had pushed the realm of calligraphy and elevated his artistic taste, which helped him develop his own theory and aesthetics in the art of calligraphy.

### **Stylistic Study of Clerical Script of the Han Dynasty and Related Practice of Calligraphy**

Han Yunshan’s maternal grandfather had taught calligraphy to him since he was a child. He became Liu Fengzhen’s student and learned calligraphy when he got older. Under the instruction of Liu Fengzhen, he built a firm foundation for his clerical-script calligraphy by the Han stelae such as the *Eulogy of Xixia*, *Stele for Zhang Qian* and *Stele for Ritual Vessels*.

It is noteworthy that Han Yunshan had analyzed and compared various styles of Han clerical script in his later years. He never called himself a scholar of calligraphy history but always provided insightful opinions in the inscriptions after his clerical-script calligraphy, as this is evident in the following analysis:

#### ***Stele for Ritual Vessels*<sup>15</sup>**

The 1994 *Copy of Stele for Ritual Vessels* (Plate 20) is one of the works Han Yunshan was pleased with. The forceful style is developed in the swift execution of lines. At the end the colophon reads: “*The Stele for Ritual Vessels* is full of variations regarding the angular characters and it is hard to seek perfection. I have practiced the writing for 50 years and sometimes I would write it again, communing with the ancients and forgetting about the existence of the universe and myself. For Chak-kwong my junior as gift.”<sup>16</sup> The assertive and lively use of the brush interprets the aesthetic meaning of “full of variations”. It requires Han Yunshan 50 years of practice to present the rhymes of the brush as one can only perceive the use of the brush by intuition instead of words. This echoes the comment on the *Stele for Ritual Vessels* in the book *Jinshi shi* (History of Bronzes and Stones) by a Ming epigrapher Guo Zongchang (c.1570–1652), which says, “The calligraphy is unparalleled in antique elegance as though spirits wrote it and it could not have come from human hands. Even ‘the spectacular vigor that would make stars drift and hair stand’ falls short to describe it. Other Han stelae are similar in the spirit of the brush but this stele is unique and deep that one can only look at it but not grasp it.”<sup>17</sup> The work incorporates changes unexpectedly and impresses the viewers with rich variations of thick, fine, light and heavy strokes and the use of dry ink, wet ink, thick dark ink and light ink. It explains the profound meaning of Guo Zongchang’s star-drifting metaphor in the calligraphy.



Plate 19 (left)  
Long Ziduo, *Landscape Painting*, 1995.  
Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 20 (top)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of Stele for Ritual Vessels*, 33x258cm, 1994.  
Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 21 (middle top)  
Han Yunshan, *Extract from the Back and Sides of the Stele for Han Chi (Stele for Ritual Vessels)* (detail), 35.5x380cm, 1997.  
Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 22 (middle bottom)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of the Sides of the Stele for Ritual Vessels* (detail), 34x408cm, 1995.  
Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 23 (right)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of the Facade of the Stele for Ritual Vessels*, 126x32cm, 1996. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Han Yunshan had copied the *Stele for Ritual Vessels* many times. At the end of his 1997 *Extract from the Back and Sides of the Stele for Han Chi (Stele for Ritual Vessels)* (Plate 21), it inscribes, “Full of variations, the writing found at the sides of the *Stele for Han Chi* is bold and quaint. It is difficult to imitate such an excellent work of Han clerical script. My work conforms to established rules as it is just an excerpt of the stele.” It shows that Han Yunshan gained a more sophisticated understanding of the stele when compared to the way he understood it, particularly the bold and quaint style of the back and sides of the stele, three years ago. Again, he emphasized that it was not easy to fully grasp the stele style based on his experience of imitating the stele all along.

Charged with a tremendous force, the characters of the 1995 *Copy of the Sides of the Stele for Ritual Vessels*

(Plate 22) are gaunt but robust and thus convey the spirit. Han Yunshan's colophon of the work accords with the two remarks in Wang Shu's (1668-1743) book *Xuzhou tibia* (Inscriptions and Colophons of Xuzhou) concerning the *Stele for Ritual Vessels*, and adds his own comments to it. Wang Shu said, "This stele is especially strange and wonderful. Made up of steely and defined strokes, the characters are as varied as a dragon's forms, and each of them has its own uniqueness, being unpredictably wonderful."<sup>18</sup> He also said, "Only the *Stele for Han Chi* (*Stele for Ritual Vessels*) is full of beauty. It appears highbrow but is actually sturdy. It appears sturdy but is actually solemn and conventional. None of the stelae are able to match this stele since *bafen* clerical script appeared."<sup>19</sup> Han Yunshan put Wang Shu's remarks together in the colophon of the 1995 work: "The characters of the *Stele for Han Chi* are made up of steely and defined strokes, being as varied as a dragon's form and full of beauty." Then he compared the writing of the facade, back and sides, and added: "The writing on the back and sides of the stele is especially robust and unrestrained." Having studied the writing of all the sides, he interpreted the unrestrainedness as a contrast of fine and tenacious strokes and robust lines in the work, employing the different structures of large, small, elongated and squat characters. Moreover, the strong but jagged strokes of the dry brush can be attributed to the influence of Lin Zhimian. Thus, he added another colophon at the end: "I cannot break through from the stylistic influence of Lin Zhimian despite 50 years of practice."

Written in 1996, *Copy of the Facade of the Stele for Ritual Vessels* (Plate 23) reveals that Han Yunshan's works of imitation are not merely calligraphy practice and they are in fact works of great originality and

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Plate 24  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of  
Stele for Yi Ying* (detail),  
47x273cm, 1995.  
Collection of Lau Chak-  
kwong

flair. In comparison to the original inscription of the *Stele for Ritual Vessels*, the characters are unrestrained in structure and even partly distorted in form. With the artist's swift execution of lines, some details of the original inscription are left out. The liftings and pressings of the brush and the contrasting thickness of the strokes are somewhat exaggerated, endowing the work with spontaneous vibrancy. He added a humorous remark as a colophon: "I copied the *Stele for Han Chi* with the method of writing cursive-clerical script. No one should ever learn my way or it will be a dead end for him." Such unconventional idea delivers a personal touch that shows originality in his calligraphy.

### *Stele for Yi Ying*<sup>20</sup>

*Copy of Stele for Yi Ying* (Plate 24) lays emphasis on the compositional principles and traditions while the aforementioned works are about spiritual approximation and personal expression. He paid attention to the subtle changes in the employment of the brush and the pressure applied through the brush to conjure vibrancy. Han Yunshan commented on the *Stele for Yi Ying* in the colophon, "The squarish structuring is solemn with a sense of ease and dynamism."

Han Yunshan's comments on the *Stele for Yi Ying* are in accord with those made by the people of the past, which stress the compositional principles. As the Qing epigrapher Weng Fanggang (1733–1818) praised, "The *Stele for Yi Ying* is the best model of Han clerical script for its moderate strokes and smoothness of the characters."<sup>21</sup> The Qing scholar Fang Shuo also says, "Angular, sophisticated and weighty, the *Stele for Yi Ying* is worthy to be deemed 'the beauty of the ancestral temple'."<sup>22</sup>

As can be seen in the interplay of the round and angular strokes and the disciplined and meditated composition, the *Stele for Yi Ying* is the model for the beginners of Han clerical script. *Copy of Stele for Yi Ying* is sophisticated in its delicate contrasting width of the strokes and emphasis on the configural force of the wavy and outwardly extending strokes. Infusing the synergy between the unyielding and pliant strokes, the squarish and squat character structuring lends the work solemnity and solidity, explaining the traditional principles as well as the artist's full understanding of the stele.<sup>23</sup>

### *Stele for Shi Chen*<sup>24</sup>

*Copy of Stele for Shi Chen* (Plate 25) is a reflection of Han Yunshan's profound understanding of the principles of ancient clerical script. The character structuring captures the spirit of the original stele in strict compliance with the principles while maintaining the balance with the outwardly extending characters. It is thanks to the balance between the beginnings of the horizontal and slanting strokes on the right and the downward sliding strokes with subtle flicks on the left, the characters flare horizontally with an eruptive force.<sup>25</sup>

The analysis and remarks made by scholars are always helpful in understanding how Han Yunshan dealt with the compositional principles and conveyed the essence of the *Stele for Shi Chen*. Guo Zongchang had this comment on the stele, "The elegance and refined calligraphy is a model for a hundred generations

Plate 25 (left)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of Stele for Shi Chen* (detail), 39x275cm. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong



Plate 26 (right)  
Han Yunshan, “*Su Yong*” in *Clerical Script*. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong



and no one can ever surpass it.”<sup>26</sup> The Qing critic Wan Jing (1659–1742) passed a remark concerning the stele in his *Fenli oucun* (A Study on Various Clerical Scripts): “Elegant, tight and orderly composed, the application of ruled measurement is outstanding. It is like one presenting himself to a new teacher for the first time with measured steps and reserved demeanor.”<sup>27</sup> Yang Shoujing (1839–1914) also said in his *Pingbei ji* (Record of Comments on Stelae): “Not all the Han stelae are great, as the people of the past mentioned, but they emit the air of antiquity and sturdiness that no scripts can convey. The *Stele for Shi Chen* would be a prominent example of this.”<sup>28</sup> It can be gleaned from the comments that the *Stele for Shi Chen* reiterates the strict compositional principles in its compact structure and sense of antiquity and sturdiness, which are evident in *Copy of Stele for Shi Chen*. The two-character work *Su Yong* (Plate 26) adopts the characters “su” (reverence) and “yong” (harmony) from the *Stele for Shi Chen*. Full of spirit and great in momentum, it is placid and robust in brushwork with the elusive flicks and outwardly extending strokes. The solemn and graceful style represents the literary meaning of the characters “su” and “yong” with the aesthetics embodied in calligraphy.

### ***Stele for Heng Fang***<sup>29</sup>

*Extract from the Stele for Heng Fang and the Heading* (Plate 27) evokes vividly the vigorous and ample style of ancient stelae. Han Yunshan combined his experience of copying *Stele for Heng Fang* and the remarks from his predecessors to show his understanding of its style as a colophon at the end: “Featuring round strokes against square forms, *Stele for Heng Fang* distinguishes itself for its archaism, awkwardness and sturdiness with its uniform composition and yet atypical brushwork. The heading is particularly round and robust in brushwork with the broad and straightforward characters.” The “uniformity” and “broadness” correspond with Weng Fanggang’s analysis of the *Stele for Heng Fang*: “The characters are spacious and broad, filling their allotted space.”<sup>30</sup>



Plate 27 (top)  
Han Yunshan, *Extract from the Stele for Heng Fang and the Heading* (detail), 43.5x307cm, 1995. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong



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Plate 28 (middle)  
Han Yunshan, *Extract from the Stele for Zhang Qian and the Heading* (detail), 34x278cm, 1995. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong



Plate 29 (bottom left)  
Han Yunshan, *Extract from the Stele for Xianyu Huang* (detail), 178x61cm, 1997. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 30 (bottom right)  
Han Yunshan, *Extract from Eulogy of Xixia and the Heading* (detail), 36x298cm, 1994. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong



***Stele for Zhang Qian,<sup>31</sup> Stele for Xianyu Huang,<sup>32</sup> and Eulogy of Xixia<sup>33</sup>***

In addition to the *Stele for Heng Fang*, Han Yunshan copied and analyzed the following three Han stelae of vigorous but distinct styles.

1. *Extract from Stele for Zhang Qian and the Heading* (Plate 28) inscribes: “The angular strokes and the compactness of the characters conjure up a sense of simplicity and antiquity of the *Stele for Zhang Qian*. The heading in seal script is especially robust and vibrant.” The mention of “antiquity” echoes Wang Shizhen’s (1526–1590) comment of “elegant antiquity”.<sup>34</sup>

2. *Extract from Stele for Xianyu Huang* (Plate 29) inscribes: “The *Stele for the Governor of Yanmen, Xianyu Huang* of the Eastern Han dynasty is elegant and austere with the use of both angular and round strokes, bringing to mind the *Stele for Zhang Qian*.”

3. *Extract from Eulogy of Xixia and the Heading* (Plate 30) inscribes: “*Eulogy of Xixia* charms with its solidity and inartificiality.”

***Stele for the Sacrifice at Mount Sangong<sup>35</sup>, Stele for the Tribute of the Governor of Dunhuang, Pei Cen,<sup>36</sup> and Stele for Jing Jun<sup>37</sup>***

Han Yunshan also found inspiration in the Han stelae in clerical script which are suggestive of the character structuring and brush employment of the seal script, such as *Copy of Stele for the Sacrifice at Mount Sangong* and *Stele for Jing Jun*.

1. *Copy of Stele for the Sacrifice at Mount Sangong* (Plate 31) incorporates the centered-tip of the seal script and the clerical script feature of *cantou yanwei* (silkworm head and goose tail) with great agility. The inscription reads: “The antique flavor and vigor pervade the *Stele for the Sacrifice at Mount Sangong*, bringing the seal script features into the clerical script. Among the copies of present calligraphers, Baishi Laoren’s (Qi Baishi) work is most known for its mellowness. Today I copied a few lines for Chak-kwong my junior with the use of wiry strokes. The viewers might understand the work in their own way.” The heading (Plate 31) adopts the seal script into the clerical script with reference to the *Stele for the Sacrifice at Mount Sangong*, but the characters are even more spontaneous.

2. *Copy of Stele for the Tribute to the Governor of Dunhuang, Pei Cen* (Plate 33) borders on the seal script with robust and harsh strokes. Han Yunshan commented on the stele in the colophon: “rawness infused with the spirit of antiquity.”

3. *Four-character-line Couplet in Clerical Script* (Plate 34) “*Guang bei sibiao; Shou kao wannian*” (Showing the brilliance to the whole world; Living a long life for ten thousand years) Adopted from the *Stele for the Chancellor of Beihai, Jing Jun*, the eight characters are elongated and closely-knit. Han Yunshan noted that the stele had a peculiar flavor that was distinctive from other Han stelae—the vertical endings that hang down like needles intensify the visual effect of an elongated character.



*Eulogy of Shimen, Marker Record for Yang Huai, and Inscription for the Baoye Path*

Han Yunshan had an eye for these three zestful Eastern-Han stone inscriptions. All of the works were originally found in Baocheng, Shaanxi and are now housed at the Hanzhong Museum. Carved into cliffs or granite boulders, the characters are irregular and jumbled in its indulgence in spontaneity as they follow the natural forms of the cliff and boulders.

1. *Copy of the Heading for Eulogy of Shimen* (Plate 35) is characterized by the steely characters that are straggly in structure, displaying natural and untrammelled qualities. Han Yunshan agreed with Yang Shoujing's view and inscribed: "Eulogy of Shimen brings about the peculiar effect with the curious character structure, and suggests a sense of movement that verges on the divine like wild cranes and gulls in flight. The heading is round and flowing in brushwork."

2. *Copy of Marker Record for Yang Huai of the Han Dynasty* (Plate 36) is rounder and sturdier in brushwork, more curious in structure and clearer in the contrast of the spacing intervals than those in *Copy of the Heading for Eulogy of Shimen*, contributing to the expressiveness of the work. The frontispiece borrows the brush method of seal script to bestow the clerical script with agility and antiquity. Han Yunshan inscribed at the end: "Although *Marker Record for Yang Huai* is in the tradition of *Eulogy of Shimen*, it is rawer and more varied... I copied it once in a while and was pleased to find myself communing with the ancient spiritually."

3. *Copy of Inscription for the Baoye Path* (Plate 37) blends seal script features into the clerical script. A natural aura radiates from the mindless use of the dry brush and the randomness of the character size.

Plate 31 (left)

Han Yunshan, *Copy of Stele for the Sacrifice at Mount Sangong* (detail), 12-page album, 48x59cm each, 1995. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 32 (middle left)

Han Yunshan, *The Frontispiece of the Copy of Stele for the Sacrifice at Mount Sangong in Clerical Script* (detail), 12-page album, 48x59cm each, 1995. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 33 (middle right)

Han Yunshan, *Copy of Stele for the Tribute to the Governor of Dunhuang* (detail), 140x69cm, 1997. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 34 (right)

Han Yunshan, *Four-character-line Couplet in Clerical Script*, 68x17cm, 1988. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Han Yunshan added a colophon at the end: “*Inscription for the Baoye Path* of the Han dynasty is assertive and vigorous in brushwork and suggestive of the seal script. Kang Nanhai (Kang Youwei) described it as the seal script of the Han clerical inscriptions. Yang Shoujing considered that no one in a hundred generations could imitate its spirit and it was an inspired work.” Han Yunshan also commented on his own work in the colophon: “By the sweat of my brow... I copied the inscription once and it is not frivolous.” His colophon suggests that calligraphers should wield the brush with the strength of the whole body so that they produce jagged strokes with the dry brush instead of frivolous lines, and demonstrate the rawness of stone inscriptions and the ruggedness of stones on the rubbings.

### *Stele for Cao Quan*<sup>38</sup>

*Copy of Stele for Cao Quan* (Plate 38) emphasizes the radiation of the characters from a compact core and the interplay of the round and angular strokes written with the centered-tip brushwork. *Stele for Cao Quan* has been praised by scholars and calligraphers since the excavation at the beginning of the Wanli reign (1573-1620) of the Ming dynasty. This is how Wan Jing described it: “The stele is captivated with elegance, vibrancy and spontaneity. Indeed, it is an inspired work.”<sup>39</sup> The Qing connoisseur Sun Chengze (1593-1676) also wrote: “Robust, elegant and untrammelled, *Stele for Cao Quan* is another great work after the *Stele for Ritual Vessels*. They are the treasures of the Han stone inscriptions.”<sup>40</sup>

Plate 35 (left)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of the Heading for Eulogy of Shimen*, 89.5x62cm, 1989. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 36 (middle top)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of Marker Record for Yang Huai of the Han Dynasty (detail) and Frontispiece*, 34.5x816cm, 1996. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 37 (middle bottom)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of Inscription for the Baoye Path (detail)*, 34-page album, 47.5x59cm each, 1995. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 38 (right)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of Stele for Cao Quan (detail)*, 46x470cm, 1997. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong



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It is interesting that Han Yunshan held a different opinion of the *Stele for Cao Quan*: “I used the brushwork of the Han bamboo strips to write the *Stele for Cao Jingwan (Stele for Cao Quan)* to avoid vulgarity.” He believed that floating strokes would spoil the gallant and vigorous qualities and make the work vulgar and tasteless. Therefore, he advised calligraphers to write the stele with reference to the writing of the Han bamboo strips. In his *Copy of Stele for Cao Quan*, the relaxed brushwork of the bamboo strips and strokes of the dry brush are commonly found. Guo Zongchang pointed out that there were changes on the back side of the stele: “The calligraphy is simple and casual, forming a style of its own. The character structuring and the implication are diversified, complex and flowing with ease. This is not imitable for calligraphers.”<sup>41</sup> His emphasis on casualness and spontaneity somewhat resembles Han Yunshan’s idea of writing the stele with regard to the Han bamboo strips.

### Imitation and Interpretation

As Han Yunshan copied and imitated various kinds of ancient stelae extensively, his aesthetics revealed itself in the Han clerical script within his calligraphy. This matches what the artist always said: spirit

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Plate 39 (top left)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of Stele for Zheng Gu* (detail), 32x247cm, 1995. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong



Plate 40 (bottom left)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of Stele for Huashan Temple of the West Mountain* (detail), 33x267cm, 1994. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong



Plate 41 (right)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of Stele for Wang the Houseman* (detail), 47x398cm, 1995. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

communion with the ancient. His colophons on his works involve quotation from the remarks by the predecessors, addition of his opinions and even suggestion of some totally differing ideas, which reflect his independence and creativity in his research. In addition to the aforementioned Han stelae, he had copied other major works which include: *Fragmented Stele for the Son of Marquis Chou*, *Eulogy of Mount Fenglong*, *Stele for Zheng Gu* (Plate 39), *Stele for Huashan Temple of the West Mountain* (Plate 40) *Stele for Kong Zhou and the Heading*, *Stele for Yin Zhou*, *Stele for Han Ren*, and some stelae that were unearthed at a later time such as *Fragmented Stele for the Thrice Venerable Zhao Kuan*, *Stele for Zhang Jing*, *Stele for Wang the Houseman* (Plate 41).

It is widely believed that imitation of masterpieces is merely a part of the calligraphic training, but Han Yunshan always gave his works a personal interpretation artistically during the process. It shows that he did not regard his imitations as pure “practice”. As mentioned above, he had rendered four dissimilar copies of *Stele for Ritual Vessels* at different times, and this proves the great originality in his imitations. It is similar to the performance of the same symphony by an orchestra now and then; it would not be the same all the time. There are endless possibilities for playing a symphony and thus writing a calligraphy modeling on the Han stelae.

### Bamboo Strips and Silk Texts of the Han Dynasty

Han Yunshan pointed out that he had learned the steady and robust use of the brush from Liu Fengzhen when he was young. He became inspired and understood the lively styles and variations of brushwork until he studied the Han bamboo strips and wooden tablets from the book *Liusha zhuijian* (Surviving Documents from the Desert) compiled by Luo Zhenyu and Wang Guowei. In his later years, he broadened his knowledge of calligraphy as he drew inspiration from the newly unearthed bamboo and wooden strips and silk texts.

In the early 20th century, a number of Han bamboo and wooden strips were found in the deserts and ruins of beacon in Gansu, Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang. Those strips are about people's life, such as production of goods, medical prescriptions, military intelligence, war materials, etc. There have been disputes over the writing on the strips and tablets. Some people think that they are not calligraphers' writing and we cannot trace the tradition from which they derive so no one should learn them. Han Yunshan took a rather positive attitude toward them. Written by anonymous scribes in the Han dynasty, he believed that the spontaneous writing acquired a natural flavor and presented certain kinds of emotions and artistic languages. *Copy of Bamboo Strips for the Documents in the Xin Mang Period* was written in 1987 and is housed in the Hong Kong Museum of Art.<sup>42</sup> Han Yunshan deliberately used the worn brush and the old and rough *louwen* paper from Korea to create an atmosphere of rawness found in the Han bamboo strips. He once said the writing of the Han strips and tablets was ragged because it was mostly on the surface of bamboo and wood. He asserted that calligraphers could not only strive for the formal likeness when copying the Han strips, but also needed to get a grasp of their spirit, and worked for the simple, raw and spontaneous qualities. One must follow his heart to write them and should

not be scrupulous in his workmanship. At the end of a handscroll which Han Yunshan had copied the Han strips of different styles, he inscribed it with the casual brushwork of the strips: “Judging from the numerous variations within the Han bamboo strips, one might get a glimpse of the charm and allure of the Han clerical script.” He also commented on his work: “I have not fallen into the habit of using the bold and vigorous brush to write the Han strips.” (Plate 42) From this it is apparent that his idea of writing the Han strips is that no overwhelmingly vigorous strokes and exaggerated style should appear in the work; instead, a calligrapher should adopt an unintentionally extemporaneous brushwork to show the vitality and rhythm of the natural charm.

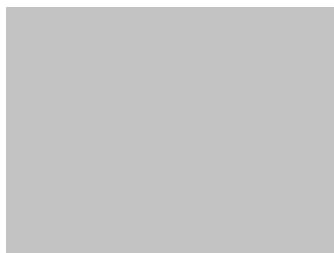
Since he regarded copying the Han bamboo strips as an act of creation, he would express his emotions and represent his style in his works. His calligraphic works are vigorous (Plate 43), leisurely (Plate 44) or untrammelled (Plate 45), having different styles. Adopting characters from the Han strips, the 2000 work *A Poem by Li Shangyin in Clerical Script* (Plate 46) was written in draft cursive script. The blunt and austere brushwork conjures creativity derived from its straightforwardness and individuality. Meanwhile, Han Yunshan’s work in the style of silk texts are graceful and natural with the interplay between the seal and clerical scripts (Plates 47 and 48).

Han Yunshan devoted his energy to the study of clerical script of various styles all his life. Therefore, his clerical calligraphy, even some of them were written at random, are the outcome of his life-long studies on the Han stelae, bamboo strips and silk texts, suggesting antiquity and the chisel effect of bronzes and stones (Plates 49, 50, 51 and 52).

Plate 42 (left)  
Han Yunshan, *Inscriptions for the Copy of Han Scripts* (detail), 46.5x398cm, 1995. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 43 (middle)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of Han Scripts: Indictment of Su Jun, Designated Officer of Jiaqu, against Kou En* (detail). Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 44 (right)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of Dunhuang Script of the Xinmang period*, 1996. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong



## Convergence of the Stele and Model-book Studies

Regarding the learning of calligraphy, Han Yunshan believed that students should begin with clerical script because its composition and brushwork are the key to a solid foundation of both the stele and model-book schools. The development of the “stele school” calligraphy is related to the promotion of evidential studies and epigraphy in the Qing dynasty. Calligraphers have been divided into the “stele school” and the “model-book school” since then. The stele school refers to the calligraphers who practice the writing on the pre-Tang stelae and of rubbings of stone inscriptions. They practice in seal and clerical scripts, and the clerical-standard transitional script of the Wei stelae. By contrast, the lineage of the model-book school copies and imitates *fatie* (model letters) or *ketie* (engraved letters). (*Ketie* are the rubbings of the stone or wooden inscriptions of which the masters’ calligraphy is engraved, and are also copybooks for calligraphy students.) Those following model-book school calligraphy theory copy the *fatie* with the calligraphy of the “masters” from the Eastern Jin and Tang dynasties, such as Zhong You, Wang Xizhi, Wang Xianzhi, Yan Zhenqing, and write in semi-cursive, cursive, Tang Dynasty standard or small standard scripts.<sup>43</sup> Hua Rende proposed that the fundamental difference between the two schools is: “stele school calligraphy” follows the calligraphy of non-masters while “model-book school calligraphy” puts emphasis on learning from that by the masters. These two learning approaches stand in opposition to each other.<sup>44</sup>

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Han Yunshan had embraced and absorbed both the qualities of the stele and model-book schools into his calligraphy. As a scholar-calligrapher, his identity and background contribute much to his belief of adapting the strengths of various subjects and the emphasis on scholarship and self-cultivation. Firmly rooting his calligraphy in the Han clerical script, he studied the stelae with their seal and clerical scripts with occasional borrowings from oracle bone and bronze scripts. As for the model-book traditions, he looked over the semi-cursive, cursive and small standard scripts by the Jin-Tang calligraphers, such as Zhong You, Wang Xizhi, Wang Xianzhi, Yan Zhenqing, Chu Suiliang and Xue Ji’, as well as the Yuan-Ming masters including Ni Zan, Zhao Mengfu and Dong Qichang. His works listed below are typical of each of the scripts, revealing his excellent command of different script forms and the depth of his knowledge of calligraphy.

Oracle bone script – The characters are written with fine and slender strokes with subtle variations in brushwork to approximate the intriguing flavor of the carving effect of sharp lines in the oracle bone inscriptions in Yanxu (Plate 53). The quaintness is infused with elegance (Plate 54) in the casual and spontaneous execution (Plate 55).

Great seal script/Bronze script – The irregularity of character size adds to its vibrancy (Plates 56, 57, 58). The weighty brushwork conjures vigor and variety of the lines and is suggestive of power and austerity (Plate 59).

Small seal script – Indebted to the headings of the Han stelae (Plate 60), the round strokes are dynamic like the drapery in the wind, which are typical of the Han seal script (Plate 61). Han Yunshan had studied

the Qin-Han roof-tile-end inscriptions, inscribed bricks, pottery characters and bronze scripts intently (Plate 62). His studies on the ancient scripts inject antique and austere flavour into his seal-script calligraphy rendered in a spontaneous manner (Plates 63, 64, 65).

Stele of the Northern and Southern Dynasties – *Couplet of Characters Adopted from Stele for Cuan Baozi*, with the meaning of "Begonia blossoming in March at the end of Spring. Refreshing breeze brings the fragrance of jasmine to the meadows", is a marriage of clerical and standard scripts, conveying an extraordinary charm (Plate 66).

Semi-cursive script – He began with Wang Xizhi and Dong Qichang in his study of calligraphy and his early works prove his solid foundation for the model-book tradition. He was also preoccupied with Lu Zishu's fluent brushwork and elegant and graceful style at that time (Plate 6). In his later years, he turned to work on his own style which was unrestrained and honest (Plates 67, 68, 69, and 70).

Small standard script – The spiritual charm is seen in a mixture of Ni Zan's purity and untrammelledness and the flowing elegance of the *Thirteen Lines of Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo* by Wang Xianzhi (Plates 71, 72). He would also borrow from the sutra writing script of the Jin dynasty to add to the rusticity and honesty of his work (Plate 73). His fountain pen calligraphy emits a sense of grace and elegance and is suitable as a model of fountain pen calligraphy (Plate 74).



Plate 45 (left most)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of Han Scripts from Dunhuang*, 175x16cm, 1991. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 46 (top left)  
Han Yunshan, *Untitled Poem by Li Shangyin in Clerical Script*, 126x41.5cm, 2000. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 47 (top middle)  
Han Yunshan, *Six-Character Couplet on Silk*, 139x26cm each, 1998. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 48 (top right)  
Han Yunshan, *Collection of Silk Texts from Han Dynasty*, 96x53cm, 1999. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 49 (bottom left)  
Han Yunshan, *"Emotions Before Style" (yi zai bi xian) in Clerical Script*, 91x31cm, 1990. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 50 (bottom right)  
Han Yunshan, *"The Poem of Snow on the River" by Liu Zongyuan in Clerical Script*, 122x61cm, 1998. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

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Plate 53 (left)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of  
Oracle Bone Script* (detail),  
90x39.5cm, 1997.  
Collection of Lau Chak-  
kwong

Plate 54 (right)  
Han Yunshan, *Twelve-  
character Couplet in Oracle  
Bone Script*, 203x54cm  
each, 2003. Collection of  
Lau Chak-kwong



Plate 51 (top)  
Han Yunshan, *Two  
Five-Character Poems by  
Wang Wei in Clerical  
Script*, 33x327cm, 1995.  
Collection of Lau Chak-  
kwong

Plate 52 (bottom)  
Han Yunshan, *Jiang Kui's  
AnXiang Ci in Clerical  
Script*, 34x764cm, 1999.  
Collection of Lau Chak-  
kwong

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Plate 55 (left)  
Han Yunshan, *Seven-  
character Couplet in Oracle  
Bone Script*, 69x15.5cm  
each, 1997. Collection of  
Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 56 (right)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of the  
Shusizi Tripod*, 124x33cm.  
Collection of Lau Chak-  
kwong

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Plate 58 (middle)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of  
the Sanshi Basin* (detail),  
179x63cm. Collection of  
Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 59 (bottom left)  
Han Yunshan, *Seven-  
character Couplet in Great  
Seal Script*, 139x26cm  
each, 1998. Collection of  
Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 60 (bottom right)  
Han Yunshan, *Seven-  
character Couplet in Small  
Seal Script*, 139x37cm  
each, 1994. Collection of  
Lau Chak-kwong



Plate 57  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of the Dayu Tripod*, 32x260cm, 1997. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 61 (left 1)  
Han Yunshan, *Twenty-four-character Couplet in Small Seal Script*.  
Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 62 (middle left)  
Han Yunshan, *Copy of Qin-Han roof-tile-end inscriptions, inscribed bricks, pottery characters and bronze scripts*, 48x180cm, 1997. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 63 (middle right)  
Han Yunshan, "*Clouds and Water intend nothing*" (*yun shui wu xin*) in *Cursive Seal Script*. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 64 (right)  
Han Yunshan, "*Painting Room*" (*xuehuashi*) in *Small Seal Script*, 73x17cm, 1996. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

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Plate 65 (top)  
Han Yunshan, *Seven-character Couplet in Cursive Seal Script*.  
Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 66 (bottom left)  
Han Yunshan, *Couplet of Characters Adopted from Stele for Cuan Baozi*,  
110x23cm each, 1991.  
Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

Plate 67 (bottom right)  
Han Yunshan, *Seven-character Couplet in Semi-cursive Script*, 139x37cm,  
1995. Collection of Lau Chak-kwong



Plate 68 (top left)  
Han Yunshan, *Lu You's Poems in Semi-cursive Script*, 48x60cm, 1995.  
Collection of Lau Chak-kwong



Plate 69 (bottom left)  
Han Yunshan, *Su Shi's Shui Long Yin Ci in Semi-cursive Script* (detail), 34.5x550cm, 1999.  
Collection of Lau Chak-kwong

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Plate 70 (right)  
Han Yunshan, *The Inscription for the Copy of Rhapsody of Fenglongshan of the Han Dynasty*, 1997.  
Collection of Lau Chak-kwong



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Plate 71 (top left)  
Han Yunshan, *Postscript  
in Small Standard script*.  
Collection of Lau Chak-  
kwong

Plate 72 (top right)  
Han Yunshan, *Self  
composed Poem in Small  
Standard script*, 1990.  
Collection of Lau Chak-  
kwong

Plate 73 (bottom left)  
Han Yunshan, *Postscript  
in Small Standard script*,  
1989. Collection of Lau  
Chak-kwong

Plate 74 (bottom right)  
Han Yunshan, Wang Ze  
Lu, *Thousand Character  
Classic*, Fountain Pen  
Calligraphy Model Book  
(detail), printed matter.  
Collection of Lau Chak-  
kwong



## Conclusion

Han Yunshan's calligraphy as seen here exemplifies that he studied the ancients but without being stuck in the old – He traveled back and forth between the stele and the model-book schools as he emulated the styles of various masters and explored their aesthetics, drawing references from those elements and transforming them into his own ideas. His profound knowledge of calligraphy and erudition brought a scholarly quality to his calligraphic works and established his individual style as an eclectic artistic language. In his 1996 work *Returning to Unaffectedness* (Plate 75), for example, Han Yunshan introduced flexibility to the structuring of the big clerical-script characters and borrowed from the brush techniques of seal script, which echoes the spirit of the Eastern Han cliff carving (*moya*) of the *Marker Record for Yang Huai* (Plate 36). As for the colophon in semi-cursive script, it demonstrates swift execution and rich variations in brush modulation, projecting the elegance of Chu Suiliang and Xue Ji's calligraphy. Although the stele and model-book schools are entirely different, Han Yunshan has fully internalized their features in his clerical and semi-cursive scripts of which the linkage is on the basis of his aesthetic concept of unadornedness, honesty and unaffectedness, which spontaneously echoes the literary meaning of "Returning to Unaffectedness".

The depth of his calligraphy is embodied in his embrace of the artistic notion of balance between deliberation and unintentionality – He strove for "spiritual communion with the ancients" by adapting the strengths of various areas, yet at the same time realized "the banishment of the existence of the universe and myself" when writing calligraphy extemporaneously. The techniques and aesthetics of the ancient masters are evident in his works, which however, reflect his sincere and unpretentious personality.

Plate 75 (left)  
Han Yunshan, *Returning to Unaffectedness*, 1996.  
Collection of Lau Chak-  
kwong



Plate 76 (right)  
Han Yunshan, "Go  
Have Some Tea" (*chi  
cha qu*), 81x17cm, 1996.  
Collection of Lau Chak-  
kwong

As far as I can recall, Han Yunshan felt the excitement of writing calligraphy when we had a “tea talk” gathering in late spring 1996, and wrote *Chi Cha Qu* (go have some tea) in clerical script (Plate 76). Written in an instant without much planning, the three-character work represents his open and unperturbed life view. The colophon in semi-cursive script flows with unaffectedness of his genuine character. With a few strokes of the brush, he summarized his view of calligraphy and on life: free of earthly cares, reclusive and unfettered.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the contribution of the Qing *yilao* (loyalists) and intelligentsia to Hong Kong calligraphy in the early 20th century, see Cheung Wai-ye, “Yueji yilao shufa yu ershi shiji chuqi Xianggang shutan,” in *Lingnan shuxue yanjiu lunwenji*, ed. Lin Yajie and Zhu Wanzhang (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2004), 108-29. For the early development of Hong Kong calligraphy, see Harold Mok, “Xiangjiang xianxian moji: wenhua chengchuan yu shufa,” in *Chinese Handwriting in Hong Kong: Gleanings of a Hundred Years* (Hong Kong: Art Museum, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2006), 15-24, and Chen Yafei, “Early Hong Kong Calligraphy: A Cultural Study,” in *Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2004*, ed. Harold Mok (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2005), 64-89.

<sup>2</sup> Chen, *ibid.*, 64.

<sup>3</sup> For the active calligraphers in the early 20th century, see note 1, and also see Harold Mok and Chen Yafei eds., *Xianggang shufa nianbiao 1901-1950* (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2009); Ma Kwok-kuen, “Xianggang jinbainian shutan gaishu,” in *Shuhai guanlan: Zhongguo shufa guoji xueshu huiyi lunwenji*, ed. Harold Mok (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts and Art Museum, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1998), 189-271. For research on the calligraphers who are active in Hong Kong from the late 20th century until now, their works and activities, see Harold Mok, “From the Traditional to the Modern: Thoughts on Calligraphy in Hong Kong Art Biennials,” in *Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2005*, ed. Harold Mok (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2006), 94-95; Tang Hoi-chiu, “Cong shuangnianzhan dejiangzhe guankui sanshinian lai de Xianggang shufa,” in *Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 1999*, ed. Harold Mok and Kurt Chan (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2000), 40-47; Tang Hoi-chiu, “Hong Kong Art Biennials and Hong Kong Calligraphy,” in *Shuyuan duoying: dangdai Xianggang bairen shufazhan* (Hong Kong: Jiazi Society of Calligraphy, 2003), 6-7 (in Chinese); and Harold Mok, Preface I to *Chuancheng yu xinyi: erling lingqi Shizhai zhi you shufazhan*, ed. Li Kai-yan (Hong Kong: Friends of Shizhai, 2007), Preface I (in Chinese).

- <sup>4</sup> The biography of Han Yunshan in this essay is based on the interview with the artist that I and my research assistant Ms. Lee Ka-ling conducted on March 30, 2009.
- <sup>5</sup> “Guofeng” means “feng,” which is one of the three components of the *Book of Songs*, namely “feng” (songs), “ya” (odes) and “song” (hymns). Songs were commonly known as “feng” in ancient times. “Guofeng” are the folk songs of the states between the Western Zhou dynasty (c. 1100–771 B.C.) and the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 B.C.).
- <sup>6</sup> Ni Zan, “Reply to a Letter from Zhang Zhongzao,” in *Qingmige quanji* (Complete Collection from the Serene-shelter Pavilion) (The *Wenyuange Siku quanshu* edition), Book 10, 9.
- <sup>7</sup> In the early 1990s, I was at Han Yunshan’s place when he was producing the work. I am delighted to get hold of a black-and-white copy of the calligraphy.
- <sup>8</sup> See note 4.
- <sup>9</sup> See note 4.
- <sup>10</sup> Jao Tsung-I had taught Han Yunshan about oracle bone inscriptions and literature when he was studying in Guangzhou.
- <sup>11</sup> Chen Shushu and Huang Huiwen were always referred to as “Huang of poetry and Chen of *ci* poetry” in Guangdong.
- <sup>12</sup> Han Yunshan, Preface to *Lu Dinggong yincun* (Seal Record of Lu Dinggong) (Han Yunshan produced the stitch-bound book of Lu Dinggong’s seal impressions in 1993 and sent it to me as a gift.)
- <sup>13</sup> Born in Guangzhou, Long Ziduo was a native of Panyu, Guangdong. He studied at the Department of Chinese Painting at Canton Municipal College of Art between 1934 and 1937, and settled in Hong Kong in 1962. His publications include *Qingshantang Huaji* (Paintings of the Qingshan Studio) (Hong Kong: Accent Co., 1983) and *Long Ziduo huaji* (Paintings by Long Ziduo) (Hong Kong: s.n., 1990).
- <sup>14</sup> Han Yunshan, Preface to *Paintings by Long Ziduo*, (Hong Kong: s.n., 1990).
- <sup>15</sup> The full title of the stele is *Stele for the Establishment of the Ritual Implements at the Temple of Confucius by the Minister of Lu, Han Chi*. It was erected in the second year of the Yongshou reign of the Eastern Han dynasty (156) and is now housed at the Temple of Confucius at Qufu, Shandong. It records that the Han minister Han Chi was responsible for the restoration of the Temple of Confucius and the renovation of ritual implements. There are inscriptions on all four sides. Scholars and calligraphers have praised the writing as the best of Han clerical script.
- <sup>16</sup> Lau Chak-kwong Daniel, “Cong shen yu guhui dao wuwo liangwang: Han Yunshan laoshi shuyi jingshen,” in *Moxiang shufa jikan*, ed. Moxiang Editorial Board, July-September Issue (2013): 16–17.
- <sup>17</sup> Guo Zongchang, *Jinshi shi* (History of Bronzes and Stones), Book 1, in *Wenyuange Siku quanshu*, 6a.
- <sup>18</sup> Wang Shu, *Xuzhou tiba* (Inscriptions and Colophons of Xuzhou), Book 2, copy of the manuscript in the National Central Library (Taipei: National Central Library, 1970), 61.
- <sup>19</sup> Wang, *Ibid.*, 69.

- <sup>20</sup> The full title of the stele is *Stele for the Ratification of an Ancestral Master at the Temple of Confucius at the Request of the Minister of Lu, Yi Ying*, also known as the *Stele for the Ancestral Master* or the *Stele for Kong He*. It was erected in the first year of the Yongxing reign of the Eastern Han (153) and originally found in Xianyuan County, Yanzhou, Shandong. It is now housed at an exhibition hall of stelae near the Dacheng Hall at the Temple of Confucius at Qufu, Shandong.
- <sup>21</sup> Weng Fanggang, *Liang Han jinshi ji* (Textual Studies of Stones Inscriptions from the Two Hans), Book 6, Copy of the *Nanchang shiyuan* reprint, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu*, Volume 892 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 352.
- <sup>22</sup> Fang Shuo, *Zhenjingtang jinshi tiba* (Inscriptions of the Bronzes and Stones of the Zhenjing Studio), Book 2, in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, Series 2, Volume 19 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1979), 14,256.
- <sup>23</sup> See note 16.
- <sup>24</sup> The full title of the stele is *Stele for the Memorial for Sacrificing at the Temple of Confucius by the Minister of Lu, Shi Chen*. It was set up in the second year of the Jianning reign of the Eastern Han (169) and is now housed at the Temple of Confucius at Qufu, Shandong. It records a memorial for the Temple of Confucius submitted to the court by the minister Shi Chen.
- <sup>25</sup> See the analysis of the style and characteristics of the *Stele for Shi Chen* in Lau Chak-kwong Daniel, “Hanbei dui Zheng Fu de qishi (Enlightenment of the Han Stele for Zheng Fu),” (paper presented at “Against Or Away: Symposium on Artworks by Ming Loyalists in Early Qing Dynasty” (豪素深心 — 明末清初遺民金石書畫學術研討會), Macau Museum of Art, Macao, September 5-6, 2009), 6.
- <sup>26</sup> Guo, see note 17, Book 1, 6a.
- <sup>27</sup> Wan Jing, *Fenli oucun* (A Study on Various Clerical Scripts), Book 1 of 2, in *Wenyuange Siku quanshu*, 24b.
- <sup>28</sup> Yang Shoujing, *Jisu feiqing ge pingbei ji*, Book 1, in *Shike shiliao xinbian*, Series 4, Volume 1 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 2006), 195.
- <sup>29</sup> The full title of the stele is *Stele for the Chief Minister of the Court of the Palace Garrison, Heng Fang*. It was erected in the first year of the Jianning reign (168) and found in Wenshang, Shandong. It is housed at the Bingling Gate in the Dai Temple in Tai’an, Shandong.
- <sup>30</sup> Weng, see note 21, Book 12, 437.
- <sup>31</sup> The full title of the stele is *Stele for the Magistrate of Dangyin, Zhang Qian*. It was erected in the third year of the Zhongping reign of the Eastern Han (186). Excavated in Dingping, Shandong during the Ming dynasty, it is now housed in the Dai Temple in Tai’an, Shandong.
- <sup>32</sup> The full title of the stele is *Stele for the Governor of Yanmen, Xianyu Huang*. It was set up in the eleventh month of the eighth year of the Yanxi reign of the Eastern Han (165). It was unearthed in Wuqing, Tianjin.
- <sup>33</sup> The full title of the inscription is *Eulogy of the Western Passage Constructed by the Governor of Wudu, Li Xi*, also known as *Hui an xi biao*. The Han cliff inscription in clerical script was carved in the fourth year of the Jianning reign of the Eastern Han (171).

- <sup>34</sup> Wang Shizhen, *Yanzhou sibu gao* (Yanzhou's Draft Writings on the Four Divisions), Book 134, in *Wenyuange Siku quanshu*, 3b.
- <sup>35</sup> Inscribed in the fourth year of the Yuanchu reign of the Eastern Han (117), the inscription is now housed at Mount Fenglong in Yuanshi, Hebei.
- <sup>36</sup> The stele was erected in the second year of the Yonghe reign of the Eastern Han (137). It commemorates the achievements of the Governor of Dunhuang, Pei Cen.
- <sup>37</sup> The full title of the stele is *Stele for the Chancellor of Beihai, Jing Jun*. It was erected in the second year of the Han'an reign of the Eastern Han (143) in Jining, Shandong.
- <sup>38</sup> The full title is *Stele for the Magistrate of Heyang, Cao Quan*. It was erected in the second year of the Zhongping reign of the Eastern Han (185). It consists of 20 columns of 45 characters in clerical script, and is housed in the Xi'an Forest of Stelae Museum, Shaanxi.
- <sup>39</sup> Wan Jing, *Fenli oucun* (A Study on Various Clerical Scripts), Book 1 of 2, *Wenyuange Siku quanshu*, 28a.
- <sup>40</sup> Sun Chengze, *Gengzi xiaoxia ji* (Records of the Summer of 1660), Book 5, in *Wenyuange Siku quanshu*, 8b.
- <sup>41</sup> Guo Zongchang, *Jinshi shi* (History of Bronzes and Stones), Book 1, in *Wenyuange Siku quanshu*, 13a.
- <sup>42</sup> The image of the work is in *Hong Kong Calligraphy: Collection of the Hong Kong Museum of Art*, ed. Tang Hoi-chiu and Szeto Yuen-kit (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1990), 44.
- <sup>43</sup> Hua Rende, *Collection of Hua Rende's Essays on Calligraphy Theory* (Beijing: Rongbaozhachubanshe, 2008), 214-221.
- <sup>44</sup> Hua, *Ibid*, 216-219.
- <sup>45</sup> The above analysis of Han Yunshan's script forms is based on my article and has been revised for the submission, see note 16. Lau Chak-kwong Daniel, "Shen yu gu hui, wu wo liang wang: Han Yunshan laoshi de shufa yishu," in *Han Yunshan xiansheng shufa jinian ji*, ed. Zhen Yingkuan (Hong Kong: Zhongbuhuitang shuhuahui, 2013), 7-9.