

## Fostering Community Identity, Place, and Belonging through Site-specific Art: Large-scale Live Performance of Chinese Calligraphy at Queen's College, Hong Kong

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### Abstract:

Large-scale live performance of Chinese calligraphy is a highly developed yet understudied form of Chinese art. Few people know how to appreciate the beauty of this art form, let alone grasp the subtlety and complexity of calligraphy performances conducted at specific sites. More than simply an artistic expression, site-specific performances of calligraphy are thoughtfully designed works that convey a variety of personal and cultural values as well as community identity. This research posits site-specific Chinese calligraphy as a vibrant and decisive catalyst that can generate cultural, sensory, and affective connections, thereby enhancing our experience and understanding of place in relation to the environment and to our sense of community. This paper offers a new methodology for examining site-specific calligraphy through the interaction of the following factors: 1) the semantic meanings in calligraphic works; 2) the conditions of site specificity; and 3) site-specific calligraphy's capacity to generate and transmit sensory and affective experiences in a manner that, upon perception, deepens our understanding of our relationship with the environment.

Research findings show that through thoughtful consideration of how a calligraphic work, its lively and compelling presentation, and its reception at a specific site can substantiate one another, the site-specific performance of calligraphy at Queen's College, Hong Kong created new concepts and viewing experiences beyond the literary meanings of the Chinese characters in the work. The study concludes that large-scale site-specific performance of Chinese calligraphy is instrumental in cultivating a strong sense of belonging and community identity through the formal, affective, and experiential dimensions of performance. This is reflected in the powerful yet subtle synergy of all elements of the calligraphy performance, including the performer as an alumnus of the college and the joint effort of the performer and his former teacher to compose the literary content of the calligraphic couplet. The couplet was filled with ideas pertinent to this community, including: 1) the two characters "Huang" (supreme or royalty) and "Ren" (benevolence)—the Chinese name of Queen's College—embedded as the first character in both poetic lines; 2) the school motto "Labour Omnia Vincit" (Labour conquers all); and 3) the hemistich "benevolent winds transform into nourishing rain," which reflects the college's educational mission and impact by portraying the benevolent influence that nurtures students and alumni like "gentle rain"—a metaphor drawn from a well-known Chinese idiom. Conducted on the main lawn of the school campus, the live performance and the forceful gestural brushstrokes emanating from the performer's body movements interacted with an environment embedded with objects symbolizing school spirit, such as the school emblem and the bronze statue of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, Queen's College's most eminent alumnus and the revolutionary

leader who overthrew the Qing dynasty and ended imperial rule in China, thus revered as the "Father of Modern China." In short, with a strong sense of history and values, all these intricate details of the environment were orchestrated by the artist to build a stronger sense of place and celebrate shared values within the community. The immense scale, magnitude, and intensity of the site-specific calligraphy amplified the work's ability to generate and transmit sensory and affective experiences in a manner that, upon perception, enhanced the audience's relationship with the environment. Ultimately, this led to deeper social connections and the establishment of community identity.

**Keywords:**

Art and Community Identity, Chinese Calligraphy, Chinese Art History, Site-specific performance of Chinese calligraphy, Site-specific Art, Place and Belonging.