

Couplets, wall hangings, and carved calligraphy -The poetic of the poetic, games, musicality, and the pursuit of immortality Written and curated by April Shen

medicine and all human movement. The calligraphy on this plaque is done in the Running Script.

literary people but all walks of life. They are hung on both sides of the entryway of a dwelling, a study room, a bed room, a living room, or main hall of a building. They can be used for everyday life, a festive occasion, as well as for a funeral 2. The language used on the calligraphy for these couplets often is clean and regulated in a specific form as well as being rhythmic, humorous, expressive and poetic. Sometimes it is even like game-playing when improvised to create the interactive text right on the spot as a socializing event among literary elites and laypeople alike. This way of spontaneously scoring text can be intellectually stimulating. More often, the wood carver would have carved these words, in varying forms of calligraphy, based on the poems or prose obtained from known scholars or calligraphers. These calligraphy

phrases might be paid for or given as a gift. Since many of the writings on these couplets, whether written on paper or carved in wood, bear an inspirational element, they also serve as a way of record-keeping for the particular writer or calligrapher's work whose writing might otherwise not be available on the existing written manuscripts or calligraphy on paper. Thus, many of the calligraphy couplets not only are artistic works to appreciate because of the beautifully written calligraphy and skillful woodwork, but they also serve as important cultural and literature heritage.

Calligraphy couplets are hung vertically on the two sides of the door and also on the pillar posts

that form part of the house and the internal main hall or living room 3. Each phrase on each panel reads vertically in descending manner and from the right to the left when facing them. Theword or words on the right panel usually correspond to each word or words on the left panel in character and in meaning. The signature and seal of the writer or calligrapher are usually placed on the far left towards the bottom of the left panel. The rhythms of the sentences are not particularly set in any form,4 but the sentences often read rhythmic with great musicality. These sentences vary a lot in subject and style from a pair of couplets to another. They can be incredibly simple and colloquial, or more formally or more elegantly written. They can even be verbally scored or created on the spot. Many of them read poetically and are poems or prose.

It takes great skill and a fast mind to come up with these improvised phrases and to interact with each other right on the spot. For example: If a person offers "天天吃飯肚子大(Stomach gets big eating every day)", one might simultaneously correspond to the phrase with "夜夜睡覺腦子正"(Your brain gets bright sleeping every night)". Or something more sophisticated like "河上煙花捲簾人5 (A beauty rolled up a bamboo curtain on a river boat in smoky dusk or in the sound of the firecrackers)", while the other sentence could be " 田中霧起還明珠6 (One gives back a love object such as Ming-Zhu pearl while the fog rose in the rice field). While the above two examples were improvised simultaneously by the author when writing this article, they may or may not be the perfect examples. But the idea is there. Of course, one gets more satisfaction in reading the sentences if one knows the Chinese language as much of the pleasure not only comes from the meaning of the words, but the fun of reading it

rhythmically and how the words correspond to each other, word by word, in a very simple language form. Couplets are very popular and well loved by both Chinese intellectuals and other classes not only because the simple and fun format it offers, but also because the content often shows the expression of one's philosophy about life. More importantly, it shows the aesthetics that is inherent to Chinese culture. It is uniquely of Chinese own. Other forms of carved calligraphy also include the horizontal single plaque that usually contains only a few large characters and often with the small characters for both the names of the gift-giver and the receiver. Some include the dates the plaques were made. This type of carved

wooden plaque is often hung above a doorway or high on the wall in the middle of a hall or a living room. The characters often depict a teaching or praise for someone's good deeds or fine virtues, or are for a birthday celebration, and so on. There are other types of wooden objects with carved calligraphy or characters, such as furniture and other decorative wooden objects, and even the knitted bamboo ware but with the characters woven. The number of wooden objects with carved calligraphy, other than couplets and hanging Below we will introduce some examples of couplets, plaques, and carved calligraphy on wooden objects. The differences between the Chinese language and the English makes it very difficult to translate the phrases on the couplets. I will try and intend to translate them in various different ways, some by translating them as close to the original form of the language and sound as possible; others simply by the meaning of the phrases. With all the different translations, hopefully

the readers can share somewhat of an idea of what the couplets are about.

Running Script 行書, Official Script隸書, and Seal Style篆書7.

Chinese calligraphy comes in different styles, including Regular Script楷書, Cursive Style草書,

calligrapher Zhen Ben Qiao (鄭板橋, 鄭燮). Zheng Ben Qiao is also a tea lover and has written many tea poems. The original phrases are青菜蘿蔔糙米飯,瓦壺天水菊花茶 or白菜青鹽糙米飯,瓦壺天水菊花茶* 9+10 and can be 文章千古事, 得失寸心知 translated as "Bok Choy, turnip, and coarse brown rice; clay pot, rain water, and chrysanthemum tea". Bok Choy is a type "Writing is a matter of timelessness; one knows of common Chinese vegetable. in heart what is gained and missed". This pair of couplet is made of the Exotic Ji-Chi-Mu hardwood These two famous phrases came from the great (chicken-feather-wood, 雞翅木) with organic color pigments applied to the characters. Zhen Ben Qiao is known for

瓦壶開水榮苓茶,

圖山墨漬西湖水,

These two phrases came from Qing Dynasty calligrapher Sui Han (隋瀚) with a small variation in one character. The original phrases are 圖山墨漬西 湖雨,煮水茶生北澗濤12 and translated here as "Painting the mountain, inking the stains, and it rains on the West Lake; boiling water, making tea, and the soaring wave rises under the Bei Jien Bridge". This pair of couplet is made of wood from almond tree and is done in the Running Script. The color on

the couplet had been stripped to blond.

白菜青鹽糙米飯

These two phrases are variations from the famous

combining different styles of calligraphy scripts and had

created his own very free and artistic style in calligraphy. 11

煮井茶生北澗濤



Tang Dynasty poet Du-Fu (杜甫),

Regular Script.

Both this pair and the previous hanging plaque

are hand-carved in different relief styles (Relief style is called Yang style 陽刻 in Chinese carving) for the characters. Crushed

mother-of-pearl powder had also been applied on both pieces for the glittering effect. The calligraphy on this pair of couplet is created in

The words 鹿養茸 (cultivating deer's new tender hairs) on this pair of signed and carved bamboo couplets appears in the work of the famous Song Dynasty poet and calligrapher Huang Ting Jien (黃庭堅) 13. The words imply a time of peace and content. This pair of bamboo couplet is in the half-round shape and is carved in the Yin style (陰刻).

cultivates its tender hairs".

果林春熟猿捋子, 雲壑秋深鹿養茸

"Fruit orchard, ripen spring (season), the gorilla gently scratches the young; cloudy canyon, deepened fall, the deer

壹勤即治家之本, "To keep a good household is to be diligent; to be able to succee<mark>d</mark> in the world is to endure a hun<mark>dred</mark> times (as often as possible)"

This set of three panels with carved and gilt-painted characters in the Regular Script on the organic powder blue color background is not a couplet. It is presented here to show the variety of the hanging wooden plaques. This is part of a much larger set. This type of hanging plaques often is carved with moral or religious teaching and the content can often come from known classical

Back view

馬蹄秋水大文章

"A real scholar does his work in a careful manner like stepping on a tiger's tail and like that on the thin spring ice; your work is as important as the Horse-Hoof and the

calligrapher Zhong Xiao Cheng宗孝忱 (1891-1979) as a gift to friend Xie Hong Xuan谢鸿轩. He praised Mr. Xie for being caring and loyal to the country as a scholar of high virtue. "Zhung Tz" is a Daoist classic written by the

prominent Daoist Zhung Tz. The two chapters referred

This pair of couplet is carved in the Cursive Style and lacquered. The white color crushed mother-of-pearl powder was lavishly applied to the background.

Fall-Water chapter in "Zhung Tz(莊子)".

These phrases came from the known modern

to are chapter 9 (Horse-Hoof) and chapter 17

虎尾春冰真學問,

(Fall-Water).14

manuscript.

This pair of couplet is inlaid with porcelain characters

created in the Running Script.

百忍能為處世方



對酒當歌明月詩,大書深刻洞天字

"One must drink to the moon and sing poetry (like that of Li Bo); to

The first phrase derived from the great Tang Dynasty poet Li Bo's (李白) famous poem "把酒問月" with a slight variation. The original two phrases from Li Bo is "唯願當歌對酒時,月光長照金樽里"15 and are translated here as "Only if I can sing and drink wine at the moment (What else would I need?); the moonlight shines long into the golden urn". Li Bo wrote many poems about the moon with famous phrases such as "舉杯邀明月,對影成三人16 (Inviting the moon to drink; the moon, myself, and my shadow become three friends)"

do calligraphy and to indulge freely in writing (and life)".

from the poem "Drinking alone under the moon". It was said that Li Bo drowned himself while drunk and trying to catch a moon in the water. Li Bo and Du-Fu were two of the greatest Chinese poets representing two different styles in poetry writing.

The "大書"in the second phrase is a type of calligraphy often used in carved plaque or carved on the stone.17+18 "洞天" is a famous Daoist retreat in southern China.19 大書深刻"appears both in the famous Yuan Dynasty calligrapher Zhao Meng Hu (趙孟頫)'s writing"米公平生好奇者,大書深刻無差訛" from"張秋泉真人所藏研山詩 "20 as well as the great late Qing Dynasty educator and poet Qiu Feng Jia (丘逢甲)'s poem "枯木寒鴉夕照遲,大書深刻壁間詞"21.

This pair of couplet is hand-carved with double lines and were hung on the posts. The upside down bat in the carving on the top represents the arrival of blessing 福. In Chinese language, the pronunciation of "bat" is the same as "blessing", and the pronunciation of the "arrival" is the same

as "upside down".

"Hall of the Careful Virtue"

慎德堂

A single long shop sign. It shows

the shop's name and says that it

sells grocery and porcelain wares.

屋窄剛留邀月地, "I have just invited the moon to stay at my narrow (humble) house; Most of my guests who come here are writers for books (who are serious about writing)".

Bamboo bird feeder with character of "sun" and "moon"

Small fan-shaped plaque with two characters reading "素 月 (The non-lavish moon or the elegant moon)". This plaque can represent the high regards in Chinese culture for a less materialized life as a virtue. It can also possibly be a piece used for a lady's bedroom.

Woven bamboo basket with "Wen-Xin (the literary heart)" characters woven on the lid. Here, the characters can read as "the elegant or the tender heart". This basket belonged to a lady with a good skill in doing embroidery. It implies the lady

had a good upbringing.

II. http://baike.baidu.com/subview/4309/7381669.htm#2_6 12. http://www.gucn.com/Service_CurioCheck_Show.asp?Id-204156 13. http://dict.variants.moe.edu.tw/yitia/fra/fra03467.htm

15. http://www3.telus.net/arts/poems/lee%20bai/lee_bai_inquire.html

21.http://souyun.com/poemindex.aspx?dynasty-Oing&author-%E4%B8%98%E9%80%A2%E7%94%B2&lang-t 22. http://images.gg-art.com/dictionary/dcontent.php?word-%B8%D5

18. https://books.google.com/books?id=1qMqAAAAYAAJ 19 http://bbs.travel.163.com/bbs/overseas/394093589.html 20. http://sou-yun.com/Query.aspx?type-poem&id-476116&lang-t

For other items in Shen's Special Collection, please click anywhere on this image to take you to www.shensgallery.com, then click "Special Collection" 5.The words 還明珠came from Tang poet张籍 Zhang Jis work 節婦吟 "还君明珠双泪垂,恨不相逢未嫁时".www.haoshici.com/Zhang ji2384.html 6.The words 捲簾人came from Southern Song Female poet李清照 Li Qing Zhao's work 如夢令 "昨夜雨疏風驟。濃睡不消殘酒。試問捲簾人,卻道,知否?應是綠肥紅瘦"。 $https://tw.knowledge.yahoo.com/question/question:_ylt=A0S080zu5BIV5ZUAaP5XNyoA:_ylu=X30DMTExaHNxYWFpBGNvbG8DZ3ExBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDREZENV8xBHNIYwNzcg=?qid=1607083005066$ 7. http://www.diyiziti.com/ 8. http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/8/9/25/n2275696.htm 9 & 10. http://big5.hwjyw.com/zyzx/jxsc/hy/200802/t20080202_12245.shtml4.

16.https://tw.knowledge.yahoo.com/question/question:_ylt-A0S080046xfVPssADCNXNyoA:_ylu-X3oDMTExOWtxZTBkBGNvbG8DZ3ExBHBvcwMyBHZ0aWQDREZENV8xBHNI YwNzcg-?qid=1105062905312 17.http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%93%98%E7%AA%A0%E6%9B%B8

Qi can be interpreted as the life force or the moving energy. It exists in the human body as well as within all living things in the universe. When this internal Qi exists cohesively with the outer Qi, it creates harmony. It is the base of Chinese Chinese hanging couplets originate from carved woodwork and were used for religious purposes to ward off the evils when hung on the two sides of the door of a bedroom.1 It is uniquely one art form in woodworking sustained from the source to the current time. The couplets with carved or

written calligraphy became very popular during the Ming and the Qing Dynasty not only among the

"Good auspicious Qi between the Heaven and the Earth". The four characters read from the right to the left. The first two characters came from 易Yi-Jing and together mean "Heaven and Earth". The third character means "auspicious; good".

客來多是著書人

There are different ways in writing the character 剛.22

This pair of half-round shaped couplet is hand-carved with double lines in the Cursive Style. They were hung on the posts.

- A carrying wooden bucket with a Fu (blessing) character on the lid for the auspicious purpose.