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## **Traditional Chinese Regular Script based on Erwin Panofsky's Iconological Theory**

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### **Abstract**

This study employs Panofsky's iconological theory to analyze Regular Script's technical features, symbolic meanings, and cultural connotations. Existing research focuses on stylistic traits and developmental causes, rarely applying Western theories to their cultural significance. Using comparative analysis, this study demonstrates Panofsky's theory as effective for regular script analysis, innovatively integrating traditional calligraphy with Western formalist frameworks. It proposes an aesthetic analysis system for calligraphic styles and bridges the gap between Western theories and Chinese calligraphy studies.

**Keywords:** Regular script; Erwin Panofsky's iconological theory; Comparative analysis

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Traditional Chinese calligraphy is a significant part of the nation's artistic heritage, reflecting deep cultural meaning and notable aesthetic importance (Wang, 2010). It stands as one of the world's most enduring writing systems, uniquely maintaining its use across millennia (Zhao, 2024). Despite its enduring presence, modern calligraphy criticism often lacks depth, especially in connecting with traditional values and integrating external perspectives (Yang, 2019).

Innovating within the realm of traditional calligraphy has become crucial. In our culturally interconnected world, there is a pressing need to explore not only the writing forms and artistic value but also the deeper aesthetic meanings that encapsulate the art of calligraphy (Zhang, 2022). This situation highlights a trend where modern interpretations often reduce calligraphy to mere artistic writing, diverting attention away from the ideological principles that underpin this art form. The rise of multimedia and advancements in technology necessitate urgent re-examinations and updates to traditional practices (Zhao, 2024). German philosopher Walter Benjamin noted that "the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its integration into traditional structures" (Berger, 1982, p. 10), emphasizing tradition's importance in both historical and contemporary contexts. With the rise of multimedia and advancements in data technology in modern society, the progress of traditional calligraphy has become increasingly urgent (Zhao, 2024). In the realm of visual arts, German philosopher Walter Benjamin asserted that "the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its integration into traditional structures" (Berger, 1982, p.10)." This highlights the enduring importance of tradition both in the early stages of social development and in its ongoing evolution.

In 1938, Chinese scholar Jiang Yi's publication "Chinese Calligraphy" introduced Western readers to the aesthetics and techniques of Chinese calligraphy, likening it to dance to highlight their connections. Jiang emphasized the importance of comparing similar art forms to fully understand calligraphy's distinctive characteristics. According to Zhao (2024), the aesthetic appeal of calligraphy is demonstrated in various elements, such as font style, structure, strokes, and overall composition. Additionally, Wang Yuzhuo asserts that the internal structure and visible lines of Chinese characters play a crucial role in the aesthetic expression of calligraphic works (Wang, 2023).

### 1.1 Research Objective

1. To apply Panofsky's three-level model to Regular Script's form, meaning, and cultural values.
2. To evaluate the theory's effectiveness as a cross-cultural tool for calligraphy analysis.
3. To propose an integrated system that combines traditional appreciation with this Western framework.

### 1.2 Research Question

1. How to apply Panofsky's three-level model to Regular Script's form, meaning, and cultural values?
2. How to evaluate the theory's effectiveness as a cross-cultural tool for calligraphy analysis?
3. How to propose an integrated system that combines traditional appreciation with this Western framework?

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Regular Script-K'ai-shu (楷书)

Regular Script, also known as Kai Shu, is the most standardized and widely taught form of Chinese writing today. Its emergence during the Han Dynasty and formal establishment in the Tang era solidified its role as the conventional script in China (Zhang, 2021). Regular Script is marked by uniformity, balanced structure, and simplified strokes.

K'ai-shu, or Regular Script, is the most standardized and widely taught form of Chinese writing today. Its emergence during the Han Dynasty and formal establishment in the Tang era solidified its role as the conventional script in China (Zhang, 2021). Regular Script is marked by uniformity, balanced structure, and simplified strokes.

Regular Script (Kai-shu) serves as the most standardized and systematically taught form of Chinese writing. Its initial development during the Han Dynasty and subsequent formalization in the Tang Dynasty established it as the conventional script widely used in China (Zhang, 2021). Characterized by uniformity, structural balance, and simplified strokes, Regular Script represents a crucial stage in the evolution of Chinese calligraphy.

Yan Zhenqing's regular script not only exemplifies technical mastery but also embodies the cultural and aesthetic grandeur of the High Tang period. As his calligraphic works are considered representative of the peak of Chinese regular script (Wang, 2024), they provide valuable material for scholarly analysis. In light of this, four of Yan's calligraphy pieces have been selected as samples for the present study. These works will be examined with reference to existing scholarly frameworks to identify both their stylistic consistencies and variations.

Furthermore, recent studies suggest that the aesthetic principles underlying Yan's regular script—such as balance, proportion, and expressive rigidity—reflect broader philosophical and social values of Tang China (Li, 2022). Such attributes make his works particularly suitable for investigating how calligraphic form intersects with historical context. This approach aligns with current scholarly calls for more context-sensitive analyses in art historical research (Zhao, 2023). Yan Zhenqing's regular script is not just about perfecting calligraphic rules; it also reflects the grandeur of the High Tang period. Since his work represents the pinnacle of ancient Chinese regular script calligraphy (Wang, 2024), we selected four of his calligraphy artworks as samples for this study. These four artworks will be analyzed according to the following:

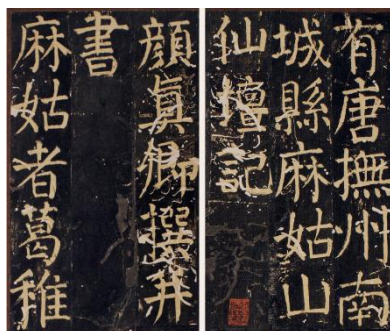


Fig. 1: Record of the Ma-gu Immortal's Altar

(Source:) Du, L., & Chen, Z. (2020). The "Inscription of the Magu Altar" and the evolution of Yan Zhenqing's regular script style in his middle and late periods. *Chinese Calligraphy*, (11), 147-153.

*Inscription:*

In 771 AD, during his demotion as governor of Fuzhou, Zhenqing Yan visited Ma-gu Mountain, inspired by the legend of Ma-gu's immortality. Disheartened by political setbacks, he sought Zen guidance and composed the "Record of the Ma-gu Immortal's Altar" (Zhang, 2020).



Fig. 2: Qinli Stele

(Source:) Zhang, J. (2020). *Famous People and Famous Works*, (04), 126-127. doi:CNKI:SUN.0.2020-04-062.

*Inscription:*

The Qinli Stele, written by Zhenqing Yan at age 71 (779 AD), honors his great-grandfather Qinli Yan. It commemorates the Yan family's virtues and achievements. The stele was unearthed in 1922, stands 268 cm tall and 92 cm wide, with text engraved on four sides, three of which remain intact (Wang, 2024).



Fig. 3: Stele of Dongfang Shuohua Zan

(Source:) <https://zitie.shufazidian.com/img/group/00b94bb13005c4a7073d2c04ae4bf10d>

*Inscription:*

The stele, inscribed by Zhenqing Yan in 754 AD, is 340 cm tall and 151.6 cm wide with text on all four sides. It features 36 lines of 30 characters each in large regular script, praising Dongfang Shuo, with inscriptions in seal, clerical, and regular scripts (Su, 2023).



Fig. 4: Stele of Duobao Pagoda

(Source:) Zhang, J. (2020). *Famous People and Famous Works*, (04), 126-127. doi:CNKI:SUN.0.2020-04-062.

*Inscription:*

Created in 752 AD during Zhenqing Yan's prime, this stele records the construction of the Duobao Pagoda and reflects the spread of Buddhism and Tang Dynasty beliefs (Zhu, 2023).

### 3.0 Methodology

This study employs a comparative analysis approach, utilizing Panofsky's three-level iconological analysis as its core framework to systematically examine the formal features and cultural connotations of Yan Zhenqing's Regular Script calligraphy. The research process strictly follows the logic of iconological analysis. First, four representative stele works from Yan Zhenqing's mature period were selected: Record of the Magu Immortal Altar (771 AD), representing his majestic late-period style; the Qinli Stele (779 AD), exemplifying the standard regulatory principles of Tang Kai-shu; the Dongfang Shuo Huazan Stele (754 AD), demonstrating vigorous brushwork; and the Duobao Pagoda Stele (752 AD), reflecting his early precise and orderly technique. These works provide complementary value in terms of chronological span and stylistic evolution, offering ideal samples for comparative study.

Regarding research data, we collected two types of materials: original image data and academic literature. It is important to note that the original image data for these four works were also sourced from journals within the CNKI database. The academic literature used to analyze the features of the calligraphy artworks was likewise derived from CNKI. The data used for analyzing aesthetic characteristics come from seven specific journals in CNKI. The selection process was as follows: we first filtered for publications from 2020 to 2025, then used the names of these four specific calligraphy works by Yan Zhenqing as keywords for further searching. After comprehensive screening and excluding literature unrelated to aesthetic characteristics, we finalized seven journal articles that have a strong correlation with the targeted aesthetic features.

These aesthetic characteristics encompass both explicit external features—such as form & line, color & ink, shape & composition, and technical aspects—and implicit features, including historical context, cultural significance, symbolic meaning, and the represented philosophical or cultural connotations.

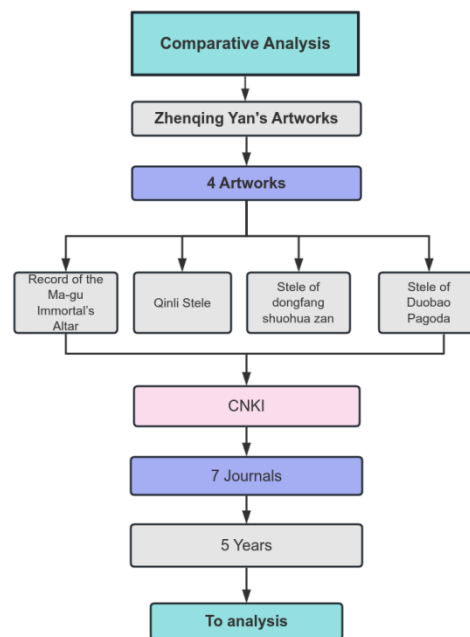


Fig.5: Flow chart of ZhenqingYan's artwork chosen

Data was synthesized from recent CNKI journal analyses related to the four stele works. Flowcharts and classification models were employed to distill findings into clear interpretive categories.

### 4.0 Findings

Table 1: Analysis of Panofsky's Iconological Theory (Pre-iconographic Analysis) of Zhenqing Yan's "Record of the Ma-gu Immortal's Altar" artwork

Record of the Ma-gu Immortal's Altar			
		Keywords	Sources
Pre-iconographic Analysis	Forms & Lines	Lines: Clear, Precise. Balanced. Mature Forms: Uniform. Dignified. Balanced. Composed	(Zhang, 2020) (Luo, 2021) (Sun & Zhao, 2023)
	Colors & Inks	Black and white	
	Shapes & Compositions	Shape: Square and dignified Composition: Elegant. Beautiful. Formality. Refinement. Nature. Plain. Space symmetry	
	Technique aspects	Rich and varied, Clear angles. Varied	

*Iconographic Analysis:*  
*Historical contexts*

In 771 AD, Zhenqing Yan, demoted to governor of Fuzhou, sought Zen guidance after political setbacks. Inspired by Ma-gu's immortality legend during a visit to Ma-gu Mountain, he composed the "Record of the Ma-gu Immortal's Altar" (Zhang, 2020).

*Cultural significance*

Tang Dynasty calligraphy thrived under the artistic patronage of emperors, notably Emperor Taizong. Its grand, inclusive atmosphere contrasted with the Qin Dynasty's rigidity, reflecting strong national power and vibrant cultural heritage (Zhang, 2020; Sun & Zhao, 2023).

*Symbolic meanings*

Zhang emphasizes that Zhenqing Yan's calligraphy fuses "law" and "emotion," blending technical precision with personal expression. His broad, majestic characters embody High Tang vitality and the Chinese concept of "concealment rather than revelation." The strict symmetry reflects the Qin Dynasty's legal system, foundational to Tang society (Sun & Zhao, 2023).

*Iconological Interpretation:*

The "Record of the Ma-gu Immortal's Altar" is a key calligraphic work that highlights Tang Dynasty Daoist culture and history, enhancing Ma-gu Mountain's visibility and cultural significance (Luo, 2021).

Table 2: Analysis of Panofsky's Iconological Theory (Pre-iconographic Analysis) of Zhenqing Yan's "Qinli Stele" artwork			
Qinli Stele			
		Keywords	Sources
Pre-iconographic Analysis	Forms & Lines	Lines: Thin horizontals. Thick verticals. Simple and understated Forms: Combining square and round forms	(Wang, 2024) (Zhang, 2020) (Sun, 2021)
	Colors & Inks	Black and white	
	Shapes & Compositions	Shape: Square and round. Composition: The structure is stable and dignified. With a sense of grace and openness, broad, revealing subtle ingenuity within its simplicity. The characters primarily follow a square form, with balanced and upright strokes. Characters with left-right structures emphasize symmetry, reflecting influences from seal and clerical scripts	
	Technique aspects	Rich and varied, Clear angles. Varied	

*Iconographic Analysis:*

*Historical contexts*

The Qinli Stele, created by Zhenqing Yan in 779 ADS at age 71 to honor his great-grandfather, commemorates the Yan family's virtues. Unearthed in 1922, it stands 268 cm tall and 92 cm wide, with inscriptions on four sides, showcasing meticulous craftsmanship (Wang, 2024).

*Cultural significance*

The development of calligraphy during the Tang Dynasty is closely linked to the emphasis placed on it by successive emperors, with Emperor Taizong being particularly devoted to the arts and culture (Zhang, 2020).

*Symbolic meanings*

It represents the pinnacle of ancient Chinese regular script calligraphy (Wang, 2024).

*Iconological Interpretation:*

Wang highlights the robust brushwork, understated elegance, and natural grace of Zhenqing Yan's calligraphy, reflecting Tang Dynasty grandeur and traditional Chinese aesthetics. It has been a foundational reference for beginners since the Song Dynasty.

Table 3: Analysis of Panofsky's Iconological Theory (Pre-iconographic Analysis) of Zhenqing Yan's "Stele of dongfang shuohua zan" artwork			
Stele of dongfang shuohua zan			
		Keywords	Sources
Pre-iconographic Analysis	Forms & Lines	Lines: Thick at both ends and thin in the middle Forms: Primarily characterized using square strokes	(Su, 2023)
	Colors & Inks	Black and white	
	Shapes & Compositions	Shape: Neat and orderly Composition: The spacing between lines and characters is relatively narrow	
	Technique aspects	Square stokes	

*Iconographic Analysis:*

*Historical contexts*

The 754 AD stele by Zhenqing Yan, measuring 340 cm by 151.6 cm, features 36 lines of Large Regular Script, eulogizing Dongfang Shuo based on Xiahou Zhan's. It combines seal, regular, and clerical scripts, with Su analyzing its cultural significance and symbolic meanings (Su, 2023).

*Cultural significance*

Zhenqing Yan, celebrated for his integrity, justice, and loyalty, exemplified courage and unwavering principles. His achievements in calligraphy and virtuous character remain influential, serving as a model of excellence and inspiration for future generations.

*Symbolic meanings*

It symbolizes moral integrity.

*Iconological Interpretation:*

It reflects moral values and the artist's spirit.

Table 4: Analysis of Panofsky's Iconological Theory (Pre-iconographic Analysis) of Zhenqing Yan's "Stele of Duobao Pagoda" artwork

Stele of Duobao Pagoda			
		Keywords	Sources
Pre-iconographic Analysis	Forms & Lines	Lines: Thick at both ends and thin in the middle. Primarily characterized using square strokes Forms: Primarily characterized using square strokes	(Zhu, 2023)
	Colors & Inks	Black and white	
	Shapes & Compositions	Shape: Square. Composition: The line spacing and character spacing are consistent	
	Technique aspects	Square strokes	

*Iconographic Analysis:*

*Historical contexts*

Created in 752 AD during Zhenqing Yan's prime, this stele documents the construction of the Duobao Pagoda and reflects the spread of Buddhism and prevailing Tang Dynasty beliefs. Zhu further elaborates on its cultural significance, symbolic meanings, and iconological interpretation (Zhu, 2023).

*Cultural significance*

His achievements in calligraphy are closely linked to his upright and incorruptible character and his dedication to his country, even to the point of sacrificing his life.

*Symbolic meanings*

It reflects the spread of Buddhism and the prevailing beliefs of the people during the Tang Dynasty.

*Iconological Interpretation:*

It not only reflects the spread of Buddhism during the Tang Dynasty and the prevailing thoughts and beliefs of the people at that time, but also embodies the upright Zhenqing Yan's personal qualities.

5.0 Discussion

Based on Panofsky's Iconological Theory, the analysis of Zhenqing Yan's artwork would be as follows:

Table 5: Summarize the characteristics of Zhenqing Yan's artwork using Panofsky's Iconological Theory

Analysis Stage	Analysis Element	Record of the Ma-gu Immortal's Altar	Qinli Stele	Stele of Dongfang Shuohua zan	Stele of Duobao Pagoda
Pre-iconographic Analysis	Form & Line	Clear, precise, balanced, mature	Thin horizontal lines, thick vertical lines, simple and unadorned	Thick at both ends, thin in the middle, primarily using square strokes	Thick at both ends, primarily using square strokes
	Color & Ink	Black and white	Black and white	Black and white	Black and white
	Shape & Composition	Square and dignified shapes, elegant, symmetrical, and simple compositions	Combination of square and round shapes, stable and dignified composition, graceful and open	Neat and orderly shapes, narrow spacing between lines and characters	Square shapes, consistent lines, and character spacing
	Technique Aspects	Rich and varied techniques, clear angles	Rich and varied techniques, clear angles	Primarily square strokes	Primarily square strokes

<b>Iconographic Analysis</b>	Historical Contexts	Written by Zhenqing Yan's 44 years old for a temple, recording the construction of the Duobao Pagoda and historical events	Written by Zhenqing Yan to commemorate his great-grandfather Qinli Yan.	Written by Zhenqing Yan, a renowned calligrapher of the Tang Dynasty, in the 13th year of the Tianbao reign (754 AD)	Created by Zhenqing Yan in the 11th year of the Tianbao era (752 AD), reflecting the spread of Buddhism and the beliefs of the Tang Dynasty people
	Cultural Significance	The development of Tang Dynasty calligraphy is closely linked to the emphasis placed on arts and literature by successive emperors	The development of Tang Dynasty calligraphy is closely linked to the emphasis placed on arts and literature by successive emperors	Zhenqing Yan's upright character and deep sense of justice are reflected in his calligraphy, and his style and virtues are still admired today	Zhenqing Yan's achievements in calligraphy are inseparable from his upright character and loyalty to his country
	Symbolic Meanings	The aesthetic embodies the traditional Chinese concept of "concealment rather than revelation," reflecting the grandeur and vitality of the High Tang period	Represents the pinnacle of ancient Chinese regular script calligraphy	Symbolizes moral integrity	Reflects the spread of Buddhism and the beliefs of the Tang Dynasty people
<b>Iconological Interpretation</b>	Artistic Value	Zhenqing Yan's regular script is characterized by rich and meticulous brushwork, demonstrating high artistic value	The brushwork is robust and powerful, full of vitality, and is considered the best model for learning Zhenqing Yan's calligraphy	Reflects moral values and the artist's spirit	Reflects the spread of Buddhism and the thoughts and beliefs of the time, as well as Zhenqing Yan's upright personality
	Moral and Philosophical Insights	Successfully unified "law" and "emotion" in his brushwork, showcasing the artist's unique personality	The brushwork is restrained and elegant, perfectly aligning with the traditional Chinese aesthetic of subtlety and restraint	Reflects moral values and the artist's spirit	Reflects Zhenqing Yan's upright personality and his achievements in calligraphy
	Personal Expression	The fusion of technical precision and emotional expression reflects Zhenqing Yan's style and spirit	The brushwork represents a combination of individuality and artistry	The fusion of technical precision and emotional expression reflects Zhenqing Yan's style and spirit	Reflects Zhenqing Yan's upright personality and his achievements in calligraphy

Therefore, from this table, the similarities among the artworks can be observed as follows:



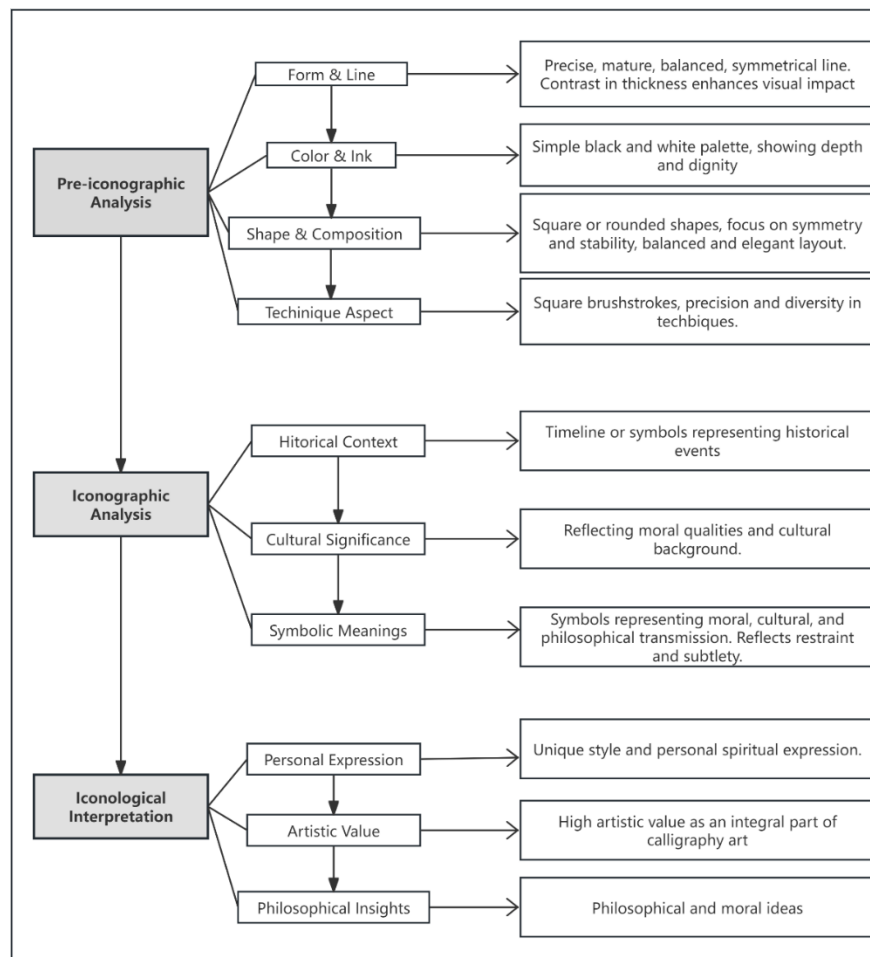


Fig. 6: Flow chart of analyzing regular script using Panofsky iconological theory

Through this flow chart, there are three dimensions in the analysis of the regular script, which are pre-iconographic, iconographic analysis, and iconological interpretation. These three dimensions have 10 levels to adapt to the regular script, which are form & line, color & ink, shape and composition, teaching aspect, historical context, cultural significance, symbolic meanings, personal expression, artistic value, and philosophical insights.

Therefore, the details about the 10 levels will be as follows:

## Pre-iconographic Analysis

### Form & Line:

In terms of form and line, all examined calligraphic works display a consistent sense of symmetry, structural balance, and refined technique. Yan Zhenqing's brushstrokes frequently feature either horizontally slender lines paired with vertically bold ones or strokes that taper in the middle while thickening at both ends, resulting in a visually striking contrast and well-defined structure. Regarding color and ink, a monochrome palette of black ink on white surfaces is consistently applied, underscoring a restrained yet authoritative aesthetic. When it comes to shape and overall layout, the compositions are generally characterized by square or squarish-round forms, with an emphasis on balanced spatial arrangements that convey grace and formality. As for technique, the brushwork varies but commonly highlights precise angles and firm control, with square-tipped strokes being a hallmark of Yan's regular script style.

In summary, Regular Script is distinguished by its refined, precise, and balanced line quality, often relying on contrasts in stroke thickness to create visual emphasis. Its presentation typically adheres to a black-and-white color scheme, reinforcing a minimalist yet formal aesthetic. The script's layout highlights symmetrical arrangements and structural stability, ensuring each character maintains its internal coherence while contributing to an overall harmonious composition. Diverse brushwork techniques are employed, but particular attention is given to clarity and variation, with square-shaped strokes emerging as a signature feature of Yan Zhenqing's style.

### Iconographic Analysis

Yan Zhenqing's calligraphic creations are deeply intertwined with pivotal historical events and personal milestones, serving as reflections of the socio-cultural environment in which they were produced. In terms of cultural significance, each piece embodies the Tang Dynasty's esteemed appreciation for the arts, particularly calligraphy, while also conveying the artist's own moral values and



intellectual aspirations. Regarding symbolic meaning, Regular Script typically conveys themes such as ethical integrity, institutional order, and the preservation of cultural tradition, mirroring the ideological and cultural atmosphere of the era.

As such, works in Regular Script are frequently rooted in historical moments, documenting notable occurrences or individual accomplishments, thereby holding considerable historical relevance. Beyond their artistic merit, these calligraphic pieces also serve as cultural artifacts, revealing the ethical character and societal values of the calligrapher. Regular Script is rich in symbolic content, often embodying the transmission of moral principles, cultural identity, and philosophical thought.

### Iconological Interpretation

Similarity of artistic value: Zhenqing Yan's regular script artworks are renowned for their strong artistic style, exquisite brushwork, and historical significance, making them models for later calligraphy study. Similarity of personal expression: Zhenqing Yan expresses his style and spirit through his regular script, with every stroke reflecting the unique character of the calligrapher. Similarly, moral and philosophical insights: Zhenqing Yan's artworks integrate law and emotion, reflecting his moral and philosophical views, and showcasing the restraint and subtlety of traditional Chinese aesthetics.

This threefold analysis shows how Yan Zhenqing's work not only achieved aesthetic mastery but also functioned as a cultural medium expressing loyalty, humility, and philosophical depth. The method offers a replicable model for analyzing other traditional scripts under a formal yet culturally sensitive paradigm.

This three-dimensional analytical system demonstrates that Panofsky's theory provides a systematic methodology for understanding how Yan Zhenqing's calligraphy functions simultaneously as formal composition, historical document, and philosophical expression. The successful application of this framework to Regular Script research validates Panofsky's assertion that iconology can reveal "the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion." This study particularly highlights the effectiveness of this theoretical approach in elucidating how technical mastery (pre-iconographical), historical positioning (iconographical), and spiritual expression (iconological) converge in Yan's works to create artistic meaning.

Furthermore, this applied research supports Panofsky's view that iconological interpretation requires both "synthetic intuition" and methodological control. The successful adaptation of the ten-level analytical system to Chinese calligraphy studies confirms the theory's cross-cultural applicability, providing a replicable model for analyzing traditional script forms within a structured yet sensitive scholarly paradigm.

### Implication

The rigorous adaptation of Panofsky's model demonstrates that such theoretical frameworks, when applied with cultural and contextual sensitivity, can yield profound insights into Chinese calligraphy, potentially bridging a long-standing disciplinary divide.

## 6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

Panofsky's iconological theory proves to be a valuable tool for investigating Regular Script beyond surface aesthetics. By decoding the underlying layers of form, context, and meaning, this study affirms the compatibility of Western formalist theory with Eastern artistic traditions.

Future research may extend this analytical model to other calligraphic styles or comparative studies involving non-Chinese scripts. The interdisciplinary method introduced here contributes to a more nuanced and globally relevant discourse on calligraphy.

### Limitation

While this study successfully develops and applies an iconological framework to Yan Zhenqing's Regular Script, several limitations should be acknowledged. The primary constraint lies in the exclusive reliance on CNKI-sourced journals for secondary data. Although these publications provide valuable scholarly perspectives, this approach may introduce a regional academic bias, potentially overlooking significant international research and alternative methodological viewpoints that could enrich or challenge the findings.

Furthermore, the scope of artistic samples, while carefully selected, remains limited to four key works by a single master calligrapher. This focused approach, while providing depth, necessarily restricts the generalizability of the conclusions. The analytical framework's effectiveness across a broader range of Regular Script styles, historical periods, or lesser-known calligraphers remains to be verified.

Another significant limitation concerns the inherent subjectivity in iconological interpretation. Despite the structured, ten-level system, the deepest layer of analysis—particularly concerning philosophical insights and cultural values—involves a substantial degree of scholarly interpretation. This process, as Panofsky himself acknowledged, relies on "synthetic intuition," which can be influenced by the researcher's own cultural and academic background. While cross-referencing with CNKI literature was employed to mitigate this, it cannot eliminate the element of interpretative bias.

Finally, the adaptation of a Western theoretical model presents both a strength and a limitation. The process of mapping Panofsky's concepts, which were developed primarily for analyzing Western representational art, onto the non-representational, line-based art of Chinese calligraphy inevitably involves conceptual negotiation. Some nuances of the theory may not transfer perfectly, and certain uniquely Eastern aesthetic concepts may not be fully captured within this borrowed framework. The study's findings, therefore, should be considered within the context of this theoretical translation.

## Acknowledgment

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study makes several significant, interconnected contributions to the fields of art history, calligraphy studies, and cross-cultural methodology. Its primary contribution is the development and validation of a three-level analytical framework that rigorously adapts Erwin Panofsky's iconological theory—originally conceived for Western representational art—to the analysis of non-representational Chinese Regular Script. By systematically decomposing the intricate art of calligraphy into three dimensions (pre-iconographic, iconographic, and iconological) and further into ten evaluative levels—ranging from formal elements like brushwork and composition to cultural concepts such as historical context and philosophical insight—the research provides a structured, replicable methodological model. This model bridges a persistent gap in scholarship, offering a tangible tool for conducting nuanced, multi-layered analyses of calligraphic works that move beyond descriptive appreciation toward theoretically grounded interpretation.

Secondly, the paper contributes to transcultural art-historical methodology by demonstrating that Western theoretical frameworks, when applied with careful cultural and contextual adaptation, can yield meaningful insights into non-Western artistic traditions. The successful application of Panofsky's model to the works of Yan Zhenqing not only enriches our understanding of Tang-dynasty calligraphy but also validates the potential for fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue between Eastern and Western scholarly traditions. This pilot application encourages future research to employ similarly adapted theoretical lenses to analyze other scripts (e.g., Clerical or Cursive Script) or art forms, promoting a more integrated global art history.

In sum, this research advances its field by providing a novel analytical system, demonstrating a viable model for cross-cultural theoretical application, elevating the scholarly discourse on calligraphy, and offering practical tools for education and further research.

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