

Beyond Textual Boundaries: Innovative Practices in Contemporary East Asian Textual Art

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Abstract

This research investigates the transformation of textual elements in experimental calligraphy and visual poetry in East Asia from the 1960s to the present, examining their transition from traditional written symbols to contemporary artistic imagery. Drawing on Kohei Sugiura's "Three Stages of Textual Spirit" theory (symbolic, imagistic, and spiritual) from his work "The Spirit of Text" the study explores how artists break conventional textual boundaries to forge new visual languages. Through comparative methodology, this work examines key pieces from Japan's Concrete Poetry movement and Chinese experimental calligraphy, illuminating East Asian textual art's development within a global framework. Two fundamental questions guide the research: first, how experimental calligraphy and visual poetry establish novel artistic expressions by deconstructing and reconfiguring traditional text; second, how these innovative approaches mediate between modernity and indigenous cultural traditions. The research contributes fresh theoretical perspectives to contemporary East Asian textual art discourse while exploring the creative potential of text in cross-cultural artistic endeavors.

Keywords: East Asian textual art, visual poetry, experimental calligraphy, Sugiura's Three Stages, textual deconstruction

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Research Background and Motivation

The researcher's engagement in graphic visual design and layout since 2019 has fostered a profound interest in the visual presentation of text within diverse cultural contexts. Practical design experience frequently prompted reflections on how to integrate the formal language and cultural connotations of text to achieve both meaning conveyance and perceptual stimulation in visual compositions. These experiences shifted the focus from text as a mere linguistic carrier to its potential as a manipulable symbolic element within visual culture.

Figure 1

Wu Rong-di's "Family Admonitions of Zeng Guofan", Four-Panel Screen (1931)



Note. This four-panel work, measuring 130.5 × 34.8 cm each, is part of the collection at Taoyuan Museum of Fine Arts. Photo by ANPIS FOTO Wang Shih-Pang. Image courtesy of Taoyuan Museum of Fine Arts.

Figure 2

Huang Hua-Cheng, "Theatre Magazine"



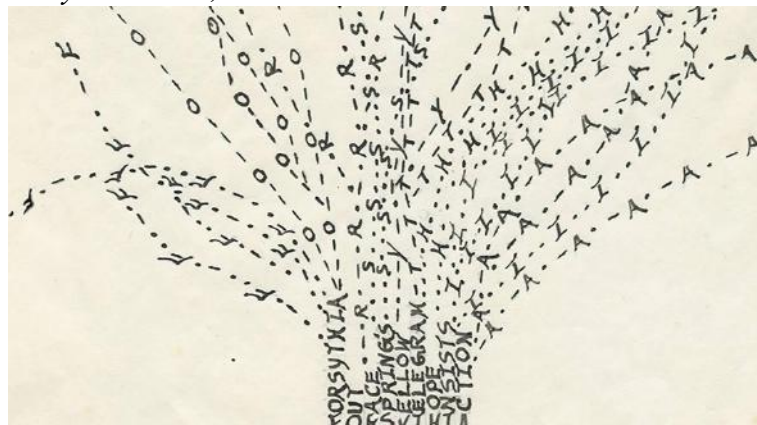
Note. This image showcases Huang's experimental approach to typography and layout, characterized by the disruption of conventional readability and the emphasis on text as a visual and spatial element. From BIOS Monthly, *The Forgotten Prophet in the Margins of History: Huang Hua-Cheng's Anti-Art and Artistic Return* (2021).

Concurrently, the researcher's Japanese language background, coupled with familiarity with the structural distinctions among Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji, has cultivated a strong interest in the application of text within East Asian linguistic systems. For instance, the semantic shift of the term “新聞” (newspaper) in Chinese and Japanese contexts exemplifies

the intimate connection between linguistic systems and cultural cognition. This observation further prompted the researcher to consider: when text detaches from its grammatical and semantic functions to transform into a purely visual form, how does it reconstruct meaning and evoke viewing experiences? And how does it, as a component of contemporary art, challenge our understanding of language and expression?

Figure 3

Mary Ellen Solt, "American Concrete Poet"



Note. This image presents the poet and critic known for her significant contributions to concrete poetry, particularly through her influential anthology, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*. From Mary Ellen Solt, by [Venezianews.it](https://venezianews.it/en/who/mary-ellen-solt/) (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://venezianews.it/en/who/mary-ellen-solt/>

With this deepening interest in textual art, the researcher further focused during graduate studies on how text, as a medium in contemporary art, participates in the articulation of thoughts, emotions, and culture. Particularly, forms such as Visual Poetry, Concrete Poetry, experimental calligraphy, and Conceptual Art demonstrate that text has transcended linguistic boundaries, becoming a perceptible and manipulable artistic material. It serves as a vehicle for cultural critique, bodily action, and the intertwining of perception.

Within this context, the research investigates how East Asian artists challenge the boundaries among “text,” “language,” and “art” through the deconstruction and recomposition of textual elements. By employing strategies such as semiotic translation, spatial arrangement, and cultural displacement, text becomes a core medium for responding to the tensions between modernity and indigenous cultures, thereby forging trans-contextual visual forms of expression.

This study integrates Kohei Sugiura's “Three Stages of Textual Spirit” theory, the critical perspective of Conceptual Art on language and signs, and the theoretical propositions of Concrete Poetry and Visual Poetry concerning the spatial manipulation of text. This framework constructs a composite analytical approach applicable to contemporary East Asian textual art:

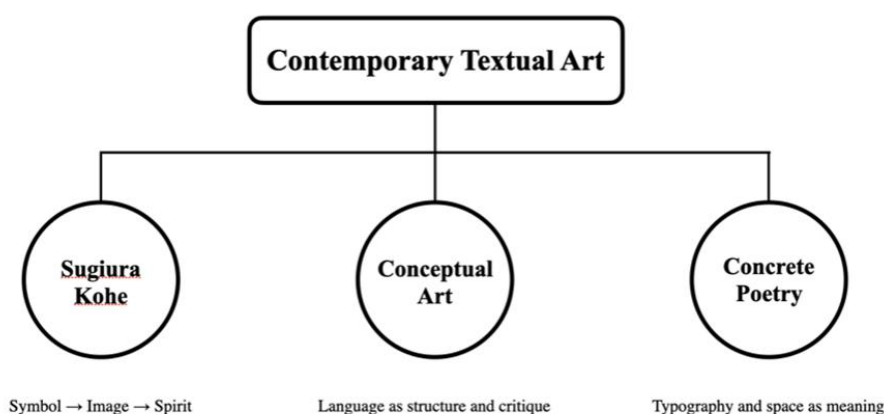
- **Sugiura Kohei's Theory of “Symbolic–Imagistic–Spiritual”:** Provides a culturally profound perspective for observing the evolution of text, revealing its trajectory from functional symbol to artistic image.
- **The Critical Perspective of Conceptual Art:** Guides us to focus on the underlying thought processes and linguistic institutions behind artistic actions, prompting the act of writing to transform into a vehicle for cultural critique.
- **The Spatial Theory of Concrete Poetry and Visual Poetry:** Emphasizes “typographical space as structure” and “non-linear narrativity,” breaking free from the

linear sequence of language and shifting towards dynamic spatial and visual construction.

This study considers these three elements as interconnected axes of inquiry: Kohei Sugiura's theory provides the cultural depth, Conceptual Art serves as the critical logical fulcrum, and visual poetics offers the spatial formation strategy. Together, they form a multi-layered analytical framework (“viewing mechanism” or “interpretive lens”) to dissect how contemporary East Asian artists develop new manifestations of visual language through textual practices.

Figure 4

Conceptual Framework of Textual Art Analysis: Integrating Sugiura Kohei's Theory, Conceptual Art, and Visual Poetics



Note. This diagram illustrates the interrelationship among Kohei Sugiura's Theory of “Symbolic–Imagistic–Spiritual,” the Critical Perspective of Conceptual Art, and the Spatial Theory of Concrete and Visual Poetry, forming a multi-layered analytical framework for contemporary East Asian textual art.

Research Questions

Based on the aforementioned research background and theoretical concerns, this study employs a comparative analysis approach. Through textual analysis and the comparison of art works, it investigates how East Asian artists utilize text as a visual element and develop new visual languages through forms such as Visual Poetry, Concrete Poetry, and experimental calligraphy.

In alignment with Kohei Sugiura's “Three Stages of Textual Spirit” theory, this study proposes two core research questions:

Core Research Questions

Question 1: The Visual Transformation Mechanism of Text

How do East Asian artists develop new artistic forms of expression by deconstructing and reconfiguring traditional text, thereby breaking through the linguistic boundaries of symbols? How does this transformation process embody the evolutionary stages of “symbolic–imagistic–spiritual” as articulated by Kohei Sugiura?

Question 2: Response Strategies to Modernity and Local Culture

How do these experimental textual art practices, through visual strategies, respond to the tension between modernity and local culture? As a cross-cultural medium, how does text embody and reinterpret East Asian cultural characteristics within a globalized context?

Specific Dimensions of Inquiry

To comprehensively address the core questions outlined above, this study will conduct its analysis from the following three dimensions:

1. **Formal Innovation Dimension:** How does the viscosity of text in Visual Poetry and Concrete Poetry transcend the grammatical structure of language, exhibiting non-linear modes of expression?
2. **Cultural Fluidity Dimension:** As a visual language, how does text reflect the fluidity of language and the transformation of symbols within East Asian culture?
3. **Cross-Cultural Practice Dimension:** How does East Asian textual art, within a globalized context, develop visually distinctive forms of expression with local characteristics?

The Symbolism of Calligraphy and East Asian Culture

During the geopolitically tense 1960s, East Asia (Japan, Taiwan, China, and Korea) was profoundly impacted by the political opposition of the two major blocs, the United States and the Soviet Union, leading to heightened ideological divisions and social unrest. Amidst political suppression and societal transformation, many artists began to address issues of poverty, war, and politics, using their works to respond to the era. Concurrently, modern art concepts emerged, prompting artists to explore non-traditional media, including video art, installation art, and even integrating calligraphy with contemporary visual arts to forge new avenues of expression.

Prior to this period, while calligraphy possessed artistic qualities, it primarily served practical writing functions and upheld traditional literati aesthetics, not yet fully integrated into the “contemporary art” discourse shaped by Western modern art movements. Calligraphic works at that time largely emphasized technical refinement and traditional continuity, with creations often constrained by historical and cultural norms, thus lacking substantial dialogue with modern art currents. However, calligraphy, as a core symbolic system of East Asian culture, carries profound historical implications. Since the Wei and Jin Dynasties, calligraphy had progressively moved beyond pure utility, shifting towards an emphasis on personal style and emotional expression, with textual forms becoming a medium for conveying feelings and thoughts.

With the influx of global art trends and the shift towards contemporary visual culture, the artistic context of calligraphy began to expand. The British art critic Herbert Read (1931) once noted that art is not merely visual or plastic expression but also encompasses diverse forms like literature and music, emphasizing that the essence of art lies in the expression of thought and emotion. This perspective inspired contemporary East Asian artists to reconsider calligraphy's mediality and transmedia potential, enabling it to become a significant element in the practice of Conceptual Art, installation art, and even Visual Poetry.

To further understand how calligraphy transforms between tradition and contemporaneity, this study will apply Kohei Sugiura's (1996) *“Three Stages of Textual Spirit”* theory as a theoretical framework, analyzing its symbolic and artistic changes across the following three levels:

- Symbolic: Calligraphic characters, as symbolic carriers, bear specific cultural backgrounds and encoded meanings through their structure and style.
- Imagistic: The spatial composition between strokes, the dynamics of brushwork, and the overall composition generate visual imagery that transcends semantic layers, evoking perception and emotional resonance in the viewer.
- Spiritual: Through calligraphic practice, artists internalize personal thoughts, cultural interpretations, and contemporary consciousness into their works, forming a spiritual dimension that extends beyond the symbolic and imagistic.

Through this three-tiered analysis, this study can not only gain a deeper understanding of the transformation process of East Asian textual art within the contemporary art field but also observe how artists expand the possibilities of calligraphy as a contemporary visual language through the deconstruction and recombination of symbols.

The Deconstruction of Calligraphy: From “Writing” to “Form-Making”—A Case Study of Huang Hua-Cheng

Traditional calligraphy has long emphasized writing techniques, character structure, and personal style in brushwork, serving as a vehicle for cultural transmission and aesthetic cultivation. However, with the introduction of modern art concepts, calligraphic practice began to break free from the confines of writing techniques, evolving towards more plastic and visual forms of expression. This blurred the boundary between “readability” and “visibility,” opening up a new type of scriptural space situated between language and image.

Figure 5

Huang Hua-Cheng, *“Concert”* (n.d.)



Note. This work exemplifies Huang's pioneering approach to visual poetry, where text is not merely read but seen as a dynamic graphic composition. From *The Room Life*, Huang Hua-Cheng (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://theroomlife.com/huang-hua-cheng/>

Huang Hua-Cheng's Experimental Calligraphic Practice

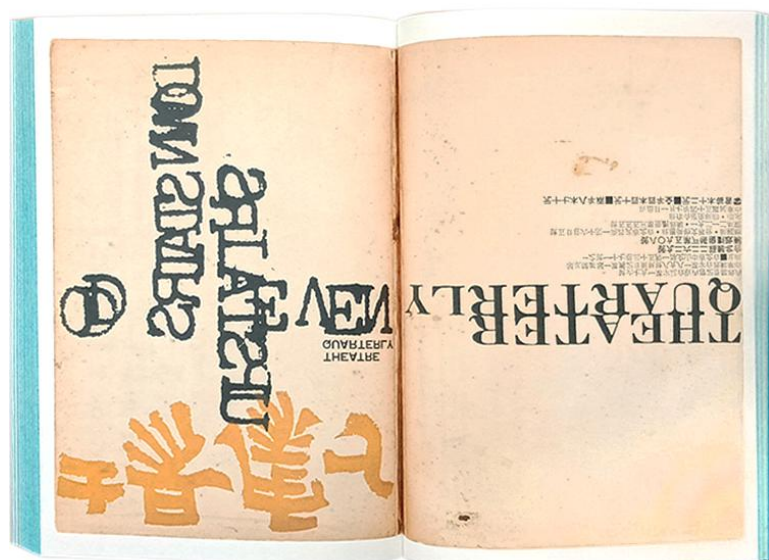
The work of Taiwanese artist Huang Hua-Cheng (1935–1996) in the 1960s provides a crucial case study for understanding the transformation of East Asian calligraphy from traditional writing to contemporary art. As the founder of *Theatre* magazine and a significant promoter of modern art in Taiwan, Huang Hua-Cheng's artistic experiments demonstrated strong cross-media characteristics. Calligraphy and text became his core means of challenging traditional aesthetics and cultural authority. He treated Chinese characters as manipulable visual elements, reconstructing calligraphy's linguistic, spatial, and spiritual dimensions through arrangement, deconstruction, and cross-media experimentation.

Visual Experimentation With Text

In his *Textual Composition* series, Huang Hua-Cheng boldly deconstructed and recomposed Chinese characters, liberating their original linguistic function and transforming them into purely visual elements. These textual forms no longer conveyed fixed semantics but entered the visual art context through their formal qualities, demonstrating the openness and polysemy of textual symbols. This prompted viewers to oscillate between reading and seeing. This operation echoes Ferdinand de Saussure's (1983) revelation of the arbitrary nature of the “signifier/signified” and responds to Jacques Derrida's (1978) emphasis on the concept of *différance*—where the meaning of text no longer originates from fixed referents but is continuously generated through the slippage of the signifier. In Huang Hua-Cheng's creations, characters were fragmented, recombined, and displaced, preventing viewers from deriving meaning through linear reading. Instead, meaning required visual perception for reconstruction, thereby embodying the fluidity and instability inherent in language itself.

Figure 6

Huang Hua-Cheng, *Experimental Book Design From “An Open Ending”*



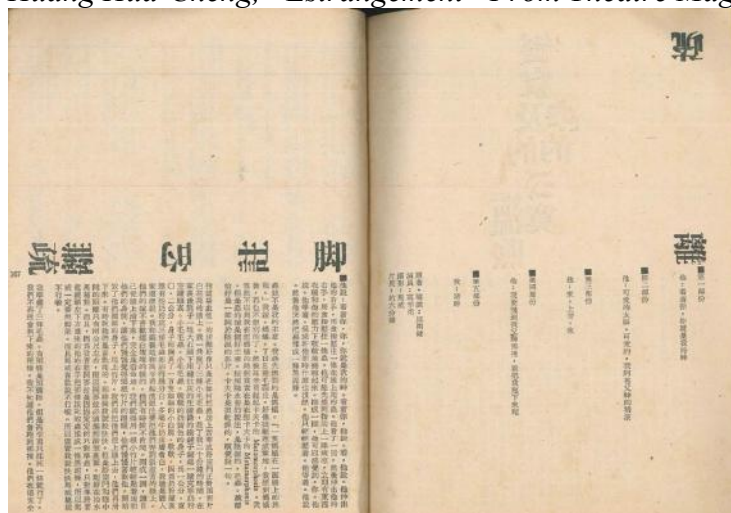
Note. This image illustrates Huang's radical approach to textual layout, where elements are fragmented and reconfigured to challenge conventional reading, transforming text into a dynamic visual composition. From Taiwan Art To Go, *An Open Ending: Huang Hua-Cheng* (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.taiwanarttogo.com/products/preorderan-open-ending-huang-hua-cheng>

Deconstructing the Authority of Traditional Calligraphy

In the layout design of *Theatre* magazine, Huang Hua-Cheng employed non-traditional arrangements such as horizontal writing, slanted alignment, and circular arrangements, breaking the habitual formats of Chinese script. This visual subversion was not merely an innovation in design technique but also a critique of calligraphic tradition and cultural power structures. As stated in the inaugural concept of *Theatre* (Huang, as cited in Chiang, 2020), “We want to create new forms of expression, so that text is no longer just a tool for carrying meaning, but an artistic element with independent vitality.” Huang Hua-Cheng utilized layout strategies such as obscuring paragraphs with black blocks and disrupting character spacing, thereby making viewers co-creators in the reading process rather than passive recipients of meaning. Reading, in this context, ceased to be a decoding act and transformed into participation in a visual experience where language and image interwove.

Figure 7

Huang Hua-Cheng, “Estrangement” From *Theatre Magazine*



Note. This image exemplifies Huang's radical manipulation of text, where characters are fragmented and spatially dislocated to create a sense of estrangement and challenge conventional linear reading, emphasizing the visual form over semantic content. From BIOS Monthly, *The Forgotten Prophet in the Margins of History: Huang Hua-Cheng's Anti-Art and Artistic Return* (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.biosmonthly.com/article/10669>

Practice as Linguistic Action

Beyond experiments in typography and composition, Huang Hua-Cheng concretely integrated language and the body in a 1965 performative installation. He exhibited an installation composed of school desks, mannequins, and a tombstone on the streets of Ximending, Taipei. After being dispersed by the police, he relocated to continue the performance beneath the Fu Bell at National Taiwan University. This action involved no recitation of poetry, yet it presented a self-standing tombstone inscribed with “No urinating or defecating here.” This phrase, superficially absurd, in fact, through contextual displacement, stimulated the audience's contemplation on the public nature of language. Here, language ceased to exist merely as a symbolic system and transformed into a spatial event and bodily practice, becoming an extended act of the scriptural entity itself.

The Transformative Process From Symbolic to Spiritual

Applying Kohei Sugiura's (1996) “Three Stages of Textual Spirit” theoretical framework from *The Spirit of Text*, Huang Hua-Cheng's practice can be viewed as a quintessential case of calligraphic language transformation:

Symbolic Layer: While retaining the basic structure of Chinese characters, allowing viewers to recognize their Chinese origin, Huang Hua-Cheng broke the stable relationship between text and meaning through deconstruction and recombination.

Imagistic Layer: Through non-traditional spatial arrangement and composition, text became a purely visual image. Its strokes and structures transformed into a plastic language, stimulating viewers' perception and emotional resonance.

Spiritual Layer: Huang Hua-Cheng infused his personal reflections on modernity and his consciousness of cultural critique into his calligraphic experiments, elevating the works beyond mere visual interest to become profound responses to traditional culture and the structure of modern society.

Innovative Application of Material Language

Huang Hua-Cheng's emphasis on “material language” also constitutes a significant characteristic of his experimental calligraphic practice.

Figure 8

The 1966 “Modern Poetry Exhibition” in Taipei



Note. This photograph captures the ephemeral installation, initially planned for Ximending and later relocated to National Taiwan University, featuring works by artists like Huang Hua-Cheng, Long Ssu-liang, Huang Yung-sung, and Chang Chao-tang. From Taiwan International Documentary Festival, *In the Form of a Human Landscape* (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.tidf.org.tw/zh-hant/films/63935>

He integrated text into heterogeneous media such as installations, publications, and layouts. Through printing traces and the interplay of text and image, he achieved a material re-shaping of calligraphy, breaking through the material limitations of traditional brush-and-ink writing and endowing calligraphy with a new material syntax. This cross-media practice demonstrates the response strategies of Taiwanese modern art in the globalized context of the 1960s, further embedding calligraphy within the vocabulary of contemporary art.

Defining Diverse Case Studies and Positioning Huang Hua-Cheng

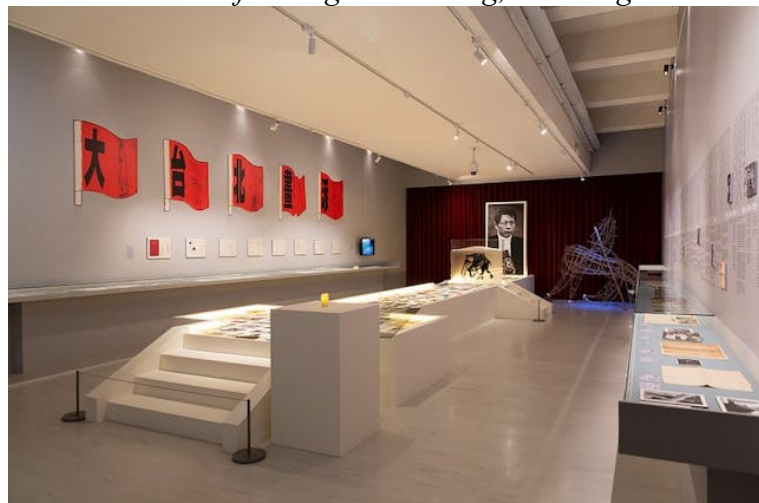
Through the case study of Huang Hua-Cheng, it can be observed that the deconstruction of contemporary calligraphy is no longer merely a formal innovation. Instead, it encompasses a comprehensive practice that includes cultural identity, the experience of modernity, and the reconstruction of artistic language. His works demonstrate the potential for calligraphy, as a symbolic system, to be reinterpreted and reshaped, embodying the cross-media and concept-driven creative trends in contemporary art.

Furthermore, Huang Hua-Cheng's practice helps define the scope of this study's core concept—“diverse case studies of contemporary East Asian calligraphy”:

- **“East Asia”**: Refers to regions centered around the Chinese character cultural sphere, including China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. Although calligraphic traditions vary in style across these regions, they all share Chinese characters as a common cultural symbolic system and artistic expressive tradition.
- **“Contemporary”**: Denotes the time frame from the 1960s to the present. During this period, calligraphic creation has transcended the aesthetic framework of traditional literati styles, actively incorporating modernism and contemporary art vocabulary, showcasing experimental and interdisciplinary creative characteristics.
- **“Calligraphy”**: Although undergoing deconstruction and recomposition, it still utilizes brushwork and character forms as core carriers for symbolic operations. In the contemporary context, calligraphy has expanded to encompass artistic practices involving visual form-making, spatial composition, and media experimentation.
- **“Diverse Case Studies”**: Refers to calligraphic creation practices undertaken by artists across various East Asian regions using different strategies. These include, but are not limited to, diverse forms of expression such as linguistic deconstruction, visual form-making, corporeal writing, and cross-media experimentation, thereby shaping a rich and heterogeneous landscape of contemporary calligraphic practice.

Figure 9

Exhibition View of Huang Hua-Cheng, “The Big Period”



Note. This image captures a scene from Huang Hua-Cheng's “farewell exhibition” held during his lifetime, which conceptually served as his own funeral. From Bo Wu Zhi Dao Editorial Team, *The Forgotten Prophet in the Margins of History: Huang Hua-Cheng's Anti-Art and Artistic Return* (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.tmaroc.org.tw/2021-article01/>

Huang Hua-Cheng is one of the representative figures among these. His experimental calligraphic practice not only mirrors the cultural exploration within Taiwan's modern art context of the 1960s but also resonates with the cross-regional and cross-media development trends of contemporary East Asian calligraphy, serving as a crucial entry point for understanding the transformation of contemporary calligraphy.

The Visual Poeticization of Calligraphy: From Writing to Arrangement

In contemporary East Asian calligraphic practice, text has evolved from “form-making” towards more structural and spatial arrangement strategies, gradually forming an artistic trend in dialogue with Visual Poetry. The visual poeticization of calligraphy not only involves transformations in textual forms but also focuses on how language generates new reading experiences and poetic meanings through spatial composition. This visual poeticization fundamentally questions the relationship between language and meaning, emphasizing the dynamic generation of text within typography, composition, and reading rhythm. Viewers no longer “read” language in a linear fashion but “participate” in the visualization process of language through spatial perception.

Compared to the formal experiments discussed in the “diverse case studies” of East Asian calligraphy, visual poeticization shifts towards a more macro-level aesthetic of arrangement, forming a cross-cultural creative dialogue with the international Concrete Poetry movement. The theoretical framework of visual poetics provides a crucial reference system for contemporary East Asian calligraphic arrangement practices, enriching the cultural context of contemporary calligraphy's cross-media transformation.

The Concrete Poetry movement, which emerged in the 1960s, provided a crucial international context for understanding the visual poeticization of calligraphy. As Mary Ellen Solt (1970) noted in *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, “Concrete poetry is international not because it is translated, but because it is built.” This perspective emphasizes a shift in poetics from semantic centrality to spatial construction, where the poem becomes a viewable artifact, and the interplay of typography and image constitutes the core of poetic practice. This shift resonates with Jacques Derrida's (1978) concept of the “slippage of the signifier” in language—when semantics become unstable, typography and composition, conversely, become the fulcrum for new poetic structures.

The aesthetic of Concrete Poetry is founded on two principles: Typographical Space as Structure, meaning that the layout space itself constitutes the structural logic of the poem; and Non-linear Narrativity, where poetic lines break free from temporal sequence, guiding the viewer's reading experience through visual rhythm.

Figure 10

Augusto de Campos and Julio Plaza, “Poemobiles” (Detail), 1974



Note. From Artsy, Augusto de Campos: Poemobiles (Detail) (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/augusto-de-campos-poemobiles-detail>

Visual Logic of Arrangement Techniques

Compared to the formalization of calligraphy, arrangement strategies place a greater emphasis on the spatial relationships and visual organization among textual elements. In the process of visual poeticization, East Asian calligraphy exhibits several typical arrangement characteristics:

- **Subjectification of Space:** Space is no longer merely a background for text but an active element in the generation of meaning. Through the design of whitespace, character spacing, and line spacing, artists create tension and a sense of breathing.
- **Multi-directional Reading Paths:** Breaking the traditional writing patterns of Chinese characters, diverse arrangement methods (such as radial or spiral) are employed to guide viewers in constructing meaning through visual exploration.
- **Rhythm and Cadence:** By varying the density of text and the strength of brushstrokes, a visual sense of rhythm is created, imbuing the static image with dynamic temporality.

Figure 11

Xu Bing, “Robert Frost After Apple Picking” (2011)



Note. This work, rendered in water-based ink on grass paper, showcases Xu Bing's “Square Word Calligraphy” system, which transforms English text into a visual form resembling traditional Chinese characters. It prompts viewers to re-engage with the act of reading and exemplifies the artist's exploration of linguistic and cultural boundaries through visual art. From CAFA Art Museum, Xu Bing’s Solo Exhibition “Between Heaven & Earth” Opened at CAFA Art Museum (2022, December 26). Retrieved from <https://cafa.com.cn/en/news/details/8321630>

Case Analysis: Spatial Poetics From Xu Bing to Gu Wenda

Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987–1991) series employs large-scale typography of pseudo-Chinese characters, creating a visual context that is both familiar and alien. Confronted with these meaningless yet highly character-like images, viewers are compelled to enter a non-linguistic state of reading. This “reading frustration” prompts viewers to shift from semantic comprehension to visual immersion, serving as a quintessential example of the visual commodification of language. His extensive compositional strategy transforms calligraphic works into a practical field of Spatial Poetics.

Gu Wenda's *Mythos of Lost Dynasties* series, conversely, utilizes the flow of ink and the random distribution of fragmented text to create a poetic space reminiscent of an archaeological site. Blurred and fragmented characters become metaphors for temporality and cultural memory, transforming the visual reading process into an act of interpreting history and symbols.

Figure 12

Xu Bing, “Book From the Sky” (1987–1991)



Note. This monumental installation features thousands of invented, unreadable Chinese characters, challenging viewers' conventional understanding of language, meaning, and cultural authenticity. From The Blanton Museum of Art, Xu Bing: *Book from the Sky* (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://blantonmuseum.org/exhibition/xu-bing-book-from-the-sky/>

Figure 13

Gu Wenda, “Mythos of Lost Dynasties Series”



Note. This work explores themes of cultural memory, linguistic fragmentation, and historical remnants through the interplay of blurred ink and deconstructed Chinese characters, evoking an archaeological aesthetic. From The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gu Wenda: *Mythos of Lost Dynasties: The Fall of Icarus* (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/77530>

The visual poeticization profoundly alters the traditional definition of “reading” as a semantic act, transforming it into a sensory engagement and spatial operation:

- **From Linear to Networked:** The reading path shifts to a non-linear network, where viewers must navigate the page, actively seeking visual rhythm and meaning.
- **From Understanding to Experience:** The focus of reading moves from “deciphering meaning” to “perceiving space,” with visual perception becoming a crucial dimension of poetic generation.
- **From Individual to Participatory:** The viewer's eye movement and participation become dynamic elements in the generation of poetic meaning, enhancing the interactivity of the work.

This transformation in reading experience responds to the concept of “interface semiotics” in contemporary semiotics (Pan, 2021)—where text is no longer interpreted as static content but generates meaning through interaction as a dynamic interface.

Significance of Cross-Cultural Poetic Dialogue

The practice of visually poeticizing East Asian calligraphy has not only expanded calligraphy's own artistic grammar but has also forged a cross-cultural dialogue with the international Concrete Poetry movement. Building upon the cultural specificities of East Asian calligraphy, such as brush-and-ink techniques and the structure of Chinese characters, it has absorbed and transformed the spatial poetics concepts of Concrete Poetry. This integration presents an artistic style that simultaneously possesses cultural distinctiveness and openness to international contexts.

Within a globalized context, this cross-cultural poetic dialogue not only enriches the artistic vocabulary of contemporary calligraphy but also offers new avenues for the construction of contemporary cultural identity. As a medium for visual poetics, calligraphy demonstrates a powerful capacity for cultural self-renewal in contemporary East Asian art, establishing itself as an undeniable innovative force in global artistic discourse.

Research Methodology: Comparative Analysis Centered on Huang Hua-Cheng

This study employs a comparative analysis approach, focusing on the calligraphic and visual poetic practices of Taiwanese artist Huang Hua-Cheng. Through a case study of Huang Hua-Cheng and a comparison with the practices of Chinese artists Xu Bing and Gu Wenda, the research aims to deepen the understanding of contemporary East Asian textual art and Huang Hua-Cheng's visual language strategies

The analysis in this chapter will proceed along three levels:

1. **Deconstruction and Transformation of Linguistic Structure:** Examining how the readability of text and the mechanism of semantic transmission are transformed.
2. **Layout and Arrangement Strategies:** Analyzing how text enters visual poetics, transforming into images and spatial structures.
3. **Translation and Intervention in Cultural Context:** Focusing on how artists, through linguistic operations, respond to social, historical, and cultural identity.

Figure 14
Huang Hua-Cheng, “Black Block Poem”



Note. This work demonstrates the artist's radical experimentation with textual disruption, where blocks of black obscure segments of text, challenging traditional readability and highlighting the visual materiality of language. From *An Open Ending*: Huang Hua-Cheng (p. 88), by Chiang, H. (Ed.), 2020. Copyright 2020 by Taipei Fine Arts Museum.

Huang Hua-Cheng: Poetic Strategies From Linguistic Interference to Cultural Arrangement

Huang Hua-Cheng's prolific work spanned text, poetry, design, and performance art. His linguistic experimentation transcended mere formal exploration, profoundly engaging with the institutional and cultural dimensions of language. He extracted text from its linguistic system, transforming it into visual structures and critical symbols. For instance, in his black block poems and in *Theatre* magazine, he extensively employed techniques such as obscuring, line breaks, misplacements, horizontal writing, and repeated characters. These methods disrupted grammatical coherence, causing the text to enter a state of being “viewed” rather than “read.”

Huang Hua-Cheng's poetic concerns were also manifested in his strategy of contextual displacement. A notable example is his 1965 performance art piece where he used a self-standing tombstone inscribed with “No urinating or defecating here.” This act transformed public language into a personal ritual, shifting language from a purely functional role to a symbolic action. This displacement strategy detached text from its social function, allowing it to become a poetic device imbued with corporeality and temporality.

Comparison With Xu Bing: From Anti-Semantics to the Construction of Visual Logic

Compared to Huang Hua-Cheng's contextual displacement and grammatical disruption, Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987–1991) undertakes a more thorough semantic detachment. Xu Bing created a vast quantity of unreadable “pseudo-Chinese characters” and employed a neat typographic layout mimicking the format of ancient texts, compelling viewers to focus on the form of writing amidst the failure of reading. This operation, where one “understands the form but not the content,” echoes Huang Hua-Cheng's semantic obscuration.

However, a key difference remains in their strategies toward language: Xu Bing handles text with massiveness and homogeneity, pursuing structural aesthetics and visual consistency. Huang Hua-Cheng, conversely, emphasizes semantic fragmentation, rhythmic disorder, and

visual interruption, more akin to an improvisational rhythm of arrangement and viewing. Huang Hua-Cheng's practice more closely resembles “poetic aftershocks following the dissolution of language,” constructing poetic fissures and seams through rupture and redirection.

Comparison With Gu Wenda: From Installation Perception to Cultural Archaeology

Gu Wenda's *Mythos of Lost Dynasties* series constructs an installed language of cultural memory through blurred ink traces, fragmented characters, and historically imbued symbols. He integrates calligraphy with archaeological imagery, rendering language not as a “description” of history, but as its “remnant.” Viewers do not decipher, but rather observe, surmise, and infer the origins and meanings of the text.

Huang Hua-Cheng also engaged with the relationship between language and history, yet his emphasis lay more on the subversion of contemporary contexts. He did not simulate historical memory but directly extracted vocabulary from social language (such as slogans and public notices) for appropriation and ironic re-configuration. Thus, Gu Wenda's linguistic operation represents a historical distance and residual perception, whereas Huang Hua-Cheng's signifies an immediate intervention and cultural displacement. Huang Hua-Cheng's approach is more anti-timely and direct, aligning more closely with the strategic practices of anti-cultural poetics and language theater.

Through comparative analysis, it is evident that both Xu Bing's typographic visual poetics and Gu Wenda's cultural memory installations demonstrate the transformative potential of text as a visual element. However, Huang Hua-Cheng's creations possess a tripartite characteristic of linguistic interference, typographic disruption, and contextual provocation, positioning him uniquely within visual poetics. His act of writing is not merely a deconstruction of linguistic form but an ongoing protest against linguistic order and cultural discourse.

Huang Hua-Cheng proposed a logic of writing that lies between poetry, design, and installation—a cultural strategy that liberates calligraphy from its reliance on brushwork, semantics, and structure. His practice proves that text need not be understood; it can also be viewed, engaged with, misread, and in these processes, construct poetic energy.

Figure 15

Huang Hua-Cheng, Untitled (detail) (n.d.)



Note. This image, likely a detail from one of Huang Hua-Cheng's experimental works, demonstrates his innovative approach to integrating text and visual elements, transforming characters into graphic forms that challenge conventional interpretation. From Taiwan Art To Go, An Open Ending: Huang Hua-Cheng (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.taiwanarttogo.com/products/preorderan-open-ending-huang-hua-cheng>

Conclusion

Through an analysis of diverse case studies in contemporary East Asian textual art, this research posits that contemporary East Asian textual practices are not merely simple transplantations of Western Conceptual Art. Instead, they are rooted in the cultural characteristics of Chinese character culture—namely, the “separation of form and meaning,” “temporality of brushstrokes,” and “visual expressiveness”—thereby developing visual poetic strategies with their own distinct contexts.

Through a comparative analysis centered on Huang Hua-Cheng, complemented by contrasting cases of Xu Bing and Gu Wenda, this study demonstrates that contemporary artists employ methods such as deconstruction, obscuration, displacement, and recomposition. These approaches drive a fundamental transformation of text from “readability” to “visibility,” expanding the expressive scope of both calligraphy and poetics. The transformation of text across symbolic, imagistic, and spiritual layers has not only fostered new viewing experiences but has also enriched the creative vocabulary of contemporary East Asian art.

These artistic creations demonstrate East Asian artists' active responses to and reinterpretation of the contemporary context. They do not “withdraw” from language but rather transform it into a poetic space for viewing, questioning, deconstructing, and constructing. Semiotic displacement, semantic *différance*, and cultural trans-translation render text a perceptible, visible, and explorable composite sign, creating multi-layered, non-linear experiential interfaces for the viewer.

In a cultural environment interwoven with globalization and digitalization, the development of East Asian calligraphy and its visual poeticization offers new perspectives for contemporary visual culture studies. Future research could further explore the interactive relationship between calligraphy and digital media, as well as AI-generated texts, thereby expanding its possibilities in contemporary art and cultural practice.

Usage of Generative AI & AI-Assisted Technologies Statement

In the preparation of this manuscript, AI-assisted tools were utilized for English translation and text proofreading. Specifically, Google Gemini and ChatGPT were used to refine grammar, punctuation, and phrasing for clarity and conciseness, and to check for spelling errors.

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