

# Based on the Thinking of Adopting New Teaching Methods for the Sketch Module in the Abstract Art Language Course of the Painting Major of Chinese Colleges and Universities in the New Era

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## Abstract

Promoting the transformation of undergraduate colleges and universities to application-oriented is a major decision and deployment of the Chinese government and an important part of the structural reform of the talent supply side in the education field. The "Outline of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development" of the State Council of China clearly proposes to promote the transformation of qualified ordinary undergraduate colleges and universities to application-oriented. The "National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan" of the Ministry of Education of China further puts forward the development goal of "a large number of ordinary undergraduate colleges and universities transform to application-oriented". In 2021, China will enter the "14th Five-Year Plan" period. Based on this new period, the Ministry of Education of China has put forward new requirements for higher education. During the "14th Five-Year Plan" period, it is required to promote the integration of vocational education and general education to meet the diverse needs of high-level talents for economic and social development. With the development of the country, abstract painting courses for oil painting majors in Chinese colleges and universities are facing many challenges. This research tries to find the existing problems at this stage and the solutions to the problems.

## Keywords

Chinese higher education; Painting major; Abstract art language course; Traditional Chinese calligraphy teaching method; New Chinese calligraphy teaching method.

## 1. Introduction

According to the provisions of the General University Undergraduate Major Catalogue and Major Introduction compiled by the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, abstract art language courses are one of the core courses of painting majors in fine arts (Department of Higher Education, 2012). The painting professional education of Chinese universities should combine the standards and requirements of application-oriented transformation and development, continuously reform and innovate teaching content, and ensure that college students can meet the diverse requirements of the development of the times in the future work development. Let students achieve better development in the art industry. Therefore, it is very important for the reform of the core curriculum. During China's 14th Five-Year Plan period, it is required to promote the integration of vocational education and general education, and some skill courses should be reformed in accordance with the requirements of the current China. We must pay attention to the balanced development of various courses to create better conditions for students to enter the workplace in the future (Gong, 2021). In recent years, abstract works of art have received more and more attention in the Chinese art market. Therefore, the reform of abstract art related courses

becomes more and more important. This research mainly explores how to better teach abstract art language courses in painting majors in China.

## 2. Defining the Scope of Abstract Art Language Courses

The title of the course in this research is derived from the Decision of the Ministry of Education on Approving the 2018 National Teaching Achievement Award Projects issued by the text number: Teacher [2018] No. 21 (Information on: [http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A10/s7058/201901/t20190102\\_365703.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A10/s7058/201901/t20190102_365703.html)). In 2018, the second prize of the "National Teaching Achievement Award" issued by the Ministry of Education of China to the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts. This award is the highest award given by the Ministry of Education of China for curriculum research in this field in recent years. In China, abstract art language courses generally consist of abstract sketch modules and abstract color modules. Some colleges and universities separate the abstract sketch module and the abstract color module into two courses, called abstract sketch course and abstract color course. There is no obvious difference or essential difference between the two in terms of teaching content, practice methods, and teaching methods (C. Wang, 2021). Therefore, this research discusses the improvement of the abstract sketch module or abstract sketch course teaching method in the abstract art language course.

## 3. The Possible Problems and Current Situation of Using Traditional Chinese Calligraphy Teaching Methods in the Abstract Sketching Module

Kangdings invented abstract painting based on 1910 (C. Wang, 2021). Therefore, his teaching method is the most representative abstract painting teaching method in the West. In the abstract art language course, because Chinese calligraphy has a certain degree of abstraction, the sketching module of the abstract art language course in China generally incorporates Chinese calligraphy into the curriculum. The purpose of this is for students to better learn Western abstract art represented by Kandinsky. There are now three mainstream traditional calligraphy teaching methods designed for non-Chinese calligraphy majors in China. They come from highest-level art research institution in china-the Chinese National Academy of Arts, China's largest calligraphy social organization-the Chinese Calligraphers Association, and China's best art academy-the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

The first is *The Story of Calligraphy* published by Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House in 2019 and written by Professor Ren Ping of the Chinese Academy of Art. The teaching method was started in 1999 and is marked by *University Calligraphy* published by Xiling Yinshe Publishing House. The second is *Qi Gong Talking about Calligraphy* by Professor Qi Gong, Honorary Chairman of the Chinese Calligraphers Association, published by Changjiang Literature and Art Publishing House in 2021. The teaching method was started in 2001 and was marked by *Qi Gong Lun Calligraphy* published by Cultural Relics Publishing House. The third type is *Calligraphy: A Memorandum of Knowledge, Concepts, and Approaches to Calligraphy* by Professor Qiu Zhenzhong of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, published by Sanlian Bookstore in 2021. The teaching method was started in 2011 and is marked by *The Seven Questions of Calligraphy* published by Renmin University Press of China.

Chinese calligraphy has been developed for more than 3,600 years, and the long historical development has given birth to many genres of this art (Qiu, 2021). Although the three traditional teaching methods of Chinese mainstream calligraphy are slightly different in teaching methods and focus. What they have in common is that it is recommended that students learn at least eight or more styles of fonts. They all try to compare the three elements of

calligraphy with Western abstract art through the three elements of calligraphy: brushwork, structure, and composition to help students better understand abstract art. These measures may cause problems in the following four areas

First, it is a discussion about learning multiple font styles and in-depth learning of a single font style. The ancient Chinese scholar Lao Zi argued in chapter 81 of his book *Dao De Jing*: 'Zhi Zhe Bu Bo, Bo Er Bu Zhi' This sentence means: wise men specialize in a few aspects, but knowledge is not broad. . And people who study too much cannot reach the level of a wise man (Huang, 2021). Lao Zi's *Dao De Jing* is praised by many scholars in the world. Heidegger, the founder of existential philosophy, wrote the article *The Uniqueness of the Poet in On Holderlin: A Journey to Ancient Greece* in Volume 75 of *The Complete Works of Heidegger*. Heidegger quoted the full text of Chapter 11 of Lao Zi's *Dao De Jing* at the end of this article (H. Li, 2019). According to statistics from UNESCO, Lao Zi's *Dao De Jing* is the most translated cultural masterpiece in foreign languages other than the Bible (Jiang, 2019). According to the requirements of the traditional teaching method, students must learn at least 8 Chinese calligraphy fonts. Each font is divided into single Zi structure analysis, Zi and Zi structure analysis, Hang and Hang structure analysis. Even if only one artist's work is selected as a template for each typeface, 24 trainings must be completed. If you choose two artists each for each font, it will become 48 trainings. Therefore, the traditional teaching method may cause students to master too many Chinese calligraphy font styles, unable to carry out in-depth study and cause confusion when creating.

Second, although Chinese calligraphy has a certain degree of abstraction, it is not entirely abstract. It is "semi-abstract" due to various factors such as practicability and literary quality, while western abstract art is moving towards "full abstraction" (Qiu, 2021). Therefore, the abstraction in Chinese calligraphy is still far from the abstraction in Western painting. This may cause students to be hindered to a certain extent in entering "full abstraction".

Third, Cui Xiaodong, a professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, believes that copying ancient works has indeed brought huge benefits and a change in appearance to the creation of contemporary Chinese paintings. It has brought deep-seated power and a steady stream of traditional cultural energy to the development of Chinese painting. On the other hand, copying the ancients, copying the tradition, especially the superficial and superficial copying, have also brought certain negative effects to the current Chinese painting creation (Cui, 2007). Therefore, the traditional teaching method blindly conducts temporary training, which may cause the rigidity of students' thinking and cannot fully mobilize students' creative thinking.

At the same time, this study, after systematically studying the three traditional Chinese calligraphy teaching methods, believes that traditional Chinese calligraphy teaching methods also have the following advantages.

First, cognitive learning theory emphasizes the connection between old and new knowledge (Chen, 2020). Therefore, Chinese calligraphy can be used as a good connection between the old knowledge learned by the students and the new knowledge learned in the abstract sketch module.

Second, the study of Chinese calligraphy is conducive to the inheritance of national culture. Chinese calligraphy provides new teaching resources for abstract art language courses and promotes the development of national culture (X. Li, 2021).

Therefore, this research suggests that the new teaching method should retain the advantages of the traditional teaching method, and how to better integrate Chinese calligraphy into the abstract sketch module as the main line of research. At the same time, the new teaching method should try to solve the possible problems of traditional teaching.

#### 4. The 111 Training Method of the New Chinese Calligraphy Teaching Method Used in the Abstract Sketch Module

The 111 training method of the New Chinese Calligraphy Teaching Method I created refers to: choose only one calligraphy style, one calligrapher, and one work for in-depth and intensive teaching and practice. The new Chinese calligraphy teaching method chose Gu Shi Si Tie, a work by Zhang Xu, a representative of the Kuang Cao style in Tang Dynasty.

The new Chinese calligraphy teaching method only chooses one calligraphy style, one calligrapher and one work, for in-depth and intensive teaching and practice. The reason for this suggestion comes from the following two aspects.

First, since 2011, the Ministry of Education of China has begun to research and set up calligraphy education courses for primary and secondary schools, and in 2013 formally issued the "Guidelines for Calligraphy Education in Primary and Secondary Schools." It requires that calligraphy education be incorporated into the teaching system of primary and secondary schools, and students learn hard and brush calligraphy by age and stage. All schools have to offer special brush calligraphy classes starting from the third grade of elementary school. According to data released by the Ministry of Education of China in 2020, the enrollment rate of school-age children in China's compulsory education reached 100%, the consolidation rate reached 94.8%, and the number of school students reached 156 million (Information on:<http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A06/s3321/>). In other words, it is estimated that by 2023, the proportion of Chinese college students who have studied Chinese calligraphy will reach 100%, and the study time will range from three to nine years. The font training of the traditional Chinese calligraphy teaching method is too comprehensive. No matter which kind of traditional calligraphy teaching method, it involves a complex history of calligraphy. This is not necessary for future college students. Because they have been learning calligraphy since the third grade of elementary school, and they already have a good foundation. The current mainstream teaching methods started in 1999, 2001, and 2011 respectively. During these periods, the Chinese government has not issued any formal calligraphy education documents. But by 2023, all college students enrolled in China will have a foundation in calligraphy. Therefore, it is more suitable to conduct in-depth research on art cases.

Second, no matter which of the above traditional teaching methods, the purpose is not to train Chinese calligraphers. The purpose of the painting profession is to train painters. In the limited study time of courses, more time should be given to abstract painting training. The traditional Chinese calligraphy teaching method will cause too heavy calligraphy work, which may cause the students to be tired of studying, and may also squeeze the training time of abstract painting. Scholar Nan Nan (2018) believes that in most subjects of school education, students face a world composed of words, concepts, and formulas, while art is a subject that focuses on experience. It requires everyone to be directly in a certain specific environment and atmosphere, to feel and understand the world made of material materials, and to operate by themselves. From this, we can see that art education is basically carried out at a level of experience. Students need to involve skills, and skill training is precisely a process that requires progressive accumulation of experience. This requires us to fully activate students' perceptions during the teaching process so that they can fully exercise their bodies and form muscle memory (Nan, 2018). Different styles of fonts in Chinese calligraphy have different physical memory effects. Students' in-depth study of a certain font will inevitably increase the number of copying of this font, which will facilitate the formation of a deeper memory effect and deepen students' in-depth understanding of this font.

The reason why I chose Kuang Cao style font is: Cursive style is the most abstract calligraphy style in Chinese calligraphy. Chinese cursive script has many classification methods in Chinese calligraphy research, including four types, three types, and two types. However, no matter

which classification method is used, the style of crazy cursive is considered to be the most artistic, personalized and creative cursive script. (Xu, 1995). Crazy cursive style is a script that strongly pursues variability and exaggeration on the basis of basically following the cursive script. Structural dismemberment of strokes not only simplifies the shape, but also deforms and proliferates (Liang, 2019). Therefore, it can be better combined with abstract art language courses.

The new Chinese calligraphy pedagogy established by my institute suggests choosing artist Zhang Xu as the research object. The reason for this suggestion comes from the following reasons.

In the history of calligraphy in the Tang Dynasty, Zhang Xu's cursive script is a peak of calligraphy practice and the inventor of the Kuang Cao style (W. Wang, 2020). In other words, he, like Kandinsky, is the pioneer of a new abstract style. Since the Tang Dynasty, there have been many records about Zhang Xu in the past, but the results mainly focus on Zhang Xu's birth and death time, artistic characteristics, and crazy personality, and most of them put Zhang Xu in a big theme. For example, written by Wo Xinghua, *History of Chinese Calligraphy* published by Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House in 2019, and *History of Chinese Calligraphy* published by Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Publishing House in 2021. These works seldom get involved in the systematic research on the generation of cursive script and its artistic achievements. Ancient calligraphy works involving Zhang Xu mainly include Zhang Huaicui's "Shu Duan", Dou Quan's *Shu Shu Fu*, Zhu Changwen's *Xu Shu Duan*, Zhang Yanyuan's *Li Dai Ming Hua Ji*, and Lu Xie's *Lin Chi Miao Kuai* and so on. Most of them are a brief commentary on Zhang Xu's exquisite calligraphy, which is relatively short. In addition, the article *Shu Zhang Chang Shi Bi Fa Shi Er Yi* by Yan Zhenqing, a famous Tang dynasty artist, is an article describing Yan Zhenqing's advice to teacher Zhang Xu's brushwork. This has a certain historical value for the study of Zhang Xu's calligraphic aesthetics, but it mostly introduces Zhang Xu's calligraphic thoughts at the technical level. The most representative researches on Zhang Xu in contemporary calligraphy are Zhu Guantian's *Tang Dynasty Calligraphy Textual Research and Comment*, *Chinese Calligraphy History-Sui, Tang and Five Dynasties Volume*. These works have a dedicated section discussing Zhang Xu's calligraphy, mostly from the perspective of historiography, and more systematic textual research on Zhang Xu's birth and death years, and the spread of calligraphy. These works do not involve the reasons for the generation of Zhang Xu's Kuang Cao style and its influence. At the same time, the famous painter Mr. Xiong Bingming wrote the French version of Zhang Xu and Kuang Cao while studying in France, which classified Zhang Xu as a romantic artist who expresses his personality. He summarized Zhang Xu's creation of Chinese calligraphy into two characteristics: wine and cursive performance. He linked wine and Zhang Xu's performance as two indispensable key factors in Zhang Xu's cursive script. This point of view opens a new perspective for Zhang Xu's cursive characteristics research. From previous studies of Zhang Xu, we can know that Chinese calligraphy circles are very affirmative of Zhang Xu's artistic achievements. But as far as the current research is concerned, there is no systematic teaching method combining Zhang Xu's font style with Western abstraction. Zhang Xu's characteristic is his handwriting. His brushwork is mainly Zhuan Liu and Jiao Zhuan, with rich variations and strong sense of power (Hua, 2021). The reason for choosing Zhang Xu's font in this study is to take into account the factor of the conversion rate between Chinese calligraphy technology and Western painting technology. The tools of Chinese calligraphy are Chinese brush and Chinese rice paper. The tools of Western painting are mostly square pen and watercolor paper. They have many differences in the shape of the tool, the amount of color, the supporting body, and the shape of the hand holding the pen. Zhang Xu's cursive script is dominated by the center, with obvious changes in line thickness, and relatively large changes in the contrast between the lightness and heaviness of the pen. This characteristic means that Zhang Xu's technique is not as dependent on the nib control of

Chinese brush pens like other calligraphers. The contact area of the brush center and the square-tip pen on the paper is similar. This feature means that Zhang Xu's style of brushwork can have a higher conversion rate of Western painting techniques.

The new Chinese calligraphy pedagogy created by our institute suggests choosing "Gu Shi Si Tie" by Zhang Xu as the research object. The reason for this suggestion comes from the following reasons. Figure 1 The whole picture of "Gu Shi Si Tie".



**Figure 1.** Gu Shi Si Tie

Regarding Zhang Xu's research, contemporary scholar Zhu Guantian has done a lot of textual research on Zhang Xu's life and works, and published related Zhang Xu's books "Tang Dynasty Zhang Xu Chuan Bi Zhu", "Tang Dynasty Calligraphy Textual Research and Criticism" and "Zhang Xu Kao". Mr. Zhu Guantian conducted research to prove Zhang Xu's birth and death years mainly from the perspective of special history. In fact, because of the incompleteness of early documents and works, our current understanding of Zhang Xu tends to be more conceptual and symbolic. The reason for this is that Zhang Xu's real works are limited, there are many fake works, and there are too many controversial works. For example, "Du Tong Tie", "Qian Zi Wen" and "Zi Yan Tie", which belonged to him for a long time, have been proved to be fake works of the Song Dynasty (Cai, 2013). At the 8th Symposium on Calligraphy in China, an essay by Mr. Qiu Caizhen, Gu Shi Si Tie and the Concept of Zhang Xu from the Late Ming Connoisseurs brought us a new perspective on Zhang Xu. The article takes Gu Shi Si Tie as the starting point, and matches the generation process and method of those controversial works under Zhang Xu's name, and then reveals the concept of Zhang Xu's works gradually established in the long history of calligraphy. Zhang Xu's Gu Shi Si Tie as we now know it was first recorded in Xuan He Shu Pu, but it is not attributed to Zhang Xu's name. Its copyright belongs to Xie Lingyun. In the 30th year of Wanli in the Ming Dynasty in China, the famous critic Dong Qichang had the honor to see Gu Shi Si Tie. He identified Zhang Xu's original works based on the works Lang Guan Shi Bi Ji, Wan Ling Tie and Yan Tiao Tie that he had seen. He used the method of style description and wrote the comment on the left side of Gu Shi Si Tie. The red box in Figure 2 shows the location of Dong Qichang's appraisal in Gu Shi Si Tie. Figure 3 is an enlarged view of Dong Qichang's appraisal of the work.



**Figure 2.** The location of Dong Qichang's appraisal in Gu Shi Si Tie

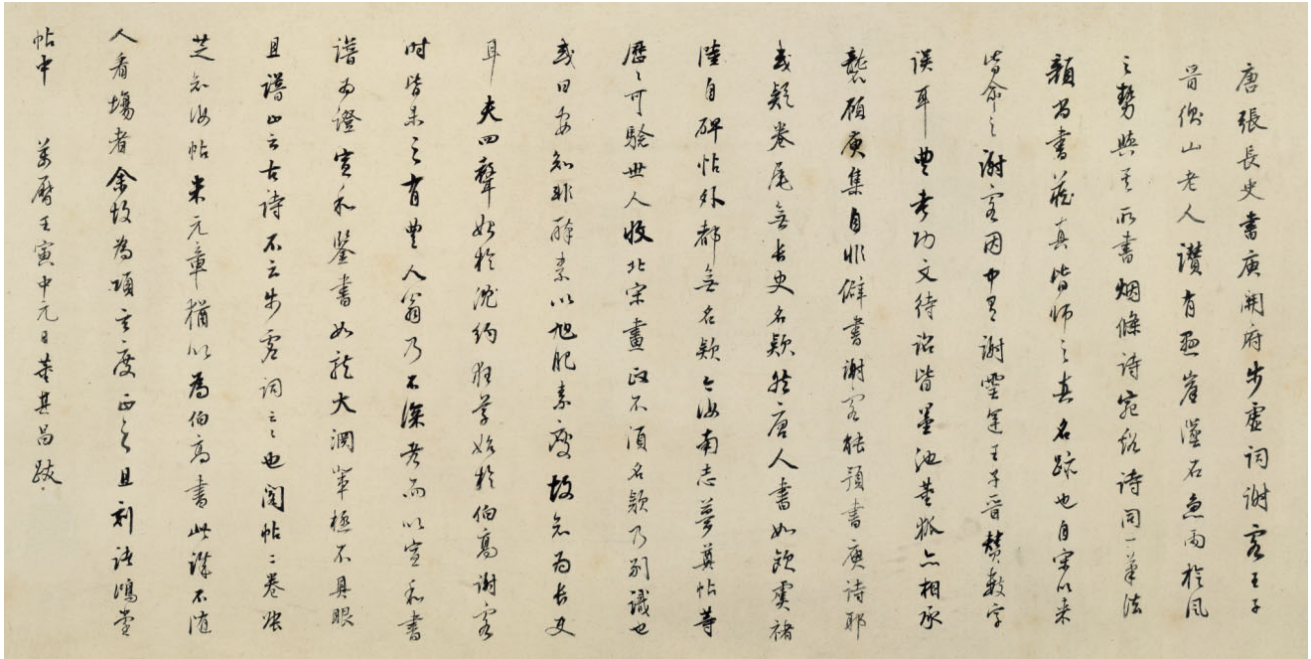


Figure 3. Dong Qichang's appraisal of Gu Shi Si Tie

This means that "Gu Shi Si Tie" is Zhang Xu's most important authentic so far. Therefore, this research suggests choosing Zhang Xu's "Gu Shi Si Tie" as the only material for this training unit. Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7 are the 4 parts used in the teaching of Gu Shi Si Tie, each of which will be integrated with Kandinsky's teaching method to different degrees.

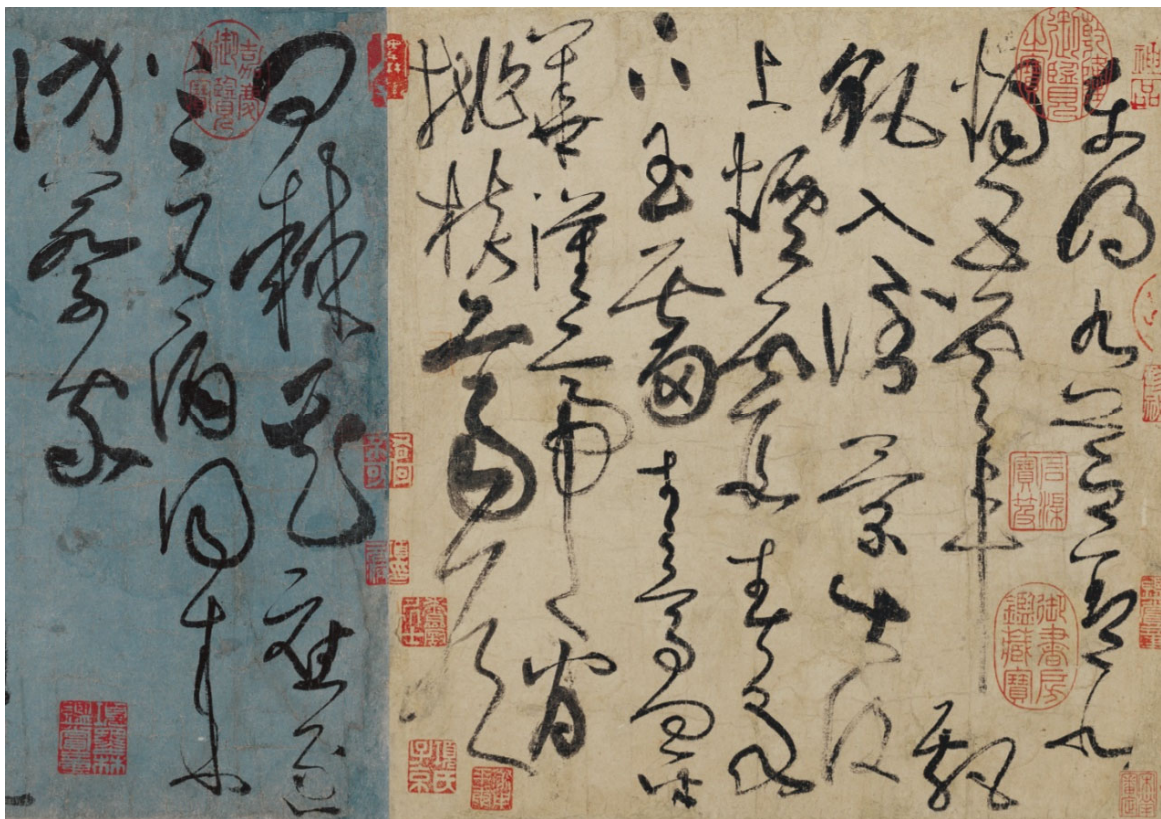


Figure 4. The first part of Gu Shi Si Tie

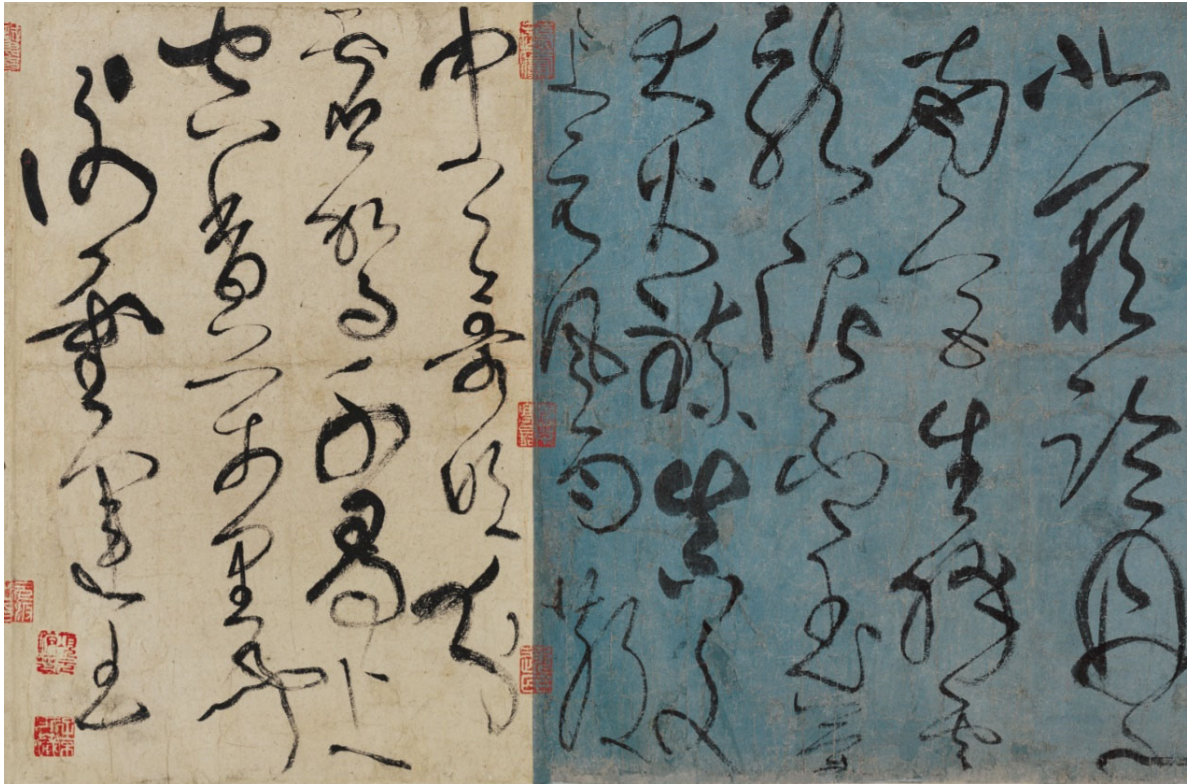


Figure 5. The second part of Gu Shi Si Tie

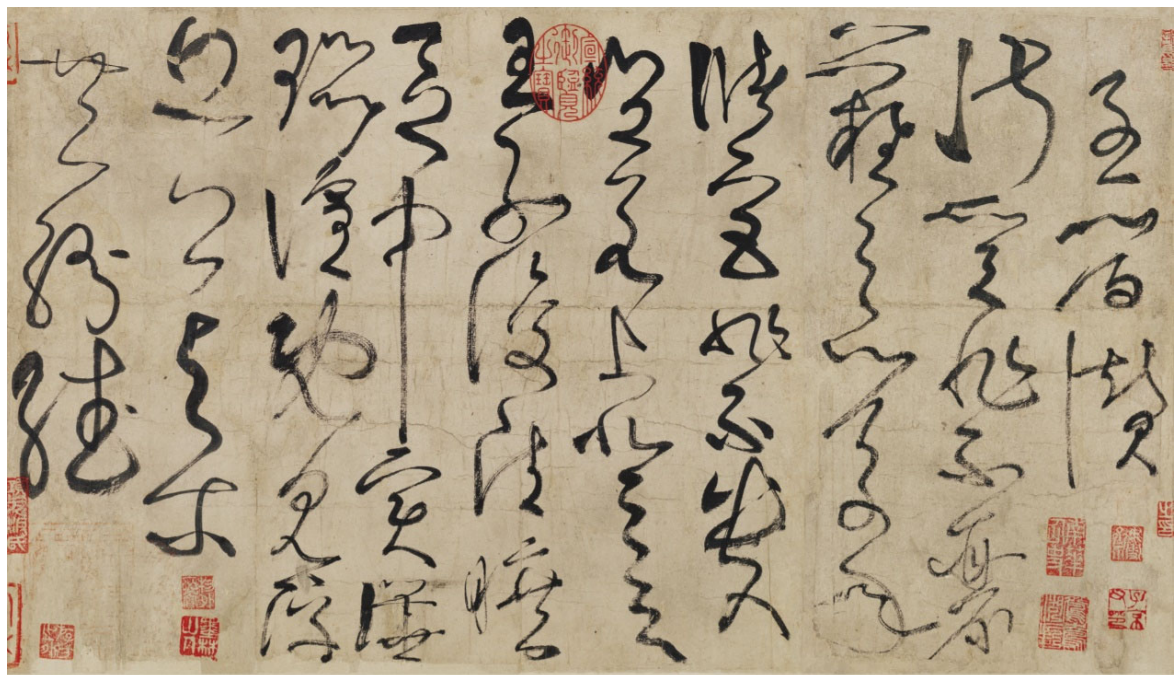


Figure 6. The third part of Gu Shi Si Tie



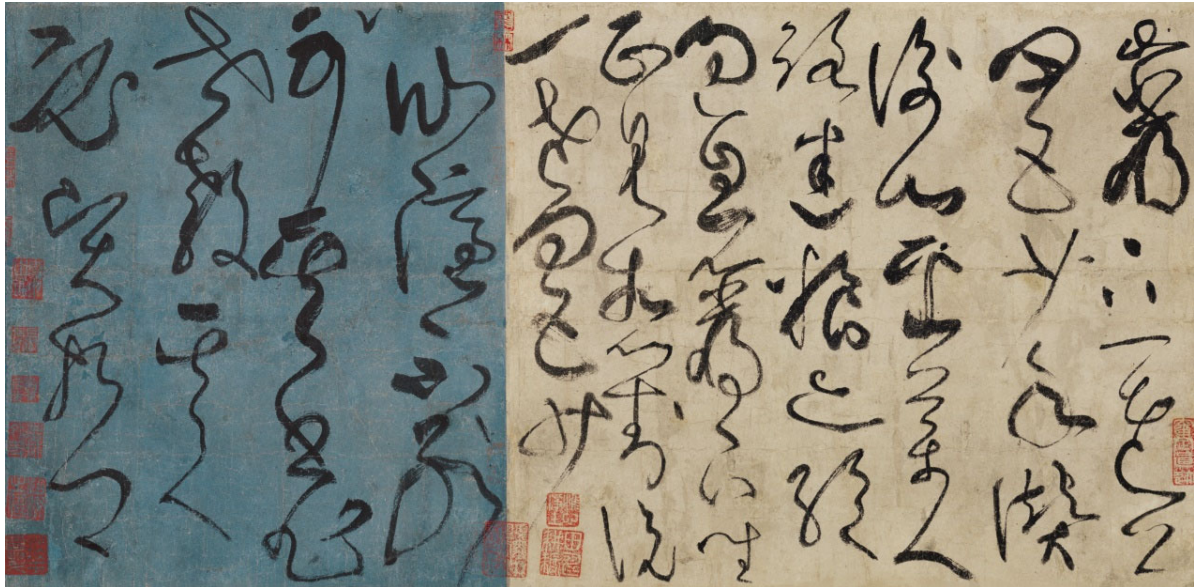


Figure 7. The fourth part of Gu Shi Si Tie

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, this research analyzes the necessity and requirements of the reform of abstract sketch module in the abstract art language course from the aspect of national policy, and analyzes the problems faced by this teaching module. It mainly includes the characteristics and possible shortcomings of the three popular teaching modes in China at this stage of the abstract sketch module in the abstract art language course. In response to these shortcomings, this study puts forward a series of related suggestions and measures. This research suggests using the 111 module of the New Chinese Calligraphy Teaching Method I created in the abstract sketching module. This can streamline the font training of the traditional Chinese calligraphy teaching method at this stage, and at the same time can enhance the students' understanding of abstract artistic language. Through this training, this research believes that it not only retains the advantages of the traditional teaching method, but also can solve the problems that may exist in the traditional teaching method.

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