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Original Research Article

A Genealogical Study of Creativity in Calligraphy: Baba Shah Isfahani's Perspective

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Abstract

Introduction: Baba Shah Isfahani, in his most comprehensive work "Adab al-Mashq", considers the ultimate goal of a calligrapher to achieve purity and dignity in calligraphic works. In his view, what liberates the calligrapher from repetitive exercises and imitative copying of the masters' lines is the imaginary practice. This research, with an introspective approach, meaning an inward look at details and finding the power of creative combination, has analyzed this subject. The aim is to address the issue of the lack of enthusiasm for creativity in calligraphy, in order to reject mere copying and unreflective repetition of the works of the ancients, and to consider a path for innovation and creative creation in calligraphy. The main question is: "What does the element of creativity in calligraphy, according to Baba Shah Isfahani, encompass?"

Research Method: This study, written in a descriptive-analytical style, is qualitative. The collection of relevant data has also been conducted through library research.

Findings: The research shows that the art of calligraphy draws on creativity in its instructions and has gradually manifested in the styles and skills of masters over time. The creativity-centered instructions of calligraphers have manifested in their written texts. Preventing the cultivation of imitators of calligraphy techniques is observed in these texts.

Conclusion: By examining Baba Shah Isfahani's views on creativity and the rules and teachings of calligraphy, especially the writing style and composition, the researcher demonstrates that, by expanding Baba Shah Isfahani's educational method, the element of creativity can be emphasized and rethought in traditional calligraphy. Baba Shah Isfahani's method of nurturing creativity begins with the practice of imaginary practices and manifests in diverse, creative forms.

Keywords

Calligraphy, Creativity, Adab al-Mashq of Baba Shah Isfahani, Imaginary Practice

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Introduction and Problem Definition

Traditional calligraphy instruction is based on the master-apprentice system. This method, from a cultural perspective, was influenced by the master-disciple model during the peak of Sufi discourse, which dominated social and educational relations. The texts of etiquette manuals and admonition books expanded this tradition across various aspects of culture until the end of the traditional era, making it pervasive across different cultural and traditional spheres. The instructions were shaped by the learner's presence in the master's studio, and the master, who had learned his teachings and experiences in a traditional, sequential, and oral manner, passed them on to his learners in calligraphy workshops. In this method, the learner learned calligraphy under the master's guidance through three traditional practices described in the book «Adab al-Mashq» by Baba Shah Isfahani. Learners received this training through workshops and interaction with the master, gaining practical experience. The word «practice (Mashq)», which refers to experiencing, also reminds one of the learner's journey and conduct. However, the empirical foundation of the traditional method of teaching calligraphy is imaginary practice. What has been said reflects the traditional process of teaching art, especially calligraphy, in Iranian culture; a process clearly outlined in ethical texts that detail the path to creativity and the learner's journey to mastery. Additionally, the use of creative opening strategies in traditional art begins with initial transformations and tendencies toward a traditional perspective, which are linked to imaginary practice and were practically implemented in traditional calligraphy workshops. The aim of this article is to examine the role of creativity in the calligraphy instructions as an educational tool for nurturing creative artists and preventing imitative behavior. Furthermore, the article seeks to partially fill the existing research gap by addressing the topic of creativity in calligraphy and providing a foundation for developing a scientific and critical perspective on traditional art. Therefore, the author intends to examine creativity in calligraphy through a research-oriented approach, drawing on one of the most important educational texts in this field. In this internal perspective, attention is given to the components and internal details of calligraphy to examine the factors and elements that generate creativity, as described in the instructional texts of Adab al-Mashq, by focusing on «imaginary practice», because this type of exercise, which involves incorporating the element of imagination into calligraphy practice, is important for initiating innovative thinking in learner instruction. Based on this, the research questions are formulated as follows: «With an internal perspective on the rules of calligraphy, what achievements can be obtained for identifying the element of creativity? What is the position of these creative elements in calligraphic works? And what impact do traditional instructions have on the formation of creativity in calligraphy works?»

Research Method

The approach of this research is qualitative, and the necessary data and materials have been collected through library methods. In this article's qualitative approach, the research is based on data derived from existing experiences through an inductive method and the study and analysis of text-centered materials. The statistical population of this research includes the texts of Adab al-Mashq, from the Herat School period to the end of the Qajar era, encompassing lines and published works of calligraphy in the conventional forms of line writing (Satr-nevisi), Chalipa, Siahmashq, and composite Muraqqaat, which have been examined on a case-by-case basis. The analysis method also used a qualitative approach based on content analysis.

Research Background

Calligraphy is a traditional art deeply connected to Persian language and literature, striving to adapt to the modern world with dynamism and creativity, and not to fall behind. From this perspective, for calligraphy to remain relevant and generate enthusiasm among its audience, it must be characterized by creativity, innovation in the field, flexibility, and adaptability, and, in terms of its well-crafted structure and form, it should be able to shape the discourse of its time. In this regard, due to the lack of significant resources on creativity and its manifestation in calligraphy, we will suffice with the few available materials and address topics related to creativity and the grounds for its occurrence. «Ajand» (2006) in the research titled «The Traditional Master-Apprentice System in Iran» explains the traditional method of teaching painting, considering the prevailing religious culture in Iranian society, the master-apprentice tradition, and artistic family lineages. A method that, before the establishment of the Kamel-ol-Molk School of Fine Arts, as a modern school, was centered around the master. Additionally, «Ghelichkhani» (2007) in the book «Treatises on Calligraphy and Related Arts» includes the texts Adab al-Khatt and Adab al-Mashq, which encompass the written teachings of previous periods of calligraphy. «Baba Shah Isfahani» (2007) demonstrates, in his «Adab al-Mashq», methods for escaping the monotonous repetition of calligraphy. He notes that he is an artist, like a singer, who needs to achieve musical diversity to avoid boring his audience. Additionally, «Sadri» (2010) in a study titled «The System of Education in Calligraphy» states that the art of calligraphy has developed in the light of traditions stemming from religious and ethical teachings. Elements such as moral education, mutual rights of the teacher and learner, and instructional methods, including theoretical, pen, and imaginary practices, with their specific characteristics and conditions, have influenced the continuity and evolution of calligraphy. From another perspective, «Ravanjo» (2015) in the research «Instruction of Calligraphy as the Complete Version of Traditional Art Instruction», considers traditional calligraphy education, based on the master-apprentice method, various exercises, and the unparalleled guidance of the master, as the foundation of the traditional instructional system. The author attempts to show that the teaching of calligraphy should not be considered merely an example of art instruction, but rather a complete traditional education in the visual arts. Additionally, «Ravanjoo» (2023) in another study titled «A Historical Research to Retrieve Iranian Cultural Identity in Creating and Expanding Nastaliq Calligraphy», discusses seven historical and creative steps from an external perspective, including the invention of Nastaliq by Mir Ali Tabrizi in the Herat School, its establishment by Mir Emad, the writing of the most important calligraphy manual by Baba Shah Isfahani during the Safavid era, the preparation for lithographic printing by Master Mohammad Reza Kalleh, the invention of artistic Siahmashq by Mirza Gholamreza Isfahani during the Qajar period, the establishment of the Iranian Calligraphers Association, and the entry of calligraphy into modern art during the second Pahlavi era. He points to the flourishing of Iranian calligraphy under the shadow of Persian literature and shows that the growth and expansion of Persian literature were also made possible by the creative flourishing of calligraphy. «Razavifard and Pourmand» (2017) also addressed the important topic of the styles of calligraphy among the early masters of Nastaliq in their research titled «Analysis and Examination of the Nastaliq Calligraphy Style of the Old Masters». The authors, in their study, mention four prominent styles in Nastaliq that can be explained from a geometric perspective and based on the principles of visual literacy, with two approaches: the beauty of arrangement and the beauty of formation. Additionally, «Razavifard et al.» (2019) write in an article titled «Analysis of Form and Composition in Nastaliq Script Based on the Principles of Gestalt Theory» that calligraphy, with its geometric characteristics, forms, and unique templates, is intertwined

with the experience of contemporary modern art. They examine the proportions and compositions of Nastaliq script, based on the Gestalt perception process, and attempt to analyze three forms of Nastaliq calligraphy, namely, «Chalipa, Siahmashq», and «Qit'ah», using Gestalt principles. In this context, «Shirbacheh and Haqani» (2024) in the book entitled «The Evolution History of the Nastaliq Script» has addressed the emergence, formal evolution, and aesthetics of the Nastaliq script. By reviewing the background and examining the written educational texts of calligraphy masters, it can be concluded that no article or book specifically addressing the element of creativity in the tradition of calligraphy has been found. This article examines this vital element in the instruction of calligraphy.

The Necessity of Creativity in the Art of Calligraphy

The art of calligraphy in the traditional master-apprentice instruction system begins with being captivated by the beauty of calligraphic displays and observing calligraphic works through theoretical practice. The master guides the learner to see and learn from the works of calligraphers whose style aligns with his own; then, through theoretical (visual) practice, the learner realizes what instructions he needs to acquire. At this stage, the learner places themselves in the position of the calligrapher and, by empathizing with the calligrapher, mentally assumes the role of the writer. After this, he practices with the master's model and continues until the letters and calligraphic compositions become second nature to him, enabling him to write calligraphic forms such as «Satr», «Chalipa, Murraqqa», and «Qit'ah» with skill and mastery. In these theoretical and pen practices, the learner only becomes a follower and imitator through practice, repetition, and imitation, with the instructor playing a guiding role at all stages. What is absent in the general instructions of calligraphy is the learning of creativity and the creation of innovative works; a matter that should be included by the master in the learner's exercises, so that the path to innovation and originality becomes clear to them. Baba Shah Isfahani has compiled a collection of technical points on the art of calligraphy, the result of the synthesis of instructional texts by previous calligraphers, in his «Adab al-Mashq». Baba Shah Isfahani wrote the last and most complete «Adab al-Mashq» on the etiquette of writing Nastaliq script. ««Adab al-Mashq» by Baba Shah Isfahani presents key points on the structure and cohesion of the principles and rules of beautiful writing, as well as on the observance of ethical principles and the expression of the allure of calligraphy» (Ravanjo, 2023). He considers the final stage of traditional student training to be «imaginary practice», where the learner, having outgrown the initial calligraphy instructions and successfully completed the basic theoretical and pen practices, should be guided to design new, complex compositions and create innovative spaces. With this method, the groundwork is laid for the lines that embody dignity and purity to become pleasing. Baba Shah believes in his «Adab al-Mashq» that the element of creativity prevents calligraphy from becoming mindless: «However, imaginary practice is when the scribe writes, not by copying, but by referring to the strength of his own nature and writing down whatever composition occurs; and the benefit of this practice is that it makes the scribe possessive of his craft. When this practice becomes abundant and the pen practice prevails, writing becomes mindless; and if someone becomes accustomed to pen practice and avoids imaginary practice, he becomes unskilled, like a reader who learns from others' compositions but cannot create his own, and in pen practice, being possessive is not permissible» (Baba Shah Isfahani, 2007, 153). Additionally, the learners carefully apply their teachings to step into the realm of creativity. «In the imaginary practice, where the master assigns the design and execution to the student, the apprentice independently and creatively composes the arrangement, proportion, base, and other rules, and also creates a composition based on their learnings and practices an imaginary sentence. At this stage, the

learners execute everything they have learned; that is, they design any composition they deem appropriate and strive to incorporate all the rules they have learned from the instructor and theoretical and pen practices into their work, ensuring that they independently organize the components of the teachings received from the teacher» (Ravanjo, 2015). However, the learner's self-sufficiency in designing professional compositions and the confidence gained from the instructor may not lead to the enhancement of the learner's creative ability, and they might resort to producing repetitive works. Therefore, it is essential for the master to convey the methods of creating innovative works to the learner, if he is aware of them himself; otherwise, a learner who follows the master will become a mere imitator. Next, the creative composition in line writing (Satr nevisi) and the creation of Chalipa (Fig. 1) enter a more complex stage, where attention to proportion, balance, and the composition of elongated, curved, and flat letters becomes particularly important. Here, the practice of creative writing exercises in the calligraphic «Chalipa» and script begins with mastery of line writing (Satr nevisi) (Fig. 2), and the master's step-by-step guidance plays a fundamental role in this journey.

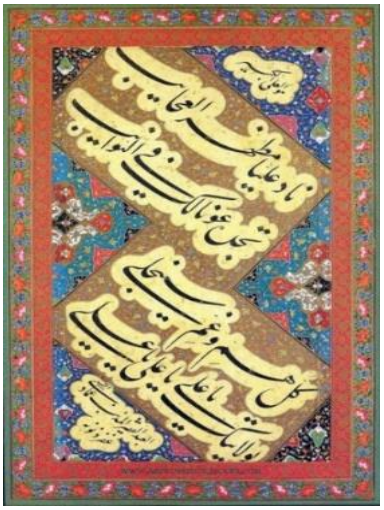


Fig 1. The Chalipa of Nadi-Ali, by Mir Emad Seyfi Qazvini. Source: Miremad, 2026.



Fig 2. Line Writing (Satr Nevisi), by Seyyed Hossein Mirkhani. Source: Mirkhani, 2026.

Preventing Repetition and Imitation

Baba Shah Isfahani, with the concept of «Imaginary Practice» in the final stage of calligraphy training, signifies the beginning of the path to creative calligraphy and independence in design thinking and artistic work. To explain this concept, he brings up the example of a singer who performs others' compositions, where all the elements are already prepared, imitatively, but does not create an independent work, and does not attain the status of an original artist. The placement of imaginary practice in the final stage of instruction, after a period of repetitive and imitative teachings, marks the end of the learner's stagnation and repetition. Thus, the master opens a new and creative path for the student, allowing them to not only utilize their eyes and hands but also their now-awakened artistic thought. They employ their theoretical teachings and pen practice as primary tools to foster creativity and produce fresh, original works. Because «not everyone perceives this quality [creativity] in handwriting, even tho they observe it; just as although everyone saw Leila, no one else saw what Majnun saw» (Baba Shah Isfahani, 2007, 225).

The Concepts of Creativity and Its Lineage in Calligraphy

«Erlhoff and Marshall» write in the entry on «Creativity» in the Design Encyclopedia: «Creativity is a complex and highly controversial term and refers to the process of engaging in creative work. This term generally refers to a method or activity that is distinct from overtly rational, scientific, methodological, or critical activities. Terms such as creative arts and creative writing are generally used to describe works that, as much as they benefit from analysis, also possess imagination, and works that are more inventive and original rather than derived from something else» (Erlhoff & Marshall, 2022, 188). From the definition of creativity in the Design Encyclopedia, it can be inferred that two supra-rational characteristics, meaning imaginative and original (non-imitative), can also be enlightening in calligraphy. Also, «Kahvand» describes creativity in graphic design as follows: «Creativity is considered the invention or inclination toward anything new, a product, a solution, an artwork, a literary work, a joke, etc., that has value (to be presented). «Valuable» can be defined in various ways. In the above definition, innovation and the creation of anything new, provided it is valuable, are introduced as the criteria for being creative». He continues, «The tone and rhythm of creativity can vary greatly depending on the factors, characteristics, and context of each work. It can sometimes be very calm, slow, and even invisible, and at other times very prominent, attention-grabbing, and loud, and of course unpredictable. However, the imposition of a clichéd concept of creativity as a shocking and inverted image will always mislead us in recognizing and identifying design works. Therefore, problem-solving at its best (in graphic design) can lead to creativity, or solving a problem in a creative way can result in creating an appropriate solution for conveying meaning or message» (Kahvand, 2013, 67). As mentioned, the concept of creativity in calligraphy also encompasses a steadfast quality in the serious execution of art and a quality beyond mere detailed reasoning, such that the artist possesses an inventive nature, avoids imitation, and the artist's creation seeks to open a new realm in art and find the desired visual solution. It seems that «Ibn Muqla Shirazi» is a suitable example for discussing creativity. With a creative and innovative act, he made the jumbled, chaotic, and illegible early Kufic script readable and beautified it by introducing three structural reforms. 1. He gave the letters a geometric order and a baseline. 2. For the size of each letter and word, he set the distances and determined their specific positions and forms by using the dot as a standard (the same writing pen). 3. To beautify and make the letters visually appealing, he established rules that provided a suitable method for calligraphers, facilitating the achievement of beautiful forms in writing through instruction (the twelve rules). Ibn Muqla, by studying the tangled, chaotic, and illegible early Kufic scripts and recognizing their numerous deficiencies, set out to address the problem of illegibility and unsightliness. He meticulously examined the form of the letters, bringing them closer to the geometry of specific shapes (circles, surfaces, and lines) and aligning them along a linear axis (the baseline), thereby overcoming this significant challenge. Geometry and the tendencies of geometric structure were a knowledge that, simultaneously with him, transformed the Islamic world through the intellectual actions and rational pursuits of the Ikhwan al-Safa, inspired by the teachings of Greek philosophers. Ibn Muqla's redesign was such that «if we look at calligraphy without the above interpretations, the characteristic of moving toward discovering the ultimate harmony between components and the evolution of geometric form places the calligrapher in the service of esthetic qualities such as grandeur, dynamism, and the creation of movement and a desire for liberation» (Hashemi Nejad, 2005). At the same time as Ibn Muqla Shirazi in the 4th century A.H., «Bayt al-Hikmah» was also translating scientific texts, including Iranian-Pahlavi, Greek, and Sogdian writings, into Arabic to be used by the learned, thinkers, and philosophers of the Islamic community during the

Abbasid period. Ibn Muqla, through the establishment of a curriculum and rules of calligraphy, as well as determining the standard size of letters, brought order, readability, and beauty to the script by applying geometry and proportion to the letters with the same pen he used for writing, including the placement of diacritics on letters and words. The authors of the Design Encyclopedia also believe that creativity is a quality that manifests itself in the work process. It becomes apparent when individuals engaged in a task demonstrate skills, flexibility, and abilities that yield a new perspective on that task. They can integrate imagination with existing knowledge to achieve a completely original and unique understanding (Erlhoff & Marshall, 2022, 188-189). As another historical example, one can refer to the skilled hand and fluid imagination of Mirza Gholamreza Isfahani, who, through repetition, practice, and contemplation of the aesthetic nature of calligraphy, transitioned from the conventional educational practice of black script to a new discovery, namely the application of artistic and authentic black scripts.

Searching for Creativity With a Look at the Text of Adab al-Mashq by Baba Shah Isfahani

1. Imaginary Practice: Looking from within at the fundamental components of calligraphy, it examines the internal elements that foster creativity among artists in this field. The components and elements that generate creativity, as mentioned in «Adab al-Mashq» by Baba Shah Isfahani, must be analyzed in detail. «Imaginary practice» has that vital element for fostering creativity in calligraphy, which is assigned by the master to the learner in exercises, so that the student gradually becomes familiar with designing compositions, placing elongated strokes, and circles in accordance with the literary meaning of the sentence in the line, and gains experience. In this practice, the master monitors the individual elements within the framework of a sentence and line in the learner's work and establishes the sentence as the foundation of the line. Then, in his instruction, he makes the line the basis for writing calligraphy, Chalipa, Murraqqa, and Qit'ah, with a touch of imaginative practice. The learner utilizes imagination-driven practice within the framework of traditional calligraphy principles to design compositions. To create innovative and creative works while maintaining the balance and proportion of the text with the style of writing (Table 1).

Table 1. Searching for Creativity in Calligraphy with a Focus on Calligraphic Texts. Source: Author.

Calligraphy Instructional Texts	Creativity in Calligraphy Texts	Creativity in Instruction	Creativity in the Art of Calligraphy (Style)	Composition	Elements and Compounds
The Treatise of Sirat al-Sutur Sultan Ali Mashhadi	In «Sirat al-Sutur», Sultan Ali Mashhadi encourages the leraners to create works characterized by the quality of readable writing and innovation in calligraphy.	According to the instructions of Sultan Ali Mashhadi, the knowledgeable teacher is obliged to encourage the learners to innovate, as per the teachings of the Sirat al-Sutur.	Familiarity with the styles of calligraphic writing (formats such as Chalipa, Qit'a, Murrqqa, etc.) and aesthetic writing (calligraphy and methods accompanying calligraphy in the art of bookdesign).	The application of balance and harmony in traditional calligraphy by encouraging learners to facilitate the readability and cohesion of letters and words.	Elements and components in writing words, sentences, and line formation in all formats, especially in writing, should aid readability.

Calligraphy Instructional Texts	Creativity in Calligraphy Texts	Creativity in Instruction	Creativity in the Art of Calligraphy (Style)	Composition	Elements and Compounds
The Treatise on Adab al-Mashq Baba Shah Isfahani	In the text of Adab al-Mashq by Baba Shah Isfahani, it discusses imaginary practice and encourages the learner's independence in creating innovative compositions, without referring to theoretical practice from non-traditional masters.	The instruction method of the master, based on the guidance of Baba Shah Isfahani, is obligated to prevent the learner from becoming confused with theoretical practices and also obligated to practice precise imaginary exercises under supervision.	Methods and styles of writing single letters and word combinations, including pen placement techniques, ink application, determining the angle of the pen nib, and the method of cutting the calligraphy pen.	The application of balance and harmony in traditional calligraphy through the arrangement of elongations, circles, the joining of letters and words, and the regulation of the baseline, following the recommendations of Baba Shah Isfahani in his «Adab al-Mashq».	The emphasis of Baba Shah Isfahani on balance and eye-catching lines (illuminating the viewer's eye) is in terms of beauty and creativity.
Instructional texts, lectures, interviews, and independent calligraphers and masters of the association	The calligraphy masters of the Calligraphers' Association have published articles on the excellence of formation and composition in calligraphy, discussing the creation of calligraphic works.	Observing the principles of excellence of formation and composition in creating a calligraphy piece can manifest at the level of details, including individual elements, combinations, and overall composition.	Four styles among traditional calligraphers in the creative rendering of letters and compositions have been identified within the Calligraphers" Association, which are sometimes mistakenly referred to as calligraphy styles.	Following the ongoing discussion about the placement of elongated characters, joined-up letters, and circles in lines, Chalipa and lines of writing, articles have been published by the masters of the Calligraphers' Association.	In the texts of the masters of the Calligraphers' Association, a blend of beautiful writing and balance is observed; both in the writing of individual letters and in the compositions and arrangement of elongated strokes and joined-up letters.

2. Creativity in Maintaining Excellence of Formation and Composition: Composition in calligraphy is considered a type of the principle of good arrangement and determines the placement of words, sentences, and lines in writing. It is the moderate and harmonious blending of letters, words, sentences, lines, two lines, and more, as well as the overall good condition of them in total, in such a way that it pleases the audience's taste and direct inclination (Fazaeli, 2011, 89). Baba Shah Isfahani also categorized composition into several stages and considered composition the first technical educational component of calligraphy: Composition is divided into two types: «partial and complete. The complete type is when several single or compound letters, or a combination of both, are composed to form a line in a way that pleases the refined taste». He continues by emphasizing the concept

of «elongation», providing examples and instructions regarding the placement of length in composition (Baba Shah Isfahani, 2007, 18-19). «Excellence of arrangement» is also intertwined with the concept of «composition» and refers to the placement of letters and words in their best positions, so that the overall structure of the work is in its most beautiful and pleasing state. In adhering to the principle of «Excellence of composition», the artist must practice utmost precision in executing the components and connections within sentences and lines, paying attention to the aesthetics of details, and carry this out according to the twelve principles of calligraphy. In adhering to the non-repetitive beauty of arrangement, the calligrapher must adjust the execution of words and phrases within the sentence structure, the role of the sentence in the line, and the position of the line in the text, in a manner appropriate to the literary text. In this process, they should avoid mere imitation and demonstrate artistic creativity.

3. Creativity in Creating Calligraphy Styles: Each calligraphy master possesses technical skills in executing individual letters and combinations, as well as in writing sentences, lines, and texts. These calligraphy skills are acquired through threefold practice. In the history of calligraphy, masters such as Sultan Ali Mashhadi, Mir Ali Heravi, Mir Emad Seifi Qazvini, Shafiee, Mohammad Reza Kalleh, Darvish Abdolmajid Taleghani, Ali Akbar Golestaneh, Mirza Gholam Reza Isfahani, Emad Al-Ketab, Ali Akbar Kaveh, Akhoun, and Amir Khani are recognized as the possessors of distinctive writing styles and special skills. The type of writing, the execution of details, and the composition in various calligraphic forms are indicative of each master's style and skill. The master's style includes his outstanding ability to write single letters and words, compose sentences, lines, and other calligraphic forms. Furthermore, a master calligrapher must also be proficient in writing common forms such as script, calligraphic panels, line writing, blackboard exercises, pieces, anthologies, inscriptions, and similar styles. In Table 1, components are listed that, in calligraphy, are considered important elements when viewed from an internal perspective of the work, with attention to adherence to rules and precise execution of details.

4. A Perspective on Adapting to the Emerging Printing and Publishing Industry: Mirza Mohammad Reza Kallhor's creative work in preventing the dropping of letters and words in the Nastaliq script during the printing process became evident. He achieved his personal style by altering the size of the stretches and circles; a style that placed his name among the prominent and enduring Nastaliq calligraphers. Another example of structural transformation in calligraphy is the unique and influential perspective of Mirza Mohammad Reza Kalhor in calligraphy. He shortened a fraction of the flat and elongated letters while preserving all their features and proportions to prevent smudging and wear in lithographic printing, which could make the text unreadable, and to maintain the inherent beauty of Nastaliq calligraphy. His goal was to preserve the invaluable heritage of Nastaliq at the critical juncture of adopting modern, newly emerging printing and publishing presses. He also mastered the techniques of page layout and the style of writing for newspapers, books, and travelogues during the Qajar period, adapting the art of calligraphy to the requirements of lithographic printing (Fig. 3). Therefore, Kalhor's calligraphic style was considered a highly esteemed model for his students. Among his students, one can mention Emad al-Kitab Sifi Qazvini, Mirza Zain al-Abidin Sharifi, Morteza Barghani, Seyyed Hassan, and Seyyed Hossein Mirkhani. His students continued his method of writing Nastaliq with the same characteristics until they eventually joined the widespread teaching of the Calligraphers'Association. «He made significant efforts to adapt the Nastaliq script for use in lithographic printing, ensuring that the Nastaliq script would not be damaged in the lithographic printing process and its readability would not be reduced. He adjusted the pen's angle and placement to 64 degrees, and for printing travelogs and books, he adhered to the

modern method of punctuation at the beginning of sentences and on proper nouns. The characteristics of his writing style in the printing industry include the bold writing of letters and words, the execution of stronger and more pronounced serifs and ligatures in his work, shortening the circles and curves by about one finger's breadth, and the condensed writing of word and letter structures, which are considered his innovations and adaptations to lithographic printing» (Ravanjo, 2023). The creative work of Mirza Mohammad Reza Kalhor in adapting calligraphy to the emerging printing industry was characterized by shortening circles, elongated strokes, and flat letters. His method was very attractive and inspiring for his students during the Qajar and Pahlavi periods.

5. Redefining the Practice Effect into an Independent Artwork: In the composition of calligraphy of Siahmashq, details and innovations have been adhered to, rooted in the fundamental teachings of Baba Shah Isfahani. The creative work of Mirza Gholamreza Isfahani in transforming instructional and practice calligraphy into an independent artistic work has become evident. In this journey, he initially overlooked the text's literary and conceptual aspects and focused solely on the visual design of the form and figure of letters and words in his calligraphy practice. Mirza Gholamreza Isfahani, in designing his Siahmashq, achieved visual appeal and attractiveness by emphasizing density rather than dispersion; that is, he followed the recommendations of Baba Shah Isfahani in Adab al-Mashq, which considered visual appeal as the foundation. The execution of the details of letters and words, beginnings, endings, the intertwining and repetition of circles and stretches, as well as the balance in the positive and negative space of the background, together create a composition that delights the viewers eye. Its allure evokes an insatiable desire to see and enhances the brightness of the gaze. «In SiahMashq writing, which before the invention of Mirza Gholamreza was merely a practice for preparing and adapting the pen, ink, and paper, in his (Mirza Gholamreza Isfahani's) magical hands, it transformed into a pure work of art. A work where the graphic plays in the beauty of composition and formation, dispersion and density, ink and whiteness, framing, direction, and angle of writing. It makes the work appealing to the viewer's eye» (Ravanjo, 2023) (Fig. 4).



Fig 3. Nastaliq script by Mohammad Reza Kalhor, a page from the Travelogue of Khorasan, Qajar period, lithographic print. Source: Kalhor, 2025.

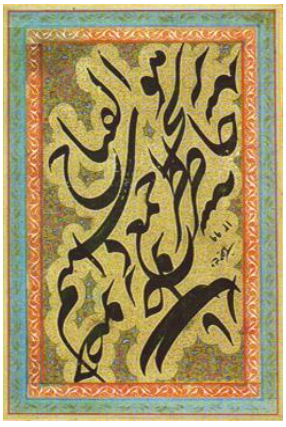


Fig 4. Calligraphy Siahmashq in the handwriting of Mirza Gholamreza Isfahani, Talabian Collection. Source: Esfehani, 2025.

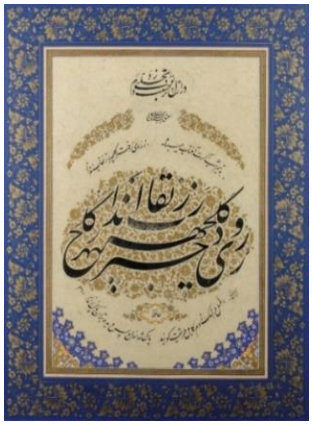


Fig 5. Untitled, ink on cardboard, by Gholamhossein Amirkhani (2018), size 46×57. Source: Amirkhani, 2021.

6. Form-Centered Perspective with Traditional Experiences: The formal works (line-based and piece-based) of Gholamhossein Amirkhani, relying on the harmonization of elongations and circles based on form centrality, bold writing, and centering, are considered

distinct and relatively creative works of the 60s and 70s in the Iranian calendar. Amirkhani, in creating these works, has showcased a unique visual appeal in the most unembellished form of calligraphy, relying on the figures of letters and words and a centric composition. The artist strives to manifest the literary concepts of the written text in the work and to ensure its effective readability. In calligraphic posters, the broad pen takes the main visual role, and two or three types of pens, from the calligraphy pen to the broad pen, with varying thicknesses and shapes, frame the main poem (Fig. 5) (Table 2).

Table 2. The Search for Creativity in Calligraphy through Formal Changes. Source: The author.

Sample Works			
Creative Masters	Mirza Mohammadreza Kalhor	Mirza Gholamreza Isfahani	Gholamhossein Amirkhani
Period	Qajar	Qajar	Islamic Republic
Creative Work in Calligraphy	Preparing the calligraphy structure to prevent shedding in the emerging phenomenon of printing.	Transforming practice siahmashq into artistic siahmashq as an independent art piece	Center-oriented calligraphic compositions (known as calligraphy posters) aim to convey the literary concepts of the written concepts.
Creativity in the Style of Calligraphy	Shortening the elongated strokes to the size of one dong for use in writing texts in the traditional manuscript format.	The removal of the literary aspect in sentences written in the form of siahmashq. He emphasized the structure, composition, and figure of letters and words by removing concepts that led to the readability of the sentence.	Creativity in center-oriented composition, adjusting elongations and compressions, approaching typographic layers, center alignment, broad writing, and avoiding the previous subtleties of Nastaliq.
Composition	In the composition of Chalipa and the innovations he made in writing the book, he acted creatively. He adhered to the prevailing concepts of modern writing form to an acceptable extent. Concepts in modern text layout include right alignment, center alignment, titling, and so on.	Mirza Gholamreza, by employing balance and harmony in traditional calligraphy thru the arrangement of stretches, circles, and the joining of letters and words, and by adjusting the baseline according to traditional recommendations, wrote circles and stretches completely in the style of Mir Emad.	Creativity in center-oriented composition, arranging elongations and compressions, centering, broad writing alongside verses with calligraphy, is written and reaches a unified composition.

Elements and Compounds, Forms in the Work	Elements and compounds in writing words and sentences and forming lines in all formats, especially in writing, should aid readability.	Mirza Gholamreza wrote the elements with complete precision and paid attention to the details of the letters, their excellence of form and composition. He paid attention to the beginning of the movement of letters and the end of the attachment of writing to other letters.	In writing elements and compound words, he uses broad strokes and avoids the previous subtleties of Nastaliq. It also approaches the functionality of a calligraphic panel.

Conclusion

In this article, the overlooked element of creativity in calligraphy was examined with an «internal perspective» on calligraphic texts and by exploring and reading creativity-centered details in the practice manuals. This internal perspective on nurturing creativity is realized through «imaginary practice» as a creativity-enhancing component in the interaction between the master and the student. This type of exercise leads to the composition of sentences, lines, and ultimately writing, resulting from the coordination of several lines into a composition and overall unity, or it takes shape in the form of a Chalipa with its own complexities, where a geometric calculation is used to adjust the balance by utilizing elongated strokes, flat letters, and circles. Creativity in the learner should instill the courage to create, innovate, and venture into new realms. Therefore, it can be accepted that creativity is shaped in a blend of knowledge, awareness of art, technical mastery, practical efficiency, and a vision for the future of the desired art. In calligraphy, due to the discursive power of tradition and the framework it provides for wise sayings and heavenly books, this art has often been regarded as a means of conveying traditional and sacred messages. Therefore, calligraphy was not initially regarded as an artistic element in itself, and the element of beauty was later added to it independently. Additionally, calligraphy was not initially recognized as an independent branch of the visual arts; therefore, discussions of its beauty were not included under the topic of aesthetics. Thus, when a calligrapher adorns a text with their art, the inherent beauty of the text also includes the calligraphy. Gradually, with an awareness of modernist thought and familiarity with philosophical aesthetics, a descriptive literature on innovation and creativity in this field emerged. Therefore, in this traditional art, rooted in Iran's ancient culture and tradition, two perspectives have emerged for examining creativity and creating innovative domains: one in the formal and the other in the conceptual aspects, both within the framework of the dominant discourse of this art. In this research, the details and exercises that the master assigns to guide the learner toward creativity were also examined. These teachings, which guide the learner toward independence, begin with imaginary exercises. In this process, the master sets a path for the learner to gradually step out of the master's shadow and attain the skill of creating innovative compositions on their own. The instructor has examined the intellectual foundations and historical examples of creativity in calligraphy (Table 1). For example, Mohammad Reza Kalhor's work in refining letters and calligraphic forms to preserve them in the lithographic printing process is considered a form of creativity within the framework of traditional calligraphy. Mirza Gholamreza Isfahani, in his masterpiece, achieved another discovery by separating literature from the letters and words of calligraphy, resulting in artistic Siahmashq, in which the technological and technical aspects of execution gained significant importance. This discovery later became a precursor to

modern art in the use of calligraphic elements without literary text (Table 2). Additionally, Gholamhossein Amirkhani created works in the 1960s and 1970s that, in the years following the revolution, were considered examples of creativity in sentence and phrase arrangement. These works were created with a Murraqqa-like structure resembling historical court journals of kings, but with a contemporary expression, and they were not unaffected by typography, layout of elements on the page, page design, and modern graphic knowledge (Table 2). The entry of calligraphy into the realm of modern graphics through typography produced works that became renowned as Iranian graphics. Graphic artists, drawing on a wealth of experiences from the traditional art of calligraphy and adhering to technical principles, embarked on the creation of innovative works in typography. Holding dozens of exhibitions on the theme of divine names, in which letter designs are rendered as graphic logos, is an example of a modern interpretation of typography in creative calligraphy. Since creativity is a complex and highly controversial act and refers to a creative process in the realm of art, it cannot be considered merely a rational, scientific, methodological, or critical activity. The presence of imagination in the process of artistic creation is essential to avoid imitation and to avoid following the works of others. The artist achieves creative artistic creation by grasping the foundations of artistic thot and by introducing novelty and unraveling expressive knots in the work. Calligraphic artists have gone through complex stages to create their innovative works, and in each instance, a new realm has been opened and a new field has emerged. Creativity requires superior thinking and a guiding mindset that is not found in everyone. There is no definitive formula or specific roadmap for producing techniques, methods, and creative organizations. However, calligraphy is a fertile ground for planting the seeds of creativity; seeds that can flourish, bear fruit, and conquer the future. This art derives its significance from the reproduction of Iranian cultural and national identity within the symbolic system of calligraphy.

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