

Northern Song Writing Brushes, Tables and Chairs, and Brushwork

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Abstract

The turmoil caused by conflict during the late Tang dynasty and Five Dynasties period led to great losses in terms of talents and cultural artifacts, bringing about the danger of a cultural break with tradition. At the same time, it created a major transformation in the composition of the scholar class. Combined with the spread in popularity of writing using tables and chairs, revolutionary changes took place in Northern Song calligraphy as a result. In response to the perceived threat of cultural loss, Northern Song scholars felt compelled to retrace tradition and create a paragon that belonged to them. In the process, they developed a keen interest in the material culture of calligraphy. Not only did scholars actively engage in researching materials related to it, they even went so far as to personally take part in refining and producing them, leaving behind much precious information on material culture for later generations. This study mainly looks at issues related to the development of writing brushes, the spread of tables and chairs, changes in brushwork, and the transformation that took place in the Tang-Song transition to reexamine aspects of Northern Song calligraphy. In doing so, an attempt is made to clarify the interrelationship between Northern Song calligraphy and related materials from the viewpoint of material, style, and culture.

Keywords: Northern Song calligraphy, Brush of Leisurely Eminence, brushwork, Tang-Song transformation