The Tradition of Imitative Copying in Chinese Calligraphy

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DECLARATION

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STATEMENT 1

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ABSTRACT

In many cultures, calligraphy is regarded as a decorative art, but in China calligraphy is one of the highest forms of art, in many ways comparable to painting and classical music in the West.

No matter the material representation of Chinese calligraphy—paper, silk, wood or bamboo slips, animal bones etc.—, its artistic object is the two-dimensional visual representation of the written characters of the Chinese language. Moreover, in the development of the Chinese scripts, calligraphy has been enriched with a wide range of technical and aesthetic features that are specific to its artistic nature and do not pertain to its linguistic nature. In order to fully appreciate the visual quality of Chinese calligraphy, the present thesis aims to explore the key aesthetic features of authoritative calligraphic models through the analysis of the copies that generations of practitioners have produced and still continue to produce. In particular, the essential qualities of being improvisational, rhythmical and written at one stretch without stopping the fluid movement of the brush until the last brushstroke is fulfilled can be acknowledged in clear terms by comparing originals with their copies.

Chinese historical sources are clear in stating that the renowned calligraphers from all dynasties began their training in calligraphic art by studying and copying the calligraphic specimens of previous masters, either through originals or through ink rubbings of stone inscriptions. There are no examples of calligraphers who became proficient in this art without modeling their work, for a certain period of their lives at least, on the calligraphic works of others.

The tradition of imitative copying in Chinese calligraphy has always existed together with the practice of creating calligraphic works. This thesis aims to present the educational background and different patterns of imitative copying as a way of learning and perfecting calligraphy.

Furthermore, the present study provides macro-level analysis of the copying process by iconographic comparisons between one of the masterpieces of Chinese calligraphy, the famous stele inscription in the standard script *Inscription of the Auspicious Spring of the Palace of Perfect*

Accomplishments (*Jiuchenggong liquan ming* 九成宮醴泉銘, hereafter *Jiuchenggong*), calligraphed in 632 by the literatus and calligrapher Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557–641), and a complete precise copy of it produced by the calligraphy teacher Yao Mengqi 姚孟起 (b. 1838–died before 1901) in 1883, more than one thousand years after the original work. This thesis aims to show that, provided basic knowledge of the brushwork and structural configurational principles that govern Chinese calligraphic creation, anyone is able to perceive the nuances and subtleties of classic calligraphic models. As a matter of fact, despite its undeniable specificity, Chinese calligraphy manifests the common physiological structure and the same rules of visual perception shared by all humans, the most evident of which are balance, rhythm, movement, etc..

The present research focuses on deepening our insight into both the educational background and the artistic value of Chinese calligraphy by investigating the tradition of imitative copying, leading to an original contribution to knowledge. In conclusion, the present thesis summarizes diverse and special phenomena in the imitative tradition of Chinese calligraphy and points out that the ultimate goal of imitative copying is to achieve a state of harmony without the constraints of rules. The exploration and practice in imitative copying of classic calligraphic models will accompany calligraphy practitioners throughout their lives.

KEY WORDS

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even before I applied for the doctoral program and taught me to follow the forefront of cognitive psychology research. During the program, he greatly supported my education research in fine arts and calligraphy from the perspective of educational psychology. He also arranged for me to take charge of a primary and secondary school art education project funded by the Guangdong Provincial Government and to participate in teaching courses for undergraduate and graduate students mastering calligraphy art education. These experiences have given me a genuine understanding of the current policies and front line implementation status of art education in China.

During my doctoral studies, I also took on some research assistant work at the Center for the Study of Handwriting Cultures and Artistic Exchange directed by Prof. De Laurentis. I often had the opportunity to receive care and guidance from part-time research fellows at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, including Prof. Yao Yuliang 姚宇亮, Prof. Mei Lin 梅林 and Prof. Yang Jianru 楊簡茹. Prof. Yao's decades-long inquiry and research into the essence of calligraphy and its intuitive cognition have reminded me not to stray from the core essence that initially fascinated and moved me in calligraphy studies. I greatly admire Prof. Mei's ability to address the truly critical issues in art history. Following one of my lectures on the imitatative copying of calligraphy, he provided valuable suggestions for improving my thesis concerning historical facts of the Tang dynasty and reminded me to maintain a composed demeanor and steady posture during presentations.

In 2022 and 2023, I had the privilege of conducting field research on calligraphy culture in various locations such as Luoyang, Hebei, and Tianjin. This was alongside Prof. De Laurentis, Prof. Wu, Prof. Yao, Prof. Mei, Researcher Zhang Naizhu 張乃翥 (1946–2023) from the Longmen Grottoes Research Institute, Wang Yang 王洋, a teaching-research officer from the Luoyang Education Bureau, Prof. Shi Rui 史睿 from Peking University, Researcher Wang Nan 王楠 from the Institute of Literature at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Prof. Li Danjie 李丹婕 from Sun

Conventions

ann.   annotated

attr.   attributed

b.   born

c.   century

comp.   compiled

compl.   completed

d.   died

d.u.   date(s) unknown

ed(s).   edited/edition

fl.   *floruit*

i.e.   id est

lit.   literally

no(s).   number

pl(s).   plate

pt.   part

publ.   published

rev.   revised

Skt.   Sanskrit

trans.   translated

vol(s).   volume

Abbreviations

CCA   China Calligraphers Association 中國書法家協會

CFLAC   China Federation of Literary and Art Circles 中國文學藝術界聯合會

FSQJ   *Zhongguo fashu quanji* 中國法書全集

FTQJ   *Zhongguo fatie quanji* 中國法帖全集

MBQJ   *Zhongguo mingbei quanji* 中國名碑全集

P   Chinese documents from Dunhuang in the Pelliot Collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

S   Chinese documents from Dunhuang in the Stein Collection, British Library, London

SFQJ   *Zhongguo shufa quanji* 中國書法全集

SHQS   *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書

INTRODUCTION

1. Motivations for Copying in China and in the Western World

There are different motivations for producing and reproducing copies from an original. In some cases, copies are not even made from originals but from copies. This is a common trait of all world civilizations. For instance, in Ancient Rome, from the first century CE, it was popular to produce copies of Greek original statues for a variety of reasons, first due to the educated and wealthy Romans' interest in Greek culture and then nourished by the enormous demand for decoration that required replicas and copies throughout the Roman empire.[1] One of the world's most famous works of art, the so-called *Alexander Mosaic* (pl. 1, Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples), is a Roman copy from Pompeii dating from the late second or early first century of the famous panel

Plate 1: Philoxenos of Eretria, *Battle of Issus*, ca. 310 BCE. Roman copy (*Alexander Mosaic*) from the House of the Faun, Pompeii, Italy, late second or early first century BCE. Tessera mosaic, 8'10''×16'9'' . Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples (from Kleiner 2011)

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[1] Cain (1998), pp. 1221-1223.

painting, the *Battle of Issus*, of ca. 310 BCE.[2] Unfortunately, we do not know which prototype was used for the production of the mosaic, so the copy is extremely important for our understanding of the original Greek painting.

As early as the Western Zhou 周 dynasty (1046 BCE–771 BCE), the Chinese upper class produced ritual bronzes which were made in great quantities by industrial processes. Artisans therefore used techniques that duplicated both moulds and visual patterns. Mass-production was applied to a number of areas of Chinese craftsmanship, including architecture and everyday utensils, as well as the soldiers of the famous Terracotta Army.[3] The need for reproduction was also key to the transmission of Chinese documents, and this was crucial, as we will see below, for the development of the art of calligraphy at the beginning of the first century CE.

2. The Development of Manuscript Culture and the Production of Tracing Copies and Ink Rubbings in China

With the division of the Chinese territory into various states competing for power, the so-called "Warring States" (Zhanguo 戰國 403–221 BCE), several schools of thought emerged, whose disciples realized the importance of preserving the discourse of their masters in written form. The Confucian school in particular, besides recording the famous *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語, i.e. the sayings of Confucius), also edited and transcribed the texts of the early Zhou, which eventually became the corpus of the Confucian classics[4] in a more fixed form than oral accounts, which were easily forgotten or distorted. In this respect, a philosopher contemporary of Confucius, Mo Di 墨翟, whose teachings were recorded in the Master Mo (*Mozi* 墨子), states in nine different passages that,

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[2] Kleiner (2011), p. 142.

[3] Ledderose (2000), pp. 57, 70-73.

[4] The Confucian five classics were *Classic of Songs* (S*hijing* 詩經), *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書), *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), *Book of Changes* (*Zhouyi* 周易), *the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋). Wilkinson (2022), p. 376.

even before the fifth century BCE, there existed three ways of writing down texts according to the materials used:

I myself did not live at the same time as they (the sage kings of the past) did so I did not personally hear their voices or see their faces. It is through what they wrote (*shu*) on bamboo and silk (*zhubo*), what they carved (*lou*) in metal and stone (*jinshi*), what they engraved (*zhuo*) on [ceremonial] plates and bowls (*panyu*) to hand down to their descendants of later generations that I know this.[5]

However, if we examine these three ways of writing texts, it is plain that only the first refers to "handwriting" in the real sense, the other two being merely ways of replicating the written sign by means of the chisel engraving of stone or metal surfaces or by other methods involved in the metal-casting process. This is very significant because it not only testifies to the diversified means of preserving texts in ancient China, especially from ancestors to descendants, but also because it shows the primary importance of handwriting, whose visual form needed to be reproduced as faithfully as possible even on utensils, such as bronze vessels and ritual bells, whose surfaces were not suitable for handwriting.

With the unification of China achieved by the Qin 秦 state (777 BCE–221 BCE) in 221 BCE, which led to the proclamation of China's eponymous first imperial dynasty (the word China comes for the word Qin in its ancient Indian pronunciation),[6] the huge territory was administered through a complex bureaucratic system relying on central and regional units. Consequently, this system required and produced an incredibly large number of handwritten administrative documents. It was in this complex administrative 'handwriting culture' that the scripts of the Chinese writing system began to be systematised. The new and more simplified lesser *zhuan* script (*xiaozhuan* 小

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[5] 吾非與之並世同時，親聞其聲、見其色也；以其所書於竹帛、鏤於金石、琢於盤盂，傳遺後世子孫者知之. Johnston (2010), pp. 156-157.

[6] Wilkinson (2022), p. 1021.

篆) replaced the ancient greater *zhuan* script (*dazhuan* 大篆). This script then evolved, in the first century BCE, into a mature form of the so-called clerical script (*lishu* 隸書). The three modern scripts, the standard (*kaishu* 楷書), the cursive (*caoshu* 草書) and the semi-cursive (*xingshu* 行書), which appeared in the second, third, and fourth centuries, all come from this.[7] With the Han 漢 dynasty (202 BCE – 220), which followed the seminal albeit short-lived Qin 秦 dynasty (221 BCE–206 BCE), not only did the empire expand into other regions, but also the court implemented an extensive policy of book-collecting, which fostered, on the one hand, the creation of libraries and, on the other, specific government posts for the production of books and the making of copies.[8]

As explained by De Laurentis, however, the real apogee of handwriting reproduction occurred in medieval China (between the third and the tenth centuries).[9] Chinese Buddhist manuscripts in medieval China can be taken as an example. They had the same purpose as Christian manuscripts - recording and preserving scriptures - but Buddhists also saw copying as a way of producing religious merit (*gongde* 功德，Skt. *guṇa*), leading to the huge number of Buddhist manuscripts.[10] Around the end of the sixth century CE, the imperial court of the Sui 隋 dynasty (581–618), which unified China after nearly three hundred years of North-South division,[11] stored 370,000 scrolls (*juan* 卷) of books while the whole of western Europe produced no more than 13,552 manuscripts in total. According to De Laurentis's estimation, the total populations of China

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[7] Qiu Xigui (2000), p. 126-130.

[8] *Hanshu* 30.1701.

[9] De Laurentis (2021b), p. 55.

[10] Kieschnik (2003), p. 164.

[11] One of the great achievements of the Sui, was the construction of the water-transport system of the Grand Canal (*Da yunhe* 大運河), still partially functioning today. Twitchett – Fairbank (1979), pp. 134-135. The English sinologist Lionel Giles (1875–1958), the compiler of the catalogue of the Chinese manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang by Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943) and then brought to the British Museum, believed that the calligraphy of the Dunhuang manuscripts reached its zenith during the Sui. Giles (1957), p. xi.

and Europe in the year 600 being, respectively, 50 million and 26 million, there was one manuscript for every 1,918 people in Europe but at least one book for every 135 people in China.[12] The difference in materials for the production of handwritten books in Europe and China also influenced the quantity. Compared to Chinese paper, which was cheap, parchment, the most popular writing material for the production of manuscripts in Europe, was very costly.

Printing spread widely in China during the twelfth century but it had been invented at least by the seventh century.[13] From at least the sixth century, however, the Chinese also had another special way to reproduce texts mechanically, namely the technique of ink rubbings (*taben* 拓本), which is the process by which a sheet of paper is stuck onto the inscribed surface of a slab of stone or wood and then ink is dabbed onto it. In this way, the carved signs of the characters are visible in white on the black background of the sheet of paper. Paper, then, one of China's greatest inventions, being a soft and absorbent medium, makes the process of taking ink rubbings (*tapian* 拓片) possible both from stone and other surfaces.[14] The earliest records concerning books preserved in the form of ink rubbings can be found in the standard history[15] of the Sui dynasty, the *Book of the Sui* (*Suishu* 隋書), which was compiled in the years 636–656, and refer to ink rubbings mounted in the fashion of hand scrolls, different from codices, which were the most common format from the ninth century.[16] Ink rubbings are extremely important because, in many cases, they are the only medium through which the appearance of a given inscribed text (or relief) of a monument long since lost or badly damaged is known. Stelae and stone inscriptions being one of the most important

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[12] De Laurentis (2021b), p. 55.

[13] *The Grove Dictionary of Art*, vol. 7, p. 117-118.

[14] The process is explained in detail in Tsien (1985), pp. 3-5.

[15] Standard histories (*zhengshi* 正史) are one of the primary sources for research in Chinese history. They were compiled by a team of scholars, such as Sima Qian 司馬遷 (*ca.* 145 BCE–86 BCE), Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) etc. See Wilkinson (2022) pp. 621-626.

[16] *Suishu* 32.1067-1068.

physical representations of Chinese calligraphic works, ink rubbings soon acquired, in many aspects, the value of true works of art, in that they provide a highly faithful representation of the text (or image) of the original inscription. At the same time, the inscription itself was the result of a duplicative process, since the characters had to be either written on the stone surface or transferred to it from a draft written on paper by the painstaking work of the carver, who materially produced the inscription.

The German philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) claimed, in his seminal work on the reproduction of artworks, that around 1900, technological reproduction had reached a standard that could reproduce all known works of art, making the appreciation of artworks more convenient for the general public. However, the question of the reproducibility of works of art requires a more comprehensive analysis of historical facts and deeper understanding of how works of art were produced and used in ancient times.

As a matter of fact, when we compare the original Chinese stelae or high-resolution pictures of them with ink rubbings taken from the original inscriptions, we notice that they represent two very different ways of 'reading' the inscription. For instance, if we look at the picture of the beautiful Buddhist votive image commissioned by Liu Gen 劉根 (d.u.) and other devotees in 524 and then at its ink rubbing (pl. 2),[17] no matter how good the physical condition and how

Plate 2: *Carving of a Buddha Image with Votive Inscription Commissioned by Liu Gen 劉根 et al.*, 524, 39.5 cm×144 cm×16cm, Henan Provincial Museum (from *Zhongguo beichao shike tapian jingpin ji*, vol. 2)

[17] In *Zhongguo beichao shike tapian jingpin ji*, vol. 2, pp. 302-308.

sophisticated the carving, it is thanks to the image which 'emerges' from the ink rubbing that we have a clear perception of the work—calligraphic or figurative—that was initially devised, designed, and executed and carved onto the stone surface. According to Gestalt psychology and especially the research of the German-born American psychologist Rudolf Arnheim (1904–2007) on visual perception and the appreciation of artworks, our eyes are inclined to perceive the simplest patterns,[18] therefore clear-cut opposition between the characters and the background as reproduced in ink rubbings highlights perfectly the carver's original work on the stone surface, as it strongly enhances the figure-ground effect. Concretely, white characters/dark background occur if the characters are in intaglio, whereas white background/dark characters if the characters are in relief, but in some cases the relief effect is achieved by simply carving out a small portion of the area surrounding the character. Moreover, the sheet(s) of paper required for producing the rubbing also convey rich visual and tactile information, since they themselves are physical objects. Evidently, even the most advanced photographic technique cannot achieve this, because it focuses only on the image of the inscription acquired by a fixed lens operating under specific conditions of brightness. In a word, modern technology cannot replace the visual effect of Chinese traditional ink rubbings.

Contrary to what is implied in Benjamin's book, the mechanical reproduction of works of art had already reached a high level of sophistication in ancient times, much earlier than the industrial revolution or the great technological age of the early twentieth century. Similarly, the emergence of new technologies for reproducing texts and images did not necessarily cause the decline of manual ability. For instance, as explained by Wolpe, in Italy during the sixteenth century the wide spread of printing technology had, among many consequences, also that of elevating the status of teachers of handwriting in Europe. Writing-masters of manuscripts could publish their models as teaching materials to be used by other teachers throughout the country.[19] This indicates that, on the one hand,

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[18] Arnheim (1974), pp. 227-233.

[19] Osley – Wolpe (1980), pp. 18-19.

the use of technology lowered the status of the common copyist and, on the other, enhanced the value of the handwriting skill of the most accomplished penmen.

3. Copying as a Way of Learning

To copy, in essence, is to make or form an imitation of (anything); to imitate, reproduce or follow,[20] accompanying human existence since primeval times as an important way of studying, accumulating and sharing knowledge. Imitation of nature and copying of existing examples are both essential in art education and in creating new knowledge.[21]

With regard to Chinese calligraphy, copying is usually the first step in learning to write. Only a small elite, however, has the chance to do copying practice from original models with vivid ink collected by their own family. Until the Eastern Han 東漢 (25–220) dynasty, when paper was invented, by examining public editorial projects displayed as stelae, the public could observe and appreciate calligraphy at close quarters. For instance, between 175 and 183, the Confucian classics were copied in the clerical script and carved on forty-six stones, which were placed at the entrance to the National University (*taixue* 太學) in Luoyang; they are now commonly known by the name, *Confucian Classics Carved in Stone during the Xiping Reign* [172–178] (although completed in the next reign) (*Xiping shijing* 熹平石經). Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192), who was a famous scholar and skilled calligrapher at that time, wrote some parts of the inscriptions. The result was so outstanding that students from the National University and general readers flocked in front of the inscriptions to

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[20] See the website of the digital edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), https://www.oed.com/ oedv2/00049908.

[21] Fransen – Reinhart (2019), pp. 215-216.

copy their texts and calligraphic form.[22] Due to their immense prestige, the inscriptions served as a textual orthographic and calligraphic model for several centuries.[23]

After the middle of Tang Dynasty, paged books were produced for the convenience of looking up texts.[24] Related to new forms of books, the classics were inscribed separately into different parts on stones matched with the dimensions of a single sheet of paper, like the *Confucian Classics on Stone [Completed during the Second Year of the] Kaicheng Reign* (*Kaicheng shijing* 開成石經) (837) now in Xi'an Beilin Museum, 27 cm × 41–49.5 cm each "folio".[25] Making a comparison with *Xiping shijing*, the production of ink rubbings from this design of separated slabs was more convenient for the reading and copying of paged books.

According to De Laurentis's survey from the standard histories, this is a phenomenon that study from contemporary calligraphers usually described in the sources with a relatively constant formula that can be summarized as, "his calligraphies were taken [by his contemporaries] as a model" [當時]以為楷法,[26] such as Liu Mu 劉睦 (*fl*. first century),[27] Xin Mi 辛謐 (*fl*. fourth

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[22] *Hou Hanshu* mentions only that the inscriptions were written by Cai Yong, but given that the total number of the characters reaches almost 20,000 and relics display different handwriting styles, it is impossible that such a huge writing project was completed by only one person. *Hou Hanshu* 8.336, 60b.1990, 77.2533, 77.2558. Hua Rende (2009), p. 130.

[23] Ink rubbings of these inscriptions belonging to the library of the southern dynasty of Liang 梁 (502–557) and of the Sui dynasty are recorded in the bibliographic treatise of the *Suishu* 32.1069; De Laurentis (2022), pp. 20-23. Extant sections of original stones are mainly preserved in Luoyang Museum, Henan Museum, Xi'an Beilin Museum, the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the National Library of China.

[24] Tsien (1985), p. 132, p. 309. *Guitian lu* 2.13b.

[25] De Laurentis (2021b), p. 55.

[26] With *kaize* 楷則, *mokai* 模[摹]楷 or even simply *fa* 法 as substitues for *kaifa* 楷法. De Laurentis (2014a), pp. 133-134.

[27] *Hou Hanshu* 14.557.

century),[28] Cui Hao 崔浩 (d. 450),[29] Wang Zhi 王志 (460–513),[30] Xiao Ziyun 蕭子雲 (486–548),[31] Yin Jun 殷鈞 (489–548),[32] Ouyang Xun,[33] Li Jianzhong 李建中 (1045–1013),[34] Zhong You 鐘繇 (151–230) and Hu Zhao 胡昭 (162–250).[35] These examples suggest how widespread this practice was in pre-modern China.

It goes without saying that the objects of copying were the calligraphies of the most renowned calligraphers, not least the greatest of all, Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361), whose calligraphy has been the most appreciated and studied throughout the ages in China.[36] We know that his calligraphies were treasured, copied and reproduced by many generations of connoisseurs and practitioners of calligraphy. The calligrapher and theorist Sun Guoting 孫過庭 (ca. 647–ca. 690) stated in his masterpiece *Manual of Calligraphy* (*Shupu* 書譜) of 687 that most famous

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[28] *Jinshu* 94.2447.

[29] *Weishu* 35.827; *Beishi* 21.790.

[30] *Liangshu* 21.320.

[31] *Liangshu* 35.515.

[32] *Liangshu* 27.407.

[33] *Xin Tangshu* 198.5645.

[34] *Songshi* 441.13056.

[35] *Jinshu* 36.1065.

[36] As early as the first half of the fifth century, not even one hundred years after the death of Wang Xizhi, the calligrapher Yang Xin 羊欣 (370–442) is credited with declaring him "unique among [all the calligraphers] of ancient and modern times" (*gujin mo er* 古今莫二). See the list of capable calligraphers attributed to Yang Xin compiled by Wang Sengqian 王僧虔 (426–485) *Cai gulai nengshu renming* 采古來能書人名, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 1.19, 2.85. The definitive establishment of Wang Xizhi as China's greatest calligrapher dates from the early Tang, when Emperor Taizong 太宗 (Li Shimin 李世民, 599–649, r. 626–649) declared his calligraphy "absolutely perfect" (*jin shan jin mei* 盡善盡美) in the postscript to Wang's official biography in the *Book of the Jin* (*Jinshu* 晉書, completed in 646). Wang Xizhi's calligraphy then became the paramount standard for all the centuries to come; thanks to its graceful and vigorous style, it was also to exert a great influence in Korea and Japan. *Jinshu* 80.2107f; De Laurentis (2021a), p. 4.

calligraphies before and after the time of Wang Xizhi were forgotten, whereas his calligraphies alone had been transmitted through time because of his creative configuration of the ancient and modern script as well as his combination of profound emotions with a harmonious style.[37] Among the Dunhuang documents we also find several copies of Wang Xizhi's letters in the cursive script.[38]

As further proof of the popularity of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy, in ancient Japan his calligraphies were used as calligraphic models. Once Chinese calligraphic culture had been accepted by other countries that had adopted the Chinese writing system, like China's neighboring country Japan, not only were tracing copies of Wang Xizhi brought from China to Japan by ambassadors and monks, but also the whole system of practising calligraphy was designed according to the habits of China. For instance, in the memorandum of rare treasures which were dedicated to Vairocana Buddha and donated to the Eastern Great Monastery (Tōdaiji 東大寺) in Nara 奈良 by the Empress Dowager Kōmyō 光明皇后 (701–760) on 22 July 756 (Tempyō shōhō 天寶勝寶 8.VI.21) (now at the Shōsōin Repository, North Section, Upper Floor, North Case, no. 158), a "list of donated items" (*kenmotsuchō* 獻物帳) entitled *Kokka chimpō chō* 国家珍宝帳 (List of national treasures), we find both tracing copies (*taben* 搨本 or *moben* 摹本) of Wang Xizhi's calligraphies and the Empress's imitative copy of Wang Xizhi's standard script calligraphy *Discourse on Yue Yi* (*Yue Yi lun* 樂毅論).[39] This fact suggests, on the one hand, that copying was an essential part of the learning of calligraphy and, on the other, that imitative copies *per se* could be

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[37] 豈唯會古通今, 亦乃情深調合. In De Laurentis (2011b), p. 36, p. 53-54.

[38] There is one copy of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy in the Pelliot collection, the *Zhanji hutao Letter* (*Zhanji hutao tie* 旃罽胡桃帖) (P.4642), and two in the Stein collection, both on the same sheet of paper (S.3753), the *Zhanjin Letter* (*Zhanjin tie* 瞻近帖) and the *Longbao Letter* (*Longbao tie* 龍保帖). On the relationship between the Dunhuang manuscripts and medieval calligraphy, see Liu Tao (1998), pp. 273–294. De Laurentis (2018), pp. 62–72.

[39] *Shodō zenshū*, vol. 9, pp. 50–51. The description in Harada Jiro 原田次郎 (1932), p. 13.

seen as precious artworks. Evidently, like their Chinese counterparts, the Empress Dowager Kōmyō, as well as her husband, the Emperor Shōmu Tennō 聖武天皇 (701–756), to whom the calligraphies had belonged, also regarded Wang Xizhi as the epitome of Chinese calligraphy.[40]

It is notable, however, that even a great artist with prowess is unable to replicate his/her own work, no matter how important it was for him or her. There are famous cases in art or music history in which the height of an artistic performance was not matched by the same artist or musician on a successive occasion. For example, in the *Records on the Lanting xu* (*Lanting ji* 蘭亭記), He Yanzhi 何延之 (*fl*. 710) mentions that Wang Xizhi, the greatest master of Chinese calligraphers, "handwrote [the self-composed *Lanting xu*] with an outburst of joy…at the time [of handwriting, it seemed a stroke of genius. After being awoken on another day, he handwrote dozens of versions of the same text but in the end none of them could reach [the perfect harmony of the first manuscript]."[41]

With regards to Western drawing, the German art historian and connoisseur Max Jakob Friedländer held a similar opinion. He explains that the decisive point of directness and spontaneity of the original, which makes the creation look fresh and vital, cannot be repeated in copies.[42] Furthermore, in the field of codicology, in some cases, lectio difficilior (the most difficult reading) is one of ways of differentiating the original from the copy,[43] which means that exquisite details are easily lost in copies. De Laurentis also uses lectio difficilior to tell the difference between Huairen's

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[40] *Kenkyū hen* 研究篇, in *Ō Gishi shoseki taikei: kaisetsu* 王羲之書蹟大系, p. 194.

[41] *Lanting xu* is Wang Xizhi's most famous semi-cursive script, and *Lanting ji* is the earliest extant record of its dissenmination. 興樂而書…其時乃有神助, 及醒後, 他日更書數十百本, 終無及者. *Lanting ji*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 3.177.

[42] Friedländer (1960), trans. Tancred Borenius, p. 235-236.

[43] The phrase lectio difficilior refers to variant of a word in a given text that, compared to one or more others, presents a greater difficulty or morphological, lexical or semantic rarity. See Maniaci (2012), p. 241.

懷仁 (*fl.* 673) simple configurative variations and Wang Xizhi's complex configurations in the great calligraphic artwork *Ji Wang shengjiao xu*.[44] The ultimate goal of copying by an art practitioner, therefore, is not to make a replica or a facsimile but to strive for perfection by continuous practice.

4. Problem Statement

In the history of writing all over the world, Chinese writing is unique because it is valued for its artistic expression by almost all social classes in China and even East Asian countries. Chinese calligraphy reached a very high level aesthetically and in sophistication, which is reflected in many traditional cultural treasures, worthy of being explored and researched from different perspectives. But even sinologists who are familiar with Chinese characters put their emphasis on the historical and literary values of these relics rather than on their artistic value; similarly, western scholars of Chinese art rarely pay attention to the art of calligraphy compared with other forms of fine arts like painting or sculpture. For example, the American scholar Karetzky's two monographs about court art in Tang China only discuss painting, gold and silver articles, ceramics and sculptures, entirely overlooking the significance of calligraphy in Tang China.[45] Despite acknowledging that Taizong is remembered for various artistic talents, one of which is calligraphy, he does not discuss this in detail.[46]

5. Contribution of the Present Research

The present research focuses on deepening our insight into both the historical and artistic value of Chinese calligraphy by investigating the tradition of imitative copying, leading to an original

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[44] De Laurentis (2021a), p. 228.

[45] Karetzky (1996a; 1996b).

[46] Karetzky (1996b), pp. 14-15.

contribution to knowledge. Specifically, this thesis has five aims in exploring the tradition of imitative copying in Chinese calligraphy:

Firstly, to introduce the copying concept in different civilizations and traditional handwriting culture in China. On this basis, the process of the emergence and development of copies is delineated.

Secondly, to emphasize copying as the most crucial and effective means to study Chinese calligraphy, rather than as a means of creating replicas to preserve the original work of producing forgeries.

Thirdly, to explore systematically the role of imitative copying in calligraphy training across different educational settings, including state schools and private tutoring, as well as within both traditional and contemporary contexts.

Fourthly, to explain the specific phenomena and definitions pertaining to imitative copying of Chinese calligraphy based on both philological sources and calligraphic works, giving prominence to the ultimate purpose and function of imitative copying in the practice of Chinese calligraphy.

Fifthly, to analyse the specific case of Yao Mengqi's Precise Imitative Copy (1883) of Ouyang Xun's *Inscription of the Auspicious Spring of the Palace of Perfect Accomplishments* (*Jiuchenggong liquan ming* 九成宮醴泉銘, hereafter *Jiuchenggong*) in order to study common mistakes that can occur during the copying process, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of "having grandiose aims but puny Abilities".

6. The Structure of the Present Thesis

The present thesis includes six chapters and a concluding chapter.

Chapter One outlines the distinction between original works and copies in art and the role and status of calligraphy in different civilizations, and highlights the primary focus of this thesis: to

elucidate the artistic sophistication of Chinese calligraphy and the consistent role of imitative copying in calligraphy education.

Chapter Two introduces the qualitative research methods and Sinological approaches employed in this study, along with the primary text and calligraphy sources on which the research is based. Building on these foundational methodologies and sources, this chapter proposes specific methods tailored to the study of calligraphy history, such as assigning coordinates to single characters for analyzing works. Finally, it underscores the close relationship between calligraphy research and practice, as well as the importance of brushwork awareness in the study of calligraphic art.

Chapter Three explores the ideals of traditional Chinese education, focusing on Confucian classics education, literacy education and calligraphic education. It identifies the interdependent relationship between literacy education and calligraphic education at the elementary level, ultimately serving the overarching educational goal of cultivating a virtuous and talented gentleman. The chapter then discusses how calligraphy training was conducted within both official schools and private tutoring, highlighting their distinct characteristics. It also touches on self-study methods used by calligraphy practitioners and important treatises on technique written by ancient calligraphers based on their practical experience.

Since calligraphy remains an active and increasingly valued tradition in contemporary China, Chapter Four discusses new perspectives in modern calligraphy research and their advantages and limitations. It also examines the significant role of the China Calligraphers Association in organizing various social resources and calligraphy communities. The chapter further explores the current state and educational philosophies of calligraphy instruction in primary and secondary schools, as well as the development of a comprehensive higher education system for calligraphy, encompassing undergraduate, master's and doctoral programs, and its establishment as an academic discipline.

Chapter Five offers a comprehensive, macro-level analysis of the copying process in calligraphy. It begins by explaining the relationship between the model (the original masterpiece) and the practitioner, emphasizing the progression from imitating the model to developing a unique style while continuing to engage in dialogue with the original. The chapter introduces an innovative perspective by exploring how the practice of tracing copying, originally intended for preserving the original works, evolved alongside imitative copying to become a crucial method for learning calligraphy and familiarizing oneself with the model. This approach enhances the historical understanding of the development of imitative copying and tracing copying in the history of calligraphy education.

Chapter Six provides a detailed, micro-level analysis of Yao Mengqi's precise imitative copying of Ouyang Xun's representative standard script work *Jiuchenggong*. It delves into the artistic excellence embodied in the model and explores common pitfalls encountered by learners.

The concluding chapter summarizes the new findings of this study and the conclusions drawn from the case studies, aiming to enrich the understanding of the phenomenon of imitative copying in calligraphy education. It also seeks to offer valuable insights for practical application and to further both historical and contemporary research in this field.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

1.1 Originals and Copies in Western Art

The history of originals and copies in Western art is a complex narrative that intertwines artistic innovation and cultural values from antiquity to the Renaissance period.

In the period of classical antiquity, the distinction between originals and copies was less rigid in ancient Greece and Rome. Roman culture highly valued Greek originals, leading to widespread copying. These copies were not seen as inferior but rather as a means of preserving and disseminating artistic excellence. The replication of sculptures and other artworks was common, with Roman artists frequently creating copies of Greek masterpieces. These practices were driven by a desire to emulate and honor the artistic achievements of the Greeks.[1] In different periods of Roman art, copyists made changes according to Roman taste and morals, even misunderstanding the original Greek works.[2]

During the Medieval period, the concept of originality was tied to the religious context. Art was primarily commissioned by the Church, and the focus was on the symbolic and didactic function of art rather than individual artistic expression. Replication of religious icons and manuscripts was common, as consistency in religious imagery was paramount. Monastic scribes produced illuminated manuscripts, often copying earlier texts. These copies were highly valued for their spiritual content and decorative artistry.[3]

The Renaissance marked a renewed interest in classical antiquity and the emergence of the artist as a celebrated individual. Originality became more pronounced, with artists like Leonardo da

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[1] Bieber (1977), pp. 221-264.

[2] Bieber (1977), p. x.

[3] For the social and historical context of the illuminators' lives from the fourth to the sixteenth century, see Alexander (1992).

Vinci (1452–1519) and Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) gaining fame for their unique creations. Michelangelo's poem bears witness to this:

> Creating new image,
>
> Nothing is in the finest artist's head
>
> That is not held inside a single stone
>
> With surplus, but to this a hand may come only where the intelligence has led.[4]

1.2 The Role of Calligraphy in Different Cultures

Writing and civilization go hand in hand. In different cultures, calligraphy plays different roles and functions. In *the Grove Dictionary of Art*, calligraphy is defined as "the art of fine writing with brush and ink or pen and ink, frequently used as a means of decoration and artistic expression as well as written communication."[5] At different levels and in different forms, there are calligraphic traditions in East Asia, the Indian subcontinent and in Islamic art. In Western art, however, calligraphy is seen as the art of fine penmanship.

1.2.1 The Role of Calligraphy in East Asia

At least from the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), expertise in grammatology (*zixue* 字學) and dexterity in handwriting were required in order to be appointed in the bureaucratic system, as attested by Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 55–ca. 149) in the postface to his seminal dictionary *Discussion of Single Characters and Explanation of Compound Characters* (*Shuowen jiezi* 説文解字).[6] At the same time, the Chinese recognised the aesthetic value of manuscripts and stone inscriptions and the

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[4] Holt (1958), p. 21. The original Italian edition see Saslow (1993), p. 302.

[5] *The Grove Dictionary of Art*, vol. 5, p. 437.

[6] *Shuowen jiezi* 15a.754. English translation in Thern (1966), pp. 8-18.

first texts praising the beauty of calligraphy appeared in this period, for instance Cui Yuan's 崔瑗 (77–141) *Description of the Cursive Script* (*Caoshu shi* 草書勢).[7]

This crucial moment fostered the great development of calligraphy during the Eastern Jin (317–420). Thanks to Wang Xizhi and other literati from southern China, the artistic qualities of calligraphy were enriched, especially in the evolution of the semi-cursive script, whose characters became more vibrant and full of dynamic force.

As a consequence, in the sixth century, the minister and scholar Yan Zhitui 顔之推 (531–ca. 590) quotes a popular saying in his *Family Instructions of the Yan Clan* (*Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓), "a letter (*chidu*) or a memorial is like the face and eyes [of the sender] shown from a distance of a thousand miles."[8] Given this degree of sophistication in handwriting and calligraphy, the Chinese have long regarded the practice of copying as extremely important both for the reproduction of texts and for the study of calligraphic art.

For the men of letters of traditional China, especially after the Tang dynasty (618–907), being skilful in calligraphy was essential for starting their official career in the ranks of the imperial administration. As recorded in the standard history of Tang, there are four methods for assessing and recruiting personnel in the official administration:

The first regarded the body, [whether] the physique was tall and stout; the second regarded the speech, [whether] words were polished and correct; the third regarded writing, [whether] the regular

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[7] Part of Wei Heng's 衛恆 (252–291) *Description of the four calligraphic scripts* (*Siti shushi* 四體書勢), included in his official biography, *Jinshu* 36.1066.

[8] 尺牘書疏, 千里面目也. *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 7.567.

script was vigorous and graceful; the fourth regarded [written] judgement, [whether] the argumentation was refined and remarkable.[9]

Although later dynasties did not strictly link calligraphy to the selection of officials as the Tang dynasty did, the Tang dynasty's deep appreciation of and emphasis on calligraphy, from the emperor to the officials, had a profound influence on future generations.

Since the first century, Korea had been influenced by Chinese culture while Japan began to contact with China a little later, in the third century. In order to govern and develop their countries, Korean and Japanese rulers sent envoys to China and obtained a large number of Chinese classics. Naturally, influenced by China, Japan and Korea also regarded calligraphy as the preeminent art. The art of Chinese calligraphy (*shufa* 書法) is called shodō (書道; lit. the way of writing) in Japan. Korea recognized sŏye (書藝, lit. the art or skill of writing) as the official term for calligraphy in 1949.[10] People today still practice calligraphy based on ancient Chinese calligraphy classics.

1.2.2 The Role of Calligraphy in Islamic Culture

Islamic religious factors mean that calligraphers and the art of writing in Arabic occupy a central role in Islamic Culture, which is stated many times in the Koran with the phrase, God 'taught man by the pen,' and shown in the Turkish saying, 'Calligraphers are destined for Paradise for copying the Koran, while painters will most probably go to the Hell'.[11]

Calligraphy enjoys a unique status in the Indian Subcontinent. Initially, calligraphy was used for decorating architecture, then gradually appeared on other materials like metal, wood or paper. The first appearance of Muslims brought a calligraphy culture. In the history of Indian calligraphy,

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[9] 一曰身, 謂體貌豐偉; 二曰言, 言辭辯正; 三曰書, 楷法遒美; 四曰判, 文理優長. *Xin Tangshu* 45.1171. English translation in De Laurentis (2014b), p. 155.

[10] *The Grove Dictionary of Art*, vol. 18, p. 327.

[11] *The Grove Dictionary of Art*, vol. 16, p. 273, p. 276.

in addition to the conventional six styles of penmanship of Islamic art, calligraphers devised new styles, like *bīhār* in the 13th century and *gulzār* (in which letters are drawn in outline and the hollows filled with floral motifs)*, ṭā'ūs* ('peacock')*, māhī* ('fish')*, zulfi'arūs* ('bride's tresses')*, larza* (in which the letters are drawn as if with a shaky hand) and *ghubār* ('dust script') from the 18th century.[12]

1.2.3 Western Calligraphy

Western scripts were written in alphabets with a reed or quill pen from the beginning, contributing to the aesthetic qualities, which come from strokes and the articulation of white space. Although variations in form can be created from the fact that the quill may have a wide or narrow nib and a square or oblique angle of the nib-tip, they are less abundant than the variations made possible by the Chinese brush and its elastic tips. Moreover, compared with ideogrammatic Chinese characters, which are the unity of pronunciation, form and meaning, western alphabets as phonograms generate less graphic richness. It is for these reasons that calligraphy has never been able to enjoy the same lofty status as painting and sculpture in the West.

1.3 Methods of Learning in Chinese Calligraphy Education

The tradition of imitative copying in calligraphy is as old as calligraphy itself. Already in the oracle bone inscriptions (*jiaguwen* 甲骨文) of the Yin Shang 殷商 dynasty (ca. 1300–ca. 1046 BCE), scholars have identified calligraphic specimens written by masters for their pupils to use as a handwriting model. This hypothesis was put forward for the first time by the scholar and politician Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) in 1937 and refers to a particular inscription bearing three repeated columns bearing the first ten elements of the sexagenary cycle (*ganzhi* 干支). The

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[12] *The Grove Dictionary of Art*, vol. 15, p. 680.
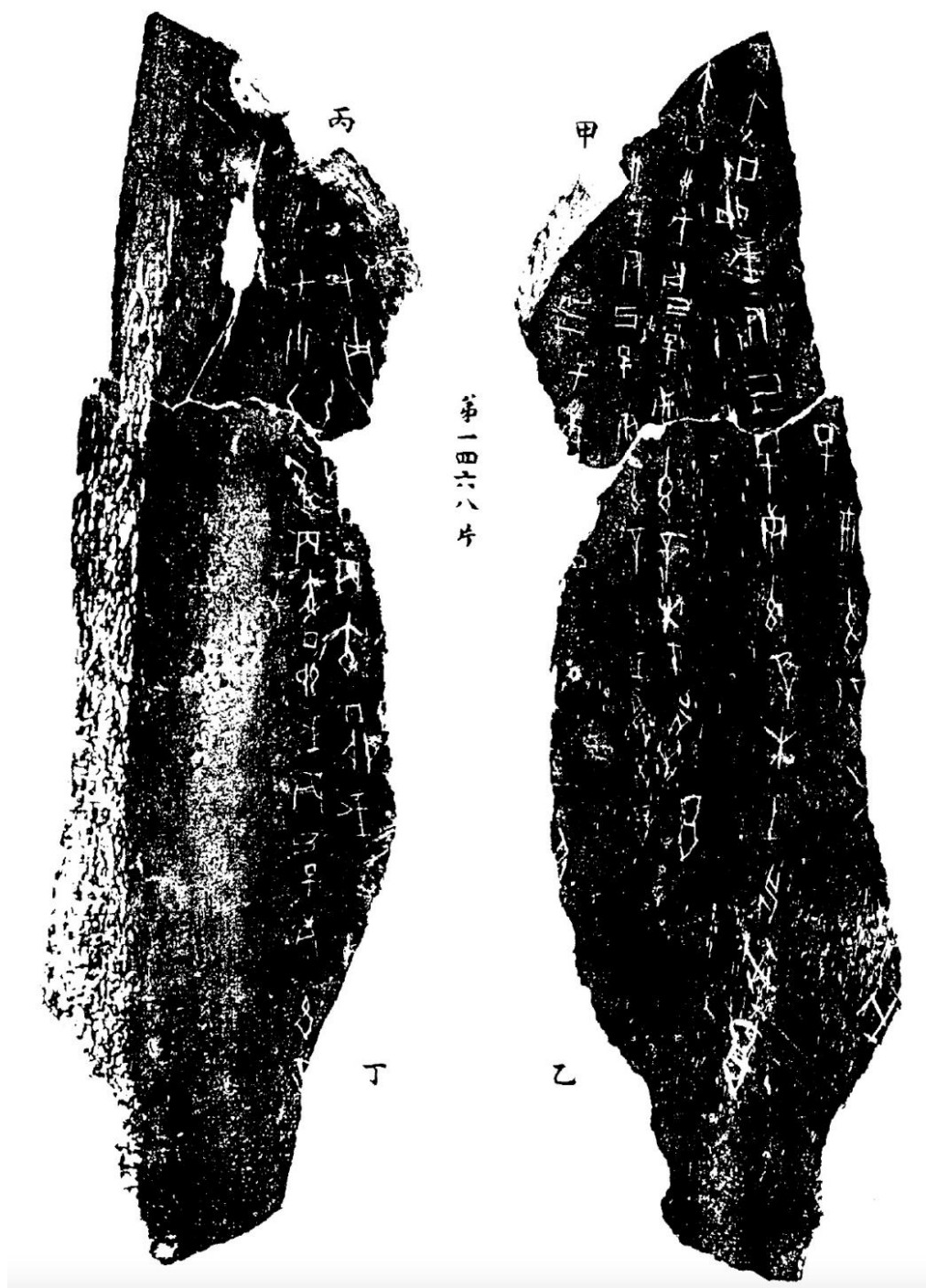
Plate 3: Oracle Bone Inscription no. 1468 (from *Yinqi* cuibian)

sexagenary cycle being the most common system in traditional China for counting days and years,

this was particularly important for any scribe and it is therefore likely that this kind of knowledge

was taught at a very first stage (pl. 3: the oracle bone inscription no. 1468 of *Yinqi cuibian*). As we

can see from plate 3, the characters are written in different hands, the most refined one clearly having been inscribed with the chisel by the master and the others by the pupils.[13]

The act of imitative copying is not only the first step for the beginner in studying the structure of characters, but is also the concrete source of inspiration for any calligrapher. Moreover, as often happens in Chinese painting, calligraphers too would cherish their own imitative copies of classic copy-models and regard them as formal artworks because they represent their own interpretation of masterworks of the past. Taking Wang Xizhi's *Preface to [Poems Composed at] the Orchid Pavilion* (*Lanting xu* 蘭亭序), the most renowned calligraphy model in history, as an example, after obtaining the original manuscript, the Tang emperor Taizong, ordered the court copyists, Zhao Mo 趙模 (d.u.), Han Daozheng 韓道政 (d.u.), Feng Chengsu 馮承素 (617–672) and Zhuge Zhen 諸葛貞 (d.u.) to make tracing copies as gifts for the heir apparent, the imperial princes and his closest ministers.[14] Several free-hand copies ascribed to famous ministers and calligraphers, such as Ouyang Xun, Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558–638) and Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (598–658) are still extant today and have become copy-models themselves.[15] In 1779, more than 1000 years later, the Qing emperor Qianlong 乾隆 (1711–1799, r. 1735–1796) commanded the imperial court (*neifu* 內府) to carve eight imitative copies of the *Lanting xu* on eight columns in order to decorate the Yuanming Park 圓明園. These eight versions are thus called "Eight Columns of the *Lanting xu*" (*Lanting bazhu* 蘭亭八柱).[16] Gradually, not only imitative copies of the *Lanting xu* but also copies of other famous calligraphic works came to be appreciated as classic calligraphic art. On the one

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[13] See Guo Moruo (1965), p. 11, p. 315, p. 734, p. 776; Ouyang Zhongshi – Wen Fong (2008), p. 70.

[14] *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 3. 184.

[15] Zhu Guantian (2009), p. 57.

[16] *Zhongguo shufa dacidian*, p. 1757.

hand, these were praised as original calligraphic pieces and, on the other, they were also studied by successive generations of calligraphy practitioners.

The importance of imitative copying in the study of calligraphy can be learned from the example of the calligrapher Wang Duo 王鐸 (1592–1652), who, despite his great achievements in calligraphic creation, continued to put a lot of effort into the practice of imitative copying:

[I arrange my practice of calligraphy as follows:] imitative copying of calligraphic models (*lintie* 臨帖) on one day, [and] coping with [other's] asking for my calligraphy works on another. This alternation of calligraphy practicing will never change all my life. Generally speaking, imitative copying [is so important for any calligrapher that it] cannot be interrupted [even] for one day.[17]

Copying works include imitative free-hand copies and a duplicative tracing-copies. Imitative free-hand copying refers to the act of recreating the configurations of the brushstrokes and characters as well as the personality expression of model-calligraphy works. It thus can be further divided into precise copying (*jinglin* 精臨) and re-interpretative copying (*yilin* 意臨) based on the subjective level of performance of the copying practitioner. Duplicative tracing-copying refers to mechanical drawing over the traces of the original model-calligraphy works in order to duplicate and preserve them.

As Huang Bosi 黃伯思 (1079–1118) explained in his *Scattered Records of the Palace Library Assistant* (*Dongguan yulun* 東觀餘論):

People often ignore the difference between imitative [copying] and tracing [copying]. Imitative copying (*lin*) means studying calligraphy by observing the configurations of an ancient calligraphic model put on its side and [copying it] on paper; [its meaning] being similar to that of [the phrase]

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[17] 一日臨帖, 一日應請索. 以此相間, 終身不易. 大抵臨摹不可間斷一日耳. Huang Dun (2009), p. 359.

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linyuan (lit. "standing at the edge of an abyss," i.e., an action requiring extreme care) [this copying method] is called *lin*. Tracing [copying] (*mo*) means drawing over the traces of the ancient calligraphic model on a superimposed thin piece of paper according to the details and the size [of the characters of the calligraphic model]; [its meaning] being similar to that of [the phrase] *mohua* (lit. "depicting") [this copying method] is called *mo*. Moreover, there is [the method of] putting a sheet of thick paper on the original, placing it against a window lit up by bright light, and tracing the [contour of the characters], which is called "tracing [by placing the sheet] on the window surface" (*xiangta*). The sharp difference between the two ways of imitative copying and tracing copying should not be confused.[18]

It goes without saying that imitative free-hand copying is essential for the practice of calligraphy because it trains one's eyes, hands and mind and is indispensable for improving personal skill in handwriting. Given the importance of imitative free-hand copying in the study of Chinese calligraphy, the present research focuses on both precise and re-interpretative free-hand copying practices.

However, there is a lot of debate over the function of precise imitative copying. Some have considered precise free-hand copying extremely important. The earliest mention of this opinion can be found in *Praise on Brushwork Connotation* (*Biyi zan* 筆意讚), ascribed to Wang Sengqian 王僧虔 (426–486) but actually dating from the Song dynasty (960–1279), in which it is said that, although the visual shape (*xingzhi* 形質) of calligraphy is inferior to its expressiveness (*shencai* 神采), only these two qualities combined can lead calligraphic practice to effective improvement, thanks to inspiration from classic models.[19] However, Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 (*fl.* mid eighth century) explains in more detail that the artistic heights of calligraphy are represented above all by

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[18] 世人多不曉臨摹之別. 臨, 謂以紙在古帖旁, 觀其形勢而學之, 若臨淵之臨, 故謂之臨. 摹, 謂以薄紙覆古帖上, 隨其細大而拓之, 若摹畫之摹, 故謂之摹. 又有以厚紙覆帖上, 就明牖景而摹之, 又謂之嚮拓焉. 臨之與摹, 二者迥殊, 不可亂也. *SHQS*, vol. 1, p. 862.

[19] *SHQS*, vol. 2, p. 922.

expressiveness.[20] His opinion was upheld also by the famous calligrapher and connoisseur, Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), who compared the practice of imitative free-hand copying to meeting strangers, and thought that one should not concentrate on their outward appearance but should focus on their personality.[21]

No matter whether imitative free-hand copying or duplicative tracing copying is concerned, the most skilled calligraphers can produce "perfect imitations" of other people's calligraphic works (*luanzhen* 亂真, lit.: [copies able to be] confused with the originals). Attainment of the ability to make perfect imitations is not, however, the final aim of calligraphy practitioners. For instance, as explained by Wang Duo, calligraphers should, on the one hand, devote themselves to "acquiring the style of the original" (*rutie* 入帖) and, on the other, to "discarding the influence of the original" (*chutie* 出帖).[22] Wang Duo also stressed the difficulties that one encounters when changing from a well-known calligraphic style to the practice of a different calligraphic model.

1.4 Gaps in the Literature

In western studies, there are no works specifically concerning the tradition of imitative copying in Chinese calligraphy, but some pioneer studies about Chinese calligraphy, writing, fine arts, manuscripts and epigraphy have reference value.

The *Grove Dictionary of Art* only mentions that the copying of models was crucial in its "Art training" section of Chinese art, with no details of the process. Lee's *Education in Traditional China* introduces a general background to education and how the calligraphy curriculum was implemented in traditional China. Manuscripts are mentioned as the most important primary materials for the recognition of subtle aesthetic information in calligraphy before and during the

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[20] *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 4.220.

[21] *SHQS*, vol. 3, p. 1002.

[22] *Guangyang zaji* 2.64.

medieval period in China. A book about ancient and medieval Chinese manuscripts co-edited by Drège and Moretti (2014) gives a detailed account of Chinese manuscripts from the 5th century BC to the 12th century. De Laurentis puts forward some profound insights into tracing copies and imitative free-hand copies in the introduction, concerning originals, copies and forgeries in Wang Xizhi's calligraphies, to his work about the *Ji Wang shengjiao xu* (2021). His translation, *Understanding Chinese Calligraphy: 35 Key Concepts* (2023) provides the latest useful tools to describe and analyze calligraphic works.[23]

It is noticeable, however, that some general introductions to Chinese calligraphy are relatively simple, seldom mentioning the aesthetic aspect of calligraphy, let alone how to appreciate and express the supreme artistic qualities of Chinese calligraphy.

Hung completed a practical textbook including fundamental definitions and specific practice methods in the art of Chinese calligraphy, designing 100 calligraphic lessons in pattern.[24] Character models in this book, however, were selected from different calligraphers, which may confuse beginners, who need a more harmonized style to do imitative copying. This research aims to make a basic examination of the process of imitative copying, the most important method for learning Chinese calligraphy.

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[23] *The Grove Dictionary of Art*; Lee (2000); Drège – Moretti (2014); De Laurentis (2021a); Zhang Tiangong (2023), trans. De Laurentis.

[24] Hung (1983).

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology and Sources

2.1 Qualitative Methods

The study presented in this thesis pertains to the realm of qualitative research, which can be summarised as "the naturalistic study of social meanings and processes, using interviews observations, and the analysis of texts and images."[1] According to the *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, qualitative research is conducted through five main paradigms, namely positivism, postpositivism, critical theory *et al*., constructivism and participatory (Table 1).[2]

The paradigm that matches the study presented in this thesis on the tradition of copying in Chinese calligraphy is participatory. Ontologically, it focuses on participative reality-subjective-objective reality, co-created by mind and given cosmos. The epistemology then takes critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with the cosmos. The method of study is based on three principles: political participation in collaborative action inquiry; primacy of the practical; use of language grounded in shared experiential context.[3]

This study's adoption of a participatory paradigm does not entail conducting participatory action research on contemporary calligraphers' imitative copying practices. Instead, it prioritizes practical knowing and living knowledge advocated by the participatory paradigm over systematic theoretical frameworks. The historical case study examined in this research—a representative practice specimen thoroughly contextualized in Chapter Six—undergoes micro-visual analysis through comparative scrutiny of the original work and its precise copy. This methodological approach elucidates both the pedagogical necessity of imitative copying of classical models in

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[1] https://guides.library.stanford.edu/qualitative_research, last accessed 7 September 2024.

[2] Denzin – Lincoln (2023), p. 78.

[3] Denzin – Lincoln (2023), p. 78-79.

Chinese calligraphic training and the challenges inherent in such imitative processes. Existing theories and the state of new experimental studies into visual and learning psychology also help to compare the performance of different copies, identify systematic problems in calligraphy learning and explain the reasons behind them.

Table 1: Basic Beliefs of Alternative Inquiry Paradigms—Updated (from Denzin - Lincoln 2023)

Issue	Positivism	Postpositivism	Critical Theory et al.	Constructivism	Participatory
Ontology	Naive realism—"real" reality but apprehendible	Critical realism—"real"reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendible	Historical realism—virtual reality shaped by social, political,cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values: crystallized over time	Relativism—local and specific co-constructed realities	Participative reality—subjective-objective reality,cO-created by mind and given cosmos
Epistemology	Dualist/ objectivist; findings true	Modified dualist/ objectivist; critical tradition/community; findings probably true	Transactional/ subjectivist; value-mediated findings	Transactional/ subjectivist; co-created findings	Critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with cosmos; extended epistemology of experiential, propositional, and practical knowing; co-created findings
Methodology	Experimental/ manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods	Modified experimental/ manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods	Dialogic/ dialectical	Hermeneutical/ dialectical	Political participation in collaborative action inquiry primacy of the practical; use of language grounded in shared experiential context

2.2 Sinological Methods

It is necessary to stress that the field of Chinese calligraphy includes knowledge from both fine arts and sinological research. Considering the complex nature of Chinese traditional sources, competent research in any discipline related to Chinese civilisation requires the command of very different materials. Endymion Wilkinson's enlarged sixth edition *Chinese History: A New Manual* can be a useful reference tool for these sources.[4] The study of imitative copying in calligraphy can be approached from two different but complementary perspectives, namely the philological survey of traditional sources and the iconographic analysis of calligraphic works.

The first approach emphasizes the importance of a wide variety of texts, such as standard histories, encyclopaedias, literary collections and compendia of calligraphic theory, for the study of how Chinese calligraphy was practised and taught. In order to resolve textual problems relevant to pre-modern China, researchers should first understand the fundamental issues concerning Chinese texts and their cultural contexts and should use and fully appreciate the available reference tools and handbooks.

The second approach refers to the analysis of concrete specimens of imitative copies. Imitative copies are recorded in many different compendia of calligraphic works; thankfully, a comprehensive collection of imitative copies in calligraphy was compiled and published in Japan: the *Complete Collection of Free-hand Copies by Famous Masters* (*Rekidai meika rinsho shūsei* 歷代名家臨書集成). The case study presented in this thesis is the precise copying of *Jiuchenggong* by the calligraphy teacher Yao Mengqi. The *Jiuchenggong* has been widely studied and is available in many facsimile reproductions, the best of which was published by the Japanese publishing house Nigensha 二玄社 in 1986. Yao Mengqi's copy was published by Heilongjiang meishu chubanshe 黑龍江美術出版社 in 2022.

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4 For a general introduction, see Wilkinson (2022).

2.3 Primary Sources of the Present Study

2.3.1 Text Based Primary Sources

In the study of the history of calligraphy, in addition to the historical texts, catalogues, indexes, and dictionaries commonly used in sinology, one must also consult specialized reference works. Additionally, there are essential reference books specific to the field of calligraphy. The *Complete Texts on Calligraphy and Painting* (*Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書, *SHQS*) published from 1992 to 1999 is a comprehensive collection that includes 258 books on the history, theory, techniques and catalogues of painting and calligraphy, ranging from Xie He's 謝赫 (479–502) *Old Record of the Classifications of Painters* (*Gu huapin lu* 古畫品錄) to Wang Li's 王禮 (1813–1879) *Liu Mei's [(1732–1802)] Records of Painting and Calligraphy* (*Liu Mei shuhua ji* 劉湄書畫記). This 14-volume set is currently the most extensive collection of ancient Chinese painting and calligraphy texts. In 2005, the index was published, making searching for specific calligraphers, calligraphy texts or terminology much more convenient.

The period of the Six Dynasties through the Tang (220–907) represents a critical and peak period in the development of calligraphy, making the treatises from this era particularly significant. Among these, the *Essential Records of Calligraphy* (*Fashu yaolu* 法書要錄) by Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘, meticulously collated by Liu Shi in 2021, stands out as the first comprehensive collection book of calligraphy theories in history. Although this work is included in the *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, this thesis gives precedence to the newly published collated edition by Liu Shi, *The Collation of Fashu yaolu* (*Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 法書要錄校理). The authenticity of any calligraphy treatise ascribed to this period has been questioned, and Zhang Tiangong has conducted thorough research to authenticate these works.[5] This study refers to Zhang Tiangong's findings for evaluating the authenticity of these treatises.

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[5] Zhang Tiangong (2009).

For specific calligraphic terms, this thesis mainly references the *Great Encyclopedic Dictionary of Chinese Calligraphy* (Zhongguo shufa dacidian 中國書法大辭典) and De Laurentis's translation of 35 key terms laid out by Zhang Tiangong. When interpreting, discussing and translating calligraphic texts, the following four dictionaries are considered authoritative reference tools for understanding the meaning of specific Chinese characters: 7-volume *Grand Dictionnaire Ricci de la langue chinoise* published in 2001; 12-volume *Great Phrase Dictionary of Chinese* (*Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典) published from 1986 to 1993; 9-volume *Great Dictionary of Chinese* (*Hanyu dazidian* 漢語大字典) published in 2010; and *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*.

2.3.2 Calligraphy Works Based on Primary Sources

When studying calligraphic works, primary materials include autograph texts (*moji* 墨跡) on wood, bamboo, silk and paper and rubbings of engraved model-books (*fatie* 法帖) and inscriptions on bronze or stone (*jinshi* 金石).[6] Autographs or manuscripts in ink are the most direct representation of the original style of a calligrapher. Therefore, whenever ink traces are available, they are prioritised in research. However, reliable pre-Tang autographs of accomplished calligraphers are extremely rare,[7] with only a few well-documented examples remaining, such as Lu Ji's 陸機 (261–303) *Pingfu Letter* (*Pingfu tie* 平復帖, Beijing Palace Museum)[8] and Wang Xun's 王珣 (350– 401) *Boyuan Letter* (*Boyuan tie* 伯遠帖, Beijing Palace Museum).[9] Most works attributed to famous

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[6] See Tsien (2004).

[7] Although very few original works by renowned artists from the pre-Tang period have survived, thanks to the systematic excavations conducted by contemporary archaeology, we now have access to a wealth of Qin and Han dynasties autographs for reference. In *FSQJ*, vol. 1.

[8] The reproduction in *FSQJ*, vol. 2, p. 18.

[9] The reproduction in *FSQJ*, vol. 2, p. 200. Li Ning thinks *Boyuan Letter* is a duplicate tracing copy, in Li Ning (2019).

calligraphers such as Wang Xizhi[10] and Wang Xianzhi[11] only survive in copies, the quality of which varies. Thus, careful discernment is required when using these copies.

In the case of rubbings from bronze and stone inscriptions, especially famous stelae and model-books, the original stones or wooden boards have often suffered significant wear due to repeated rubbings, natural weathering or deliberate damage. As a result, the earlier the extant rubbing, the closer it is likely to be to the original, making early rubbings particularly valuable. For instance, in the case study of the *Jiuchenggong*, the scholar Zhong Wei categorizes the best surviving rubbings into five grades: early Northern Song (ca. late tenth-early eleventh century), late Northern Song (late eleventh-early twelfth century), early Southern Song (mid-twelfth century),[12] late Southern Song (early thirteenth century), and Yuan-Ming (late thirteenth-early seventeenth century) rubbings, with the early Northern Song rubbings being the most highly regarded.[13] This research uses the early Northern Song dynasty rubbing, the so-called "Li Qi's Rubbing" (*Li Qi ben* 李祺本, Beijing Palace Museum), which once belonged to the Ming minister Li Qi (d. 1403), because it is considered to be among the finest by the academic community. It is datable to the second half of the tenth century, and once belonging to Li Qi, son-in-law of Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398, r. 1368–1398), the founding emperor of the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644). The ink rubbing was discovered around the year 1940 and is now in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing.[14] From pictures of original relics and ink-rubbings in the collection book of archeologically

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[10] For special study of Wang Xizhi in Eastern Jin dynasty, see Nakata Yūjirō 中田勇次郎 (1970) and (1974); see also Qi Xiaochun (2007) and (2009).

[11] For special study of Wang Xizhi in Eastern Jin dynasty, see Tian Xijing (2023).

[12] This stele was erected in Linyou 麟游縣, Shaanxi Province 陝西省, outside the borders governed by the Southern Song court. Therefore, the term Southern Song here refers to those from the period corresponding to the time of the Southern Song dynasty.

[13] Zhong Wei (2015), p. 399.

[14] See Ma Ziyun – Shi Anchang (1993), p. 240.

excavated calligraphic specimens,[15] it is clear that, compared with famous stele like the *jiuchenggong* inscriptions, the newly unearthed entombed funerary inscriptions (*muzhiming* 墓誌銘) have often been well-preserved underground, appearing almost as if new. Fresh rubbings of these items are relatively easy to obtain, with clear impressions that accurately capture the details of the characters.

2.3.3 Assigning Coordinates to Single Characters——The Basic Method of Analysis for Calligraphy Works

Calligraphy uses Chinese characters as its medium, with the basic unit being a single character. A calligraphic piece is therefore a sequence of characters arranged either vertically in columns (*hang* 行) or horizontally in rows (*lie* 列), no matter their number or their calligraphic script. It goes without saying that within the same text certain characters may repeat. From an artistic perspective, these seemingly identical characters are actually distinct and unique in their calligraphic expression. In a calligraphic masterpiece, referring to characters by some kind of computer printed font or temporary symbols is not convenient for distinguishing and analyzing their unique artistic qualities and the reasons behind them. To address this issue, when studying the calligraphic features of the *Preface to the Sacred Teaching [Scriptures Translated by Xuanzang] in Wang [Xizhi's] Collated [Characters]* (*Ji Wang shengjiao xu* 集王聖教序, 1 January 673, Xi'an Beilin Museum), De Laurentis was the first to use images of each character labelled in the format of column number/ character number (for instance, 1/1 meaning the first character of the first column, 2/2 the second of the second column etc.).[16] In this way each character is given a unique coordinate. According to his summary, these coordinates make it easier to quickly locate each character within the complete

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[15] *Xin Zhongguo xin faxian shufa daxi.*

[16] For the method, see Chapter eight "The Shape and the Calligraphy of the *Ji Wang shengjiao xu*" in De Laurentis (2021a), pp. 195-240.

work, and this coordinate-based labelling can be set up in computer systems to automatically arrange identical characters or radicals next to each other, facilitating systematic analysis and comparison of specific characters, repeated characters and component radicals.[17]

The diversity of varying configurations within the same character or the same radical reflects a calligrapher's ability to control the brushtip and handle the configuration of Chinese characters with flexibility. This is one of the key criteria for assessing the artistic expressiveness of a calligraphy work. The Tang dynasty minister and calligraphy theorist Li Sizhen 李嗣真 (d. 696) once remarked, in his *Sequel to the Classification of Calligraphy* (*Shupin hou* 書品後):

[Zhong] Yuanchang's (courtesy name of Zhong Yao) every dot-stroke is different, and [Wang] Xizhi's ten thousand characters are never the same.[18]

Within the confined space of Chinese characters, calligraphy carries the infinite imagination and creativity of the calligrapher. Rudolf Arnheim once described imagination in a similar vein:

Artistic imagination can be more nearly described as the finding of new form for old content, or-if the handy dichotomy of form and content is eschewed-as a fresh conception of an old subject. The invention of new things or situations is valuable only to the extent that they serve to interpret an old-that is, universal-topic of human experience. There is more imagination in the way Titian paints a hand than in hundreds of surrealist nightmares depicted in a dull, conventional manner.[19]

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[17] De Laurentis (2021b), pp. 75-79.

[18] 元常每點多異, 羲之萬字不同. *Shupin hou*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 3.143. Accordingly, the cursive script of Li Sizhen's contemporary Sun Guoting was criticised by Dou Ji 竇臮 (*fl.* 750) in the *Rhapsody Discussing Calligraphy* (*Shushu fu* 述書賦) (775) for lacking variety. *Shushu fu*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 6.302.

[19] Arnheim (1974), p. 142.

In the context of calligraphy, the same character and even the same stroke varies in style across different scripts, different calligraphers or even each time it is written by the same calligrapher. This variability is what distinguishes calligraphy from static, uniform, crafted handwriting work, embodying its artistic value and vitality. In this thesis, the art of calligraphy is examined using contemporary information technology to its full advantage. Following De Laurentis's approach of assigning coordinates to single characters, each character from the *Jiuchenggong* and Yao Mengqi's imitative precise copy has been processed with coordinate-based labelling. This method allows for a convenient and detailed comparison of the calligraphic expressions in the original work and also serves as a means to assess whether the copyist's observations were meticulous enough and whether their execution was accurate.

2.4 The Importance of Practical Experience and Maintaining Sensitivity to Brushwork while Studying Calligraphy History

The infinite variety of brushwork is the unique charm of calligraphy as an art form and the reason it has captivated countless practitioners for thousands of years. The subtlety of brushwork has been discussed by countless theoreticians; here is the description given by Sun Guoting in his *Shupu*:

The brush does not move in vain; when it goes down it must have a cause. Inside of one long stroke, modify the rising and falling [movements] through the tip. Within a single dot-stroke, vary the pressures and the rotations by the very end [of the brush].[20]

While the study of the history of calligraphy should indeed consider the transmission of calligraphers and their works within various social, cultural and civilisational contexts, it is even

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[20] 翰不虛動, 下必有由. 一畫之間, 變起伏於峰秒. 一點之內, 殊衄挫於豪芒. The Chinese text and the English translation of this sentence from the *Shupu* is from De Laurentis (2011b), p. 75.

more crucial to maintain a focus on the unique artistic expressions of each calligrapher in their era. The most fundamental manifestation of these contemporary styles or individual styles lies in the brushwork details of each artist's work. However, this sensory ability cannot rely solely on visual perception and the brain's rational analysis of historical texts. It is preferable that researchers engage in the practice of imitative copying of the works themselves, to maintain a keen sensitivity to their subjects. Through a hands-on approach, it is much easier to experience fully the texture, speed, pressure and rhythm of each brushstroke, thus appreciating the three-dimensional expressions of time and space within what appears to be a two-dimensional calligraphic work. Without the experience of actual calligraphy practice, it is difficult to achieve a meaningful artistic dialogue with the calligraphers and their creations and to understand the pleasure of practising calligraphy.

The author's engagement with Chinese calligraphy commenced in 2002 through foundational training in baisc brush techniques and standard script at Xiangyang Primary School, Pizhou, Jiangsu Province, China. Systematic professional technique training was subsequently pursued at age sixteen through dedicated calligraphy studio instruction, marking the initiation of semi-cursive script practice.

During undergraduate studies in Educational Psychology in Jiangsu Normal University, supplemental training was pursued through audited coursework in calligraphy specialization at the university's art college and active participation in exhibitions and activities organized by the Xuzhou Calligraphers Association. This dual engagement facilitated technical mastery of five cardinal scripts: the zhuan script, clerical script, standard script, semi-cursive script and cursive script.

Following the completion of a Master's degree in Educational Psychology in University of Macao (2017), the author undertook advanced artistic training through an Master of Fine Arts program specializing in Chinese calligraphy in Renmin University of China. Upon joining in

Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts (2019), professional teaching experience was acquired through delivering undergraduate courses of Calligraphy Pedagogy and assisting supervisor Professor Pietro De Laurentis in coordinating four practical workshops conducted by Master Wang Chengxiong on small standard script, cursive script, calligraphy education methodologies and colophons calligraphy.

These cumulative experiences - spanning thirty years of technical practice, pedagogical implementation, and theoretical study - have established a robust foundation for conducting philological analyses of calligraphy techniques or educational literature and case study of imitative copying in this research. Furthermore, practical experiences provide assistance in translating traditional Chinese calligraphy treatises into English with clearer meanings.

CHAPTER THREE

The Educational Background of Chinese Calligraphy

3.1 Literacy and Handwriting Proficiency in Education

Religious institutions in many parts of the ancient and classical world played a key role in education.[1] However, secular education in traditional China has always been more decisive at least when it comes to literacy. Since both secular and religious education teach the reading and writing of complex texts, literacy is the basis on which secular and religious education are applied in China. Excluding religious scriptures, which comprise dogmatic, historical and liturgical precepts, religious education in traditional China shared many points in common with Confucian education. This chapter discusses calligraphic education outside of religious organizations, although both Buddhism and Daoism have given great importance to the practice of calligraphy and the collection of calligraphic works.[2]

The ideal of traditional Chinese secular education, which took shape in the sixth century BCE and from the second century BCE to the early twentieth century was taken as the official ideology of the empire, was to cultivate morally sound gentleman (*junzi* 君子). This ideal was deeply rooted in traditional culture and Confucian thought.[3] Personal moral perfection and enrichment were viewed as the foundation of education. The emphasis on "benevolence" (*ren* 仁) and "rites" (*li* 禮) in Confucianism was instrumental in maintaining state governance and a harmonious social order, making it highly valued by rulers, who recognized the utility of Confucian

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[1] Johnson — Stearns (2023), p. 11.

[2] For Buddhism and calligraphy in medieval China, see De Laurentis (2021a).

[3] Chinese calligraphy likewise stands as one of the crucial vessels embodying this ideal. Ledderose argues that calligraphy is not merely an art form, but also an embodiment of personal cultivation, carrying multiple social roles, see Ledderose (1986), pp. 35-50; McNair explores Neo-Confucian personalities' enodrsement for calligraphy, see McNair (1994), pp. 209-225.

principles in governance from the Han dynasty. Confucian ideals were integrated into the education

system, ensuring that future generations of officials and citizens would be imbued with these values.

The content of secular education in China also revolved around Confucian classics,[4] with scholars

like Thomas Lee (Chinese name Li Hongqi 李弘祺) even arguing that Chinese education was

classicist in nature.[5] Of course, as Lee also mentions, there were other important philosophical

schools. For example, the Daoist philosopher of the late Warring States period, Zhuangzi 莊子 (ca.

370–300 BCE), believed that true knowledge comes from purely personal experience of confronting

knowledge. On the other hand, the Indian religion of Buddhism, which started to spread in China in

the first century BCE, held that knowledge originates from more private personal enlightenment and

transcendence.[6] Despite differences in specific practical ideas, thinkers generally emphasize

intensely personal endeavor, as seen in this quotation from the *Analects* (14.24) "In old days men

studied for the sake of one's own self; nowadays it is for the sake of [showing off to] others" (古之

學者為己, 今之學者為人).[7]

The curriculum in traditional Chinese education historically centered on the Confucian

Classics, which formed the foundation of moral and intellectual education, emphasizing broad

learning and literacy skills. For the national administrative system, which developed enormously

after the formation of the first unified empire in 221 BCE, it was objectively necessary for officials

to have adequate literacy skills and proficiency in handwriting to ensure administrative efficiency.

The system of civil service examinations (*keju* 科舉), which was based primarily on the Confucian

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[4] The Confucian Classics accepted generally are "thirteen classics": *Change, History, Poetry, Rites of Chou, Book of Rites, Record of Rites, The Tso Commentary, The Kung-yang Commentwy, The Ku-liang commentary, Analects, Classic of Filial Piety, The Erh-ya*, and *Mencius*. Lee (2000), p. 204.

[5] Lee (2000), p. 21; Chinese enlarged edition, *Xue yi wei ji* (2012), p. 20.

[6] Lee (2000), p. 4-5. The introductory remarks on the educational background of Chinese calligraphy in this section are primarily taken from Lee's monograph *Education in Traditional China: a History*.

[7] English translation in Lee (2000), p. 2.

classics, was first formally established during the Sui and lasted until 1905, a few years before the end of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Even during the Northern and Southern dynasties, however, when the appointment of officials was merely a matter of acquired privilege, the curriculum was grounded on the Confucian classics. Success in these exams was essential for attaining official positions, making the mastery of Confucian texts a crucial aspect of education and career advancement. This system reinforced the importance of Confucian education across Chinese society. The institutional requirement for proficiency and aesthetic quality in writing Chinese characters became fertile ground for the evolution of Chinese calligraphy.

The perquisite for calligraphic education is literacy, the ability to read and write Chinese characters. But literacy in traditional China was limited to a small elite group. Due to the transmission of calligraphy skills requiring oral instruction, personal demonstration and the copying of classic models or even original works, the proportion of people proficient in calligraphy was even smaller than the literate group in the general population. We cannot calculate literacy rates across different dynasties and analyze their fluctuations accurately using existing historical documents, but it is possible to estimate the proportion of individuals involved in calligraphy practice by considering the ratio of officials who regularly engaged in handwriting to the total population. Because of the further development and refinement of the civil service examination system, the Tang dynasty was a period of flourishing calligraphy art, especially in the standard script. For example, according to data from 740, in a total population of 48,143,609,[8] there were 368,668 officials,[9] constituting approximately 0.77% of the population. But it should be noted that, apart from those who possessed the skills to serve in the bureaucratic system but were not entitled to, merchants, itinerant vendors, monks and craftsmen evidently also needed to master certain writing skills for purposes such as conducting business, copying Buddhist scriptures for the

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[8] *Xin Tangshu* 37.960.

[9] *Tongdian* 40.1106.

production of religious merit (*gongde* 功德) and engraving inscriptions on stones or writing on walls. Considering these groups, the scope of individuals involved in calligraphic education in Tang China far exceeds 0.77% and can be fairly estimated to be at least double this figure, i.e. ca. 700,000.

The Confucian emphasis on moral development and social harmony permeated the educational content, with a strong focus on cultivating virtues like filial piety, loyalty and righteousness. The study of classics was intended to develop not only intellectual abilities but also moral character. This orientation profoundly influenced how people evaluated calligraphers and their works, and even the methods used to learn calligraphy. As early as 1964, the Dutch sinologist Erik Zürcher pointed out that the grading (*pin* 品) of painters, calligraphers and poets that emerged in the fifth century derived from the grading system implemented for the recruitment of officials, and this was, in turn, based on moral characterization (*pinmu* 品目).[10] Later, this feature was further incorporated into calligraphic appreciation so that, for instance, Sun Guoting used the example of the Confucian sage Zeng Shen 曾參 (505 BCE–535 BCE) to ironically critique Wang Xianzhi's lack of respect for his father. The *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經) recounts how Zeng Shen, upon encountering the hamlet called "Surpassing the Mother" (Shengmu 勝母), deemed the name inappropriate and refused to enter. It is known that Wang Xianzhi's calligraphy was inherited from his father, although he only learned some of the basic principles and did not fully master his father's achievements. Pretending that calligraphy was bestowed by an immortal on Mount Kuaiji and being ashamed of valuing family education reveals a misguided approach to learning calligraphy. [11]

The standard history of the Tang dynasty also documents that the calligrapher and minister Liu Gongquan 柳公權 (778–865) advised Emperor Muzong 穆宗 (Li Heng 李恆, 795–824, r. 820–

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[10] Zürcher (1964), pp. 380-381.

[11] See De Laurentis (2011b), p. 44.

824) that rectifying the mind and self-discipline was fundamental. Liu said to the emperor: "The use of the brush lies in the heart. If your heart is upright, then your brush will be upright."[12] This historical record illustrates, on the one hand, the high value placed on calligraphy by both emperors and officials and, on the other hand, reflects how Confucian principles of personal moral perfection were consistently applied across various aspects of life even for a ruler. At the same time, it suggest that calligraphy, as well as many other leisure activities, might be instrumental in fostering or prompting the moral training and adjustments of sovereigns and, we can also fairly infer, all kinds of superiors.[13]

3.2 The Status of Calligraphic Education

As previously mentioned, Chinese calligraphy, with Chinese characters as its medium, has been inextricably linked to literacy education from the beginning. The *zhuan* script (*zhuanshu* 篆書) forms the foundation of the entire study of Chinese characters. The first systematic dictionary to analyze character forms and etymology, Xu Shen's 許慎 (ca. 55–ca. 149) *Explanation of Non-composite Characters and Analysis of Composite Characters* (*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字), primarily features *zhuan* script. Even today, understanding this dictionary is essential for comprehending the Confucian classics. In addition to the *zhuan* script, other official scripts, such as the clerical script

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[12] 用筆在心, 心正則筆正. *Jiu Tangshu* 165.4310. English translation in McNair (1998), p. 2.

[13] McNair chose the model Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709–785) as the research subject who was a man of upright character and an upright style of writing. For insights on the politics of calligraphy, see McNair (1998), pp. 1-15.

(*lishu* 隸書) and the standard script (*kaishu* 楷書) were valued by the state and used for engraving the Confucian classics.[14]

Calligraphic education was integral in the broader framework of traditional Chinese education. It was not only about learning to write correctly and beautifully but also about internalizing cultural values. The practice of calligraphy was believed to cultivate patience and focus and to help to memorize the classics. This made it an essential component of the training of the literati, reflecting the Confucian emphasis on the unity of knowledge and moral development. The Southern Song Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (Zhao Gou 趙構, 1107–1187, r. 1127–1162) and his Empress Xiansheng 宪圣 (née Wu 吳, 1115–1197, r. 1143–1197) both participated in the handwriting of the *Shaoxing Shijing.* The Southern Song scholar Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223–1296) records in the encyclopedia *Jade Sea* (*Yuhai* 玉海) that Zhao Gou once said to some ministers, "Learning to write by copying the Confucian classics is beneficial, as it not only improves calligraphy skills but also helps in retaining [the content of] the texts."[15] It was because Zhao Gou often wrote the Confucian classics that he once bestowed a handwritten copy of the *Classic of Filial Piety* in both standard and cursive scripts to the prime minister Qin Hui. Qin Hui

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[14] From 175 to 1794 there were seven large-scale official Confucian shijing carvings, which produced the following: *Xiping shijing* 熹平石經, *Confucian Classics on Stone Carved during the Second Year of the Zhengshi Reign* (*Zhengshi shijing* 正始石經), *Kaicheng shijing* 開成石經, *Confucian Classics Carved in Stone during the First Year of Guangzheng Reign* (938) (although completed in 1169) (*Guangzheng shijing* 廣政石經), *Confucian Classics Carved in Stone completed during the Six Year of Jiayou Reign* (1061) (although started in 1041) (*Jiayou Shijing* 嘉佑石經), *Confucian Classics Carved in Stone during the Ninth Year of Shaoxing Reign* (1139) (although completed in 1177) (*Shaoxing shijing* 紹興石經), and *Confucian Classics Carved in Stone during the Qianlong Reign* (1791–1794) (*Qianlong shijing* 乾隆石經). These were created to provide unified standard texts. For collections of texts about the Confucian classics carved on stones, see *Shijing yanjiu wenxian jicheng* (2022).

[15] 學寫字不如便寫經書, 不惟可以習字, 又得經書不忘. *Yuhai* 43.22a.

took the opportunity to request that the manuscript be engraved in stone for posterity.[16] In contrast to the other six official Classics in Stones, *Shaoxing Shijing* displays a clear handwritten quality and features a style reminiscent of the semi-cursive script. The extant stones of *Shaoxing Shijing* are now preserved in the Hangzhou Confucian Temple.

Calligraphic education played a crucial role in traditional Chinese education, embodying the cultural and philosophical values of the time. It was a key element in the cultivation of a gentleman, serving both practical and symbolic functions.

Although calligraphy originated from the study of characters, its extensive practice over time, combined with the square shape of Chinese characters, has evolved it into an art form with significant artistic content. As a form of fine art in traditional China, calligraphy has high standards which require extra artistic endeavour. Calligraphy has captivated countless scholars and literati, who have immersed themselves in its practice and found deep satisfaction in it. However, an excessive immersion in the artistic aspects of calligraphy can sometimes lead people to forget the fundamental task of cultivating one's understanding of the classics themselves. This balance is difficult for many to achieve, and it has been a concern for some scholars. The Eastern Han literatus,Zhao Yi 趙壹 (122–196), once composed a treatise strongly criticizing the contemporary craze for the newly emerging art of the cursive script. He decried the use of the cursive script and thought that scholars should focus their attention on the classics.[17] *Family instructions of Mr. Yan* [Zhitui 之推, 531–ca. 590] (*Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓) presents the view that while learning calligraphy is necessary, it should not be pursued as a profession. Yan Zhitui advised descendants that gaining a reputation and establishing oneself should not be prioritized over calligraphic achievement; he thought that the most important thing was to be valued as a man of letters.[18]

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[16] *Yuhai* 41.36a.

[17] *Fei caoshu*, in *SHQS*, vol. 1, pp. 31-32.

[18] *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 7.567-571. English translation see Tian Xiaofei (2021).

3.3 Calligraphic Training in State Schools

The earliest art school in China, the School at the Gate of the Great Capital (Hongdu menxue 鴻都門學), dates back to 178, established by the Eastern Han Emperor Lingdi 靈帝 (Liu Hong 劉宏, 157–189, r. 168–189), who was interested in literature and the arts. Candidates eligible to attend school, in addition to being recommended by officials, needed to meet basic requirements: namely, being able to "compose letters and documents (*chidu*) and being proficient in script [resembling the shape] of birds (*niaozhaun* 鳥篆)."[19]

Despite protests from the literati, led by Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132–192), who criticized the students for using minor skills to curry favour with the Emperor and gain high-ranking positions,[20] the establishment of this school objectively enriched the content of official education and paved the way for the later practice of selecting officials based on literary and artistic talents.

Moreover, this school produced some renowned calligraphers, such as Shiyi Guan 師宜官 (*fl.* second century) and his disciple Liang Hu 梁鵠 (*fl.* second century). However, it is important to recognize that from the perspective of calligraphy art, the script [resembling the shape] of birds promoted by the School at the Gate of the Great Capital was not true calligraphy in the strict sense but rather a decorative script. As Sun Guoting noted, this type of script had a more pictorial quality and was not considered part of mainstream calligraphy.[21]

The standard history of the Northern Zhou 周 (557–581) dynasty records that:

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[19] 為尺牘及工書鳥篆者. *Hou Hanshu* 60b. 1991-1992, translated with minor differences in Lee (2000), p. 553.

[20] *Hou Hanshu* 60b.1992, 1996.

[21] "Their technique is related with painting and the [relevant] skill is inferior to that of calligraphy." 巧涉丹青, 工虧翰墨. English translation in De Laurentis (2011b), p. 52.

An official named Ji Jun, who was skilled in the standard script and especially proficient in imitative copying, was summoned to teach calligraphy to Shizong 世宗 (posthumous title of Yuwen Yu 宇文毓, 534–560, r. 557–560), the Duke Songxian 宋獻公 (i.e. Yuwen Zhen 宇文震, d. 550) and other students. At that time, students entering the School for Writing would generally follow the *shuxiu* (lit. "bringing the bundle of dried meat as a salary for the teacher") ceremony,[22] which was known as *xiezhang* (lit. "presentation of the [student's] gratitude"). Ji Jun believed that the creation of writing originated from Cang Jie 倉頡 (d.u.), and if the ceremonies were performed in a common manner, it would not be in accordance with the etiquette. Therefore, he petitioned the Taizu 太祖 (posthumous title of Yuwen Tai 宇文毓, 507–556, r. 557–560) to [set up a banquet to] offer sacrifices to Cangjie and the ancient sages and masters."[23]

This record shows that the court at the time primarily taught the standard script and accorded great respect and appropriate ceremonies to the school for writing. Although there are no detailed records about the specific operations of the calligraphy school, it is evident that, compared to the late Eastern Han period, which was marked by intense political strife and during which one could gain high office merely by impressing the emperor with a particular skill, the specialized school system of the Northern dynasty had become orthodox.

The Sui dynasty established a Directorate of Education (Guozi si 國子寺, from 607 called Guozi Jian 國子監),[24] which was continued by the Tang dynasty and was further developed. It is known from the *Suishu* 隋書 (Book of the Sui) that:

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[22] *Shuxiu* ceremony is dated to Confucius, *Analects* xiv, 22.

[23] 冀儁…善隸書, 特工模寫…尋徵教世宗及宋獻公等隸書. 時俗入書學者, 亦行束脩之禮, 謂之謝章. 儁以書字所興, 起自蒼頡, 若同常俗, 未為合禮. 遂啟太祖, 釋奠蒼頡及先聖、先師. *Zhoushu* 47.838; Lee (2000), p. 515.

[24] *Suishu* 28.793.

The Directorate of Education … took charge of the School of the Sons of the State (Guozi xue), the National University (Taixue), the School of the Four Gates (Simen xue), the School for Writing (Shuxue) and the Mathematics School (Suanxue); the erudites[25] and instructors were both assigned to five positions each in the School of the Sons of the State, the National University and the School of the Four Gates, two posts each in the School for writing and the Mathematics School. [There were] 140 students in the School of the Sons of the State, 360 students each in the National University and the School of the Four Gates, 40 students in the School for Writing, 80 students in the Mathematics School.[26]

In the Tang dynasty, calligraphy not only became one of the four major criteria for selecting general officials, but also led to the establishment of specialized positions for copyists under various titles, such as *shushou* 書手, *chaoshu shou* 抄書手, copyist in the standard script (*kaishu shou* 楷書手), copyist of various books (*qunshu shou* 群書手) and tracing copyists (*tashu shou* 搨書手), including the auxiliary scribes (*shuszhi* 書直) and the copyists of imperial books (*xie yushu ren* 寫御書人).[27] Other official positions, such as the positions of editors (*jiaoshu lang* 校書郎) and proofreaders (*zhengzi* 正字)[28] of the Palace Library, were also involved, to ensure the efficiency and accuracy of the copies undertaken in the Palace Library.

The role of tracing copyists was crucial in the evolution of calligraphy history. Due to their exceptional skills in copying, they were able to accurately reproduce the masterpieces of calligraphy, which were then preserved and theoretically available to people other than the owner of

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[25] Wang Xiaoyi 王孝逸 (*fl.* 611) was hired as an erudite of the School of writing by the School of the Sons of the State according to *Suishu*. *Suishu* 41.1187.

[26] 國子寺...統國子、太學、四門、書、算學, 各置博士國子、太學、四門各五人, 書、算各二人. 助教國子、太學、四門各五人, 書、算各二人. 學生國子一百四十人, 太學、四門各三百六十人, 書四十人, 算八十人. *Suishu* 28.777.

[27] De Laurentis (2014b), pp. 142-144.

[28] *Tang liudian* 10.300.

the original, i.e. the emperor, although only a very restricted circle of high ministers and imperial princes were normally granted the honour of receiving the gift of tracing copies. The court copyists Zhao Mo 趙模 (*fl.* seventh century), Han Daozheng 韓道政 (d.u.), Feng Chengsu 馮承素 (617–672) and Zhuge Zhen 諸葛貞 (d.u.) produced copies of calligraphic works under the Emperor Taizong's orders. The Emperor presented them as gifts to the princes and officials, and even used them as a national gift to Japan, which was recorded in a "list of donated items" (*kenmotsuchō* 獻物帳) entitled *Kokka chimpō chō* 国家珍宝帳 (List of national treasures) and preserved in the *Sannomaru Shozukan* 皇居三の丸尚蔵館 (Museum of the Imperial Collections) in Tokyo.

Wang Xizhi's manuscript *Preface to the Lanting Collection of Poems the Orchid Pavilion* (*Lanting xu* 蘭亭序), traditionally attributed to Feng Chengsu, has survived to the present day and has become one of the most renowned calligraphic works in East Asia. De Laurentis believes that its cultural significance and artistic value are comparable to Leonardo da Vinci's famous work, the *Mona Lisa*.[29] The Museum of the Imperial Collections in Japan today also preserves tracing copies of Wang Xizhi during the Tang dynasty, such as *Sangluan Letter* (*Sangluan tie* 喪亂帖), *Erxie Letter* (*Erxie tie* 二謝帖) and *Deshi Letter* (Deshi *tie* 得示). Wang Xizhi's original works no longer exist, and these copies have become crucial keys for understanding the peak moments of Chinese calligraphy art. Contemporary reproductions of these copies are also essential books for calligraphers and enthusiasts.

Correspondingly, the Tang government also established a specialized official calligraphy school known as the school for writing. Other schools, such as the Sons of the State (Guozixue 國子學), the National University and the School of the Four Gates (Simen xue 四門學, the Law

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[29] De Laurentis (2020); De Laurentis (2023), pp. 98-99.

School (Lüxue 律學) and the Mathematics School were also managed by the Directorate of Education.

In this system, the school for writing, the Law School and the Mathematics School belonged to technical subjects (*shike* 實科). After graduating from these schools, students could take exams for the subjects relevant to their respective schools. In other word, students from the school for writing could only sit for the examination on writing and characters (*mingshu* 明書 or *mingzi* 明字) rather than the law examination (*mingfa* 明法) or the mathematics examination (*mingsuan* 明算). With regard to scripts, unlike the script [resembling the shape] of birds required by the School at the Gate of the Great Capital during the late Eastern Han period, Tang dynasty students studied the Classics Inscribed on Stone (*Shijing* 石經) in three scripts, namely the archaic script (*guwen* 古文), the lesser *zhuan* (*xiaozhuan* 小篆) and the clerical scripts.[30] Students who passed the these technical exams could initially obtain official positions which were very low ranking (in the ninth-middle rank)[31] compared with those who were eligible to attend examinations like the presented scholar (*jin shi* 進士), the cultivated talent (*xiu cai* 秀才) or the classicist (*ming jing* 明經).[32] Therefore, from the perspective of future career development, graduates from technical schools such as the School for Writing were far less favoured compared to those from the School of the Sons of the State, the National University and the School of the Four Gates.

For students who were sons (between 14 and 19 years of age) of officials of the third rank and above or great grandsons of officials of lower-second rank and above at the School of Sons of

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[30] *Tang liudian* 21.562; Tsien (2004), pp. 84-85.

[31] For the origin and development of the system of the "nine ranks" used for classifying the hierarchy of officials in the government, see Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定 (1997).

[32] Lee (2000), p. 138.

the State,[33] the most prestigious of all the State schools, calligraphy was not a required subject. According to the *Six Codes of the Tang* (*Tang liudian* 唐六典), only those students who had studied the Confucian classics and still had spare time were required to learn the standard script, a more practical form of script in the Tang dynasty.[34]

Additionally, there were two institutions, the Institute for the Veneration of Literature (Chongwen guan 崇文館, under the household of the Heir Apparent [Dong gong 東宮]) and the Institute for the Advancement of Literature (Hongwen guan 弘文館, under the Chancellery [Menxia sheng 門下省]), that only admitted young men who were sons of officials of the fifth rank and above with interests in calligraphy or sons of imperial relatives, and that placed special emphasis on cultivating an appreciation for calligraphic art. In 627, renowned calligraphers and ministers Yu Shinan and Ouyang Xun were ordered to personally demonstrate the standard script techniques.[35]

In summary, during the Tang dynasty, calligraphic training was an essential skill for all officials and a necessary refinement for the youth of high-ranking officials and nobility. The training, however, differed in focus: for the former, the emphasis was on writing the Confucian classics accurately and correctly, representing a technical and knowledge-based education, while for the latter, calligraphy was regarded as a sophisticated art worthy of lifelong study.

The Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279) continued the system of the Directorate of Education and also established a School for Writing in 1104, but the requirements were more comprehensive than those of the Northern dynasties and the Sui and Tang periods. Students were expected to master

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[33] In general, only the descendants of lower-ranked officials (eighth rank and below) were eligible to attend technical schools. Those of seventh rank and above or young men of preeminent families had the opportunity to pursue further education in other institutions like the School of the Four Gates. For specific different admission qualification in different state schools in the Tang dynasty, see the table "Qualification and Number of Students in T'ang Government Schools" in Lee (2000), pp. 571-572.

[34] *Tang liudian* 21.559.

[35] *Tang liudian* 8.255.

three calligraphic scripts, the *zhuan*, the standard, and the cursive, to understand the essential meanings of Confucian classics such as the *Analects* and *Mengzi*, and to be able to imitate accurately the calligraphic style of ancient masters such as Zhang Zhi 張芝 (d. 192), Wang Xizhi, Wang Xianzhi, Ouyang Xun, Yu Shinan, Yan Zhenqing and Liu Gongquan.[36] It is notable that there were no ranking requirements for admission; both officials and commoners (*shuren* 庶人) had the opportunity to enroll.[37] The artistic quality of calligraphy was divided into three levels, as recorded by the standard history of Song (*Songshi*):

As for the grades of the calligraphy examination, [those who wrote with] the balanced presence of squared and round, thin and thick, with the tip of the brush concealed [inside the stroke] and [producing] vigorous strokes, [and also had] a pure spirit resonating with the ancient [models], as well as a consummate and not vulgar [style] were considered as superior; [those who could write] both squared and round [configurations], [who were] thin but not withered, thick but not gross, and reached each particular script were considered medium; [those who wrote] squared [configurations] without being able to [write] the round, were thick [in their writing] incapable of being thin, and imitated the brushstrokes of the ancients without reaching their sense, although well ordered, were considered as inferior.[38]

This evaluation standard did not refer to specific calligraphic scripts or styles but was a general standard applicable to all scripts or styles. It did not prescribe a single style but encouraged students to develop their own unique styles, continuously refining them to ultimately achieve metaphysical qualities such as balance, the ancient configuration and an absence of vulgarity. It also

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[36] *Songshi* 157.3688.

[37] *Songshi* 157.3686; 157.3688.

[38] 考書之等, 以方圓肥瘦適中, 鋒藏畫勁, 氣清韻古, 老而不俗為上; 方而圓筆, 圓而有方意, 瘦而不枯, 肥而不濁, 各得一體者為中; 方而不能圓, 肥而不能瘦, 模倣古人筆畫不得其意而均齊, 可觀為下. *Songshi* 157.3688. English translation see De Laurentis (2014b), p. 150.

revealed an important methodology, emphasizing the imitative copying of ancient calligraphy models.

The School for Writing in the Song dynasty moved away from the pragmatic need to copy classical texts and instead pursued a pure artistic interest in calligraphy. An objective reason for this shift was the widespread use of book printing technology at the time. The impact of printing on calligraphy was multifaceted. On the one hand, it reduced the practical need for hand-copying scriptures; on the other hand, it helped the transmission of anthologies of treatises on calligraphy: the earliest extant Song engraved version is Chen Si's 陳思 (*fl.* 1237) *Anthology of the Calligraphy Garden* (*Shuyuan jinghua* 書苑菁華, completed in ca. 1230). Two more important anthologies are Zhang Yanyuan's 張彥遠 (ca. 817 – ca. 875) *Important Records on Calligraphy Models* (*Fashu yaolu* 法書要錄, completed before 847)[39] and Zhu Changwen's 朱長文 (1039–1098) *Anthology of the Ink Pond* (*Mochi bian* 墨池編, completed in 1074 although the earliest extant engraved versions circulated during Ming dynasty). Extant versions of these three collections also include handwritten ones.

The Song dynasty court's emphasis on collecting and copying classic calligraphy works from previous dynasties made the engraving and ink rubbing of calligraphy collections feasible. The Northern Song Emperor Taizong 太宗 (Zhao Jiong 趙炅, 939–997, r. 976–997) ordered the Hanlin Academician and renowned calligrapher Wang Zhu 王著 (ca. 928–969) to engrave the manuscripts, many of which were forgeries, preserved in the imperial archives, that could be regarded as calligraphic models for various dynasties from pre-Qin to the Tang dynasty, on wooden blocks to facilitate the production of rubbings for copying and appreciation. This work was called

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[39] According to the preface of *Fashu yaolu jiaoli*, it was completed before *A Record of the Famous Painters of all the dynasties* (*Lidai minghua ji*) also by Zhang Yangyuan. *Fashu yaolu jiaoli*, p. 4.

Calligraphy Model-book [Engraved during the] Chunhua Reign (*Chunhuage tie* 淳化閣) and was completed on December 2nd, 992 (Chunhua 3.XI.6).[40]

Unfortunately, in 1041, a fire in the palace destroyed the original jujube wood blocks. Consequently, in 1109, the Northern Song Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (Zhao Ji 趙佶, 1082–1135, r. 1101–1126) had these models re-edited and re-engraved on stone tablets, known as the Imperial Calligraphy Copy-Model book [Carved during the] Daguan Reign (*Daguan tie* 大觀).[41] In these two ten-volume collections, works by Wang Xizhi occupied three volumes, and works by Wang Xianzhi occupied two volumes, establishing the Eastern Jin "Two Wangs" as classics for the so-called "School of Model Letters" (*tiexue* 帖學).[42]

Calligraphy was just one aspect of the Song dynasty's reverence for antiquity. The rulers' advocacy of the restoration of Confucian rituals led to a fervor for studying ancient bronzes and stone inscriptions, which constituted the emergence of Chinese epigraphy (*jinshixue* 金石學). This not only resulted in comprehensive works such as Ouyang Xiu's 歐陽修 (1007–1072) *Records on the Collection of Antiques* (*Jigu lu* 集古錄, completed in 1063) and Zhao Mingcheng's 趙明誠 (1081–1129) *Records on Metal and Stone Inscriptions* (*Jinshi lu* 金石錄) at the time, but also in the creation of numerous rubbings during research trips. These rubbings were used for verifying classical texts and historical records or as calligraphic models for copying. For easier reading, scholars often reassembled them into the form of a book, commonly known as a "rubbing-book"

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[40] *FTQJ*, vol. 1.

[41] *FTQJ*, vol. 3. For the comparison in detail between these two engraved calligraphy compendia in the Northern Song dynasty, see McNair (1995a).

[42] The" School of Model Letters" focused on calligraphic models based on handwriting and engravings; it emerged from the Song dynasty and kept its mainstream influence on calligraphy training until the rise of the "School of Tablets [or stelae]" (*beixue* 碑學) during the Jiaqing Reign (嘉慶時期, 1796–1820) in the Qing dynasty, which drew inspiration from calligraphy engraved on tombstones, Buddhist statues, stelae, cliffs and bronze artifacts.

(*jianbiaoben* 剪裱本, lit. "Rubbing cut and mounted in the shape of a codex"). These rubbings were mounted with silk of different grades according to their quality. In contemporary times, Song dynasty rubbings have almost become synonymous with high-quality rubbings as, no rubbings made prior to the Song dynasty have been discovered apart from four dating from the Tang that were found in Dunhuang in 1907–1908.[43]

Furthermore, the Emperor Huizong, due to his fervent passion for the arts of calligraphy and painting, founded the School for Painting, which had no precedent in the Tang dynasty, in 1004, alongside the establishment of the School for Writing. The School for Painting was also under the administration of the Directorate of Education. It is recorded in *Songshi* that:

The subjects studied in the School for Painting included painting Buddhist and Daoist [images], figures, landscapes, birds and animals, flowers and bamboos and architectural buildings. Instruction was given using texts like the *Shuowen jiezi*, *Erya*, *Fangyan* and *Shiming*. When using the *Shuowen jiezi*, students were organised to write the *zhuan* script [from it] to grasp the pronunciation and meanings of characters. Other texts were used in a question-and-answer [format] to assess whether students comprehended the essence of painting through their understanding of these texts.[44]

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[43] These rubbings are the *Inscription of the Stūpa of the Meditation Master Sengyong [543–631] of the Monastery of Buddhist Salvation* (*Huadu si Seng yong chanshi shelita ming* 化度寺僧邕禪師舍利塔銘) by Ouyang Xun of 631 (its 12 folios are divided into P.4510 and S.5791); the *Inscription of the Hot Spring* (*Wenquan ming* 溫泉銘, ca. 648, with a colophon dated September 27th, 653, Yonghui 4.VIII.5) by Taizong (P.4508); the *Diamond Sutra* (Skt. *Vajracchedi-kā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, *Jingang jing* 金剛經, colophon dated May 8th, 824, Changqing 4.IV.6) by the famous calligrapher Liu Gongquan (P.4503) and the *Great Compassion Dhāraṇī Sutra Spoken by the Buddha* (Skt. *Mahākaruṇā Dhāraṇī Sūtra, Foshuo dabei tuoluoni jing* 佛說大悲陀羅尼經) (P.4620), see Ma Ziyun – Shi Anchang (1993).

[44] 畫學之業, 曰佛道, 曰人物, 曰山水, 曰鳥獸, 曰花竹, 曰屋木, 以說文、爾雅、方言、釋名教授. 說文則令書篆字, 著音訓, 餘書皆設問答, 以所解義觀其能通畫意與否. *Songshi* 157.3688.

This indicates that students at the School for Painting were also required to be proficient in philological knowledge and basic *zhuan* script writing methods. Although there are no explicit records, it can be inferred that practising the *zhuan* script likely influenced their brushwork skills and even their style of brush use in painting. Both calligraphy and painting utilized the brush and paper as fundamental tools, so the skills needed for *zhuan* script writing would also have had an impact on their approach to painting.

In 1110, these two schools were transferred to the administration of the Hanlin Academy (Hanlin yuan 翰林院), an imperial institution in charge of the intellectual and cultural life of the empire.[45] As pointed out by Lee, this change means that the technical training program was no longer considered equal or even relevant to higher education and recruitment, in spite of the Chinese government continuing to train technical personnel for government service.[46]

Ironically, despite the more comprehensive training and the meticulous assessment of students' calligraphic skills, the overall calligraphy level of the Song dynasty could not compare to that of the Tang dynasty. Northern Song literati, represented by Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), all held this view. However, Ouyang Xiu believed that the reason why skilled calligraphers were abundant among officials and commoners during the Tang dynasty but scarcely found among Song literati was not a lack of ability among the latter; rather, it was because most did not put effort in that direction.[47] Su Shi pinpointed the specific reason, stating that the motivation for the widespread proficiency in calligraphy during the Tang dynasty was that calligraphy, along with conduct, speech and judgements, was a fundamental ability for becoming an official; calligraphy skills, however, were no longer a foundational criterion for recruiting officials.[48]

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[45] *Songshi* 20.384; 157.3687.

[46] Lee (2000), p. 520.

[47] In *Records on the Collection of Antiques*, in *Ouyang Xiu quanji* 139.2223.

[48] In *Colophons by [Su] Dongpo* (*Dongpo tiba* 東坡題跋), in *SHQS*, vol. 1, p. 628.

Even the Southern Song Emperor Gaozong acknowledged this shortcoming. As he wrote in *Records on Calligraphy* (*Hanmo zhi* 翰墨志):

Since their era followed the Five dynasties period, no commendable calligraphic works (*zihua*) existed. It was not until the Emperor Taizong began to collect classical calligraphy pieces that a more thorough effort was made to gather and preserve these works…The decline in the study of calligraphy has never been worse than in our current dynasty. Writing characters has really become [just a means to] record names. The strokes and configuration [of calligraphy by people of this era] do not produce a single piece of brushwork that could be renowned worldwide. Emperor Huizong, who loved calligraphy, established the School for Writing to cultivate talent, yet only Du Tangji (*fl.* 1119–1125) [is commendable]. The rest merely imitate styles without any spirit. Therefore, [I often] reminisce about [when the Emperor Yudi 元帝 (Sima Rui 司馬睿, 276–323, r. 318–323),] crossed the [Yangtze] River [with the royal family of the Western Jin dynasty and established the Eastern Jin dynasty in Jianye 建鄴 (modern-day Nanjing 南京)]. Even then, the Wang and Xie families [excelled in calligraphy]. [In the] later [Tang] dynasty, no official was incapable of writing calligraphy, and many were praised for their skills. What a prosperous time that was! However, since the Shaoxing Reign [of 1131], [there have been only a few notable calligraphers:] Wu Shuo (ca. 1092–1170) from Wutang, known for his "script of mixed style" (*zaishu*) and "script of floating silk style," (*yousishu*) and Xu Jing (1091–1153) from Xinzou, known for his *zhuan* script. The rest are quite mediocre, which truly makes one lament the decline [of calligraphy in our current dynasty].[49]

Nostalgia for the Jin and Tang dynasties, along with the lament that the present could not compare to the past, had become a consensus at the time. The Emperor Gaozong believed that,

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[49] 本朝承五季之後, 無復字畫可稱. 至太宗皇帝始搜羅法書, 備盡求訪…學書之弊, 無如本朝, 作字真記姓名爾. 其點畫位置, 殆無一毫名世. 先皇帝尤喜書致立學養士, 惟得杜唐稽一人, 餘皆體仿了無神氣. 因念東晉渡江後, 猶有王謝而下朝士無不能書, 以擅一時之譽, 彬彬盛哉! 至若紹興以來, 雜書游絲書惟吳塘吳說, 篆法惟信州徐兢, 亦皆碌碌, 可嘆其弊也. *Hanmo zhi*, in *SHQS*, vol 2, pp. 1-2.

despite Huizong's establishment of a specialized calligraphy school, this situation could not be changed. By the time he governed, the situation had worsened, with only two calligraphers who were passable. However, their expertise was not in the commonly used scripts such as the standard script, semi-cursive script or cursive script and their work was quite mediocre.

3.4 The Development of Chinese Calligraphy after the Tenth Century and the Decline in the Standard Script: From the "Academic style" (*Yuanti* 院體) of the Late Tang to the "Palace Style" (*Guangeti* 館閣體) of the Ming and Qing Dynasties

The Chinese scholar Cao Baolin, who authored the section on the Song dynasty in the seven-volume history of Chinese calligraphy series, *Zhongguo shufa shi*, summarized that the inherent deficiencies in Song calligraphy were due to the turmoil of the Five dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (902–979) period.[50] This unrest disrupted the long-standing tradition of master-apprentice transmission of calligraphic techniques, resulting in a severe shortage of skilled teachers and the destruction of many outstanding calligraphic relics. These disruptions were detrimental to the continuity of calligraphic art. Furthermore, the institutional requirement that calligraphic skill be a criterion for selecting officials no longer existed in the Song dynasty. Calligraphy was no longer tied to official appointments, promotions and evaluations, leading to a lack of incentive for developing great calligraphers. The authenticity and quality of the original works and even the high-quality copies used in the palace for creating engraved calligraphic models compendia were often dubious and mixed, yet these compendia were the primary references for learning calligraphy by handwriting works during the Song dynasty and subsequent dynasties. Cao Baolin's argument overlooks the decisive impact of printing technology. Moreover, there had already been signs of a decline in calligraphy after the mid-Tang period. Scholar Liu Tao believes that the standard script of

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[50] Cao Baolin (1999), pp. 1-4.

the late Tang (835–907) overly emphasized slenderness and strength, resulting in an aesthetic bias that neglected balance. He described it as resembling a person with only bones and no flesh, appearing distressed and emaciated.[51] De Laurentis argues that the turmoil brought by the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763) not only affected the political sphere but also significantly weakened the cultural influence of the court. After the mid-eighth century, handwriting quality had already declined and the aesthetic gradually became more and more standardized.[52]

As early as the early Tang dynasty, Sun Guoting lamented that the farther one was from the golden age of calligraphy, epitomized by Eastern Jin masters like Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi, the more the art declined.[53] This was even more true for the Song dynasty, which lacked both the original masterpieces of classical calligraphic works and great calligraphers. The Tang dynasty had witnessed a flourishing period where famous calligraphers engaged in mutual learning and where masters like Yu Shinan and Ouyang Xun personally demonstrated their standard script techniques to students in court schools, a glory that was never seen again in later generations.

Given that there is no longer any scope for creatingnew calligraphic styles—and indeed, this has proven true, as the history of calligraphy has remained centered around the mainstream of the *zhuan* script, clerical script, standard script, semi-cursive script and cursive script since the Tang dynasty, when the standard script reached its maturity—and given that it is exceedingly difficult for anyone to surpass the artistic achievements of the Eastern Jin calligraphers like Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi, why does generation after generation of calligraphy enthusiasts remain so fascinated by and enthusiastic about it? This is a question that later calligraphers and educators of calligraphic art have to confront.

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[51] Liu Tao (2014), p. 156.

[52] De Laurentis (2021a), p. 240.

[53] Reproduction of the manuscript of the *Shupu*, in *FSQJ,* vol 3, p. 94.

In the opening of his calligraphic and theoretical work *the Manual of Calligraphy* (*shupu* 書譜), Sun Guoting addresses the development of calligraphy in different eras.[54] He views changes in calligraphic styles over time as a natural progression. Sun believes that it is valuable to inherit the fine traditions of ancient calligraphy while simultaneously embracing the spirit of contemporary calligraphy. He advocates for engaging with contemporary calligraphers, learning from one another and being careful not to adopt the flaws of contemporary calligraphic practices.

The painter, calligrapher and connoisseur Ke Jiusi 柯九思 (1290–1343), in the Yuan dynasty, was the first to summarize the characteristics of Jin dynasty calligraphy as 'resonance' in his colophon to Zhao Mengfu's 趙孟頫 (1254–1322) imitative copy of the *Yellow Court Classic* (*Huangting jing* 黃庭經), attributed to Wang Xizhi:

The calligraphy of the [Eastern] Jin[55] dynasty excels in resonance (*yundu*), the calligraphy of the Six dynasties excels in style (*fengshen*), while the Tang dynasty aimed for psychological features but could only achieve sinews and bones (*jingu*).[56]

The Ming dynasty minister and artist Dong Qichang (1555–1636) further summarized the styles of calligraphy in the Jin, Tang and Song dynasties and gave his own evaluation:

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[54] Reproduction of the manuscript of the *Shupu*, in *FSQJ,* vol 3, p. 98.

[55] The Jin in this context refers to the Eastern Jin dynasty, an era marked by a group of gentlemen-grandees (*shidafu* 士大夫), represented by Wang Xizhi, who elevated calligraphy to the level of artistic creation.

[56] 晉人書以韻度勝, 六朝書以風神勝, 唐人求風神而不得, 故以筋骨勝. The manuscript of the colophon is preserved in the Beijing Palace Museum, see https://www.dpm.org.cn/subject_zhaomengfu/distinguish/245892.html. Contemporary prints of Zhao Meng fu's imitative copy and Ke Jiusi's colophon, See *Zhao Mengfu lin Huangtingjing* (2023).

The calligraphy of the [Eastern] Jin dynasty seeks resonance (*yun*), the Tang dynasty seeks regularity (*fa*) and the Song dynasty seeks [personal] expression (*yi*). Some might say, 'Is not seeking [personal] expression better than seeking regularity?' That is not the case. The Song calligraphers wrote with their own expression but could not present the expression of the ancients. Zhao Mengfu corrected the shortcomings of the Song [calligraphers by] not showing his own expression, even if he possessed one. This [approach] would surely be criticized by Song calligraphers, [who would say he] was constrained by [regular] methods. The poetic forms of the Tang dynasty are similar to their calligraphy, being both splendid but also somewhat removed from the ancient methods. I often say that [there is] no direct way to [learn] the calligraphy of the Jin, [while learning] Tang calligraphy does not have [fixed] forms. By studying Tang calligraphy, [one can still] access [the resonance] of Jin [calligraphy].[57]

Clearly, in his reverence for Jin dynasty calligraphy, Dong Qichang's views align with those of Ke Jiusi. He believes that the ideal situation is to be able to further appreciate the spirit of Eastern Jin calligraphy by using the structured calligraphy of the Tang dynasty as a foundation. In contemporary times, the tradition of calligraphy creation and copying ancient masterpieces continues, but the ultimate goal is neither to create new styles or surpass the ancients, nor to copy exactly. Rather, it is to 'bring calligraphy to life' by continually absorbing the essence of classical calligraphy models, especially the naturally lively and highly skilled Eastern Jin calligraphy. Calligraphy is a living performance art. The entire process of creating a calligraphic work unfolds sequentially over time and the final piece faithfully records this entire process. With a certain amount of basic calligraphic training, one can observe from the autographs left by the ancients not only visual information such as the size, weight, thickness and breaks or connections of the strokes, but also the calligrapher's writing rhythm and speed at the time. This approach is similar to musical

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[57] 晉人書取韻, 唐人書取法, 宋人書取意. 或曰: "意不勝於法乎?" 不然. 宋人自以其意為書耳, 非能有古人之意也. 然趙子昂矯宋之弊, 雖己意亦不用矣. 此必宋人所訶, 蓋為法所轉也. 唐人詩律與其書法頗似, 皆以穠麗為主, 而古法稍遠矣. 余每謂晉書無門, 唐書無態, 學唐乃能入晉. In *Calligraphy Evaluation* (*Shupin* 書品), in *Rongtai's* (i.e. a nickname given to Dong Qichang) *Additional Literary Collection* (*Rongtai bieji* 容台別集), vol. 2, pp. 1669-1670 .

performance, where each handwriting is a unique and vibrant presentation. The Swiss scholar Jean-François Billeter proposed that the musical note, motif and composition can be compared with the calligraphic element, written character and calligraphic composition.[58]

Moreover, today, there are numerous calligraphy models available, including manuscripts, bamboo slips, bricks and stelae from the pre-Tang and Tang handwriting practice, which are continuously being unearthed. These provide many high-level and diverse examples of calligraphic writing. For example, the first five volumes of the *Complete Collection of Chinese Calligraphy Autographs* (*zhongguo fashu quanji* 中國法書全集) published in 2009 by Cultural Relics Press, from pre-Qin to Five dynasties (ca. 1300 BCE–1000), includes many refined handwriting works written by anonymous authors, which greatly enrich our understanding of Chinese calligraphy and considerably widen the very concept of calligraphic work far beyond the realm of the specimens that were available to the Ming and Qing calligraphy connoisseurs.

From this perspective, calligraphers who, like Zhao Mengfu in the Yuan dynasty, advocated a "return to the ancients" (*fuguzhuyi* 復古主義) tried to correct the individualism of the Song dynasty, which evidently disregarded calligraphic method. However, not only due to the inevitable changes in calligraphic taste and perception that happened from the fourth to fourteenth century, but also because their revival relied on engraved calligraphic models which were severely altered during the Song and which comprised works of dubious authenticity as well as copies, they could not truly capture the essence of Eastern Jin calligraphy.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911), China experienced a period of highly centralized imperial power. The emperors' endorsement of specific calligraphers often led to widespread imitation among officials, who sought to cater to the imperial taste. For instance, the Ming Emperors Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (posthumous title Taizu 太祖, 1328–1398, r. 1368–1398)

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[58] See the section "A Music Art," in Billeter (1990), English trans. Clarke – Taylor, pp. 89-107.

and Zhu Di 朱棣 (posthumous title Chengzu 成祖, 1360–1424, r. 1402–1424) highly esteemed the calligraphy of Shen Du 沈度 (1357–1434), while the Qing Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (1654–1722, r. 1661–1722) was infatuated with the calligraphy of Dong Qichang and Emperor Qianlong 乾隆, 1711–1799, r. 1736–1796) admired the calligraphy of Zhao Mengfu. This trend resulted in a certain homogenization of official calligraphic aesthetics, namely the Bureaucratic Standard script which was known as "palace style" (called *taigeti* 台閣體 in the Ming dynasty and *guangeti* 館閣體 in the Qing dynasty). During the Qianlong and Jiaqing Reigns (1736–1820) in particular, the influence of the palace style in calligraphy extended from officialdom to the examination halls, becoming a crucial criterion in the civil service examinations system.

In 1772, the Emperor Qianlong convened officials to begin compiling the *Complete Library of the Four Branches* (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書). This monumental work was completed in 79,070 volumes, containing approximately 800 million characters.[59] It encompasses various books representing Chinese culture across four categories: classics, history, philosophy and literature, making it the largest collection of its kind before the twentieth century. Due to the collection's vast scale, creating copies using woodblock printing was unfeasible. From 1782 to 1788, more than 3000 court copyists were commissioned to hand-copy seven complete sets. This large-scale book copying project objectively increased the court's demand for copyists who were skilled in the palace style, further reinforcing the popularity of this style of calligraphy.[60] Plate 4 shows a page from the Wenjinge 文津閣 edition preserved in the National Library of China.[61] One can see that uniformity is its most prominent feature, with repeated characters such as *ren* 人, *zhi* 之 and *yi* 以 being almost identical. In contrast, the essence of true calligraphic art lies in its flexibility and variation. The

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[59] Wilkinson (2022), pp. 945-948.

[60] Liu Heng (2009), pp. 129-130.

[61] *Maoshi jiangyi* 1.2.

安意有所向也所謂哀窈窕思賢才也參差荇菜左右

采之者亦思有如此之人居如此之職也故曰窈窕

淑女琴瑟友之謂后妃之賢宜以琴瑟之和聲親友

之也采取也芼擇而調和之也后妃之賢又宜以鐘

鼓之盛樂而樂之也所謂樂得淑女以配君子也此

篇毛氏小序傳用數則字彂明風人之義極分曉不

以為文王太姒最有意至鄭氏則所箋差矣大抵此

篇所言后妃之德惟窈窕淑女四字夫貞靜幽閒者

Plate 4: A page from the hand-copied *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (1789)

treatment of strokes in the standard script works used as calligraphic models by examinees for the civil service examinations during the Qing dynasty is much more flexible;as evidenced in a partial copy of the Daoist scripture, *Classic of Spiritual Flight* (*Lingfei jing* 靈飛經, ca. 738) attributed to Zhong Shaojing 鍾紹京 (*fl.* 713) (now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York) (pl. 5),[62] the use of the brush-tips is more dynamic and varied. When the same character is repeated, as happens with *ren* 人 and *shang* 上, the shape is subtly adjusted depending on the context; similarly, the same component, such as 彳 in the characters *xing* 行 and *de* 得, is adjusted in length according to the right-hand component of the character. These adjustments directly recall what the Tang calligrapher and theoretician Sun Guoting stated in his *Shupu*:

As for the simultaneous use of various long strokes, for each of them the shape should be different; when numerous dot strokes are arranged in succession, their figure should be diversified.[63]

It is no wonder that some calligraphers have consistently criticized this standardization of aesthetic criteria. For example, the Qing official and calligrapher Zhou Xinglian 周星蓮 (*fl.* 1840) once remarked:

In recent years, the characters written by copyists (*shusheng*) and the writings of court literati, with their meticulous and intricate configuration of componentswhen merely writing regular charactersdo not, however, represent the true standard script.[64]

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[62] Liu Heng (2009), p. 124. According to Liu Heng, other models were works attributed to Wang Xizhi, like the *Yellow Court Classic*, *Discussion on Yue Yi* (*Yue Yi lun* 樂毅論), the *Stele of Cao E* (*Cao E bei* 曹娥碑).

[63] 至若數畫並施, 其形各異; 眾點齊列, 為體互乖. Reproduction of the manuscript of the *Shupu* in *FSQJ*, vol. 3, p. 95. English translation in De Laurentis (2011b), p. 59.

[64] 近來書生筆墨, 台閣文章, 偏旁佈置, 窮工極巧, 其實不過寫正體字, 非真楷書也. In *A Humble Opinion on Learning Calligraphy* (*Linchi guanjian* 臨池管見), in *Zhongguo lidai shufa lilun pingzhu*, p. 337.

行此道忌淋汙經死尸之家不得與人同牀
寢衣服不假人禁食五辛及一切肉又對近
婦人尤禁之甚令人神器魂凶生邪失性災
及三世死為下鬼常當燒香於寢林之首也
上清瓊宮玉符乃是太極上宮四真人所受

Plate 5: Detail of the Daoist scripture *Classic of Spiritual Flight* (*Lingfei jing* 靈飛經, ca. 738) attributed to Zhong Shaojing 鍾紹京 (*fl.* 713) (from Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York)

The Qing dynasty official and man of letters Jin Anqing 金安清 (1817–1880), articulated the essence of how the palace style in calligraphy was shaped by imperial preferences:

The palace style in calligraphy changes with the times, always reflecting the emperor's taste. Early in the [Qing] dynasty, [Emperor] Shengzu's (i.e. Kangxi) fondness for Dong [Qichang]'s style [led] many civil officials to follow suit, with Zha Shengshan (1650–1707) and Jiang Ximing (1628–1699) being notable followers. The calligraphy of [Emperors] Yongzheng (1678–1735, r. 1722–1735) and Qianlong was rooted in the calligraphy of Yan [Zhenqing], infused with [the calligraphy of] Zhao [Mengfu] and Mi [Fu]. This style is commonly described as black, round, glossy and square. However, [this approach resulted in] a robust yet imposing aesthetic. Later, Emperor Jiaqing (1760–1820, r. 1796–1820) preferred the style of Ouyang Xun and Prince Cheng 成 (Aixinjueluo Yongxing 愛新覺羅·永瑆, 1752–1823) was initially skilled in Ouyang's style. During [Emperor] Daoguang's (1782–1850, r. 1820–1850) reign, the preference shifted to Liu [Gongquan's style], with Qi Shouyang (1793–1866) being a notable practitioner. After [Emperor] Xianfeng (1831–1861), the popularity of Ouyang [Xun], Liu [Gongquan] and Zhao [Mengfu]'s styles waned, and the majority began studying [the standard script of] the Northern Wei [dynasty (386–534)].[65]

The copy of *Kuaixue shiqing letter* (*Kuaixue shiqing tie* 快雪時晴 , Taipei Palace Museum) attributed to Wang Xizhi,[66] includes colophons by Zhao Mengfu, the Emperor Qianlong (pl. 6a) and Hududa'er 護都沓兒 (*fl.* 1315) (pl. 6b), the number one scholar in the civil service examination in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). From these colophons, it is evident that, while the

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[65] 館閣書逐時而變, 皆窺上意所在. 國初, 聖祖喜董書, 一時文臣皆從之, 其最著者查聲山、姜西溟. 雍正、乾隆皆以顏字為根底而趙、米間之, 俗語所謂墨圓光方是也. 然福澤氣息, 無不雄厚. 嘉慶一變而為歐, 則成親王始之. 道光再變而為柳, 如祁壽陽其稱首者也. 咸豐以後, 則不歐不柳不顏, 近且多學北魏. In *Murmur by the Window Overlooking the Water during Spring* (*Shuichuang Chunyi* 水窗春囈), vol. 2, p. 106.

[66] *Kuaixue shiqing letter* was a copy work that is only partly representative of Wang Xizhi's calligraphic style. See De Laurentis (2021a).
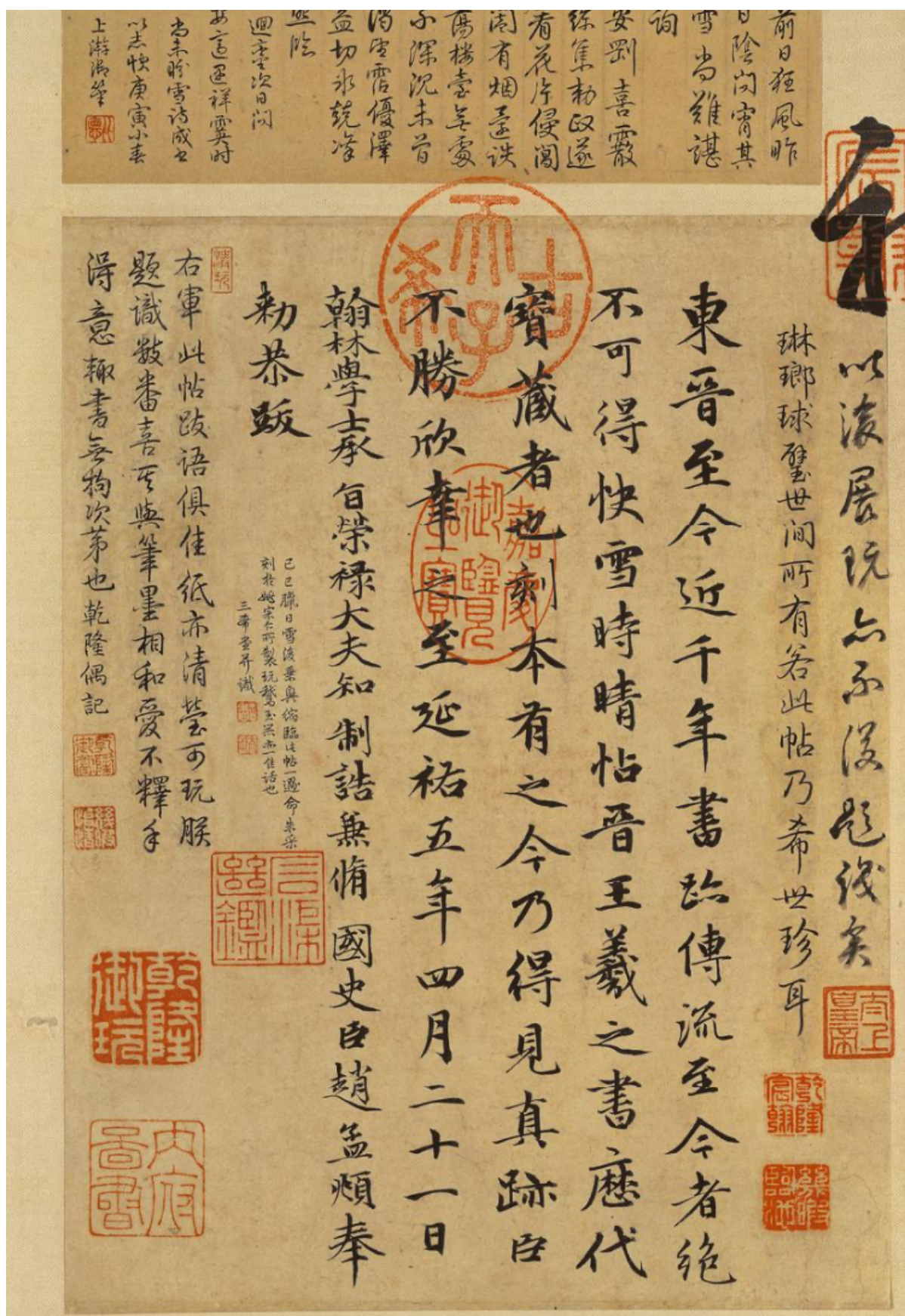
Plate 6a: Colophons by Zhao Mengfu, the Emperor Qianlong to the copy of *Kuaixue shiqing letter* 快雪時晴 attributed to Wang Xizhi (from Taipei Palace Museum)

晉王羲之墨跡前賢已多論者當為天下法書第一快雪時
晴帖歷年雖遠神物護持不至磨滅傳之今日甚可珍藏也又
使四海之內學儒諸生知
萬幾之暇不事遊畋不寶珠玉博古尚文致精如此延祐五年
四月廿三日
賜進士及第翰林待制承直郎臣薰 國史院編修官臣護都沓兒奉
勑恭跋

壬辰小春十
有八日夜雪
咸什明宗積
雲暎素展册
怡齊拜手

入晚復飄雪
連晨窻間珠
宏將至二寸來
是樂三條澤
也日因潤惛
我心那舒不
知其為遇觀遇

Plate 6b: Colophon by Hududa'er 護都沓兒 (*fl.* 1315) to the copy of *Kuaixue shiqing Letter* 快雪時晴 attributed to Wang Xizhi (from Taipei Palace Museum)

Emperor Qianlong's palace style semi-cursive script was modelled after Zhao Mengfu, it lacked the variation in brushstroke weight and character size of Zhao's work. Furthermore, as early as the Yuan dynasty, the standard script used by examination candidates already exhibited a uniform and monotonous style.

This phenomenon of standardizing calligraphic aesthetics under imperial influence had precursors in earlier periods, such as the Northern Song and even Tang dynasty, and this was commonly called "academic style" (*yuanti* 院體), in reference to the Hanlin Academy (Hanlin yuan 翰林院).[67] As Huang Bosi noted in a colophon of 1114 to an ink rubbing of the inscription *Ji Wang shengjiao xu*:

In recent times, most of the personal attendants in handwriting (*shishu*) of the Hanlin Academy have been imitating this stele['s style], but they have been unable to reach it[s artistic style], as their [calligraphies] completely lack in elegance. Hence they themselves regard their calligraphies as "academic style," and since the time of Wu Tongwei (*fl.* 795) and his brother [Wu Tongxuan (*fl.* 791)] of the Tang there was already such a handwriting manner. Consequently, today's gentlemen-grandees rarely appreciate this [stele]. However, [this is because] those who study this stele fail to reach [its level of excellence], which makes their work appear stelae. The calligraphy on the stele itself is not tasteless.[68]

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[67] Hanlin Academy originated from Hanlin (lit. Grove of brush point) given by the Tang Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (Li Longji 李隆基, 685–762, r. 713–756) to officials with concurrent appointments as academicians, was regarding as training ground for the ambitious till Qing dynasty. Wilkinson (2022), p. 258.

[68] 近世翰林侍书辈多学此碑, 学弗能至, 了无高韵, 因自目其书为院体. 由唐吴通微昆弟已有斯目, 故今士大夫玩此者少. 然学者弗至, 自俗耳, 碑中字未尝俗也. *Dongguan yulun*, in *SHQS*, vol. 1, p. 878. Translated with several differences in De Laurentis (2021a), p. 197.

As we learn from these excerpts, it is evident that the main reason why an 'official' or 'academic style' of the past was followed was not calligraphic taste per se, but the fact that learners focused solely on imitating its appearance to please imperial authority or to pass the official examinations. This distorted attitude was reproached by several connoisseurs and theoreticians, whose aim was to point out that the essence of calligraphic art is pure artistic expression. Huang Dun believes that the palace style of the Ming dynasty stifled the artistry of calligraphy, leading to its decline in popularity a century later due to its monotonous aesthetics and lack of substance.[69] Liu Heng acknowledges the practical value of the Qing dynasty's palace style calligraphy in copying and preserving large encyclopedic compendia, transcribing exam papers to ensure fairness in local exams and expressing royal aesthetic requirements. However, like Huang Dun, he criticizes this style for being overly uniform and monotonous and notes that it quickly faded away following the abolition of the Qing dynasty's civil service examination system.[70]

3.5 Calligraphy Training by Family Education

Family education was a highly significant form of education in ancient China. From an anthropological perspective, the earliest educational interactions occurred between elders and younger members within families. Early medieval China (fourth to sixth centuries) was an era characterized by aristocratic families—commonly referred to with the collective term 'genry'—, which dominated politics and the economy and of course influenced the transmission of knowledge in areas such as Confucian classics, literature and the arts, not to mention their interest in Daoism and Buddhism.

The famous Chinese treatise on family education, the *Family Education Family Instructions of Mr. Yan*, despite being produced at the end of this period, can be considered as a rich source on

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[69] Huang Dun (2009), p. 216.

[70] Liu Heng (2009), p. 130.

the whole of early medieval culture. The book is divided into twenty chapters in which Yan Zhitui, drawing on his personal experiences and observations, advises his descendants on how to educate children, manage households, engage in affairs and pursue scholarly activities. In the nineteenth chapter, which begins with a discussion on miscellaneous arts, Yan mentions calligraphy.[71] However, instead of delving into specific techniques or skills, he exhorts his sons against seeking renown through calligraphy. In order to achieve his goal, Yan therefore uses examples such as that of Wei Dan 韋誕 (179–253), who risked his life to provide calligraphy at the top a newly-built tower, Wang Xizhi and Xiao Ziyun 蕭子雲 (487–537), who were overshadowed by their calligraphy instead of reaching fame because of their scholarship, or Wang Bao 王褒 (510–576), who was enslaved by excessive requests for his writing.

Regarding other miscellaneous arts like painting, archery, divination, astrology and wind-divination, *yin-yang*，mathematics，medicine, zither-playing, encirclement chess，pitch-pot and pellet chess, Yan's attitude is similar: they should be slightly familiar with these arts but should consider Confucian classics and philology as their basic pursuits. Possibly due to his own youthful efforts in these arts without achieving his ideal level, his feelings are conflicted. Despite recognizing the potential pitfalls of fame in calligraphy, he still advises that Wang Xizhi's style is the most important model and source for learning calligraphy. Yan Zhitui not only collected ten scrolls of works by Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi but also commented on famous calligraphers like Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), Ruan Yan 阮研 (*fl.* sixth century) and Xiao Ziyun, who he believed were all influenced by Wang Xizhi's calligraphy. He even speculated that Xiao Ziyun's late style resembled Wang Xizhi's early style.[72] In fact, the "*bibliographic treatise*" (*jingji zhi* 經籍志)

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[71] English translation with corresponding Chinese text of the chapter on miscellaneous arts in Tian Xiaofei (2021), pp. 414-437.

[72] Tian Xiaofei (2021), pp. 418.

of the second standard history of the Tang dynasty (*Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, first publ. 1060), compiled by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) *et al.,* clearly records a monograph on *Brushwork and Ink Techniques* written by Yan Zhitui, but unfortunately the text is no longer available. This suggests that Yan Zhitui himself did not simply pay cursory attention to calligraphy but deeply appreciated it and studied the works of Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi to form such detailed insights.[73]

The calligraphic achievements of the Eastern Jin dynasty hold a milestone significance in the history of Chinese calligraphy. Represented by the 'Two Wangs' (Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi), calligraphers advanced calligraphy from ancient plainness (*guzhi* 古質) to modern grace (今妍), greatly enriching the skills and artistic expression of calligraphy. Liu Tao concludes that this transformation included Wang Xizhi's development in the standard script, where he altered Zhong You's "flipping and lifting" (*fantiao* 翻挑, i.e. turning and lifting the brush-tip) to "one stroke down" (*yita zhixia* 一拓直下, i.e. ending a stroke without lifting the brush, but rather smoothly transitioning to the next stroke), resulting in a more concise and fluid style.[74] In the cursive script, Wang Xizhi transitioned Zhang Zhi's "loose intersection" (*kuanjie* 寬結) to "tight intersection (*jinjie* 緊結),"[75] known as modern cursive (*jincao* 今草), which features a more compact structure. This evolution, combined with the vertical arrangement of characters in calligraphic tradition, led to a vertical handwriting force, making the characters more connected and the composition more group-structured. Wang Xizhi's early works, like the *Aunt Letter* (*Yimu tie* 姨母帖, Liaoning

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[73] *Xin Tangshu* 57.1449.

[74] Liu Tao (2009), pp. 171-172.

[75] This concept originated from the calligrapher Sha Menghai's 沙孟海 (1900–1992) summary of the calligraphic style of the Northern dynasties a s "tight intersection of diagonal strokes" (*xiehua jinjie* 斜劃緊結) and distinguished it from another style of "loose intersection of flat strokes" (*pinghua kuanjie* 平劃寬結). Sha Menghai (1987), p. 223.

Provincial Museum)[76], reflect the pre-reform style, while the *Sangluan Letter*[77] showcases the reformed style. Wang Xianzhi further developed this trend into a more rapid and continuous style, exemplified by the *Pill [Made from] Duck Letter* (*Yatou wan tie* 鴨頭丸帖, Shanghai Museum)[78], where cursive and running scripts intermingle seamlessly.

By the Liu-Song dynasty (420–470), the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi had already become highly esteemed and regarded as prime models for future generations. Details of the Wang family's calligraphy education are recorded in the Yu He's 虞龢 (*fl.* 470) *Memorial on Calligraphy* (*Lunshu biao* 論書表).[79] The calligraphic models which Wang Xianzhi imitated included not only Wang Xizhi but also earlier renowned calligraphers. He trained on various scripts such as the standard, semi-cursive, *zhang* cursive (*zhangcao* 章草), cursive and even the flying white script (*feibai shu* 飛白, which was more a brushwork technique than a script per se). He practised writing texts, including ancient poems, rhapsodies, eulogies and treatises.[80] Moreover, when Wang Xianzhi began learning calligraphy at the age of seven or eight, he was so focused that even when Wang Xizhi tried to pull his brush away from behind, he couldn't succeed. Wang Xianzhi's training wasn't limited to sitting upright and practising diligently; it sometimes included playful writing exercises (*xixue* 戲學), repeatedly practising a single character, or writing in several scripts on one piece of paper. Yu He notes also that when Wang Xianzhi started to learn his father's calligraphy, his standard script did not quite resemble Wang Xizhi's but his *zhang* cursive was very similar and even more fluid and graceful than Wang Xizhi's. It also records that Xie Lingyun's 謝靈 運 (385–433) mother, née Liu, was the niece of Wang Xianzhi. Due to this familial connection, Xie

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[76] In *FSQJ*, vol. 2, p. 54.

[77] In *FSQJ*, vol. 2, p. 86.

[78] In *FSQJ*, vol. 2, p. 174.

[79] *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 2.44-54.

[80] *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 2.50-52.

Lingyun had many opportunities to learn the Wang family's calligraphy and his own calligraphy displayed many features of the Wang family's style. This indicates that family education in calligraphy was not only passed down through direct descendants but also benefited relatives. Xie Lingyun was renowned for both his poetry and his calligraphy during his lifetime, with his landscape poetry being particularly famous. The standard history records that his handwritten poems and essays were referred to as the 'two treasures' by the Liu Song Emperor Wendi 文帝 (Liu Yilong刘义隆, 407–453, 424–453).[81] While his poetry has survived to this day, unfortunately, none of his calligraphy works or their copies have been preserved.[82]

Wang Xianzhi's early experience of learning calligraphy from his father is also recorded in Zhang Huaiguan's 張懷瓘 (*fl.* 727) *Judgements on Calligraphy* (*Shuduan* 書斷) but at an even younger age[83] and with richer details:

[When Wang] Zijing was five or six years old, he [began] studying calligraphy. [Wang] Youjun [tried to] secretly pull the brush from behind him, [but the brush did] not leave [Zijing's hand]. Wang Youjun wondered and said, "This son [is so dedicated to calligraphy that he] will gain great fame [when he grows up]." [He] then wrote the *Yueyi lun* in the standard script for him. After studying the *Yueyi lun*, [Wang Zijing] could write very small standard script, mastering its subtle nuances and reaching an extraordinary level, with tight and structured sinews and bones, comparable to his father. [However, Wang Zijing's] large [standard] script was straight and lacked [rich] forms; it was unable to match that of Wang Xizhi. [84]

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[81] *Songshi* 67.1772.

[82] English translations of Xie Lingyun's poems see Frodsham (1967), Westbrook (1973), Hinton (2001), Mark (2004), Tian (2020).

[83] *Jinshu* also records the story that Wang Xianzhi began studying calligraphy at seven or eight years old. *Lunshu biao* and *Jinshu Jinshu* predate *Shuduan*, and are therefore more credible. *Jinshu* 80.2105.

[84] 子敬五六歲時學書, 右軍潛於後掣其筆, 不脫, 乃嘆曰: "此兒當有大名." 遂書《樂毅論》與之. 學竟, 能極小真書, 可謂窮微入聖, 筋骨緊密, 不減於父. 如大字則遒直而少態, 豈可同年. *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 8.418-419.

Wang Xianzhi's calligraphic training was exceptionally privileged, with his father being a pivotal and unparalleled calligrapher through the ages and demonstrating appropriate calligraphic models on the spot based on his learning status. Nevertheless, his ability to stand out among his other six brothers and his contemporaries was due to his intense dedication to calligraphy and his efforts in imitative copying. According to the standard history of the Jin dynasty, Wang Xizhi had seven sons and a daughter: Wang Xuanzhi 王玄之 (ca. 324–357), Wang Ningzhi 王凝之 (334–399), Wang Huanzhi 王涣之 (335–396), Wang Suzhi 王肅之 (*fl.* 353), Wang Huizhi 王徽之 (338–386), Wang Caozhi 王操之 (ca. 340–391), Wang Xianzhi and Wang Mengjiang 王孟姜 (b. ca. 344), whose daughter was Xie Lingyun's grandmother.[85] Amongst all the siblings, only one tracing copy of Wang Huizhi's calligraphy, *New Moon Letter* (Xinyue tie 新月   ),[86] is extant in the *[Calligraphies in Form of] Epistles [Submitted] in [the Second Year of] the Wansui tongtian Reign* [696–697] (*Wansui tongtian tie* 萬歲通天   [87], Liaoning Provincial Museum).

In addition to the most famous aristocratic families, such as the Wang 王 clan of Langya 琅琊 (southern Shandong), the Yu 庾 clan of Yingchuan 潁川 (central Henan), the Xie 謝 clan of Chenjun 陳郡 (eastern Henan) and the Xi 郗 clan of Gaoping 高平 (eastern Shandong), other notable calligraphy families during the Eastern Jin dynasty had their places of origin in both north and south China, such as the Wang clan of Taiyuan 太原 (Shanxi), the Li clan of Jiangxia 江夏

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[85] *Jinshu* 80.2101-2106.

[86] *FSQJ*, vol. 2, p. 214.

[87] Wang Fangqing 王方慶 (d. 702), the eleventh generation descendent of Wang Dao 王導 (276–339), who was Wang Xizhi's uncle, submitted 10-scoll calligraphic works by his twenty-eight ancestors from the Wang clan of Langya to Empress Wu Zetian on March 1st, 697 (Wansui tongtian 2.IV.3). Unfortunately, only ten fragments of letters by seven of these calligraphers are extant. See Kanda Kīchirō – Tanaka Yoshimi (1954–1968), vol. 26, p. 64; *Jiu Tangshu* 89.2899.

(Hubei), the Zhang 張 clan of Wujun 吳郡 (southern Jiangsu-northern Zhejiang), the Yang 楊 clan of Taishan 泰山 (Shandong) and the Wei 韋 clan of Jingzhao 京兆 (Xi'an, Shaanxi).[88]

These families exchanged insights into calligraphy, as evidenced by extant letters from Wang Xizhi. The transcriptions of many of the letters and autographs of Wang Xizhi can be found scattered across several collections, including the two catalogues collected in *Fashu yaolu*: the *Catalogue of [Wang] Youjun's Calligraphies* (*Youjun shumu* 右軍書目) compiled by Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596–658) in the 640s; *Records of [Wang] Youjun's Calligraphies* (*Youjun shuji* 右軍書記) compiled by Zhang Yanyuan two hundreds years later (ca. ninth century); the *Chunhuage tie* compiled in 992 by Wang Zhu; Xu Kai's 許開 (d.u.) *Comments and Annotations on the Two Wangs' Calligraphy* (*Er Wang tie pingshi* 二王帖評釋) during the Southern Song 南宋 (1127–1279)and Zhang Pu's 張溥 (1602–1641) Ming dynasty compilation, *Collected [Calligraphies] of Wang Xizhi* (*Wang Youjun ji* 王右軍集).[89] The Japanese scholars Moriya Shigeo and Sato Toshiyuki compiled and annotated these works into the *Complete Letters and Manuscripts of Wang Xizhi* (*Ō Gishi zen shokan* 王羲之全書翰), collecting the texts of 695 fragments. Among these, letters discussing calligraphy (nos. 396 to 406) provide insights into the calligraphic practices of the time, with engraved copies of nos. 398 to 401 still visible in the *Chunhua getie*.[90] The texts of letters 396 to 406 are as follows:

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88 Liu Tao (2009), pp. 154-169.

89 Morino Shigeo – Satō Toshiyuki (1996), p. iv.

90 The *Huangxiang Letter* of no. 398 in *FTQJ*, vol. 1, p. 341; the *Sheng feibai Letter* of no. 399 in *FTQJ*, vol. 1, p. 341; the *Sizhi feibai Letter* of no. 400 in *FTQJ*, vol. 1, p. 353; the *Feibai buneng naijia Letter* of no. 401 in *FTQJ*, vol. 1, p. 398.

No. 396, *Jun xueshu youyi tie* 君學書有意 : [I see that] you are interested in learning calligraphy, so I am sending you a scroll of cursive script today.[91]

No. 397, *Mazhi tie* 麻紙 : You recently [expressed] a need for hemp paper, [and I happened to] have some; I am sending you three hundred sheets today. Have you found a copyist? If so, please let me know who this person is.[92]

No. 398, *Huang Xiang tie* 皇象 : Please send [a specimen of] Huang Xiang's *zhangcao* script to me; don't forget, via a reliable courier.[93]

No. 399, *Sheng feibai tie* 省飛白 : [I have] reviewed your flying white script; it's quite good. [After] hastily gathering [some works in the flying white script], [you should] have the willingness to probe the fundamental principles, and there will undoubtedly be some progress. [If you continue] like this, you will surpass [me or your teacher].[94]

No. 400, *Sizhi feibai tie* 四紙飛白 : The messenger mentioned that Shezi (anonymous) sent [you some items] separately, which are from the north. Why do you want these items? How many do you want? I am sending you four pieces in the flying white script. How do you think [these works] look? Can they be [used as models for] learning?[95]

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[91] 君學書有意, 今相與草書一卷. In Morino Shigeo – Satō Toshiyuki (1996), p. 418.

[92] 足下近欲麻紙, 適成, 今付三百. 寫書, 竟訪得否, 得其人示之. In Morino Shigeo – Satō Toshiyuki (1996), p. 419.

[93] 皇象草章, 旨信送之, 勿忘, 當付良信. In Morino Shigeo – Satō Toshiyuki (1996), p. 420. During the Han dynasty, Shi You's 史游 (48 BCE–33 BCE) *An Essay to [Help with] Quickly Getting to [Learn Characters]* (*Jijiu zhang* 急就章) was the most widely used elementary text. It was eventually copied by in the *zhang* cursive script by Huang Xiang. See *FTQJ*, vol. 16, pp. 1-81.

[94] 省飛白乃致佳. 造次尋之, 乃欲窮本, 無論小進也. 稱此將青于藍. In Morino Shigeo – Satō Toshiyuki (1996), p. 420.

[95] 信云, 舍子別送, 乃是北方物也, 以欲此? 欲幾許? 致此四紙飛白, 以為何似? 能學否? In Morino Shigeo – Satō Toshiyuki (1996), p. 421.

No. 401, *Feibai buneng naijia tie* 飛白不能乃佳　: [I] can't write the flying white script very well. I have tried to improve, but it is a very difficult script. [I may continue to] practise it, [and if I write something good], [I will] send it to you again.[96]

No. 402, *Bijing tie* 筆精　: The paper and brushes are of excellent quality, [they] need to be deeply (unreadable character). The children have arrived, but there was nothing to take out; afterwards, [I will have] the messenger [send a] reply [to you].[97]

No. 403, *Zijing feibai tie* 子敬飛白　: [Wang] Zijing's *feibai* script is excellent.[98]

No. 404, *Zhangcao tie* 章草　: I recently wrote this piece of *zhang* cursive script, [which I believe] holds considerable reference value, but the brush used was extremely poor, [and I am] very dissatisfied [with it].[99]

No. 405, *Jiuku tie* 久苦　: [I have] long been distressed by this; cursive script is always exhausting. I know your calligraphy—each character is unique, each stroke is smooth, a beauty that cannot be replicated. [Please write some more and send them to me] when you have time. Recently, [I have wanted to improve my cursive script, but it seems] too late [now], and ultimately, it is impossible to achieve. [Looking at it] this way, I don't know] what to say. [100]

No. 406, *Linchi xueshu tie* 臨池學書帖: Zhang Zhi practised calligraphy near a pond, and the water turned black [from his ink washing]. If I were as dedicated to [calligraphy practice] as him, [my skill in calligraphy] would not necessarily be inferior to his.[101]

Overall, Wang Xizhi is passionate about exploring calligraphy styles in various scripts, such as the flying white, cursive and *zhang* cursive script. These letters also reveal Wang Xizhi's

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[96] 飛白, 不能乃佳. 意乃篤好, 此書至難. 或作, 復與卿. In Morino Shigeo – Satō Toshiyuki (1996), p. 422.

[97] 紙筆精, 要深□. 兒至一物而無所出, 後信酬. In Morino Shigeo – Satō Toshiyuki (1996), p. 423.

[98] 子敬飛白, 大有意. In Morino Shigeo – Satō Toshiyuki (1996), p. 423.

[99] 復與君斯章草, 所得極不爲少, 而筆至惡,殊不稱意. In Morino Shigeo – Satō Toshiyuki (1996), p. 424.

[100] 久苦此, 草書嘗多勞苦. 亦知足下書, 字字新奇,點點圓轉, 美不可再書. 得足下聞下. 比來遲遲, 終不可也, 之果云云. In Morino Shigeo – Satō Toshiyuki (1996), p. 425.

[101] 張芝臨池學書,池水盡墨. 使人耽之若是, 未必後之也. In Morino Shigeo – Satō Toshiyuki (1996), p. 426.

meticulous attention to writing tools like brushes and paper (nos. 397, 402). In his correspondence, Wang Xizhi often gives his guidance on calligraphy practice to or praises juniors (nos. 396, 399, 403), discusses the challenges of calligraphy with peers (nos. 401, 404, 405), expresses his desire to learn from esteemed predecessors and contemporaries (nos. 398, 400) and, of course, assertsd his confidence in his calligraphy skills and the potential for him to surpass the earlier calligraphy master, Zhangzhi (no. 406). These letters vividly portray Wang Xizhi as a dedicated, humble yet confident calligrapher.

Wang Xizhi's calligraphy was highly acclaimed during his lifetime, as recorded in the standard history of the Jin dynasty, which compares his skill to that of Zhang Zhi and considers his letters to be cherished calligraphic works:

Once [Wang Xizhi] replied to Yu Liang (289–340) using the *zhang* cursive script, and [Yu] Yi (305–345) was deeply impressed. Therefore, in a letter to [Wang Xizhi], he wrote, 'I once had ten sheets of [Zhang] Boying's (i.e. Zhang Zhi's courtesy name) *zhang* cursive script, [but they were] lost [when I] crossed the river hastily [fleeing to the south]. [I] often lamented that these wonderful works were lost forever. Suddenly seeing your letter in reply to my brother, [it] shone like divine light and took my perception back to the past immediately.[102]

The remarkable achievements in calligraphy during the Eastern Jin dynasty were partly due to the competitive spirit amongst these aristocratic calligraphy masters. Wang Xizhi compared himself to earlier calligraphers, believing his cursive script to be slightly inferior to that of Zhang

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[102] 嘗以章草答庾亮, 而翼深嘆伏, 因與羲之書云: "吾昔有伯英章草十紙, 過江顛狽, 遂乃亡失, 常嘆妙跡永絕. 忽見足下答家兄書, 煥若神明, 頓還舊觀." *Jinshu* 80.2100. This record is also in *Lunshu biao*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 2. 51. Unfortunately, there are no extant autographs or even tracing copies of Zhang Zhi's *zhang* cursive works; only the engraved copies of six dubious letters attributed to him can be found in the second volume of *Chunhua getie*, in *FTQJ*, vol. 1, pp. 62-71.

Zhi but his standard script to be on a par with that of Zhong Yao.[103] *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, completed in ca. 440) records that after Wang Xianzhi gained calligraphy fame, he also considered himself not inferior to his father:

Xie An asked [Wang] Zijing (coursety name given to Wang Xianzhi), "How would you rate your own calligraphy in comparison with that of your father?" [Wang Zijing] replied: "Of course mine isn't the same as his." [Xie] An said: "People's opinions are surely not like this." [Wang] Zijing again replied saying: "How can commoners ever know?"[104]

Wang Xizhi was also asked the same question:

Someone then asked [Wang] Xizhi, "According to contemporary discussions, your calligraphy doesn't match up to that of [Wang] Xianzhi." Xizhi replied, "That's not so at all."[105]

This shows that fathers and sons would also compete with each other to see who is more skilled in calligraphy. It is also recorded that Wang Xianzhi once sent a letter to Xie An, expecting him to cherish and preserve it, but Xie An wrote his reply directly on the same paper and sent it back. Liu Tao believes that, on the surface, Xie An was admonishing Wang Xianzhi not to be overly self-assured, but in reality, he himself might have been vying for the title of the leading calligrapher

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[103] *Comment on his own Calligraphy* (*Zilun shu* 自論書) by Wang Xizhi, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 1.5.

[104] 謝公問王子敬: "君書　如君家尊?" 答曰: "固當不同." 公曰: "外人論殊不爾." 王曰: "外人那得知?" *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 9.276. English translation in Mather (2002), p. 289. *Lunshu biao* and *Shupu*, the reply from Wang Xianzhi is more direct, stating that he is certainly superior to his father. *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 2.44; reproduction of the manuscript of the *Shupu*, in *FSQJ,* vol 3, p. 94.

[105] 有問義之云: "世論卿書不逮獻之?" 答曰: "殊不爾也." *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 9.276. For an English translation, see Mather (2002), p. 289.

of their time.[106] In this vein, he once wrote out Ji Kang's 嵇康, 223–263) poems for Wang Xianzhi, perhaps to show his superior calligraphy skills and to suggest that Wang Xianzhi use his works as models for learning.[107]

In addition to emphasizing the cultivation of calligraphy skills within their families, both the royal and aristocratic families of the time placed great importance on an individual's calligraphy. They competed to improve their calligraphy skills, relying on family and inter-family education or communication between peers, and thus developing calligraphy to an extraordinarily high level.

It is also noteworthy that during the Southern and Northern dynasties following the Eastern Jin, according to Liu Tao's summary,[108] some calligraphers from humble backgrounds are recorded in the standard history, such as Dai Faxing 戴法興 (414–465), Xu Ai 徐愛 (394–475) and his son Xu Xixiu 徐希秀 (*fl.* 476), Wang Daoqi 王道迄 (*fl.* fifth century) and his brother Wang Daolong 王道隆 (d. 474), Ji Sengzhen 紀僧真 (*fl.* fifth century) and his brother Ji Sengmeng 紀僧猛 (*fl.* fifth century), Liu Xizong 劉係宗 (d. 496), Hu Tianyi 胡天翼 (*fl.* fifth century), Ma Cheng 馬澄 (*fl.* fifth century) and Xu Sengquan 徐僧權 (*fl.* sixth century) in the Southern dynasties and Zhang Jingren 张景仁 (*fl.* sixth century) in the Northern Qi 北齊 (550–577) dynasty, who achieved significant recognition for their high-level calligraphy. Despite lacking noble lineage or renowned mentors, these individuals were admired for their exceptional skill, often obtaining prestigious positions in the imperial palace. Liu Tao does not elaborate on how they reached such heights, but it is suggested that it is through the opportunity to observe high-quality models and the possession of innate talent alongside a strong practice in imitative copying, that they achieved top-tier proficiency.

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[106] Liu (2009), pp. 162-163.

[107] In the *Discourse on Calligraphy* (*Lunshu* 論書) by Wang Sengqian*, Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 1.29. Xie An's extant calligraphic works are two letters in *Chunhua getie*, in *FTQJ*, vol. 1, pp. 23-25; and one tracing copy preserved in Beijing Palace Museum, in *FSQJ*, vol. 2, p. 214.

[108] Liu Tao (2009), p. 285-287.

This phenomenon was also present in the Eastern Jin, as evidenced by Zhang Yi 張翼 (*fl.* first half of fourth century), who was also not from a prominent family like the Wang clan of Langya; his imitation of Wang Xizhi's handwriting was so precise that Wang himself could hardly distinguish it at first.[109]

However, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the goal of education is to cultivate educated gentlemen with both virtue and talent. The most influential calligraphers, whose legacies endure, not only excelled technically but were also respected for their knowledge and character. Wang Xizhi's *Lanting xu* is renowned as the world's premier calligraphy work and also as an inspiring literary work.

Another notable case in which father and son were accomplished calligraphers is that of Ouyang Xun and his son Ouyang Tong 歐陽通 (625–691). Both were prominent ministers and calligraphers in the Tang dynasty. The standard history records Ouyang Tong's challenging path to learning calligraphy:

[Ouyang Xun's] son, Ouyang Tong, became an orphan when his father died in his youth. His mother, née Xu, taught him his father's calligraphy. Whenever she gave him money, [she would] decieve him: "It is the legacy of your father's calligraphic works." [Ouyang] Tong, aspiring to his father's reputation, [diligently practised Ouyang Xun's calligraphy] day and night, never tiring, eventually gaining fame second only to his father's. During the Yifeng reign (676–679), [he was] promoted several times [and held the position of] Concurrent Secretariat Drafter (*zhongshu sheren*).[110]

Under his mother's guidance and encouragement, Ouyang Tong diligently practised his father's style, achieving significant success. Unlike Wang Xianzhi, who received direct and

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[109] *Lunshu biao*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 2.51.

[110] 子通, 少孤, 母徐氏教其父書. 每遺通錢, 紿雲: "質汝父書跡之直." 通慕名甚銳, 晝夜精力無倦, 遂亞於詢. 儀鳳中, 累遷中書捨人. *Jiu Tangshu* 189a.4947.

prolonged guidance from his father Wang Xizhi, Ouyang Tong was taught by his mother, likely through demonstrations and instructions that she had received from Ouyang Xun. The historical texts do not record her calligraphy level, but even though née Xu's own calligraphy skills might not have been exceptional, her opportunity to observe Ouyang Xun's writing process allowed her to offer Ouyang Tong insightful advice that was beneficial for his practice. Moreover, Ouyang Tong was fourteen years old when his father died in 641. This meant that at least during his teenage years, he had chances to learn calligraphy under the personal guidance of his father. Crucially, Ouyang Tong's success was also due to his dedicated practice and meticulous imitative copying of his father's originals.

His extant calligraphic works, the *Table of Master Monk Daoyin* (*Daoyin fashi bei* 道因法師碑, Xi'an Beilin Museum) of 663[111] and the *Entombed Funerary Inscription of Quan Nansheng* (*Quan Nansheng muzhi* 泉男生墓誌,[112] Kaifeng Library, entombed in 679, unearthed in 1922 in Luoyang) can be observed to be very similar to Ouyang Xun's calligraphic style but leaner and stronger. Zhang Huaiguan commented in his *Shuduan* :

Although [Ouyang Xun's] standard and semi-cursive scripts originated from Wang Xizhi, [they] also formed their own unique style, whose imposing and towering appearance resembles spears and halberds in a weapons warehouse, more rigorous than [the calligraphy of Monk] Zhiyong regarding expressiveness, less mellow and full than Yu Shinan's (558–638) [style]… [His] son [Ouyang] Tong also excelled at writing, [and Tong's calligraphic style] is thinner and weaker than his father's.[113]

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[111] Ink rubbing reproduced in *Xi'an Beilin shufa yishu*, pp. 134-137.

[112] Ink rubbing reproduced in *Suitang wudai muzhi huibian Luoyang juan*, vol. 6, p. 50.

[113] 真、行之書, 雖於大令亦別成一體, 森森焉若武庫矛戟, 風神嚴於智永, 潤色寡於虞世南...子通, 亦善書, 瘦怯於父. *Shuduan*, *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 8.442.

Zhang Huaiguan's era was only a few decades after that of Ouyang Tong, so he must have been able to compare original scripts and even manuscripts by Ouyang Xun and Ouyang Tong. Take the two characters of their surname Ouyang 歐陽 from their representative standard works as an example: the inception termination of vertical, horizontal and left-falling strokes displays a more exaggerated exposing brush-tip, while the retracting termination of long vertical and horizontal stokes and bending has obvious lifting, pressing, pausing and turning of the tip of the brush in Plate 7b compared to that in Plate 7a. Later calligraphers, theorists or critics, such as Zhu Changwen 朱長文 (1039–1098) of the Song dynasty, Yang Shiqi 楊士奇 (1366–1444), Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590) of the Ming dynasty, and He Zhuo 焯 (1661–1722), Wang Shu 王澍 (1668–1743) and Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1818) of the Qing dynasty, who perhaps had only seen the *Daoyin fashi bei*, mostly believed that Ouyang Tong's calligraphy inherited the strict structure of his father's style, while also incorporating elements of clerical script and Northern dynasty standard script, but they found his style to be too steep and lacking in subtlety. Based on the *Quan Nansheng Muzhi* unearthed in 1922, however, as can be seen from the Plate 7c, the calligraphy style of the 54-year-old Ouyang Tong had already become more gentle and smooth, devoid of the sharpness seen at the age of 38. Zhang Huaiguan's evaluation remains relatively impartial, noting that the brushwork in Plate 7b and 7c is still weaker compared to Plate 7a. This highlights the enduring charm of calligraphy art and classic models: a calligrapher's style undergoes flexible adjustments and changes with age and experience and classic masterpieces are worthy of being studied and contemplated repeatedly by different people across different eras and ages

3.6 Calligraphy Training by Other Methods

The prominence of calligraphic families like the Wang and Ouyang is relatively rare, and there were no descendants who could match their renown. For the majority of calligraphers, training in the art
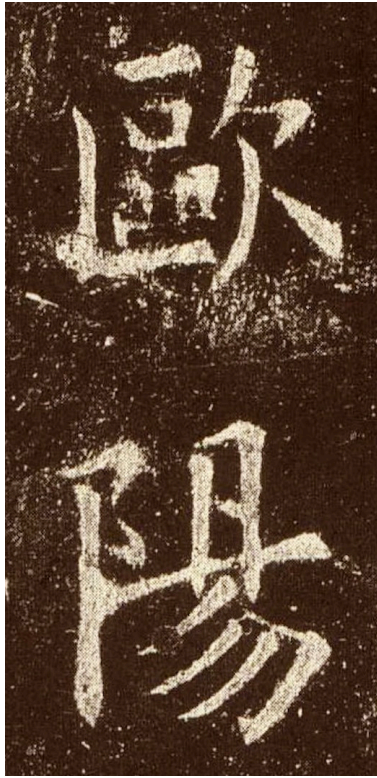
Plate 7a (left): Characters *ou* 歐 and *yang* 陽 from *Jiuchenggong* of 632 by 75-year-old Ouyang Xun (from Beijing Palace Museum)

Plate 7b (middle): Characters *ou* 歐 and *yang* 陽 from *Daoyin fashi bei* 道因法師碑 of 663 by 38-year-old Ouyang Tong (from *Xi'an Beilin shufa yishu*)

Plate 7c (right): Characters *ou* 歐 and *yang* 陽 from *Quan nansheng muzhi* 泉男生墓誌 of 679 by 54-year-old Ouyang Tong (from *Suitang wudai muzhi huibian luoyang juan*)

of calligraphy primarily came from a combination of methods, including studying ancient masters, learning from teachers, peer observation or drawing inspiration from life, nature or other art forms.

Historical records, such as those in the *Shuduan*, note that calligraphers often took ancient calligraphic masters as their mentors. For example, the philologist Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 55–ca. 149) was deeply influenced by Li Si 李斯 (d. 208 BCE). After the Eastern Jin dynasty, famous calligraphers like Monk Zhiyong and Chu Suiliang studied under Wang Xizhi, while others, like the Southern Qi 齊 (479–502) Emperor Gaodi 高帝 (Xiao Daocheng 蕭道成, 427–482, r. 479–482), Yu Shinan, Ouyang Xun and Wang Shaozong 王紹宗 (d.u.) took Wang Xianzhi as their teacher.

Additionally, Tao Hongjing studied under Zhong Yao and Wang Xizhi, while Sun Guoting was inspired by both Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi.[114]

Additionally, historical records indicate that the scope of calligraphers studying the works of the ancients also included ancient stele inscriptions that they encountered outdoors by chance. For instance, Liu Su's 劉餗 (*fl.* mid 8th c.) *Stories from the Sui and the Tang* (*Sui Tang jiahua* 隋唐嘉話) records that:

When Ouyang Xun was traveling, he came across an ancient stele inscription written by Suo Jing (239–303). He stopped his horse to observe it, remaining there for a long time before leaving. After walking several hundred steps, he returned, dismounted, and stood before the stele for an extended period. When he grew tired, he spread out a mat on the ground and sat down to continue studying it. He was so captivated by the inscription that he spent the night beside the stele, only leaving several days later.[115]

Studying the ancient calligraphic models is an essential path for any calligrapher. But in the journey from learning from the ancients to developing one's own style, it is also crucial to study under a master and learn through peer observation. For example, *Shuduan* clearly documents Chu Suiliang's own methods of learning, as well as the study process of Xue Ji 薛稷 (649–713), who had a teacher-student relationship with Chu Suiliang:

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[114] *Shuduan*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 8.293-445; 9.447-482.

[115] 歐陽詢行, 見古碑索靖所書, 駐馬觀之, 良久而去. 數百步複還下馬佇立, 疲則布毯坐觀, 因宿其傍, 三日而後去. *Sui Tang jiahua* 2.28. The stele inscription by Suo Jing that Ouyang Xun visited is no longer extant, and its existence cannot be verified. However, an engraved copy of Suo Jing's *Yueyi Letter* (*Yueyi tie* 月儀) has been preserved in the calligraphy model-book in *Rutie* 汝 (Calligraphy Model-Book [Engraved in] Ruzhou) (1109), in *FTQJ,* vol. 4, pp. 59-62.

Chu Suiliang…in his youth, he was deeply devoted to and admired [the calligraphy of] Yu Jian (courtesy name of Yu Shinan). As [he] grew older, [he began to] follow and imitate the calligraphy of [Wang] Youjun. His standard script captured the elegance and charm of Wang Xizhi's style, likened to a beautifully adorned pavilion in a springtime forest, or to the graceful posture of a beauty for whom even the finest silk is insufficient. The splendor and delicacy [of his standard script] surpassed even that of Ouyang Xun and Yu Shinan. However, his semi-cursive and cursive scripts ranked below those of Ouyang Xun and Yu Shinan…He had once studied calligraphy under Shi Ling (*fl*. late sixth century and early seventh century), whose calligraphy was characterized by an ancient, upright simplicity, though it tended to be sparse and slightly thin.[116]

[Xue Ji's] calligraphy was modeled after Chu Suiliang, especially valuing ornate beauty. His script captured half of the skin and flesh (i.e. visual form) of his teacher's, [Chu Suiliang], and he was regarded as one of Chu's most outstanding disciples, highly esteemed and admired by his contemporaries.[117]

Although the examples above do not have the same level of renown as the Two Wangs and the Ouyang family, they still represent descendants of high-ranking officials and nobles who relied on family connections and access to extensive collections of calligraphic models to achieve their success. However, there were also individuals from humble backgrounds or declining noble families who achieved extraordinary success through their dedication to the works of ancient masters and observing their peers. Notable examples include Sun Guoting and the brothers Wang Xuanzong 王玄宗 (632–686) and Wang Shaozong 王紹宗 (*fl*. seventh century).

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[116] 褚遂良...少則服膺虞監, 長則祖述右軍. 真書甚得其媚趣, 若瑤臺青鎖, 窅映春林; 美人嬋娟, 不任羅綺. 鉛華綽約, 歐、虞謝之. 其行、草即居二公之後...亦嘗師授史陵, 然史有古直, 傷於疏瘦也. *Shuduan*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 8.444.

[117] 薛稷...書學褚公, 尤尚綺麗. 妍好膚肉, 得師之半, 可謂河南公之高足, 甚為時所珍尚. *Shuduan*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 8.472.

In his calligraphic and theoretical work *Shupu*, Sun Guoting recounts that at the age of 15, he resolved to achieve accomplishments in the field of calligraphy.[118] He studied the styles of Zhong Yao, Zhang Zhi and the Two Wangs. Sun also mentions that others sought his guidance in learning calligraphy and he took pride in his students' progress, noting that they were able to grasp the essence of calligraphy and achieve a certain level of proficiency. Motivated by this, Sun wrote *Shupu* to share his experiences and insights into calligraphy with the public, holding nothing back.

According to *Shuduan*, Sun Guoting was particularly gifted in the cursive script, a skill in which he achieved significant mastery.[119] The text also mentions that the minister and calligrapher Lu Zangyong 盧藏用 (ca. 655–713) studied Sun's cursive script during his youth, though it is unclear whether Lu received direct instruction from Sun or simply practised through imitative copying of his works.[120]

De Laurentis has suggested that Sun Guoting likely formed a friendship with Wang Shaozong before 690 in Luoyang, and their interactions probably included discussions on the art of calligraphy based on their dedication to and deep understanding of it.[121] Historical records indicate that Wang Shaozong was a descendant of the prominent calligraphy family, the Wang clan of Langya, a fact corroborated by the inscription that he wrote for his brother, the *Inscription of the Oral Instructions Approaching the Death of Wang Who Refused the Imperial Call for Officialdom* (*Wang zhengjun linzhong koushou ming* 王徵君臨終口授銘, 686, now at the Dengfeng 登封 Museum).[122] This inscription states that Wang Xuanzong was the tenth-generation descendant of Wang Dao of the Langya Wang clan. However, over time, their family's status had declined, leading

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[118] Reproduction of the manuscript of the Sun Guoting's *Shupu* (handscroll, ink on paper, 26.5 x 900.8 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei), in *FSQJ*, vol 3, pp. 94-95.

[119] *Shuduan*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 8.471.

[120] *Shuduan*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 8.472.

[121] De Laurentis (2011b), p. 14.

[122] Complete text recorded in Zhou Shaoliang – Zhao Chao (1992), p. 744.

Wang Shaozong to live in a monastery during his early years, where he made a living by copying Buddhist scriptures.[123]

Despite his humble circumstances, Wang Shaozong maintained his aristocratic demeanor. From a young age, he diligently studied the classics and history and excelled in both cursive and standard scripts. Although he copied scriptures for a living, he did not make it a permanent occupation. Once he had earned enough to live on each month, he would refuse any further commissions, even if offered a higher payment. His refusal to serve when the rebel Xu Jingye 徐敬業 (d. 684) forced him into office reflects his sense of noble heritage and his commitment to a gentleman's ideals. Wang Shaozong was not swayed by worldly fame or fortune, and his unyielding integrity earned him significant respect among the gentry. After the rebellion was quashed in 684, his reputation led the minister Li Xiaoyi 李孝逸 (*fl.* seventh century) to invite him to serve as vice-director of the Palace Library, reader-in-waiting and court calligrapher of the Eastern Palace, where he was responsible for tutoring the crown prince. Meanwhile, Wang Shaozong's brother, Wang Xuanzong, embraced Daoism and lived as a recluse on Mount Song 嵩 (Henan Province).

Wang Shaozong once studied Wang Xianzhi's calligraphic works but also greatly admired Lu Jianzhi's 陸柬之 (585–638) calligraphy.[124] Zhang Huaiguan evaluated his small standard script in middle age, noting that its form was particularly unique, characterized by calmness, depth, solidity and tightness. Although it lacked the splendour of Lu Jianzhi's calligraphy,[125] it shared the same ancient simplicity. However, regarding Wang Shaozong's cursive script in his later years, Zhang Huaiguan believed that it had gone astray, lacking proper rules. The small standard script by

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[123] The biography of Wang Shaozong, in *Jiu Tangshu* 189b.4963-4964; *Xin Tangshu* 199.5668.

[124] For Zhang Huaiguan's record and evaluation, see *Shuduan*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 8.470-471.

[125] One original semi-cursive work by Lu Jianzhi, *Fu on literature* (*Wenfu* 文賦), a famous composition by Lu Ji 陸機, 261–303), is still extant today, preserved in Taibei Palace Museum. The reproduction of it is in *FTQJ*, vol. 3, pp. 150-189.

Wang Shaozong that Zhang Huaiguan praised can still be appreciated today through the *Wang zhengjun linzhong koushou ming*. As Zhang Huaiguan mentioned, his style is compact and powerful, with well-coordinated spacing and full internal and external spaces. The characters *tai* 太, *lang* 琅, *ye* 耶, *zheng* 徵, *di* 弟, *dong* 東, *shi* 侍 and *jian* 兼, etc. from Plate 8 still exhibit a
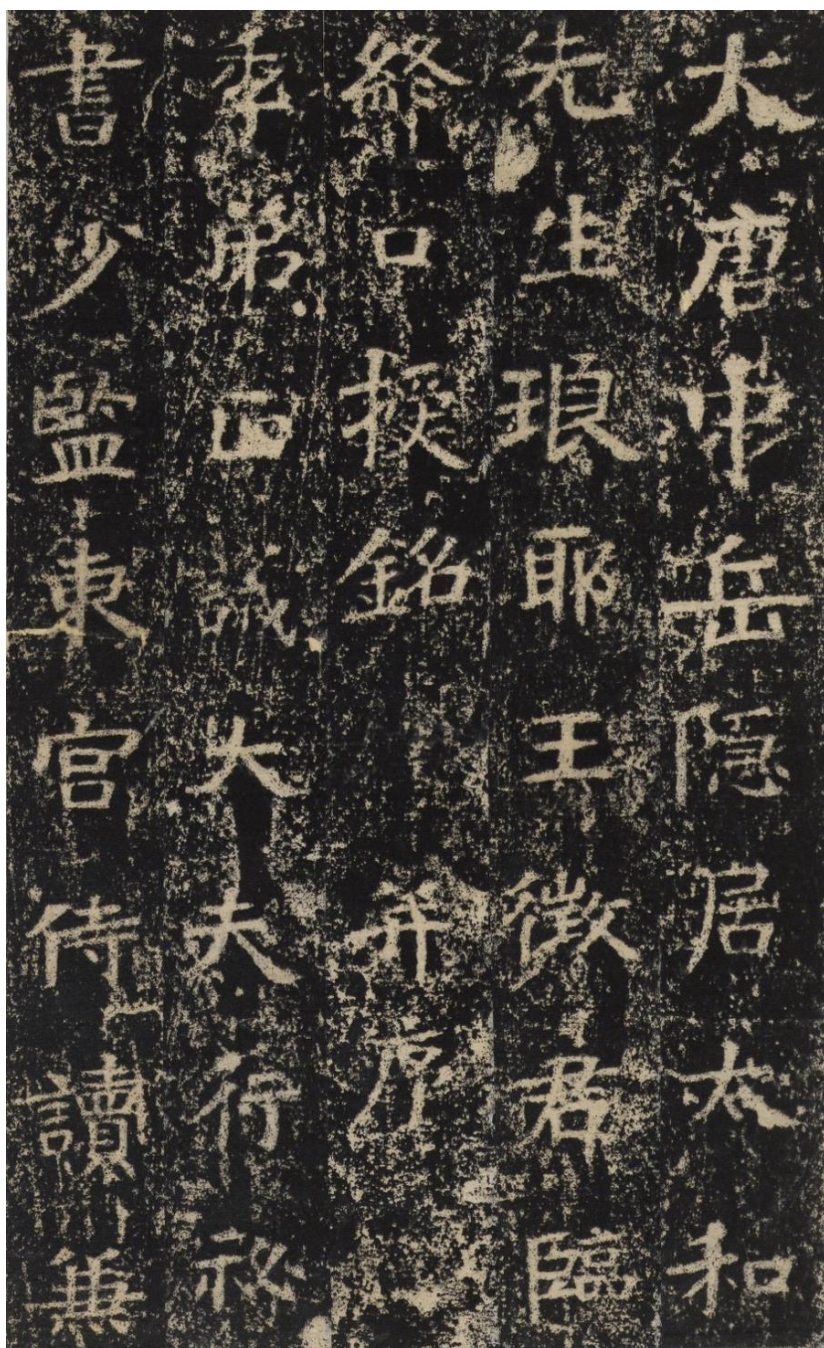

Plate 8: Detail of the rubbing of the *Inscription of the Oral Instructions Approaching Death Wang Who Refused Imperial Call for Officialdom* (*Wang zhengjun linzhong koushou ming* 王徵君臨終口授銘, 686) by Wang Shaozong (from Dengfeng Museum)

horizontal tendency, exuding an ancient charm. The calligrapher and man of letters, Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927),believed that this work had the stylistic flavor of the Sui dynasty's inscriptions.[126] Wang Shaozong's achievements in the standard script were not unrelated to his early
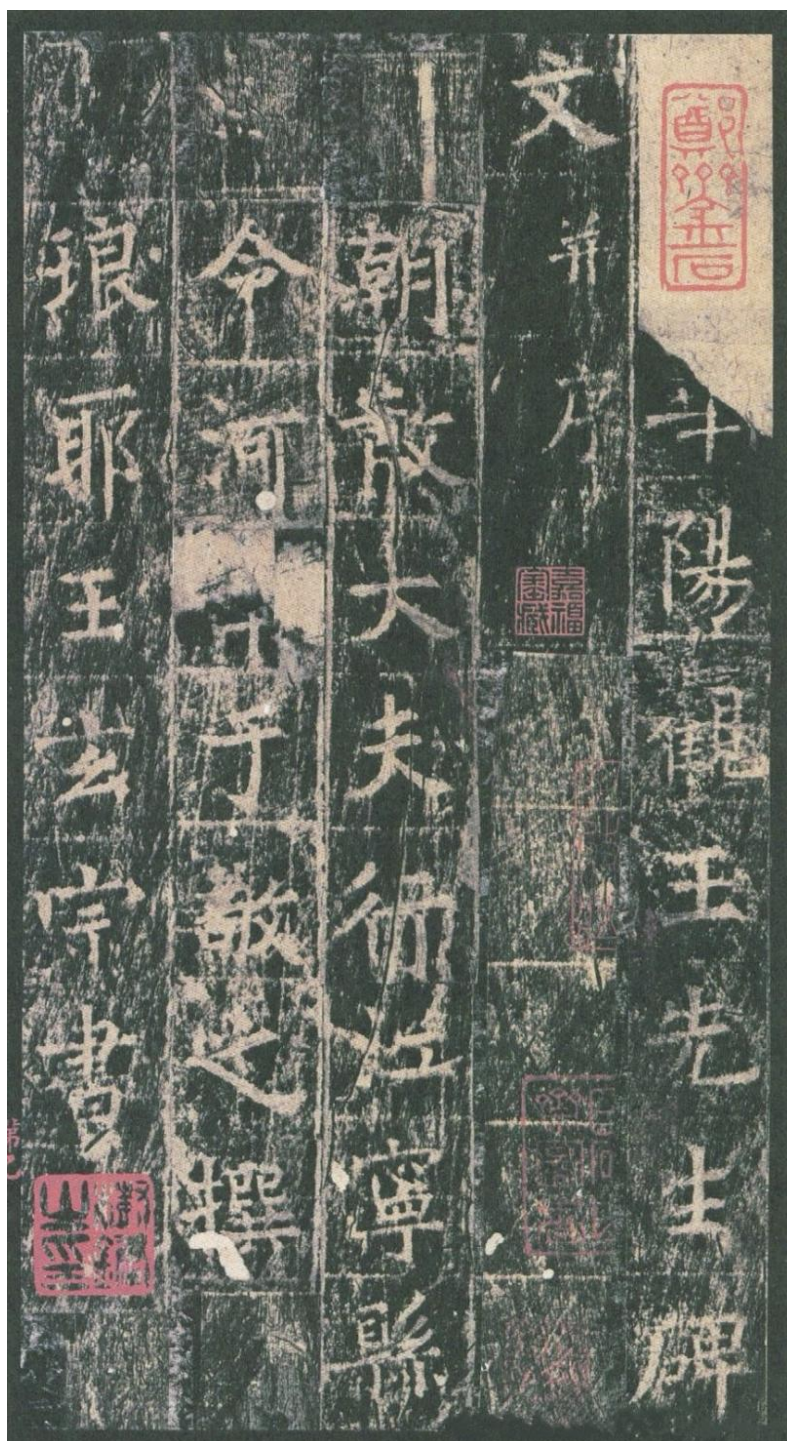

Plate 9: Detail of the rubbing of the *Stele of Wang Hongfan* (*Wang Hongfan bei* 王洪範碑, 667) by Wang Shaozong
(from *Genshoku hōjō sen 44*: *Ō Kōhan hi*)

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[126] *Guang Yizhou shuangji zhu* 3.143.

years of extensive practice, copying Buddhist scriptures, which were normally in the standard script out of respect. His brother, Wang Xuanzong, also left behind the *Stele of Wang Hongfan* (*Wang Hongfan bei* 王洪範碑, 667),[127] likely a result of their early shared study experiences in the same family; as shown in Plate 9, Wang Xuanzong's standard script style is also very tight and powerful, but the structure of the *Wang Hongfan bei* is mainly vertical, and the characters *lang* 琅 and *ye* 耶 in Plate 9 show this clear difference. His calligraphic style is similar to that of Ouyang Xun and Chu Suiliang, especially the character *yang* 陽 (plate 10a), where the compact square strokes resemble Ouyang Xun (plate 10b), while the slanting, graceful, upper-right part carries Chu Suiliang's (plate 10c and 10d) traits.

The *Xin Tangshu* records that Wang Shaozong developed a unique approach to practising calligraphy:

The calligraphy of shallow people never turns out well; [their work] is merely the result of long-term practice with water and ink. [I] often refine [my] calligraphy [by practising with] full concentration, letting my intentions guide me, focusing completely and thinking quietly. The Lu Dafu (d.u.) from Wu often compared me to Master Yu (respectful title of Yu Shinan) because neither [of us practises by] imitatative copying directly. I have heard that Master Yu used to trace calligraphy with his fingers on his abdomen under the quilt, which is exactly what I do.[128]

Here, when Wang Shaozong says that he does not practise by copying, he does not mean that he avoids using ancient masterpieces as models to do imitative copying. Instead, he refers to the method of 'writing in the air' (*shukong* 書空), where he focuses on imagining the movements and

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[127] The original stele lost, rubbing reproduced in *Genshoku hōjō sen 44: Ō Kōhan hi.*

[128] 鄙夫書無工者, 特由水墨之積習耳. 常精心率意、虛神靜思以取之. 吳中陸大夫常以余比虞君, 以不臨寫故也. 聞虞被中畫腹, 與余正同. *Xin Tangshu* 199.5668.
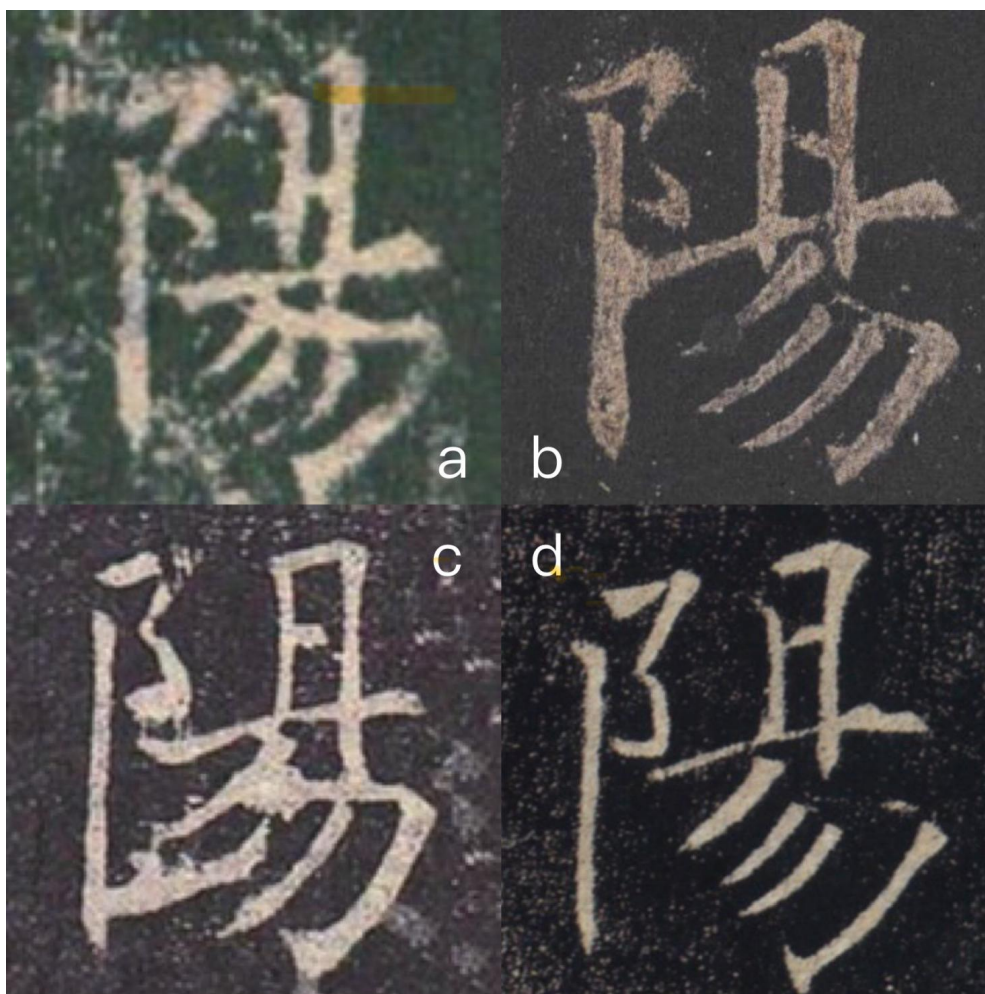
Plate 10a: Character *yang* 陽 from the *Stele of Wang Hongfan* by Wang Shaozong

Plate 10b: Character *yang* 陽 from *Jiuchenggong* by Ouyang Xun

Plate 10c: Character *yang* 陽 from the *Stele of Meng Fashi* (*Meng Fashi bei* 孟法師碑) by Chu Suiliang (from *MBQJ*, vol. 13)

Plate 10d: Character *yang* 陽 from the *Preface to the Tripiṭaka Scriptures of the Sacred Teaching of the Great Tang* (*Da Tang sanzang shengjiao zhi xu* 大唐三藏聖教之序) by Chu Suiliang (from *MBQJ*, vol. 14)

forms of brush writing in his mind and then mimics them with his fingers. Repeatedly practising in this way helps one to achieve a state where the intention precedes the brushstroke. It is worth noticing that 'writing in the air' corresponds to the concept of procedural knowledge in modern cognitive psychology, such as motor skills and cognitive strategies, which cannot be easily expressed verbally. Modern cognitive psychology supports the idea that mental rehearsal can enhance motor memory.[129] This concept of procedural knowledge was first introduced by

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[129] Shadmehr – Holcomb (1997), p. 821.

psychologist John R. Anderson[130] in order to differentiate it from declarative knowledge, which can be easily articulated. Anderson and his colleagues later developed a cognitive model known as the Adaptive Control of Thought, Rational (ACT-R) theory to address different types of knowledge.[131]

Calligraphy training and the improvement of artistic skills can also be inspired by sources beyond calligraphy itself. *Xin Tangshu* records that Zhang Xu 張旭 (675–759) gained insights into brushwork techniques and the spirit of calligraphic art from scenarios in everyday life and from other art forms:

[Zhang] Xu said, "First I witnessed a noblewoman's porters racing each other down the road; I also listened to the *Guchui* (composition for percussion instruments and wind instruments), and [from that I] obtained [my] concept of a brush method. [I] witnessed the dancer [Mistress] Gongsun (*fl.* eighth century) dancing the *Jianqi* (i.e., sword dance) and from that [my cursive script] gained its spirit."[132]

The renowned poet of the same era, Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), in the preface to his poem *On Seeing an Apprentice of Mistress Gongsun Dance the Sword Dance* (*Guan Gongsun Daniang dizi wu jianqi xing* 觀公孫大娘弟子舞劍器行), specifically mentions that Zhang Xu frequently visited the area of Ye 鄴 (at the borders between Hebei, Henan and Shanxi) to watch Mistress Gongsun dance. Through these observations, Zhang Xu is said to have made significant progress in the cursive script,[133] achieving a dynamic style infused with passion. Du Fu also provides vivid and

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[130] For the exact comparison between procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge, see Anderson (1984).

[131] Anderson *et al.* (2004), pp. 1036-1040.

[132] 旭自言, 始見公主檐夫爭道, 又聞鼓吹, 而得筆法意, 觀倡公孫舞劍器, 得其神. *Xin Tangshu* 220.5764. English translation with slight differences in McNair (1998), p. 22.

[133] Extant representative cursive script works attributed to Zhang Xu include the autograph *Four Ancient-Style Poems* (*Gushi sitie* 古詩四帖, Liaoning Provincial Museum) and the engraved *Fragmentary Thousand-Character* (*Qianzi wen canzi* 千字文殘字, Xi'an Beilin Museum), in *FSQJ*, vol. 3, pp. 266-287; *FTQJ*, vol. 2, pp. 412-416.

exaggerated descriptions in his poem about Mistress Gongsun's art of dancing, which was characterized by fluidity and sudden shifts:

> She flared as when Archer Yi shot the nine suns down,
> soared upward like a host of gods circling with dragon teams.
> She came like a peal of thunder withdrawing its rumbling rage,
> then stopped like clear rays fixed on the river and sea.[134]

Specifically, the scene of porters competing for space on a narrow path directly alludes to the principle in calligraphy where strokes, characters, and even columns must interweave and give way to each other to achieve a relative dynamic balance. Moreover, the strong sense of rhythm and the continuous momentum found in music and dance, as well as the diverse and ever-changing postures of dance, resonate with the forms and structures of calligraphy. High-level art inherently follows shared aesthetic principles, which is why calligraphy training can draw from or be inspired by other art forms, either directly or indirectly.

This inspiration beyond calligraphy also includes elements from nature. For instance, the introductory calligraphy textbook, the *Diagram of the arrangement of the brush by Lady Wei* (*Jin Wei furen bizhen tu* 晉衛夫人筆陣圖), uses metaphors to describe seven fundamental strokes:

First stroke - Like a cloud formation stretching a thousand *li*; indistinct, but not without form. [horizontal stroke]

Second stroke - Like a stone falling from a high peak, bouncing and crashing about to shatter. [dot-stroke]

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[134] 霍如羿射九日落, 矯如群帝驂龍翔. 來如雷霆收震怒, 罷如江海凝清光. Chinese text and English translation in Owen (2016), vol. 5, pp. 332-335.

Third stroke - The tusk of an elephant or rhinoceros (thrust into and) broken by the ground.[left-falling stroke]

Fourth stroke - Fired from a three thousand pound crossbow. [slanted hook, *xiegou* 斜鈎]

Fifth stroke - A withered vine, ten thousand years old. [vertical stroke]

Sixth stroke - Crashing waves or rolling thunder. [right-falling stroke]

Seventh stroke - The sinews and joints of a mighty bow. [broken-stroke][135]

These metaphors are not meant to guide beginners in depicting the shapes of natural objects, as one would in painting, but rather to employ imagery to help beginners to quickly grasp the characteristics of different strokes. From the outset, it teaches that the key to brushwork lies in achieving a sense of strength, liveliness and naturalness in brushwork. The calligrapher Suo Jing once compared his calligraphy to "silver hooks" (*yingou* 銀鈎) and "scorpion tails" (*chaiwei* 蠆尾).[136] Similarly, metaphors from Tang dynasty calligraphers, such as comparing brushwork to the "imprint of a seal on clay" (*yin yinni* 印印泥), an "awl punching in the sand" (*zhui hua sha* 錐畫沙),[137] the "tail ends of ancient hairpins" (*gu chaijiao* 古釵腳), the "wall cracks" (*chebi lu* 坼壁路)

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[135] 一, 如千里陣雲, 隱隱然其實有形. 、, 如高墜石, 磕磕然實如崩也. 丿, 陸斷犀象. 乀, 百鈞弩發. 丨, 萬歲枯藤. 乁, 崩浪雷奔. 　, 勁弩筋節. In *Jin Wei furen bizhen tu*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 1.8-9. English translation in Barnhart (1964), p. 16; De Laurentis (2014b), p. 137.

[136] In *Lunshu*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 1.29. Debon included "silver hooks and scorpion tails" along with other metaphors mentioned below—such as "imprint of a seal on clay" and "awl punching in the sand"—among the twenty Chinese calligraphy's guiding principles or foundational concepts. Naturally, he believed these principles remained open to further expansion. Debon (1978), pp. 1-2.

[137] The imprinting of a seal on clay and an awl punching in sand are compared to the brushwork of a steady, powerful and graceful concealing brush-tip (*cangfeng* 藏鋒) in *the Twelve Concepts of the Brush Method of Administrator Zhang* [the courtesy name of Zhang Xu] (*Shu Zhang Zhangshi bifa shier yi* 述張長史筆法十二意) attributed to Yan Zhenqing, in *Songkan Shuyuan jinghua* 19.583.

or the "[water]marks [dripping from] the leaking roof" (*wulou hen* 屋漏痕),[138] have had a profound influence on later generations of calligraphers. For instance, Jiang Kui 姜夔 (ca. 1154–ca. 1221) further expanded on the metaphor of the ancient hairpin and used the bending of a hairpin (*zhe chaigu* 折釵股) to describe round and powerful turning strokes.[139]

In summary, calligraphy training is far more than just a technical exercise; it is a comprehensive cultivation of cultural understanding and artistic sensitivity. The learning process in calligraphy involves imitative copying of classic works, observing the demonstrations of teachers in the early stages, engaging in mutual critique and refinement with peers, maintaining a keen observation of life and nature and drawing inspiration from other art forms.

3.7 Treatises on Calligraphic Techniques and Imitative Copying

In ancient China, and even today, literacy education and calligraphy instruction have always been closely intertwined. Chinese characters require both spoken and written forms, and the foundation of calligraphic art is the accurate recognition and reading of these characters. However, as scripts evolved, the official scripts used during different periods varied, generally showing a trend towards greater simplicity. Before calligraphy developed into a conscious artistic form in the Eastern Han dynasty, educational texts primarily relied on character books and stone inscriptions. The ultimate goal of recognizing, reading and writing Chinese characters was to understand the meanings of classical texts or to efficiently compose and write official documents. Therefore, the criteria for

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[138] Ancient hairpins used to describe the smooth, rounded and robust guiding pull of the vertical stroke in the cursive script, while wall cracks and the watermark dripping from the leaking roof are compared to the natural, fluid and unpredictable brushwork of the cursive script. In the biography of Tang Monk Huaisu 懷素 (b. 737) written by Lu Yu 陸羽 (733–ca. 804), in *Songkan shuyuan jinghua* 18.562-561.

[139] In *the Sequel to the Manual of Calligraphy* (*Xu shupu* 續書譜), in *SHQS*, vol. 2, p. 173. English translation see Chang – Frankel (1995), pp. 17-29.

literacy education emphasized the uniformity, accuracy and neatness of writing, ensuring that it was easy to read and met standardized guidelines.

The earliest character book is considered to be the *Text [compiled by] Historian Zhou* (*fl.* eighth century BCE) (*Shizhou pian* 史籀篇), written in the greater *zhuan* script (大篆) during the Western Zhou Emperor Xuanwang's 宣王 (Ji Jing 姬靜, d. 782 BCE, r. 828 BCE–782 BCE) reign. This text continued to exert considerable influence even into the early Han dynasty.[140] Although the original text is no longer extant, its orderly and vigorous visual style can still be observed in inscriptions such as the bronze inscriptions from the late Western Zhou (1046 BCE–771 BCE) dynasty, such as the *Duke Mao Tripod* (*Maogong ding* 毛公鼎, Taibei Palace Museum)[141], the *San Clan Basin* (*Sanshi pan* 散氏盤, Taibei Palace Museum)[142] and the *Stone Drums* (石鼓文, Beijing Palace Museum)[143], all written in the greater *zhuan* script.

During the Qin dynasty, the unification of writing led to the adoption of the three *Texts on Cang Jie* (*San Cang* 三倉, also collectively known as *Cang Jie pian* 倉頡篇), written by three ministers and calligraphers, Li Si 李斯 (d. 208 BCE), Zhao Gao 趙高 (d. 207 BCE) and Huwu Jing 胡毋敬 (*fl.* third century BCE), in the lesser *zhuan* script (小篆) as the official character book. In the Han dynasty, the new character book *Jijiu pian* by Shi You became popular, which was copied by Huang Xiang of the Wu 吳 Kingdom (222–280) in the *zhang* cursive script. Like the *Shizhou*

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[140] *Hanshu* 30.1719-1721.

[141] Ink rubbing reproduced in *SFQJ*, vol. 2, pp. 148-151.

[142] Ink rubbing reproduced in *SFQJ*, vol. 2, pp. 164-167.

[143] According to Gilbert L. Mattos, the *Stone Drums* can be dated to the fifth century BCE. Mattos (1988), p. 369. The modern reproduction of the Stone Drums' ink rubbing is in *Zhongguo mingbei quanji*, vol. 1, pp. 2-44.

pian, the *Cang Jie pian* no longer exists in its entirety. However, fragments of both of the texts in the clerical script have been discovered among unearthed Han dynasty bamboo slips.[144]

Due to the close connection between the *zhuan* scripts and the origins of writing, China's first comprehensive dictionary to systematically analyze Chinese character forms and origins, the *Shuowen jiezi*, also used the lesser *zhuan* script as the standard form for characters. The dictionary includes 479 characters, supplemented with ancient script and greater *zhuan* script forms. The entire work is organized into 540 sections, encompassing a total of 9,353 characters. It provides extensive explanations of character meanings, often citing classical texts, making it an essential resource for scholars aiming to master the Confucian classics. As a result, even though more convenient scripts, like the clerical script (*lishu* 隸書), standard script (*kaishu* 楷書), semi-cursive script (*xingshu* 行書) and cursive script (*caoshu* 草書), later developed and became popular, the *zhuan* scripts (*zhuanshu* 篆書), being the origin of Chinese characters, continued to hold an important place in the study of ancient writing and calligraphy training. This enduring significance of the *zhuan* scripts is evident in the appearance of the *Three Stone Classics in Three Scripts* of 241 during the Three Kingdoms period, which featured inscriptions in the clerical script, the lesser *zhuan* script and the ancient script. Since the *zhuan* scripts emphasize centering the brush-tip (*zhongfeng* 中鋒), concealing the brush-tip, revolving (*jiaozhuan* 絞　) the brush-tip and round brushstrokes (*yuanbi* 圓筆) with balanced structure, mastering and practising the *zhuan* scripts can help to enhance a calligrapher's ability to maintain stability in brush movements and to refine the precision of adjustment of the brush-tip in changing direction (*tiaofeng huanbi* 調鋒換筆). This, in turn, can improve the expressive power of other script styles.

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[144] For the collation and deciphering of these unearthed fragments, see the monograph of the paleography scholar Liu Huan (2009).

After the emergence of a conscious calligraphic art during the Eastern Han dynasty, the artistic quality of Chinese character writing became a higher pursuit. A quintessential example of this is the *Thousand Character Text* attributed to Zhou Xingsi 周興嗣 (d. 521) of the Liang 梁 (502–557) dynasty under the commission of Emperor Wudi 武帝 (Xiao Yan 蕭衍, 464–549, r. 502–549). Notably, it was a collation work from the works of the renowned calligrapher Wang Xizhi, giving the text a strong emphasis on calligraphy as well as literacy. The text contains no repeated characters, is rhymed for easy memorization and is logically structured. It also covers a wide range of humanistic and natural knowledge, making it highly effective for teaching children how to read and write Chinese characters as well as some cultural knowledge. Consequently, it remained a staple in elementary education throughout subsequent historical periods. The original version of Zhou Xingsi's collation work no longer exists; the most influential calligraphic model of the *Thousand Character Text* is the monk and calligrapher Zhiyong's 智永 (*fl.* 560) handwritten copy[145] in both the standard and cursive scripts, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The recognition of the works of renowned masters such as Zhong You, Zhang Zhi and especially the Two Wangs as classic models for calligraphic practice led to the early emergence of the collation of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy, the *Thousand Character Text*,. Subsequently, there was a growing body of literature dedicated to analyzing the techniques found in the classic works and explaining how to express them effectively.

For example, in Emperor Wudi of Liang's *Observations on Twelve Qualities of Zhong You's Calligraphy* (*Guan Zhong You shufa shier yi* 觀鍾繇書法十二意)[146] and the *Second Letter in Reply [to Tao Hongjing]* (*Liang Wudi you da shu* 梁武帝又答書),[147] there is a fragment from a discussion

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[145] The modern reproduction of Zhiyong's handwritten copy is in *FSQJ* vol. 3, pp. 1-33.

[146] In *Guan Zhong You shufa shier yi*, in *Fashu yaolu yaoli* 2.55.

[147] *The Epistolary Correspondence between Liang Wudi and Tao Yinju* (*Tao Yinju yu Liang Wudi lunshu qi* 陶隱居與梁武帝論書啓), in *Fashu yaolu yaoli* 2.61-62.

delving into brushwork techniques and artistic principles. During the Sui dynasty, the earliest short essay specifically discussing calligraphic techniques and especially brushwork, the *Ode to Mature [Calligraphic Techniques] in the Heart* (*Xincheng song* 心成頌),[148] was perhaps written by the monk and calligrapher Zhiguo 智果 (*fl.* 598).[149]

As for the nine treatises on calligraphy traditionally attributed to Wang Xizhi, research by the scholar Zhang Tiangong has shown that none were actually written by Wang Xizhi himself.[150] Among these, the most credible, the *Evaluation of my Own Calligraphy* (*Zilun shu* 自論書), is likely a compilation of excerpts from various sources by later individuals, while the remaining eight treatises are forgeries attributed to him by later generations.

Furthermore, as indicated by the excerpts from Wang Xizhi's letters in section 3.5, it is clear that when teaching younger members of his family, he did not rely on any specific textbook or treatise, whether authored by himself or former masters. Instead, he primarily focused on demonstrating calligraphy through direct practice. His family members had the advantage of observing his writing process and receiving personal guidance. For other eager students who sought his advice, he would generously write a scroll in the cursive script as a gift and encouragement.

During the fourth and fifth century, the absence of clearly defined written rules for calligraphy techniques can be attributed to two main factors. First, it was a time of transition from ancient to more modern script styles, and the calligraphic art was still in a phase of exploration, with no definitive conclusions yet established. Second, within the context of family education, direct instruction provided several advantages: "instant recognition through visual perception from [the master's manifestation of] the principles" (目擊道存), the lasting impact of gaining insight from observing exemplary works which can be preserved for a long time within the family,

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[148] In *Songkan huyuan jinghua* 20.599.

[149] Zhang Tiangong (2009), p. 349.

[150] Zhang Tiangong (2009), pp. 104-121.

combined with the ability of the instructor to provide immediate and personalized feedback based on the student's practice, made this approach more effective than rigid adherence to prescriptive rules. The rich, multifaceted knowledge transmission and the immediacy of feedback during calligraphic training are irreplaceable strengths of direct family instruction.

As the Sui dynasty unified China in 589 and imperial power strengthened, the political and cultural influence of the noble families from the Six Dynasties waned, leading to the decline of the aristocratic educational approach.[151] This decline was partly due to the irreparable loss of invaluable calligraphic models during times of war and turmoil. Moreover, the transmission of calligraphy skills within families, which had relied heavily on face-to-face instruction, was severely disrupted by the unstable political and social situation.

In place of this aristocratic education, the maturing civil service examination system gave rise to a new class of literati-officials, and official calligraphic education became the new trend.[152] The strong connection between official appointments and level of calligraphic art in the Tang dynasty created a substantial demand for high-level calligraphy instruction. Calligraphy was no longer the exclusive means by which the aristocracy maintained their cultural status. However, this surge in demand for advanced calligraphy education was met with a significant shortage of masters. Many learners who could not access elite instruction began to believe that obtaining the secret calligraphic techniques passed down by famous calligraphers of the past would allow them to master the art. A prime example of this phenomenon is reflected in the anonymous text, *Names of Those who Transmitted the Technique of the Brush* (*Chuanshou bifa renming* 傳授筆法人名), which is collected in the *Fashu Yaolu* by the compiler Zhang Yanyuan and can be dated to before 847. This text illustrates the growing belief that acquiring such transmitted techniques was the key

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[151] Lee (2009), pp. 489-490.

[152] For the important role of civil service examinations in breaking down the continuity of the ruling aristocratic membership, see Lee (2009), pp. 131-150.

to developing superior calligraphy skills. It documents the familial transmission of calligraphic brushwork as follows:

Cai Yong received his calligraphic techniques from an immortal and passed them on to Cui Yuan (77–142) and his daughter Cai Wenji (d.u.). Wenji passed them on to Zhong You (151–230), Zhong Yao to Lady Wei (272–349), Lady Wei to Wang Xizhi, Wang Xizhi to Wang Xianzhi, Xi Chao (336–377) and Xie Zhuo (d.u.). Wang Xianzhi passed them on to his nephew, Yang Xin (370–442), Yang Xin to Wang Sengqian, Wang Sengqian (426–485) to Xiao Ziyun (487–549), Ruan Yan (d.u.) and Kong Linzhi (369–423). Xiao Ziyun passed them on to Monk Zhiyong (*fl.* 560), Zhiyong passed them on to Yu Shinan and Yu Shinan passed them on to Ouyang Xun.[153]

Initial calligraphic brushwork came from an immortal and this technique was almost linearly passed down to famous calligraphers in later generations, which adds a mythical aspect to the story and raises doubts about its authenticity. However, this narrative does indicate that, during the Tang dynasty, there were some people who believed in the existence of mystical calligraphic brushwork techniques which were the key to becoming a master and that these techniques were exclusively passed down through certain persons. The fabrication of genealogies for the transmission of calligraphic techniques is, in reality, a reflection of the decline of superb calligraphic techniques taught through an elite calligraphic approach. In response to this decline, some individuals also created a number of spurious texts attributed to ancient masters such as Cai Yong, Zhang Zhi, Zhong You or Wang Xizhi. The Chinese scholar Zhang Tiangong speculates that the forgery of calligraphic texts attributed to earlier masters likely dates from the Zhenyuan 貞元 (785–805)

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[153] 蔡邕授于神人，而傳之崔瑗及女蔡文姬，文姬傳之鐘繇，鐘繇傳之衛夫人，衛夫人傳之王羲之，王羲之傳之王獻之、郗超、謝拙，王獻之傳之外甥羊欣，羊欣傳之王僧虔，王僧虔傳之蕭子雲、阮研、孔琳之，蕭子雲傳之僧智永，智永傳之虞世南，世南傳之，授於歐陽詢、褚遂良. *Chuanshou bifa renming*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli*, vol 1, p. 21.

reign.[154] This trend is documented in the *Supplement to the History of the Tang Dynasty* (*Tang guoshi bu* 唐國史補) by the minister Li Zhao 李肇 (*fl.* 813), where it is noted:

In Chang'an, during the Zhenyuan period, the local custom was first to indulge in banquets, and later in calligraphy and painting.[155]

According to the earliest catalogue in the standard history, *Monograph on Bibliography* (Yiwen zhi 藝文志), which is based on the catalogue edited by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77 BCE–6 BCE), there had been works attributed to ancient sages since pre-Qin.[156] The scholar Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682) also discusses this phenomenon in his work, *Records of Daily Knowledge* (*Rizhi lu* 日知录). He mentions that, during the Han dynasty, it was common for people to attribute their own writings to ancient figures, such as the minister and renowned scholar of the Confucian classics, Zhang Ba 張霸 (*fl.* first century), and Wei Hong 衛宏 (*fl.* first century).[157] The motivation behind this practice was that the authors, lacking significant renown themselves, sought to ensure the survival and dissemination of their works by falsely attributing them to ancient sages.

The earliest relatively systematic technical treatise on calligraphy, the *Forbidden Classic of the Jade Hall* (*Yutang jing jin* 玉堂禁經), traditionally attributed to Zhang Huaiguan but certainly an early tenth century forgery, is also a reflection of this trend. As calligraphy education shifted to imperial and official institutions, people began to believe that the true techniques of calligraphy were preserved within the imperial court. According to research by De Laurentis, this text

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[154] Zhang Tiangong (2009), p. 115.

[155] 長安風俗, 自貞元侈于遊宴, 其後或侈于書法圖畫. *Tang guoshi bu* 3b.127.

[156] *Hanshu* 30.1729-1731.

[157] *Rizhi lu* 18.1172.

underwent a period of initial development in the ninth century, followed by over a century of supplementation and refinement, before reaching its final form in the early eleventh century.[158] The version that we see today is the result of contributions and revisions by multiple authors across different eras. From another perspective, however, these spurious works also represent the later generations' understanding and synthesis of classical calligraphic models. They even provided a paradigm for structuring technical texts on calligraphy in a systematic, categorized manner. Thus, while these works may have been falsely attributed, they nonetheless contributed to the codification and transmission of calligraphic knowledge for beginners.

In this context, Sun Guoting's *Shupu* stands out for its remarkable openness and confidence in sharing his insights. Sun's candid approach is especially valuable given the climate of the time, where secretiveness surrounding calligraphic techniques was prevalent. The loss of two sections of Sun's original manuscript, particularly the first large segment that dealt with brushwork techniques, is likely to be the result of this prevailing attitude. Possibly, one enthusiast, influenced by this trend, upon gaining access to a friend's collection of *Shupu*, did not dare to steal the entire manuscript but instead deliberately stole what he or she believed to be the most critical passages on brushwork techniques, reflecting the high value placed on such knowledge.

In subsequent generations, literature on calligraphic technique became increasingly specialized and cumbersome, with the number of such texts rising sharply after the Song Dynasty.[159] For instance, the influential *Mochi bian* and *Shuyuan jinghua* are both collections of calligraphic treatises compiled during the Northern Song dynasty. The *Mochi bian* includes twenty-seven articles on brushwork techniques, while the first two volumes of *Shuyuan jinghua* contain thirteen articles on calligraphy techniques. In the subsequent Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, more instructional writings on calligraphy techniques emerged, such as the *Essential Precepts of the*

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[158] De Laurentis (2011b), pp. 113-146.

[159] De Laurentis (2020), p. 57; (2011b), pp. 62-63.

Hanlin Academy (*Hanlin yao jue* 翰林要訣) by Chen Yizeng 陳繹曾 (*fl.* first half of fourteenth century),[160] the *Comprehensive Explanations on Calligraphy* (*Fashu tongshi* 法書通釋) by Zhang Shen 張紳 (*fl.* late fourteenth century),[161] the *Correct Commentary on the Technique of Calligraphy* (*Shu fa zheng zhuan* 書法正傳) by Feng Wu 馮武 (d. 1627),[162] the *Comprehensive Explanations on Calligraphy by [Ge] Hanxi* (*[Ge] Hanxi shufa tong jie* [戈]漢谿書法通解, preface dated 1750) by Ge Shouzhi 戈守智 (courtesy name Hanxi, 1720–1786)[163] and the *Correct Model for Calligraphy* (*Shu fa zhengzong* 書法正宗, preface dated 1782) by Jiang He 蔣　 (*fl.* eighteenth century).[164]

While earlier works, such as those from the pre-Tang period, primarily focused on discussing the distinctive styles and brushwork techniques of various calligraphic masters, later theorists, such as Jiang Kui, Zhao Huanguang and Yao Mengqi, also devoted entire treatises to the practice of imitative copying,. The section on copying and tracing in Jiang Kui's *Xu Shupu* discusses the characteristics of imitative copying and tracing copying as essential steps in learning calligraphy. It then uses the example of the imitative copying of the *Lanting Xu* to explain how to choose a version for copying and what to pay attention to during the practice, aiming for a better understanding of the original work's style and spirit. Zhao Huanguang wrote an article of over 3,400 characters, entitled *Faithfully Imitative Copying and Imitative Free-hand Copying* (*Lin fang* 臨仿), to explore this topic further. [165]At the beginning of the article, he clearly states that the ultimate goal of copying is to internalize and make the techniques one's own. He also discusses the differences in detail between original handwriting works and ink-rubbings of their engraved

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[160] In *SHQS*, vol. 2, pp. 842-846.

[161] In *SHQS*, vol. 3, pp. 307-322.

[162] In *SHQS*, vol. 9, pp. 804-870.

[163] In *SHQS*, vol. 10, pp. 460-510.

[164] In *Zhongguo shufa lunzhu huibian*, vol. 7, pp. 75-128.

[165] In *SHQS*, vol. 2, pp. 97-99.

versions. Yao Mengqi's *Zixue yican* compiles 79 quotes from his personal experiences, which include both detailed discussions of specific calligraphers and their inscriptions or calligraphy works, as well as broader discussions on brush techniques, artistic spirit and aesthetic taste.

The Study and Practice of Calligraphy Today

4.1 Basic Resources and Conditions of Calligraphy Today

Thanks to significant advances in and the widespread availability of reproduction technology, we are now able to take in a much wider picture of the history of Chinese calligraphy. From electronic versions to high-quality printed reproductions, a wide range of calligraphic works is available to the amateur and the professional calligrapher. Viewing calligraphic works is no longer the exclusive privilege of a few collectors; now, high-resolution images of masterpieces and other calligraphic specimens are also easily accessible to the general public. Apart from a diverse range of resources available on the websites of museums, cultural institutions and associations of amateurs, large collections of Chinese calligraphy have been published in the last decades in both China and Japan. The earliest comprehensive collection of calligraphy ever published, covering China, Korea and Japan, was the 28-volume set, *Complete Collection of Calligraphy* (*Shodō zenshū* 書道全集), published by the Japanese publishing house Heibonsha 平凡社 in various editions from 1930 to 1968, with its sequel, focused on China alone, published in 1986–1989. In China, drawing inspiration from Japanese publications, a project for a 100-volume publication on the history of calligraphy was launched in the 1980s, the *Complete Collection of Chinese Calligraphy* (*Zhongguo shufa quanji* 中國書法全集), whose first volume was published in 1991. The 17-volume *Complete Collection of Chinese Calligraphy Model-books* (*Zhongguo fatie quanji* 中國法帖全集) was published in 2002, the 18-volume *Complete Collection of Chinese Calligraphy Autographs* in 2009 and the 20-volume *Complete Collection of Famous Chinese Stelae* (*Zhongguo mingbei quanji* 中國名碑全集) in 2013. At the same time, collections of texts on calligraphy were edited and published

along with texts on painting in the massive 14-volume *SHQS*, making reliable editions of ancient treatises on calligraphy readily available.

Technological progress has also deeply influenced written communication, which has entered the digital text era. Since the mid-twentieth century, not only have formal documents been typed, but daily handwriting has also predominantly been done with ballpoint pens, fountain pens and other hard-tipped pens once alien to China. Compared to the past, when there was an objective need for brush writing for anyone who had access to literacy, the actual amount of handwriting practice people undertake today has significantly decreased. Only professional calligraphers or calligraphy enthusiasts continue to maintain the practice of brush writing for creative works. Despite the availability of an extensive collection of calligraphic works for practice, the overall improvement in calligraphy skills is hindered by a lack of the substantial practice that was common in ancient times. Another point to be stressed is the obvious fact that Chinese traditional learning, in itself an essential part of calligraphic training, has become less popular in education curricula, leading to a lack of classical knowledge in the younger generations.[1]

4.2 Attempt to Reinterpret Calligraphy from the Perspective of Other Modern Disciplines

Calligraphy and its intersection with other disciplines, such as psychology, can be understood in two distinct ways. The first approach, which focuses on calligraphy, utilizes research methods, perspectives and findings from other modern disciplines to enhance our understanding of calligraphy. The second approach leverages the uniqueness and strengths of calligraphy to enrich and develop other disciplines, whose research focus is not on calligraphy per se.

The first scenario often relies on findings from Gestalt psychology, particularly Arnheim's perceptual psychology theory, to re-visualize and intuitively analyze calligraphy works and techniques. An attempt at practical exploration of this approach is Qiu Zhenzhong's *Chinese*

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[1] See Liu Caichang – Lu Ying (2007), pp. 550-551.

Calligraphy: 167 Exercises (*Zhongguo shufa 167 ge lianxi* 中國書法：167個練習),[2] in which he seeks to establish a comprehensive training program for calligraphy techniques based on intuitive visual analysis, ranging from simple to complex and encompassing various styles of script. However, there is a risk in such an attempt that the rich brushwork and nuanced expression encapsulated within even a single stroke of calligraphy may not be fully captured by the simplicity of Euclidean geometric analysis. When it comes to the expressive qualities of calligraphy, relying solely on visual and technical analysis can often lead to a self-referential loop, failing to grasp the deeper, more complex aspects of calligraphic art.

Another Chinese scholar, Zhang Tiangong, has considered the problem of calligraphic training from a psychological point of view. In his Psychology of Calligraphy Learning (*Shufa xuexi xinlixue* 書法學習心理學),[3] he expresses the belief that calligraphy is a highly unique artistic form whose appreciation is substantially different from that of cinema and music. Unlike watching a movie, which does not require one to be a director or actor, or enjoying music, which does not necessitate playing an instrument, appreciating calligraphy requires some experience in copying calligraphic works, even if only at a basic level. Thus, he argues that the starting point for the psychology of calligraphic art must be the psychology of learning. In his monograph, Zhang draws on various theories from aesthetics, educational psychology and developmental psychology and proposes a system of recognition, experience and observational learning that serves as an interdependent framework to capture the expression and visual form of calligraphy. He advocates the character group (*zizu* 字組) observation method, which he believes is particularly useful for observing and deconstructing the movement and structure in continuous semi-cursive or cursive works. This viewpoint in particular has made a significant impact in the field of contemporary calligraphy training.

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[2] Qiu Zhenzhong (2005).

[3] Zhang Tiangong (1988).

The above attempts use Western visual arts and related philosophical and psychological theories to reconstruct and analyze the practitioners' understanding of calligraphy. Once used properly, this approach has the advantage of being intuitive, easy to understand and demystifying, and so helps to popularize the study of calligraphy. The drawbacks, however, are evident, in that these theories are based on western visual arts or participants from the Western culture and are therefore not necessarily suitable for traditional Chinese art, such as calligraphy. If there is no corresponding basic research paradigm training, it is easy to make arbitrary decisions based solely on any theoretical details or conclusions.

The second approach has also achieved significant research outcomes. For example, based on multiple psychological experiments conducted by his team, Gao Shangren from the University of Hong Kong concluded that Chinese calligraphic handwriting (CCH) has an activating effect on the brain functions of practitioners.[4] He developed a comprehensive theory of calligraphy therapy and applied it to the intervention into and emotional improvement of various physical and mental conditions, including depression, hypertension, attention deficit and hyperactive disorder (ADHD), autism and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). His team also conducted an experiment comparing calligraphic handwriting with meditation (i.e. sitting still) and found that both effectively reduce stress.[5] The experiment suggested, moreover, that the uniqueness of calligraphy lies in its ability to engage the body's muscles, increasing tension while simultaneously promoting emotional relaxation. Interestingly, Gao's experimental research also revealed that training in different scripts resulted in different breathing patterns. The breathing rate is higher when writing in the *zhuan* and clerical scripts compared to the standard and cursive scripts, highlighting its broader potential in the cognition of different scripts.[6]

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[4] Gao Shangren (1986), (1992), and (1995).

[5] Zhu Lin et al. (2013).

[6] Gao Shangren (1986), p. 148.

By using scientific research methods focused on causality from psychology experiments, his studies have validated the traditional calligraphy theories, which claim that calligraphy can cultivate emotional well-being, significantly expanding the contemporary role of calligraphy training. Under his influence, some scholars have also conducted pre-test and post-test experimental research into the impact of calligraphy practice on the cognitive and personality development of children. These studies have shown that calligraphy positively affects children's well-being, emotions, behaviours and personality.[7] However, these findings are based solely on pre- and post-test experiments, and there is still a lack of strong causal support from long-term longitudinal studies.

Imitative copying of calligraphic masterpieces is an essential method for learning calligraphy. The research conducted by Zhang Tiangong and Gao Shangren on this topic can further illustrate the specific differences, advantages and disadvantages of these two research approaches.

Zhang Tiangong examines the practice of imitative copying using feedback theory from sports psychology.[8] He believes that the act of copying is based on mental images stored in memory through seeing. He explains that the process of comparing the dots, lines and ink traces created during writing with these mental images and adjusting the writing actions to make the ink traces resemble the mental images is called synchronous feedback. The level of synchronous feedback depends on the simultaneous development of one's ability to discern, observe and write.

He also categorizes memory in the practice of imitative copying into three types, based on the characteristics of imagery in calligraphic art and memory theory in psychology: form memory (the observed shapes of dots and lines), motor memory (the continuous actions corresponding to writing dots and lines) and form-motor memory (a combination of the first two). Accordingly, he believes that relatively static characters, such as those in the *zhuan*, clerical and standard scripts,

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[7] Guo Kejiao, Gao Dingguo and Gao Shangren (1993); Zhou Bin (2005), (2007); Zhou Bin, Liu Junsheng and Sang Biao (2005), (2009); Zhou, Liu Junsheng and Liu Botao (2009); Zhou et al. (2013).

[8] Zhang Tiangong (1988), pp. 41-54.

focus on form memory. He cites perceptual psychology experiments to remind learners to be cautious of tendencies toward averaging (making characters more uniform), emphasizing (highlighting specific features) or standardizing (approaching an ideal prototype) when practicing these scripts. For the cursive and semi-cursive scripts, he argues that form memory and motor memory alternately play a leading role. However, when discussing the challenges of static scripts, which lie in the expressive qualities of the dot and line shapes, and the challenges of the semi-cursive and cursive scripts, which lie in the harmony of dot and line shapes and their movement, he bases these views solely on his subjective experience of imitative copying.

In summary, although Zhang Tiangong's analysis of imitative copying in his book aims to establish a systematic and comprehensive psychological discourse, it falls prey to a theoretical patchwork and unverified subjective personal experience. In contrast, Rudolf Arnheim, who also uses a psychological perspective to systematically analyze Western visual arts, demonstrates a higher level of coherence and consistency in his arguments.[9] This is because Arnheim himself was rigorously trained in Gestalt psychology and is well-versed in various means of expression in visual arts, which gives him a comprehensive consideration and accurate understanding of theories and their origins.

Turning to Gao Shangren, who has professional psychological training and practical experience in calligraphy handwriting, his research on imitative copying, tracing copying and freehand handwriting strictly follows the empirical research paradigm in psychology.[10] This includes the theoretical foundation, research hypotheses, experimental design and implementation, data analysis, discussion of the reasons why the hypotheses were confirmed or unconfirmed and final conclusions. His experimental results indicate that imitative copying, tracing copying and freehand handwriting all lead to a reduction in heart rate, with tracing copying causing the greatest

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[9] Arnheim (1974).

[10] Gao Shangren (1986), pp. 159-178.

reduction. Moreover, individuals with more calligraphy experience took longer to write the same number of the clerical script characters compared to those with less experience. However, the differences in respiratory changes across the three activities, as hypothesized in the study, were not significant.

Another interesting result from the experiment was that, in the tracing copying condition, the slower the participants wrote, the greater the reduction in heart rate. This phenomenon was not observed in the imitative copying and freehand handwriting conditions. Gao cites the theory that increased concentration is more likely to induce a state of calmness, leading to a reduced heart rate.[11] He explains that this result is likely because tracing copying requires much more attention than imitative copying and freehand handwriting. Therefore, he suggests that for beginners, tracing is the most constructive method as it demands the highest level of concentration. This experimental conclusion aligns with the traditional advice that beginners should use tracing copying to train the writing movements of their hands.[12] However, it seems to contradict Jiang Kui's 姜夔 (ca. 1163 – ca. 1203) explanation that tracing copying requires less attention than imitative copying and is thus more easily forgotten.[13] Evidently, Jiang Kui intended to explain that imitative copying involves more observation, analysis and short-term memory processes than tracing copying, which is why it is more beneficial for future creative work. In tracing copying, the calligraphic model sheet and practice paper overlap, eliminating the need for the analysis and memory process required in imitative copying. However, a closer look at Gao's experiment also reminds calligraphy practitioners that the level of concentration required for tracing copying is not as low as commonly assumed. Questions remain about which aspects of attention are required during imitative copying versus tracing copying, whether more appropriate psychological or behavioral indices and new

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[11] Lacey et al. (1963).

[12] *Xu shupu, in SHQS*, vol. 2, p. 174. English translation in Chang – Frankel (1995), p. 25.

[13] *Xu shupu, in SHQS*, vol. 2, p. 174. English translation in Chang – Frankel (1995), p. 25.

advanced experimental equipment could better reveal this process, the psychological and behavioral differences between imitative copying and copying from memory (*beilin* 背臨), and the similarities and differences between copying from memory and freehand handwriting. These issues all require further experimental verification.

Gao's research into the psychological therapeutic possibilities of Chinese calligraphic handwriting has received a positive response and further investigation from the academic community. However, foundational experimental research on calligraphy handwriting behavior has yet to see new groundbreaking studies from other scholars. As a result, it has not garnered sufficient attention from calligraphy educators and practitioners.

Although the aforementioned studies are not yet mature or fully developed, they are sufficient to indicate that the relationship between psychology and calligraphy practice merits further exploration. Today, with advances in experimental equipment and methods in cognitive psychology, this field should see corresponding breakthroughs to help with the recognition of the uniqueness of Chinese calligraphy from different perspectives. These valuable and reliable cognitive explorations will also bring benefits for effective calligraphy training in contemporary times.

4.3 The Activities of the China Calligraphers Association (Zhongguo shufajia xiehui 中國書法家協會, CCA) and the Effort to Advocate Daily Handwriting and Cultivation in Literature and History like the Traditional Literati

Founded in May 1981, the China Calligraphers Association (Zhongguo shufajia xiehui 中國書法家協會, CCA) is affiliated with the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (Zhongguo wenxue yishu jie lianhehui 中國文學藝術界聯合會, CFLAC), which was established in July 1949. The CCA has a permanent institution in Beijing funded by the government, members and social

sponsorship to manage its affairs.[14] It currently has forty member groups (i.e. branches of the association) spread across various provinces and cities in China and over 15,000 individual members. The CCA is the most important and influential professional association in the field of Chinese calligraphy today.[15]

The CCA is most notable for organizing the China Calligraphy Lanting Award (Zhongguo shufa lanting jiang 中國書法蘭亭獎, which is held irregularly and includes awards for both theory and creation, open only to members) and the National Calligraphy and Seal Engraving Exhibition (Quanguo shufa zhuanke zhanlan 全國書法篆刻展覽, held every four years and open to all Chinese citizens and people of Chinese descent over the age of 18). These awards and exhibitions are the highest-level events in the Chinese calligraphy community, comprehensively showcasing the calligraphy field.

For many contemporary calligraphy practitioners, being selected for a national exhibition organized by the CFLAC or the CCA is a critical milestone in their professional career as a calligrapher. Being selected for national and other exhibitions has therefore become the ultimate goal of the vast majority of contemporary calligraphy creation and practice. While participants can submit their own poems and prose for consideration, most choose to copy ancient classical texts during the process of creation. This has led to a trend where many calligraphy creators, in an attempt to be selected for exhibitions, focus solely on calligraphic techniques and visual form, neglecting the cultural depth and refinement that underpins the art. As a result, their attempts at refined writing or even just copying classical texts often contain inappropriate phrasing, incorrect

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[14] In no. 37 of the Constitution of CCA, in http://www.cca1981.org.cn/sxgk/zhangcheng/202102/ t20210204_532165.html.

[15] The introduction to the CCA's official website, http://www.cca1981.org.cn/sxgk/jianjie/201502/ t20150210_285183.html.

characters and other basic errors, as revealed in the article by Li Song 李松, a calligrapher and member of the Creation Committee of the CCA.[16]

In response to these issues, the 11th National Exhibition in 2015 introduced a creative philosophy rooted in tradition, encouraging innovation, balancing art and literature and promoting diversity and inclusiveness.[17] The 12th National Exhibition in 2019, and the most recent 13th National Exhibition in 2024 not only maintained a rigorous evaluation process for submitted works but also established a separate text review process.[18] This process, overseen by professors from the field of philology at universities, aims to ensure the relative correct use of language and characters in selected works. These measures reflect the CCA's commitment to returning to the essence of calligraphy and avoiding the pitfalls of mere craftsmanship and exhibition-oriented work. The CCA advocates for calligraphers to emulate the comprehensive cultural and artistic cultivation of traditional calligraphers, who were also renowned as the literati, striving to enhance the overall cultural and artistic refinement of the calligraphy community. However, cultivating cultural and historical refinement is a lifelong endeavor, and it may be difficult to change long-standing habits quickly.

The CCA's professional exhibition system not only includes routine juried exhibitions but also invitational or juried special exhibitions in conjunction with calligraphy relics. Notable examples in recent years include the large-scale "Origin and Era: Wang Xizhi Centered Calligraphy of the Past Dynasties and Contemporary Calligraphy" (*Yuanliu shidai: yi Wang Xizhi wei zhongxin de lidai fashu yu dangqian shufa chaungzuo* 源流‧時代: 以王羲之為中心的歷代法書與當前書

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[16] Li Song (2014), pp. 127-131.

[17] This creative philosophy was later incorporated into the CCA's constitution, see http://www.cca1981.org.cn/xhyzx/201901/t20190128_434522.html.

[18] For evaluation details, see http://www.ccagov.com.cn/stxw/zhanshi/201908/t20190822_453602.html.

法創作) exhibition in 2019[19] and the "Inherit and Continue: Grand Calligraphy Exhibition of New Work on the Theme of Calligraphic Specimens Archeologically Excavated Since 1949" (*Chengxu: xinzhongguo xinfaxian shufa zhuti dazhan* 承續: 新中國新發現書法主題大展) in 2023. These exhibitions showcase both classic stele rubbings, newly unearthed calligraphic works and invite contemporary calligraphers to create pieces inspired by their own insights. This approach highlights the foundational influence of ancient civilizations and classic calligraphic models on modern calligraphy creation, as well as the interpretations and expressions of contemporary calligraphers. Both exhibitions were accompanied by catalogue publications. The 2023 exhibition also featured six volumes of complete rubbings of stele and entombed stone inscriptions, providing enthusiasts with high-definition resources for study and practice.[20]

It is noteworthy that the CCA is not only a professional association serving calligraphers but also has the mission of promoting the standardization of calligraphy education and the systematization of calligraphy theory.[21] It actively works towards building calligraphy as an academic discipline and advancing calligraphy education at all levels.

In addition to professional exhibitions focused on calligraphy creation, the CCA also publishes the academic periodical *Chinese Calligraphy* (*Zhongguo shufa* 中國書法), which, along with *Chinese Calligraphy Studies* (*Shufa yanjiu* 書法研究) published by the Shanghai shuhua chubanshe 上海書畫出版社, is one of the most authoritative journals in the field of calligraphy.

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[19] This exhibition included two exhibitions themed around imitation works and writing one's own poems and essays, "As Great as Calligraphy: Articles on Classic Model Calligraphy Through the Ages" (Wenmo tonghui: lidai jingdianfashu zhong de hanmo wenzhang 文墨同輝——歷代經典法書中的翰墨文章) and around health, "Expressing my heart: Textual Representation of Contemporary Calligraphers" (Woshuwoxin: dangdai shujia de wenbenbiaoxian 我書我心——當代書家的文本表現).

[20] *Xin Zhongguo xin faxian shufa daxi.*

[21] See http://www.cca1981.org.cn/xhyzx/201901/t20190128_434522.html.

Many individual members of the CCA are also university professors or specialized calligraphy teachers in primary and secondary schools. When the Ministry of Education of China issues policies related to calligraphy education, the CCA and its members play a crucial role in their implementation.

On April 29, 2021, the Ministry of Education established the China Calligraphy Education Committee (Zhongguo shufa jiaoyu zhidao weiyuanhui 中國書法教育指導委員會), the China Traditional Martial Arts Education Committee (Zhongguo wushu jiaoyu zhidao weiyuanhui 中國武術教育指導委員會) and the China Traditional Opera Education Committee (Zhongguo xiqu jiaoyu zhidao weiyuanhui 中國戲曲教育指導委員會).[22] These committees aim to leverage the expertise of specialists in calligraphy, martial arts and opera to provide research, consultation, evaluation and guidance in these fields. Calligraphy, martial arts and opera are unique disciplines within Chinese civilization, distinct in their native characteristics and diverse styles when compared to other world cultures. The formation process of the Calligraphy Education Committee took three years to complete. In the committee member list announced by the Ministry of Education on June 7, 2024, both advisors are former CCA chairpersons; the two directors are former Deputy Secretary-General of the State Council, Ding Xiangyang 丁向陽, and the current CCA chairperson, Sun Xiaoyun 孫曉雲. Additionally, two CCA vice-chairpersons, Ye Peigui 葉培貴 and Pan Shanzhu 潘善助, are among the six vice-directors, with Pan Shanzhu also serving as the director of the CCA's Calligraphy Education Committee. This highlights the CCA's significant guiding role within the entire calligraphy education system.

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[22] For the official notification see http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A17/s7059/202105/t20210514_531576.html.

4.4 Elementary Calligraphic Education in China

Just as calligraphy historically evolved from a practical tool for literacy education into an independent art form, contemporary calligraphy education in China's primary and secondary schools has also transitioned from a focus on handwriting (*xiezi* 寫字) to calligraphy as an art. This shift occurred in 2011 when the Ministry of Education issued the *Opinions on Conducting Calligraphy Education in Primary and Secondary Schools* (*Guanyu zhongxiaoxue kaizhan shufa jiaoyu de yijian* 關於中小學開展書法教育的意見, Document No. 4, 2011).[23] Besides formally renaming it "calligraphy education" (*shufa jiaoyu*), the document clearly states that dedicated calligraphy courses should be offered from the third grade of elementary school through to the high school level. In 2013, the Ministry of Education released the *Guidelines for Calligraphy Education in Primary and Secondary Schools* (*Zhongxiaoxue shufa jiaoyu zhidao gangyao* 中小學書法教育指導綱要, hereafter *Guidelines*), which provide more practical guidance for education in this field.[24] However, it is important to note that although these documents acknowledge the artistic and cultural aspects of calligraphy, the primary focus of calligraphy education remains the recognition and writing of Chinese characters. Artistic expression and cultural cultivation are not the main educational objectives. As stated in the *Guidelines*:

Calligraphy education in primary and secondary schools is based on the teaching of character recognition and handwriting within the language curriculum; it aims to improve Chinese character

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[23] For the document see http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/moe_714/201108/t20110802_167341.html.

[24] For the official notification, the guidance and its appendix see http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/201301/t20130125_147389.html.

writing skills and takes writing practice as the fundamental method, with moderate integration of calligraphy aesthetics and cultural education.[25]

The current official script in China is the simplified standard script (*jianti zi* 簡體字), which is also the primary focus of literacy education in schools. Even traditional poems and classical texts are presented in simplified characters in language textbooks. In contrast, the traditional standard script uses traditional Chinese characters (*fanti zi* 繁體字) (still the official script in Taiwan and Hong Kong and also used in mainland China for certain publications) and calligraphic styles such as the clerical, *zhuan*, and cursive scripts belong to entirely different writing systems compared to simplified characters, although several simplified forms existed in the past. In the long term, the artistic expression of calligraphy in primary and secondary school education is unlikely to surpass the goal of writing aesthetically pleasing and standardized simplified Chinese characters (*jianhua zi* 簡化字).

In the appendix of the *Guidelines*, the names of twenty-eight types of brushstroke and seven basic rules for the stroke order (*bishun* 筆順) are provided.[26] Appendix 3 specifically mentions that the imitative copying of classical calligraphy models is an important aspect of and fundamental method for learning calligraphy with a brush. The appendix recommends works from the calligraphers Ouyang Xun, Chu Suiliang, Yan Zhenqing, Liu Gongquan and Zhao Mengfu because of their representative works in the standard script. For the cursive script, it also recommends four works separately by Wang Xizhi, Yan Zhenqing, Su Shi and Zhao Mengfu. For the clerical script, recommended calligraphic models include the *Stele of Yi Ying* (*Yi Ying bei* 乙瑛碑, 153), the *Stele of*

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[25] 中小學書法教育以語文課程中識字和寫字教學為基本內容, 以提高漢字書寫能力為基本目標, 以書寫實踐為基本途徑, 適度融入書法審美和書法文化教育. At http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/201301/t20130125_147389.html.

[26] Appendix available at http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/201301/t20130125_147389.html.

the Ritual Vessels [of the Confucian Temple] (*Liqi bei* 禮器碑, 156), the *Stele of Shi Chen* (*Shi Chen bei* 史晨碑, 168) (these three inscription are now in the Museum of Stele Inscriptions from the Han and Northern Wei Dynasties, Qufu 曲阜) and the *Stele of Cao Quan* (*Caoquan bei* 曹全碑, 185, now in the Xi'an Forest of Tablets Museum). The last appendix recommends twenty classical examples of the *zhuan*, *zhang* cursive, cursive, semi-cursive and standard scripts for appreciation. It also suggests works by the calligrapher Wang Duo and nine modern and contemporary calligraphers, such as Wu Changshuo 吳昌碩 (1844–1927) and Yu Youren 于右任 (1879–1964), for further appreciation.

In 2014, the Ministry of Education approved the *Calligraphy Practice Guide* (*Shufa lianxi zhidao* 書法練習指導) textbooks for brush calligraphy, which were written for grades 3-6 of compulsory education based on the *Guidelines*.[27] The approved textbooks were by 12 chief-editors and calligraphers, including Qin Yonglong 秦永龍, Cao Baolin 曹寶麟, Yu Maoyang 于茂陽, Wo Xinghua 沃興華, Jia Duo 賈鐸, Ouyang Zhongshi 歐陽中石 (1928–2020), Wei Tianci 尉天池, Liu Shaogang 劉紹剛, Shen Peng 沈鵬 (1931–2023), Tian Yingzhang 田英章, Zhang Xin 張信 and Liu Jiang 劉江, resulting in a total of eleven sets of textbooks. These textbooks were officially introduced for use in the autumn semester of 2015, providing the necessary resources for calligraphy education in primary and secondary schools across the country. These textbooks are listed in the *Catalogue of National Curriculum Teaching Books for Compulsory Education* (*Yiwu jiaoyu guojia kecheng jiaoxue yongshu mulu* 義務教育國家課程教學用書目錄) up to 2022, respectively published by Beijing Normal University Publishing Group, Guangdong Education Publishing House, Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House, Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, People's Education Publishing House, Sino-culture Press, Jiangsu Juvenile and Children's Publishing House,

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27 Official notification available at http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/201503/t20150323_189375.html.

Qingdao Publishing Group, People's Fine Arts Publishing House, Shanxi People's Publishing House, Shanghai Scientific & Technological Education Publishing House and Xilingyinshe Group Publishing House.[28] Unfortunately, no updated version of the national calligraphic textbooks has currently been published.

4.5 Higher Calligraphic Education in China

In 1963, Pan Tianshou 潘天壽 (1897–1971), Lu Weizhao 陸維釗 (1899–1980), Sha Menghai 沙孟海 (1900–1992) and Zhu Lesan 諸樂三 (1902–1984) established the first calligraphy major in China at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (Zhejiang meishu xueyuan 浙江美術學院, now the China Academy of Art 中國美術學院).[29] This programme included courses in calligraphy, classical Chinese, seal carving and other disciplines. The academy began training its first class of undergraduate students in September of that year. In 1979, under the commission of the Ministry of Culture, the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts began enrolling and training graduate students in calligraphy and seal carving.

In 1993, Ouyang Zhongshi established the first doctoral program in calligraphy at Capital Normal University (Shoudu shifan daxue 首都師範大學), marking the formation of a complete higher education system for calligraphy, spanning undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels.[30] However, from its inception, the discipline of calligraphy was subsumed under fine arts. It was not until the State Council Academic Degrees Committee and the Ministry of Education issued the *Catalogue of Disciplines and Specialties for Graduate Education (2022)* (研究生教育學科專業目錄 2022年) that Fine Arts and Calligraphy was formally classified as a first-level discipline. This

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[28] List available at http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/202204/t20220425_621597.html.

[29] For the history of the calligraphy major, see the official website https://www.caa.edu.cn/xy/jxjg/zfxy/index.html.

[30] See the official website of the Institute of China Calligraphy Culture of Capital Normal University, https://shufa.cnu.edu.cn/yjyjj/jj/index.htm.

change elevated calligraphy from a second-level discipline under the "Fine Arts" category to a first-level discipline under the broader category of "Art," standing parallel to the Fine Arts.

In response to this significant shift, two of China's flagship fine arts academies, the China Academy of Fine Arts and the Central Academy of Fine Arts (Zhongyang meishu xueyuan 中央美術學院), separated their calligraphy departments from the Chinese Painting Schools in 2023 and 2024 respectively, establishing independent Calligraphy Schools.[31] This leap forward in the academic status of calligraphy demonstrates the strong support of the Ministry of Education for the construction of calligraphy as a discipline.

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[31] See the official websites https://www.caa.edu.cn/xy/jxjg/zfxy/index.html; https://www.cafa.edu.cn/sp/nljg/?j=102.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Function and Patterns of Copying of Chinese Calligraphy

5.1 Models of Chinese Calligraphy Practice

The Chinese writing system comprises five fundamental scripts, which are also the scripts used in calligraphic practice: *zhuan*, clerical, standard, semi-cursive and cursive. After the standard script had reached its mature stage, in the early seventh century, no new scripts emerged in China.[1] During the development of Chinese writing scripts, the study of handwriting required specific models according to which one could learn characters. Characters do not exist in the abstract, but only in their actual script configuration, be it the *zhuan*, clerical, standard and so forth. This is to say that, from the emergence of a mature script during the second half of the second millennium BCE, Chinese writing relied on models through which students and practitioners could study and perfect their handwriting skills. Hence, several primers intended for beginners circulated at least during the Han dynasty. These handwriting models were part of elementary education (*xiaoxue* 小學), which was essential for acquiring the philological knowledge necessary for studying the classics of the Confucian school. Some of these textbooks, like the slips of *Cangjie pian* (pl. 11)[2] and fragmented paper no. 171 of *Jijiu pian* (pl. 12),[3] have been unearthed through archaeological excavations.

It goes without saying that any script requires models so that it can be learned and practised. In the case of calligraphic learning, however, these models were more than simple textbooks that one had to copy in order to master a given script. When calligraphy became a conscious art form in the first century CE, specimens of skilled calligraphers were treasured for their calligraphic beauty,

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[1] According to Qiu Xigui, the standard script reached its mature stage with Ouyang Xun in the 630s. Qiu Xigui (2013), pp. 99-101; English translation by Gilbert Mattos and Jerry Norman (2000), pp. 147-149.

[2] *Beijing daxue cang Xi Han zhushu*, vol. 1, p. 23.

[3] *Loulan hanwen jianzhi wenshu jicheng*, p. 315.

褭嬽鄭舞炊竽規捐媌嬯

歌潘閒簡鞏鼓歌釀盥娶

歃醶細小貧寠乞匃貰捈

悒頯勃醉酤趮文宰窶姜費

百廿八

頑祐械師鰥寡特孤

Plate11: Slips of the *Cangjie pian* 倉頡篇 (from *Beijing daxue cang Xi Han zhushu*, vol. 1)

130
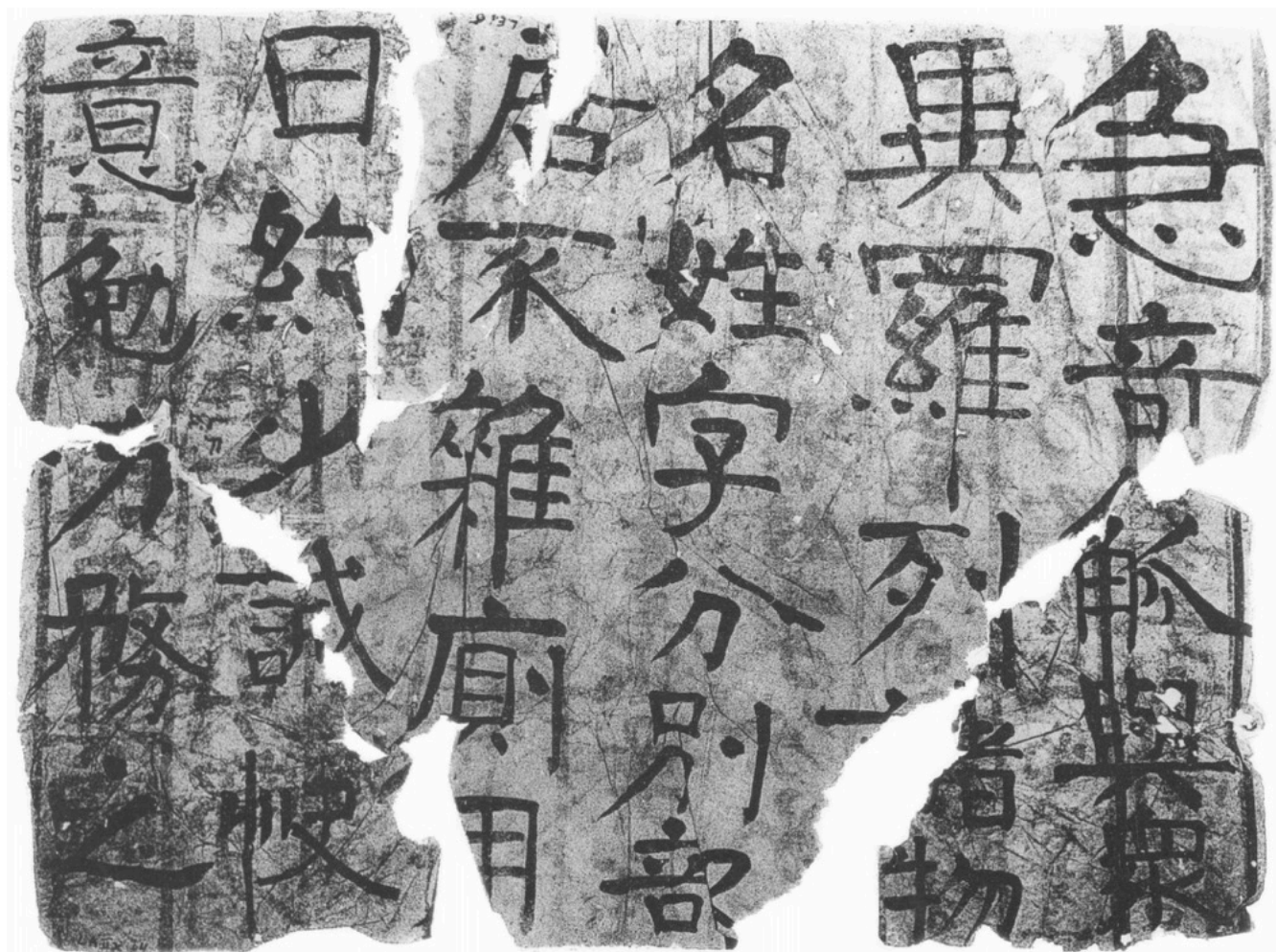
Plate 12: Paper Fragment no. 171 of *Jijiu pian* 急就篇 (from *Loulan hanwen jianzhi wenshu jicheng*)

as happened with Chen Zun's 陳遵 (d. 24) epistles (*chidu* 尺牘), which were treasured by their addressees.[4] It goes without saying that Chen Zun's calligraphic specimens were not only admired but also served as calligraphic models, perhaps for children or beginners. As calligraphy became very popular among the literati of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420), it is obvious that children were trained in the calligraphic style of their family and studied from calligraphic works by their elders. At the same time, particularly skilled calligraphers became very popular because of the usefulness that their calligraphic specimens had for the learning of handwriting, and so "were taken

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[4] *Hanshu* 92.3711.

[by contemporaries] as a model" ([當時]以為楷法), as mentioned in several biographical records of trained calligraphers from the first to the eleventh century.[5]

In the fifth century, connoisseurship and collecting began to shape the bulk of the Chinese calligraphic tradition; the value of refined works of calligraphy was therefore enhanced, as they could be used as artistic reference material for calligraphic practice. These works were studied by means of free-hand copying, with the aim of acquiring the style of a given calligrapher by imitating the shape of the characters from his or her original work.

The selection of calligraphy models has experienced several changes in the history of Chinese calligraphy. From the viewpoint of elementary education, the Confucian classics carved in stone in 183 and 243 served as authoritative models.[6] For instance, during the Tang, students of the state schools were required to complete the study of *the Confucian Classics* on Stone *in the Three Scripts* (*Santi shijing* 三體石經)—the archaic, lesser *zhuan* and clerical scripts—within three years.[7]

From a calligraphic point of view, however, calligraphic works written by the literati of the Eastern Jin have been especially treasured by calligraphy practitioners of subsequent centuries. For instance, the Tang calligrapher and calligraphy theorist Sun Guoting (ca. 647–ca. 690) explains in his *Shupu* 書譜 (*Manual of Calligraphy*) (687) that, during the Eastern Jin, calligraphers mutually influenced each other through the inspiring aura that permeated their calligraphic experience.[8] However, as Sun Guoting continues, in later times calligraphy lost the extraordinary spirit that characterised the calligraphic specimens of the epoch of Wang Xizhi. Consequently, the Eastern Jin became the epitome of supreme calligraphic creation *par excellence* and calligraphic works by literati from that epoch became the most treasured of all calligraphic works and served as a constant

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[5] De Laurentis (2014a), pp. 133-134.

[6] Tsien (2004), pp. 84-85.

[7] *Tang liudian* 21.562.

[8] The original text and English translation in De Laurentis (2011b), pp. 31-32, pp. 47-48.

reference for calligraphic training. After the Eastern Jin is the Tang dynasty, which, thanks to its stone inscriptions, has provided a wide range of calligraphic models, especially in the standard script. Already in the Song dynasty, the Eastern Jin and the Tang were the most represented epochs regarding the calligraphy models selected by state schools. Besides the archaic scripts, the models for the standard and the semi-cursive scripts were two calligraphers of the Eastern Jin, Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi, as well as four calligraphers of the Tang, Ouyang Xun, Yu Shinan, Yan Zhenqing and Liu Gongquan.[9]

Furthermore, the importance of calligraphic copies can be deduced from the fact that they are also treasured along with original calligraphic works in important calligraphy collections. For instance, among the 1344 calligraphic pieces listed in the imperial catalogue of the early twelfth century, the *Catalogue of Calligraphies [Compiled during] the Xuanhe Reign* (1119–1125) (*Xuanhe shupu* 宣和書譜),[10] there are 21 copies made by 11 calligraphers, namely Wang Xizhi, Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558–638), Monk Zhiyong 釋智永 (*fl.* 560), Lu Jianzhi 陸柬之 (585–638), Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596–658), Monk Huairen 釋懷仁 (*fl.* 673), Monk Huaisu 釋懷素 (b. 737), Monk Menggui 釋夢龜 (*fl.* 901—903), Zhang Yanyuan 張彦遠 (ca. 817–ca. 875), Wei Rongzong 韋榮宗 (d.u.) and Pu Yun 蒲雲 (d.u.).[11] One of these copies is Pu Yun's tracing copy of standard scripts, of which two are semi-cursive and the others all cursive. It is worth noting that a special focus is given to the four masters Zhang Zhi 張芝 (d. 192), Zhong You 锺繇 (151–230), Wang Xizhi and Zhang Xu 张旭 (ca. 675–759). Not only are their biographies and original works included, but also copies of their works from later generations are listed. It means that the ministers entrusted with the task of compiling the imperial catalogue were interested in both calligraphic models and interpretative free-hand copies

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[9] *Songshi* 157.3688.

[10] The total number of works listed in the *Xuanhe shupu* is from the website of the Beijing Palace Museum: https://www.dpm.org.cn/lemmas/243200.html (last accessed 29 April 2024).

[11] *Xuanhe shupu* 15.120, 8.65, 17.136, 8.64, 3.24, 11.85, 19.148, 19.151, 20.160, 10.82, 6.52.

by famous calligraphers from later generations. Perhaps the imperial court collected many different copies by these calligraphers, but only those related to famous masters, and particularly Wang Xizhi, are listed. Moreover, it is no coincidence that even a copy of Zhong You's cursive script *Suohuai Letter* (*Suohuai tie* 所懷帖), is listed alongside Wang Xizhi's other 242 calligraphic works, despite the fact that it is not clear that it is really Wang Xizhi who made the copy. During the Song, Wang Xizhi was already known as the long-established "sage of calligraphy" (*shusheng* 書聖), but to the compilers of the catalogue, and presumably to its readers, his calligraphic art was no exception: it too stemmed from the process of imitative copying of models by previous masters.

Further proof of the importance of the calligraphic tradition of the Eastern Jin for the study of calligraphy can be taken from the selection criteria of the most complete collection of calligraphic copies yet made: the *Complete Collection of Free-hand Copies by Famous Masters* (*Rekidai meika rinsho shūsei* 歷代名家臨書集成) published in 1988 in Japan. Nearly half of the copies (138 vs. 291) regard original models dating from the third to the sixth centuries, and among these, Wang Xizhi's works constitute the majority (81).

A very important role in the dissemination of calligraphic models has been played by the so-called "calligraphy copy-model books" (*fatie* 法帖), for which, from, the mid-seventh century,[12] representative calligraphic specimens, most dating from the fourth to the seventh centuries, were reproduced on stone or wood and then circulated, mainly as ink rubbings.[13] With the twentieth century the implementation of photography in publishing, good quality reproductions of originals began to be published and works that had once been in the possession only of a small circle of connoisseurs and that had, at best, been published through stone reproductions, which more often

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[12] An early example of a calligraphy copy-model book is the *Shiqi Calligraphy Model-book* (*Shiqi tie* 十七帖), a collection of 29 letters by Wang Xizhi that was edited and carved in stone in the mid-seventh century. See Qi Xiaochun (2009), p. 174.

[13] The most complete collection of calligraphy copy-model books is *Zhongguo fatie quanji*.

than not did not preserve the calligraphic quality of the originals, were made available to the general public.

Nowadays, high-quality reproductions of manuscripts and ink rubbings are available both as single publications, the so-called *zitie* 字帖, or in multi-volume sets of calligraphy collections. Publishing houses such as the Cultural Relics (Wenwu), the Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting (Shanghai shuhua) and the Japanese Nigensha 二玄社 have published massive series of calligraphic works, which serve as the fundamental object of calligraphic practice for both calligraphers, university students and amateurs.

5.2 The Two Phases of Imitative Copying: "Acquiring the Style of the Original" and "Discarding the Influence of the Original"

Once the calligraphy models are selected and practitioners start studying them, the learning process can be divided in two main phases: the first is called "acquiring the style of the original", the second "discarding the influence of the original". These two phases are sequential and, although the second is the ultimate goal of the copying process, the first is the essential prerequisite for acquiring the basic knowledge of calligraphic training. More specifically, the term *rutie* refers to the stage of becoming familiar with the original model and acquiring both its spiritual outlook and visual form. Conversely, *chutie* refers to the stage of being able to capture the aura of the original without being limited by its outer appearance, after one has fully mastered the technical features of the original.[14]

Due to the complex characteristics of any calligraphy model, either in terms of structure or brushwork, during the initial stage of *rutie* one lays the foundation for being able to interpret more personally the same calligraphy model, once one has acquired the necessary skills to be able to depart from its outer appearance. It goes without saying that the initial phase of *rutie* determines the

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[14] *Zhongguo shufa dacidian,* p. 196.

technical mastery that a calligrapher will be able to achieve. Accordingly, in calligraphic creation, if practitioners neglect the first stage, their creation will be inclined to be clumsy, sloppy and whimsical. This is the danger of producing what is termed "tasteless calligraphy" (*sushu* 俗書) in calligraphic treatises such as Zhao Yiuang's 趙宧光 (1559-1625) *Hanshan's Spontaneous Discourses on Calligraphy* (*Hanshan zhoutan* 寒山帚談).[15] As early as the seventh century, however, Sun Guoting criticized those practitioners who were unwilling to spend time studying calligraphy models and yet indulged in a fantasy of writing a good hand.[16]

As practitioners become more and more familiar with calligraphy models, they may also turn to different ways of adapting the originals. For instance, faithfully copying an original, including doing imitative copying character by character or collating characters from calligraphic models is very different from writing a brand new calligraphic work in the style of a given original. The famous *Preface to the Buddhist Scriptures Engraved on Stone in Wang Xizhi's Collated Characters* (*Ji Wang shengjiao xu* 集王聖教序) of 673 is therefore both a work of reproduction and of creation.[17] The problem of how to write characters that are not present in the original challenges the calligraphic insight of the practitioner. This kind of production is called "free-hand imitative creation" (*fang* 仿)[18] and regards any calligraphy work in which the text to be written —be it a

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[15] *SHQS*, vol. 4. p. 88.

[16] In Sun Guoting's words: "[For those who have] studied with their heads bent down at length in the observation of calligraphies by their side⋯as well as those who bear] a muddled mind in the ways of copying and a puzzled hand in the principles of wielding and moving, is not [in all these cases] the aim for grace and subtlety [of calligraphy] only an absurdity then?" (曾不傍窺尺牘(牘), 俯習寸陰⋯心昏擬效之方, 手迷揮運之理, 求其妍妙, 不亦謬哉). English translation in De Laurentis (2011b), pp. 46-47. Reproduction of Sun Guoting's manuscript at the Taibei Palace Museum in *FTQJ*, vol. 3, p. 104.

[17] On this inscription, see De Laurentis (2021).

[18] Zhao Yiguang differentiated "imitative free-hand copying" (*fangshu* 仿書) from "faithfully imitative copying" (*lintie* 臨帖), *SHQS*, vol. 4, p. 99.

poem, an excerpt from the Chinese classics or a Buddhist scripture— presents characters which are absent from the calligraphy models with which the practitioner is most familiar. Simply put, it is a work "in-the-style-of" a famous calligrapher or calligraphy and obviously requires a thorough comprehension of the original style from which it takes inspiration. The inscription for Xuanzang's 玄奘 (d. 664) funerary *stūpa* (*taming* 塔銘) was carved only in 839, more than 150 years after his death, and is a fine imitative work from the authoritative model, *Ji Wang shengjiao xu* 集王聖教 序.[19] The inscription of *Ji Wang shengjiao xu* commends Xuanzang's great deeds in propagating the Dharma as a translator, and is supplemented by Taizong's (Li Shimin 李世民, 599–649, r. 626–649) *Preface* and Gaozong's (Li Zhi 李治, 628–683, r. 649–683) *Note* with Wang Xizhi' collated characters; perhaps, therefore, the monk Lingjian 令捡 (d.u.), who was in charge of producing the inscription, selected the monk Jianchu 建初 (d.u.) as the calligrapher of the funeral inscription in memory of Xuanzang because he was able to do free-hand imitative creation in the calligraphic style of *Ji Wang shengjiao xu*.[20]

The challenge of writing characters that are different from one another is another stimulus which kindled the popularity of a text like the *Qianziwen*. This text was created as a collation work from Wang Xizhi's calligraphies during the early sixth century, but its original form was soon lost and only its textual content, therefore, has been transmitted through the ages. Its main value lies in

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[19] Xuanzang died in 664 but no funeral inscription was granted to him, despite the great fame that he achieved in his life. This was due to Gaozong's unfriendly attitude towards the monk because he favored Daoism rather than Buddhism. See De Laurentis (2021), pp. 128-132.

[20] After the death of Taizong, in 649, imperial support for Buddhism declined and in 845 (Huichang 5. VIII *renwu*), six years after the construction of Xuanzang's funerary *stūpa*, Buddhism experienced an unprecedented calamity, when Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (Li Yan 李炎, 814–846, r. 840–846) promulgated the edict against Buddhism and launched a drastic anti-Buddhist campaign. During the Huichang reign (840–846), as many as 4,600 monasteries were closed, with 260,500 monks and nuns being compelled to renounce their vows. *Jiu Tangshu* 18a.604-606.

the fact that it provides 1000 non-redundant characters to help beginners acquire a basic knowledge of the Chinese language. For this reason, it has long been a favorite text for imitative creation. Indeed, as early as the second half of the sixth century, the Buddhist monk Zhiyong produced 800 copies of this text in his own handwriting, both in the standard and the cursive scripts, and distributed them in the lower region of the Yangtze (southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang), where they served as a learning tool for both the lay and Buddhist communities. Buddhist scriptures, believed to be the words uttered by the Buddha, were usually written in the standard script,[21] but other texts, such as the doctrinal treatises (*abhidharma*, *lun* 論),[22] could also be copied out in the cursive script, as demonstrated by several manuscripts discovered in the so-called "Library Cave" of the Mogao 莫高 Grottoes in Dunhuang (western Gansu).[23] It can be inferred that Zhiyong aimed to provide a tool for monks so that they could improve their literacy knowledge, at the same time copying more accurately and effectively the Buddhist scriptures and even devoting themselves to calligraphic art.

However, if practitioners only indulge in the imitative copying of the original model, even though they have the capacity to write forceful strokes, they still cannot been regarded as calligraphers with their own personal "style" (*ti* 體); their work will be seen as "enslaved

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[21] After the Tang dynasty, when, in 673, the *Ji Wang shengjiao xu* in Wang Xizhi's semi-cursive characters was erected, Buddhist sutras were also copied out in the semi-cursive script; the most popular of these copies was the *Heart Sutra*, which was copied in the semi-cursive and cursive scripts by several famous calligraphers, such as Zhang Xu 張旭 (ca. 675–759), Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322), etc. See *Lidai mingjia shu Xinjing* (2013), p. 21, p. 35.

[22] The corpus of Buddhist scriptures is usually referred to through the metonymy "three baskets" (*sanzang* 三藏, Skt. *tripiṭaka*), as it was believed that three baskets had once contained, respectively, sutras (*jing* 經, the words spoken directly by the Buddha), *vinaya* texts (*lü* 律, monastic regulations) and *abhidharma* texts (*lun* 論, com-mentaries). See *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, p. 924.

[23] For instance, see manuscripts P.2176, P.2037, SB.12, S.2721, P.2063, S.2700, P.2147.

calligraphy" (*nushu* 奴書). In contrast, the calligraphy scholar Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 (*fl.* the first half of the 8th century) believed that the "Ou [yang Xun] Script" (*outi* 歐體) and the "Liu [Gongquan 公權 (778–865)]" (*liuti* 柳體) were successful works with creative new forms benefitting from the work of previous masters of calligraphy.[24]

Although the practice of *chutie* puts the emphasis on casting off the influence of the original, it does not mean that, when practitioners acquire enough calligraphic skills from calligraphy models and devote themselves to calligraphic creation, they can stop learning from them. This is because the practical and artistic application of calligraphy merges with other cultural practices, such as that of reading and copying classical texts, particularly before the eleventh century, when printing
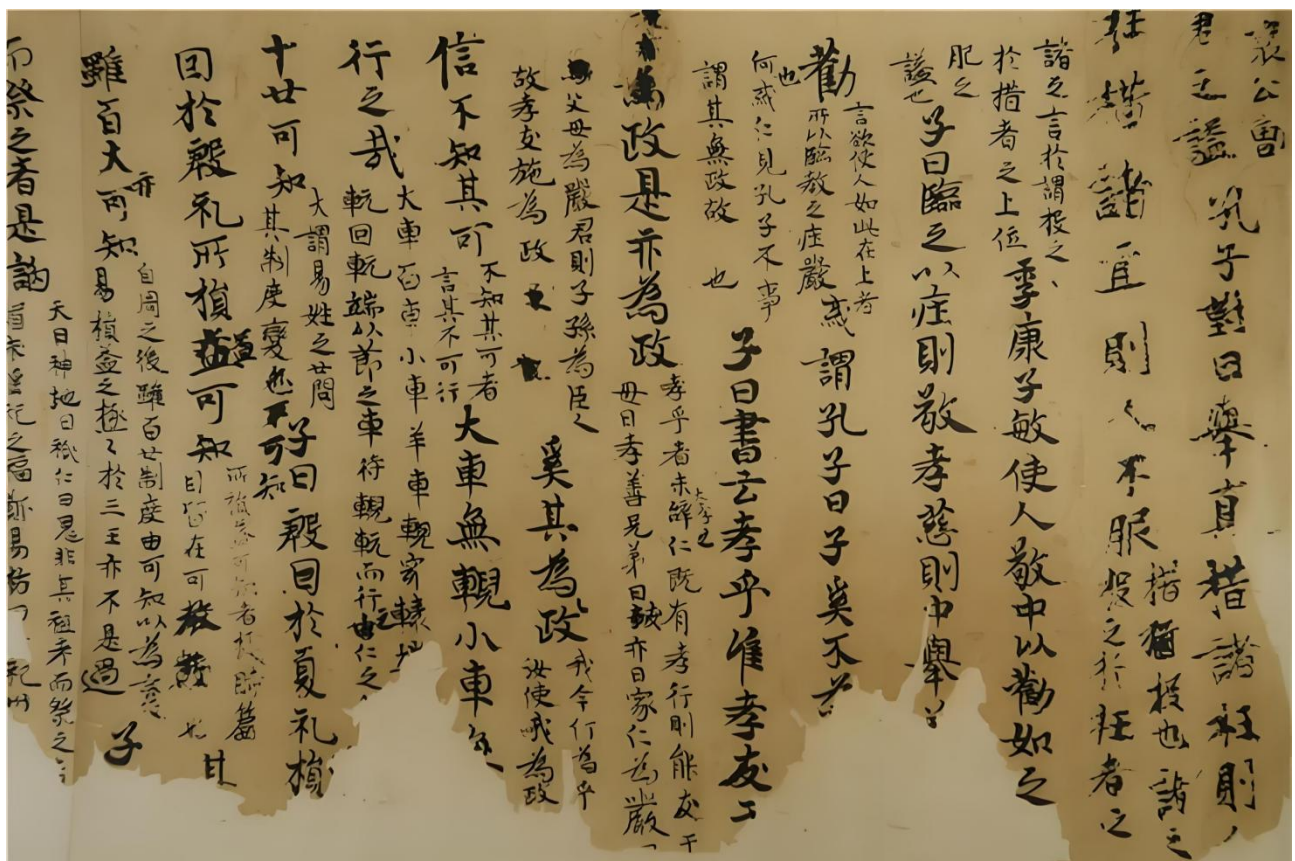
Plate 13: Detail of the Partial Copy of *Zheng Xuan's Commentary to the Analects* (*Zhengshi lunyu zhu* 鄭氏論語注) by a 11-year-old Student under the Name of Bu Tianshou 卜天壽 (b. 699) (*Tulufan chutu wenshu*, vol. 3)

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24 *SHQS*, vol. 2, p. 441.

became a widespread technology for reproducing books.[25] Copying classical texts was seen as a study method to develop literacy skills and to help to recite and understand the meaning of the text itself. A very significant proof is given by a copying exercise (538 cm x 27 cm) that was unearthed in 1969 in Turfan 吐魯番 (Xinjiang Province, the westernmost region of China). This is a manuscript, written in a neat and forceful hand, that bears a partial copy of *Zheng Xuan's Commentary to the Analects* (*Zhengshi lunyu zhu* 鄭氏論語注) (plate 13). The manuscript is dated 710 and was written by an 11-year-old student under the name of Bu Tianshou 卜天壽 (b. 699), very likely as a piece of homework assigned by his teacher.[26]

Another piece of work, Fan Kankan's 樊侃侃 (d. 720) entombed funerary inscription (*muzhiming* 墓誌銘) (plate 14a and 14b),[27] gives further proof that calligraphy education around the early eight century was effective and common. This fluent and nuanced work was written by Fan Kankan's fifth son, 16-year-old Fan Heng 樊恆 (b. 704). Only 5 years older than Bu Tianshou, Fan Heng had already been assigned to write his father's entombed funerary inscription, which was generally considered a formal and dignified duty.

Moreover, we know that the minister and man of letters Wang Yun 王筠 (481–549) declared in his old age that copying classical texts had brought him great pleasure from youth until old age because each copying could bring him a new understanding of the same texts.[28]

Accordingly, it is worth studying the superlative skills and subtleties expressed in classical calligraphic models through relative imitative copying and detached observation. For instance, the calligrapher Wang Duo devoted himself to imitative copying even after he had become a very

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[25] *Shilin yanyu* 8.116.

[26] *Tulufan chutu wenshu*, vol. 3, pp. 571-583.

[27] Qi Yuntong– Yang Jianfeng (2017), p. 162.

[28] *Liangshu* 33.486.
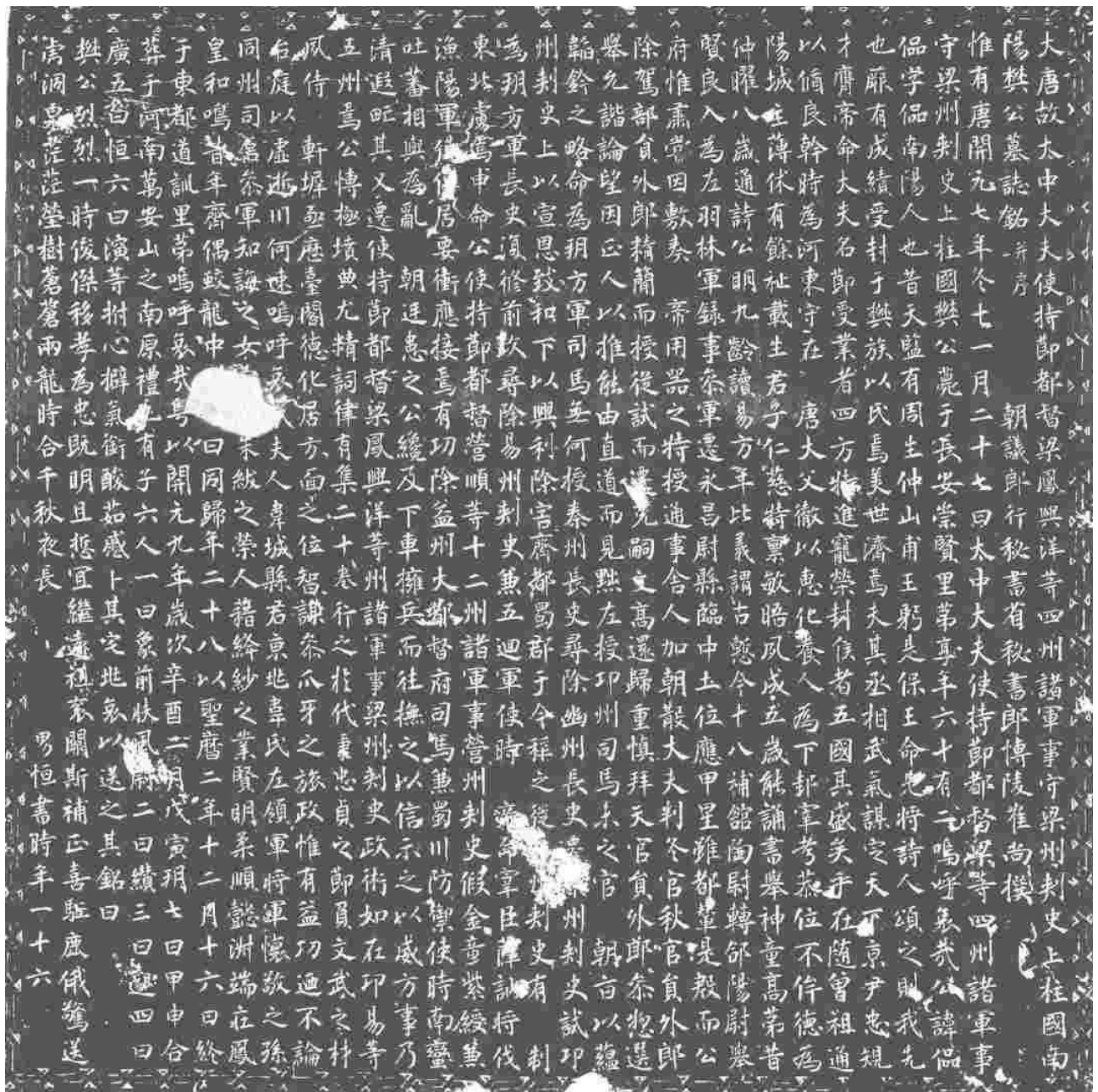
Plate 14a: *Entombed Funerary Inscription of Fan Kankan* (*Fan Kankan muzhi* 樊侃侃墓誌, 720) by his Fifth Son 16-year-old Fan Heng 樊恆 (b. 704) (Qi Yuntong – Yang Jianfeng 2017)

地泉以送之其銘曰
祖衰闋斯補正喜駈鹿俄鶩送
男恒書時年一十六

Plate 14b: Detail of the *Entombed Funerary Inscription of Fan Kankan*

famous calligrapher.[29] With regards to observation of the original, Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) emphasized its importance as follows:

During the study of calligraphy [one needs to] do imitative copying constantly, only this way can [practitioners] get the similarity of [the original's] visual form. The key is looking at ancient calligraphies for the most time. Once one feels the spirit of the original, one can get the subtleties from it. Only when [observing the model] in a mood that is not restless, [is one able to find] the main path that leads to the spiritual realm of the model…The ancients' study of calligraphy was not limited to [doing actual] imitative copying: they would spread calligraphy models by their predecessors on the wall, observing them [until] they got into the spiritual realm. Then their handwriting could become coordinated with what they wanted to express. When they completed the study of characters [of ancient calligraphic models] and could keep them in mind without the stateless aura, it could be said that they had achieved the level where their writing could be shown to others as norms. If practitioners ever want to write calligraphy, they should be familiar with calligraphy models from the Wei and Jin dynasties; then they will grasp brush technique.[30]

During the Republic of China 民國 (1911–1949), Xu Ke 徐珂 (1869–1928) described the detached observation of the original model as "reading the calligraphic model" (*dutie* 讀帖).[31] He maintained that the calligrapher Li Jingzhi 李靜之 (1855–1919) kept the habit of imitative copying for more than 40 years; when he was tired of copying, he would hold a calligraphic model in his hand and observe it in the same way that one reads a book. Even in his old age, Li Jingzhi kept on

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[29] Huang Dun (2009), p. 359.

[30] 學書時時臨摹, 可得形似. 大要多取古書細看, 令入神, 乃到妙處. 惟用心不雜, 乃是入神要路...古人學書不盡臨摹, 張古人書于壁間觀之入神, 則下筆時隨人意. 學字既成且養于心中, 無俗氣然後可以作示人為楷式, 凡作字須熟觀魏晉人書會之于心, 自得古人筆法也. *Colophons by Shangu* (*Shangu tiba* 山谷題跋), in *SHQS*, vol. 1, p. 690.

[31] *Qingbai leichao*, vol.8, p. 46.

copying several pages of one calligraphic model and read one or two original models every day.[32] In Deng Sanmu's 鄧散木 (1898–1963) textbook, *How to do Imitative Copying* (*Zenyang lintie* 怎樣臨帖), reading calligraphic models frequently in one's spare time was seen as an essential part of the process of imitative copying.[33] Specifically, practitioners could put an original model on the wall or on the desk so that it could easily be seen at any time. This habit recalls a concept put forward by modern educational psychology that goes by the name of "implicit learning" and consists of the passive acquisition of knowledge without the awareness of what has been learned. Participants exposed to sequences following certain rules can later recognize these sequences without explicitly knowing the rules.[34] Moreover, knowledge gained implicitly tends to be robust and retained over long periods.[35] Implicit learning is a crucial aspect of human cognition that enables individuals to adapt and acquire knowledge efficiently without conscious awareness.

Implicit learning plays a significant role in the acquisition and refinement of artistic skills. Artists often internalize complex techniques and styles through repeated practice and exposure, leading to a deeper, subconscious mastery of their craft. The famous American artist Ben Shahn (1898–1969) thinks that effective and correct training is necessary for intuition in art and he believes that "intuition in art is actually the result of prolonged tuition."[36] His understanding of "prolonged tuition" not only includes active acquisition of knowledge but also "implicit learning", whose significance is often neglected by people and thus misunderstood as an intuition built in at birth. In fact, expertise in art frequently involves an intuitive grasp of techniques and styles. This intuition is a result of implicit learning, where the artist can perform complex tasks without conscious thought.

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[32] 晚歲猶日臨帖數頁, 讀帖一二種. *Qingbai leichao*, vol.8, p. 46.

[33] Deng Sanmu (1984), p. 18.

[34] This is a concept first defined by American psychologist Arthur Reber. Reber (1967), pp. 855-863.

[35] Reber (1989), pp. 219-235.

[36] Shahn (1957), p. 108.

Implicit learning also has the characteristics of pattern recognition. Implicit learning enables artists to recognize patterns and structures within their art form. For instance, musicians might develop an ear for harmonies and rhythms through exposure and practice, even if they cannot articulate the underlying rules.[37]

Implicit learning is a fundamental aspect of artistic skill acquisition, enabling artists to master complex techniques and styles subconsciously. This process is integral to the development of expertise and creativity in various art forms, from visual arts to music and dance.

5.3 The Methods of Reproducing Calligraphic Works and Their Influence on Calligraphic Learning

According to Yu He's 虞龢 (*fl.* 470) *Memorial on Calligraphy* (*Lunshu biao* 論書表) of the Liu-Song 劉宋 (420–479) dynasty, in order to preserve precious originals by famous calligraphers such as Wang Xizhi, collectors and connoisseurs reproduced copies by means of tracing (*ta* 搨).[38] Although Yu He does not specify the process of tracing, it is clear that it was already a refined technique by the mid fifth century. In the Tang dynasty, the administrative bureau instituted special posts for the so-called "tracing copyists" (*tashu shou* 搨書手), whose task was to duplicate calligraphic works in the imperial collection, so that the copies could be stored or donated to high officials and members of the imperial clan for the study and appreciation of calligraphy. These tracing copies also served as official gifts to foreign embassies, for instance the Japanese envoys to whom Wang Xizhi's famous *Sangluan tie* 喪亂帖 (Imperial collection, Tokyo), which arrived in Japan in the second half of the eighth century, was given.

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[37] Jäncke (2012), pp. 122-123.

[38] *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 2.38.

Unfortunately, the specific tracing technique is recorded only in texts dating from the thirteenth century and later. Zhang Shinan 張世南 (*fl.* 1225), a man of letters and official of the Southern Song (1127–1279) dynasty, describes the two main techniques of reproducing calligraphic works in his *Accounts during Years of Government Service Away from Home* (*Youhuan jiwen* 遊宦 紀聞). These are "tracing with transparent paper specifically treated with wax" (lit. "stiff yellow [paper], *yinghuang* 硬黃) and "tracing with paper illuminated by a source of light" (*xiangta* 嚮搨).[39] These two techniques both aim to outline the contours (*shuanggou* 雙鈎) of the original characters as clearly as possible and then to fill the contours with ink (*tianmo* 填墨), while checking against the shape of the original, placed at one's side.

In order to guarantee subtle nuances of resemblance to the original calligraphic works, for instance the "dry strokes" which show spots of white within their contour, the tracing process needed special brushes that could "fill the contour with tiny lines like the hair of oxes" (*niumao goufa* 牛毛勾法); this process required special skill from the tracing copyists, as described by the man of letters, painter and calligrapher Li Rihua 李日华 (1565–1635).[40] Thanks to these tracing techniques, the visual form of the ancient calligraphic models could be preserved and transmitted to calligraphy practitioners from generation to generation.

Tracing techniques are not only used to reproduce or preserve ancient models. They are also very important for beginners, as they serve as an effective method for observing and acquiring the visual form of calligraphic models. In some cases, calligraphers also copy by tracing in order to stick to the original, rather than in order to make a personal interpretation. When one draws over the contours of characters on the superimposed paper, there is objectively no visual separation between

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[39] *Youhuan jiwen* 5.80.

[40] Li Ning thought that this method of filling the ink was very different from that of using one-time strokes, as it required numerous tiny lines to fill one stroke, see Li Ning (2019).

the original and the surface on which the copy is done. When the purpose of tracing was the enhancement of the practitioners's familiarity and comprehension of the original, so that the focus was not on the faithful duplication of the original, the contours could also be filled with heavier brushstrokes rather than with tiny lines.

In the *Separate Collection of Writings of Shangu* [nickname of Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105)] (*Shangu bieji* 山谷別集), the great Song calligrapher mentions the official and calligrapher Tang Linfu 唐林夫 (*fl.* 1068), who had made a "desk for copying" (*linshu zhuozi* 臨書 卓 [桌] 子). In Huang Tingjian's words, the desk "has a drawer, with the desktop two lines off the ground. [Tang Linfu] has put a lantern inside the drawer. [He is able to] do copying and tracing without losing [any perception of] the "minutest detail" (*qiuhao*)."[41] Perhaps he was inspired by the technique of tracing through paper illuminated by a source of light, and so designed such a desk for tracing conveniently even without sunlight. The renowned man of letters and calligrapher Su Shi 蘇 軾 (1037–1101) believed that Tang Linfu's calligraphy skills were far superior to his own;[42] Huang Tingjian praised him for understanding the spirit of the ancient masters' brushwork,[43] and the calligrapher and painter Mi Fu 米芾 also mentioned that his collection of calligraphy works was unmatched by others.[44] This indicates that his calligraphy collection, his skill and effort in copying the works of others and his own calligraphy abilities were all of the highest calibre at the time, earning recognition from contemporary calligraphers. Unfortunately, none of his works have survived to the present day.

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[41] 中有抽替 (屜), 卓 (桌) 面兩行許地. 抽替 (屜) 中置燈. 臨寫摹勒, 不失秋毫. *Shangu bieji* 18.13.

[42] *Dongpo's (nickname of Su Shi) Colophons* (*Dongpo tiba* 東坡題跋), in *SHQS*, vol. 1, p. 635.

[43] *Shangu's Colophons* (*Shangu gu tiba* 山谷題跋), in *SHQS*, vol. 1, p. 714.

[44] *Famous Statements of Haiyue* (nickname of Mi Fu) (*Haiyue mingyan* 海岳名言), in *SHQS*, vol. 1, p. 977.

The minister and calligrapher Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1818) recorded his personal understanding of the tracing process in a colophon that he composed after he had completed the tracing copy of 100 selected characters from the 1108 in the famous inscription *Jiuchenggong liquan ming*. He borrowed a fine ink-rubbing from a friend for forty days. Weng Fanggang mentions his errors in reproducing some brushstrokes, made during the process of filling the contours, and then reflects on the fact that being able to admire the fine ink-rubbing he had borrowed had helped him to grasp the subtleties of Ouyang Xun's characters. Through the process of producing this partial tracing copy he was able, on the one hand, to keep a copy in his hands and, on the other, to comprehend the expressive quality of *Jiuchenggong Liquan ming*.[45]

As seen in the Introduction, the Chinese sources often mix the characters *lin* (imitative copying) and *mo* (tracing copying) and so are confusing as regards the differences between the two copying procedures. In order to explain the differences between tracing and imitative copying, the man of letters and calligraphy theorist Jiang Kui wrote as follows:

Tracing calligraphy is very easy. Tang Taizong said: "Let Wang Meng lie on your paper and let Xu Yan sit at the tip of your brush"[46]; then you can mock Xiao Ziyun. Beginners must trace in order to control the hand and achieve results easily. It is imperative to place famous pieces of calligraphy by ancient [masters] on the desk and hang them to the right of the seat, to contemplate them all day long, pondering the principles of their brushworks. After that has been done, one is ready to trace or to copy. Next, the edges of each character should be outlined (*shuanggou*), traced on waxed paper very carefully without losing the beauty of the position of [brushstrokes and characters]. In copying calligraphy, one easily loses the ancient masters' composition while acquiring much of their technique. In tracing, one easily captures the ancient masters' composition while losing much of their technique. By copying, one easily makes progress; by tracing, one easily forgets. The difference is between paying attention and not

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[45] *Rekidai meika rinsho shūsei kaisetsu hen,* p. 208.

[46] This is from Tang Taizong's postscript to the biography of Wang Xizhi. *Jinshu* 80.2108.

paying attention. In tracing, if one misses the smallest detail, the resulting spirit will be quite different [than if one had not missed it]. The important things are attention to detail and careful work.[47]

Jiang Kui specifically mentioned that, whether tracing or imitative copying a piece of calligraphic work, one must first make an effort to thoroughly study the model before starting to practise. Only after fully understanding the principles of the brushwork should one begin to practise, as this is the most effective approach. While tracing copying is relatively easier and often a necessary step for beginners, it has the distinct advantage of helping to capture precisely the positioning of strokes, which imitative copying alone cannot replace. Both detailed tracing and imitative copying are essential methods in the process of learning calligraphy.

5.4 The Apex of Precise Imitation: "Perfect Imitation" (*luanzhen* 亂真, lit.: [copies able to be] confused with the originals)

Wang Sengqian's Discourse on Calligraphy (Lunshu 論書) mentions two anecdotes about achieving an almost indistinguishable level of perfect imitation. The first involves Zhang Yi, who, under the instruction of Jin Emperor Mudi 穆帝 (Sima Dan 司馬聃, 343–361, r. 344–361), imitated a memorial to him written by Wang Xizhi.[48] After the emperor had written his response to this memorial imitation and sent it to Wang Xizhi, Wang himself initially did not realize that it was not his own handwriting. It was only after some time that he discovered the truth, marveling at how

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[47] 摹書最易, 唐太宗云: "臥王濛於紙中, 坐徐偃於筆下", 亦可以嗤蕭子雲 (487–549). 唯初學書者不得不摹, 亦以節度其手, 易於成就. 皆須是古人名筆, 置之幾案, 懸之坐 (座) 右, 朝夕諦觀, 思其運筆之理, 然後可以摹臨. 其次雙鉤蠟本, 須精意摹拓, 乃不失位置之美耳. 臨書易失古人位置, 而多得古人筆意; 摹書易得古人位置, 而多失古人筆意. 臨書易進, 摹書易忘, 經意與不經意也. 夫臨摹之際, 毫髮失真, 則神情頓異, 所貴詳謹. in *SHQS*, vol. 2, p. 174. English translation with slight differences in Chang and Frankel (1995), p. 25.

[48] *Lunshu*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 1.25.

Zhang Yi's imitative copy was nearly indistinguishable from the original. That Wang Xizhi himself could not immediately recognize the difference speaks to the highest level of imitative copying, where the copy can be confused with the original. This account is quite legendary and is also recorded in Yu He's *Lunshu biao*.[49]

The second anecdote notes that Kang Xin 康昕 (*fl*. fourth century) learned Wang Xizhi's cursive script so well that his work also reached a level of almost perfect imitation. However, unlike Zhang Yi, Kang Xin's work did not receive Wang Xizhi's direct validation through such a fortuitous incident. Instead, the account serves more as praise for Kang Xin's ability to closely imitate Wang Xizhi's cursive style.[50] According to records in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳) by Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554), a monk-calligrapher named Kang Fashi 康法識 (*fl*. fourth century) once encountered Kang Xin.[51] Believing his own calligraphy to be superior, perhaps Kang Xin suggested that they each create an imitative copy of Wang Xizhi's cursive script to see who could better capture the original style. When these works were taken to the market for sale, no one could tell them apart, indicating that their skills were on a par with each other: both of their imitative copies could be regarded as perfect imitation.

Kang Fashi was from the western regions, which further suggests that Wang Xizhi's original works or copies had already spread widely at the time, becoming models for calligraphy practice. People at that time were contemporaries of Wang Xizhi, so it was not difficult to see his authentic works. Even if someone had not seen Wang Xizhi's calligraphy in person, they could still reach an indistinguishable level of perfect imitation through diligent study of the originals or accurate tracing copies.

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[49] *Lunshu biao*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 2. 51.

[50] *Lunshu*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 1.27.

[51] *Gaoseng zhuan* 4.

In the *Records on the Two Wangs' Calligraphy* (*Er Wang deng shulu* 二王等書錄), Zhang Huaiguan also praises Zhiyong, a descendant of Wang Xizhi, as someone whose imitations of Wang Xizhi's cursive script were considered to have reached a perfect level.[52] In addition, Zhang Huaiguan mentions that, during the Liu Song dynasty, the court frequently studied Wang Xianzhi's calligraphy and, as a result, imitation works by Kang Xin, Wang Sengqian, Bo Shaozhi 薄紹之 (*fl.* fourth century) and Yang Xin 羊欣 (*fl.* fourth century) were often mistaken for genuine pieces by Wang Xianzhi and kept in the imperial collection. This led to the popular saying, "Buying Wang [Xianzhi's calligraphic works] and getting Yang [Xin's], without losing hope;"[53] a humorous expression that to some extent reflects the value of these imitations. Because they preserved and demonstrated a high level of calligraphy skill, these works were still valuable as models for study or as objects of appreciation. However, Zhang Huaiguan points out that truly knowledgeable individuals should have the ability to discern authenticity and quality, rather than blindly praising all works. In the absence of any surviving authentic works from the Two Wangs in contemporary times, it is especially important for practitioners of calligraphy to discern carefully which pieces embody a higher level of brushwork and better represent the Two Wangs and their era. Otherwise, as in Zhang Huaiguan criticism, there is a risk of mistakenly praising the inferior brushwork of counterfeit works.

5.5 Cultural Patterns of Imitative Copies by Famous Masters

The Complete Collection of Free-hand Copies by Famous Masters is a corpus of 291 imitative copies of famous calligraphic works published in Japan in 1988. This collection of imitative copies includes works from the early seventh to the early twentieth century, consisting of 195 copies by

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[52] *Er Wang deng shulu*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 4.209.

[53] 買王得羊, 不失所望. *Shuduan zhong*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 8.435.

Chinese calligraphers and 95 by Japanese calligraphers. The calligraphic works copied comprise all calligraphic scripts, namely *zhuan* 篆, clerical (*li* 隸), standard (*kai* 楷), semi-cursive (*xing* 行) and cursive (*cao* 草).[54] They begin with oracle bone inscriptions (ca. 1300 BCE) and end with Feng Zizhen's 馮子振 (b. 1257) semi-cursive calligraphy. These imitative copies and colophons reveal different dimensions of imitative copying.

According to the colophons of this collection, when ancient or modern calligraphers make copies, whether by precise imitation or conceptual imitation, there are three motivations for their practice. The first is to behave as if one were the disciple of former eminent calligraphers. This attitude is a very ancient one and can be traced back as far as the Warring States period, as we learn from a conversation between Confucius and his disciple Yan Hui 颜回 (521 BCE–490/481 BCE), reported, with an ironic and criticizing tone, in the Taoist classic *Zhuangzi*. In the lively, albeit fictitious dialogue, Yan Hui explains that "by doing my work through the examples of antiquity, I can be the companion of ancient times" (成而上比者, 與古為徒)[55].

For example, when Wen Peng 文彭 (1498–1573) saw an ink-rubbing of Zhang Xu's *Qianziwen*, he was inspired to copy out the original out of admiration for the famous Tang calligrapher, as we read in the colophon that he attached to his calligraphic copy.[56] Moreover, the Japanese calligrapher Miyajima Eishi 宮島詠士 (1867–1943), in a colophon that he left on a copy of Yan Zhenqing's 顏真卿 (709–785)[57] semi-cursive calligraphy *Song Liu Taichong xu* 送劉太冲序 (completed in 772)[58], praises Yan's fine and ingenious brushwork. The Manchu official Tiebao 鐵保

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[54] For a general view of the transformation of the Chinese writing scripts, see Qiu Xigui (2000).

[55] *Zhuangzi* "In the World of Men" (*Renjian shi* 人間世), English translation in Watson (1964), p. 53.

[56] *Rekidai meika rinsho shūsei*, vol 6, p. 65.

[57] *Rekidai meika rinsho shūsei*, vol 6, p. 93.

[58] *FTQJ*, vol. 9, p. 44.

(1752–1824) declares, in a colophon to a copy of Yan Zhenqing's semi-cursive work *Liu Zhongshi tie* 劉中使帖 (completed in 775, now in Taipei Palace Museum), [59] that it is thanks to the continuous study of Yan Zhenqing's calligraphic works that he managed to sense deeply the grandness of Yan Zhenqing's personality through the process of copying.

As can be argued from the notes left by these practitioners of Chinese calligraphy, they all shared a common passion for appreciating classic calligraphic models. Through their study and practice, they reached a state in which they felt as if they could talk with former worthies face to face.

Moreover, it is important to stress that Chinese and Japanese literati held the positive influence that the most skilled of them could exert on others in high consideration. Sometimes, they actively presented their copies to their peers for advice; so Wang Shu 王澍 (1668-1743) and Chen Li 陳澧 (1810-1882) showed their imitative copies of the works of the Song literatus, artist and connoisseur Mi Fu 米芾 (1051–1107) to their senior fellows and expected comments and criticism from them. Sometimes, calligraphers like Nukina Sūō 貫名菘翁 (1778-1863) from Japan would especially enjoy the sight of his predecessors' copies of famous calligraphic models, because examining the copies of other practitioners was also a means of improving one's skill in calligraphy.

Another common situation was to ask for a celebrity's copies of classic calligraphic models. Masters such as Wang Shihong 汪士鋐 (1658–1723), Shen Quan 沈荃 (1624-1684), Liang Yan 梁巘 (1710–1788) and the Japanese Ichikawa Beian 市河米庵 (1779—1858) state clearly in the colophons of some of their calligraphic copies that they made them in response to frequent requests from others.[60]

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[59] https://digitalarchive.npm.gov.tw/Painting/Content?pid=20640&Dept=P.

[60] *Rekidai meika rinsho shūsei*, vol. 6, p. 34, p. 116, p. 85, p. 135.

People appreciated both original calligraphic works by past calligraphers and the work of reinterpretation that their contemporaries manifested through calligraphic copies. Through the copying process, the vividness and richness of Chinese calligraphy aesthetics, represented by the original calligraphies on paper and calligraphy copy-model books, became a timeless object of study, treasured by connoisseurs and practitioners of different ages.

CHAPTER SIX

Case Study: An Analysis of Yao Mengqi's Precise Free-hand Copy (1883) of Ouyang Xun's

***Jiuchenggong* (632)**

6.1 Ouyang Xun and his *Jiucheng gong*

In the history of Chinese calligraphy, Ouyang Xun's *Jiuchenggong* of 632 is usually considered the very best example of the standard script. Given the great clarity of its characters' structure and at the same time the subtle nuances of the brushwork configurations, this work has been cherished by calligraphers and connoisseurs since its erection, and has proven an authoritative calligraphic model for many generations of calligraphy practitioners. The minister-scholar Wang Youdun 汪由敦 (1692–1758), for example, acclaimed this work as "the most demanding rule of the standard script."[1] The representative works of Ouyang Xun's existing standard script and the age at which they were written are shown in Table 2. Considering the immense impact that this inscription has had on the history of East Asian calligraphy, this research will use it as a case study and analyze its original characters and those of the most accurate among its precise imitative copies, namely Yao Mengqi's copy (ink on paper, 165 x 77 cm, collection location unknown) dating from 1883.[2]

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[1] 楷書之極則. *Songquan wenji* 18.3b.

[2] The reproduction of manuscript of Yao's copy in *Yao Mengqi lin Ouyang Xun Jiuchenggong liquan ming.* Additionally, a engraved edition exists based on Yao's copy of *Jiuchenggong,* carved by Tang Renzhai 唐仁齋 (1875–1908). The reproduction of its ink-rubbing in *Kaishu Jiuchenggong liquan ming sanzhong.*

Table 2: Ouyang Xun's Extant Standard Calligraphies

Title	Year	Holding institutions	Age of Ouyang Xun
Huadu si yong chanshi taming 化度寺邕禪師塔銘	Zhenguan 5 貞觀五年 (631)	Shanghai Library	74
Jiuchenggong liquan ming 九成宮醴泉銘	Zhenguan 6 貞觀六年 (632)	The Palace Museum	75
Yu gonggong Wen Yanbo bei 虞恭公溫彥博碑	Zhenguan 11 貞觀十一年 (637)	Shanghai Library	80
Huangfu Dan bei 皇甫誕碑	ca. middle of the Zhenguan Reign [627–650]	Shanghai Library	unknown

6.2 On Technical Terms and Calligraphic Scripts

6.2.1 Elements of Standard Script Brushstrokes

Chinese standard script is a revered art form characterized by its precise and deliberate brushstrokes. This script emerged during the Han dynasty and became the standard form of writing in the Tang dynasty. The standard script evolved from earlier forms of Chinese writing, such as the *zhuan* script and clerical script. It refined the brushstroke techniques to create more legible and standardized characters.

There are eight forms found in the fundamental elements of the brushstrokes of the Chinese standard script: the dot-stroke (*ce* 側), horizontal stroke (*le* 勒), vertical stroke (*nu* 努), hook stroke (*ti* 趯), right-rising stroke (*ce* 策), left-falling stroke (*lüe* 掠), short left-falling stroke (*zhuo* 啄) and the right-falling stroke (*zhe* 磔).

The dot is a fundamental element in Chinese characters, often serving as a starting or ending point for more complex strokes. It requires a controlled, downward press of the brush, creating a

teardrop shape. The horizontal stroke moves from left to right, requiring even pressure throughout. The stroke should be slightly thicker in the middle and taper off at the ends, reflecting a steady, controlled movement. Executed from top to bottom, the vertical stroke demands consistent pressure and a straight path; it represents stability and strength in the character structure. Hooks can be found at the end of vertical or horizontal strokes, adding complexity and intricacy. They require a swift, deliberate turn of the brush, creating a sharp, pointed end. Starting from the top right and moving to the bottom left, the right-rising stroke requires a gradual release of pressure, creating a tapered end. It introduces a sense of motion and dynamism. Starting from the top right and moving to the left, the short and long left-falling strokes both require a gradual release of pressure, creating a tapered end; they also introduce a sense of motion and dynamism. Opposite to the left-falling stroke, the right-falling stroke begins from the top left, moving to the bottom right. It ends with a slight upward flick, adding a graceful finish.

6.2.2 Technical Terms

Balance, structure and rhythm are fundamental in the study and practice of Chinese calligraphy, reflecting both aesthetic principles and cultural values deeply rooted in Chinese tradition.

Balance in Chinese calligraphy refers to the distribution of visual weight and harmony within a composition. This basic principle includes symmetry, proportion and visual weight and aims to achieve a harmonious distribution of strokes and spaces, ensuring that different parts of the character or composition are proportionate and balancing the thickness and thinness of strokes to create equilibrium. Balance is crucial for creating a pleasing visual effect and conveying the calligrapher's control over the brush-tip.

Structure in Chinese calligraphy pertains to the internal organization and arrangement of strokes within a character or composition. Strokes should be placed in relation to each other to form coherent characters, ensuring that strokes fit together to create a unified whole. Unlike the rules

concerning pattern and background put forward by Arnheim,[3] the term for "considering the white spaces as well the black spots," *jibai danghei* 計白當黑, reflects a particular Chinese visual perspective on structure. This phrase emphasizes the importance of negative space (white areas) in the overall composition of a calligraphic piece, treating it as having the same significance as the inked (black) portions. It reflects a balance and harmony between the filled and empty spaces in the artwork, ensuring a visually pleasing and cohesive design. Considering white as black is a fundamental principle that governs the distribution and utilization of white space to enhance the visual impact and aesthetic balance of the inked strokes within a composition.

Rhythm in Chinese calligraphy involves the flow and movement of strokes across the writing surface. Rhythm adds vitality and expression to Chinese calligraphy, reflecting the calligrapher's skill and artistic sensitivity.

Chinese calligraphy is often associated with traditional virtues such as discipline, harmony and respect for tradition. The beauty of Chinese calligraphy lies not only in its linguistic function but also in its expressive power and aesthetic appeal. Understanding technical terms like balance, structure and rhythm is essential for appreciating the artistry and cultural richness of Chinese calligraphy. These terms highlight the meticulous craftsmanship and expressive potential that characterize this ancient art form.

6.3 Yao Mengqi as a Calligrapher and a Calligraphy Teacher

Huangqing shushi 皇清書史 records that Yao Mengqi's (b. 1838–died before 1901) courtesy name was Fengsheng 鳳生 and that he came from Wuxian 吳縣 (in present day Suzhou City, southern Jiangsu province, eastern China). He taught calligraphy for a living and was renowned for excelling in imitative calligraphy copying. In the artist Dou Zhen's 竇鎮 (1847-1928) *Record on*

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[3] Arnheim (1974), pp. 30-32.

Calligraphers and Painters (*Shuhua jia bilu* 書畫家筆錄), the structural configurations of Yao Mengqi's copy of *Liquan ming* [*bei*] are the very image of the original and the brushwork is upright and mild, which can be [regarded as] the bridge leading to [calligraphy partitioning] for beginners.[4]

Yao Mengqi's general considerations on the copying of calligraphic models are expressed in his *Personal Considerations on the Study of Calligraphy* (*Zixue yican* 字學臆參).[5] Nearly eleven of the seventy nine chapters that make up this work are devoted to the discussion of copying. Although these comments are not arranged in a strict logical order, they are useful for our understanding of the process of copying, which includes both precise and conceptual copying. In these notes, Yao Mengqi stresses the importance of copying for grasping the outward shape of calligraphic models. However, this is not the ultimate goal of the practice of calligraphy, as the real purpose of copying is to possess the spiritual aura of a given calligraphic work rather than its formal appearance. There follows below a complete transcription and translation of Yao Mengqi's insights into the practice of copying:

[05] In the first stage of imitative copying, [one should] pursue the similarity of the visual form. When structural composition has not yet been refined, it is even pointless to mention any subtlety of the brushstrokes.[6]

[09] Copying of [Wang Xianzhi's 王獻之 (344–386)] *Thirteen Columns of [Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess (Luoshen fu* 洛神賦*)*] enables people to be calm and peaceful; [it is] therefore [equivalent to] studying the path of the great sage (i.e. Confucius), which indeed sought relaxation and enjoyment of the arts as its goal.[7]

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[4] 所臨... 《醴泉銘》間架逼肖筆亦勁挺溫潤, 可為初學津梁. *Huangqing shushi* 11.21.

[5] The punctuated edition by Ma Yifang, see *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi.*

[6] 初學臨書, 先求形似. 間架未善, 遑言筆妙. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 5.

[7] 臨《十三行》能使人心平氣和, 故聖學終於遊藝. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 7.

[21] The *Diamond Sutra* (*Jingang jing*) in particular explains the *dharma* (i.e. law of the Buddha) to all sentient beings, as well as teaching them to be free from the marks of [reality]. Learning from the calligraphy of the ancients is like listening to the Buddha explaining the *dharma*. [If practitioners] are able to recognize the subtlety of calligraphic works from the Qin, Han, Jin and Tang dynasties, and combine [those calligraphies] with their inner personalities, this [is equivalent to] being completely freed from the marks of reality, and is the reason for attaining the Way of the Buddha.[8]

[34] As regards [the study of] ancient stelae, it is preferable to read them continuously, whereas copying them without enough preparation (*sheng*) is to be avoided. [Only when] one's mind senses the subtleties [of the stelae] and [is able to] express [one's understanding] in brushstrokes, can one resemble the personality expressed in [the original work].[9]

[35] [One should] observe the brushwork of the ancients with calm and sobriety (*leng*), without pouring in one's distracting thoughts. This is also one method for concentrating one's self-indulgent mind.[10]

[37] [With regard to] the way to make tracing copies of the ancient works, my fellow-townsman Mr. Li Zixian (d.u.) once said: "[It is] like when ghosts relish oblation: they only inhale the smell rather than taking in the real [food and wine]."[11]

[45] Transcending visual form and capturing the essence is the calligraphers' superior [skill]. But the changes [that one encounters] in this process are extremely subtle, [hence] it is impossible to adhere rigidly to a fixed meaning.[12]

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[8] 一部《金剛經》專為眾生說法, 而又教人離相. 學古人書, 是聽佛說法也. 識得秦、漢、晉、唐書法之妙, 而會以自己性靈, 是處處離相, 得成佛道之因由也. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, pp. 19-20.

[9] 古碑貴熟看, 不貴生臨. 心得其妙, 借筆以達之, 方能神似. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 29.

[10] 冷看古人用筆, 勿參以雜念, 是亦收放心之一法. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 30.

[11] 摹古之法, 吾鄉李子仙先生曾言: "如鬼享祭, 但吸其氣, 不食其質. " *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 30.

[12] 離形得似, 書家上乘. 然此中消息甚微, 不可死在句下. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 38.

[59] When copying [the calligraphy of] the stelae of the Han dynasty, it is proper to possess the stone aura [that they emanate], but this does not mean [writing brushstrokes] with deliberate twisted shapes, [as they may appear on the uneven and rough stone surface]. [And if one] asks: "What is the stone aura?", I will reply: "It is impossible to explain in words."[13]

[63] When studying from inscriptions or calligraphic pieces of the Han, Wei, Jin and Tang dynasties, one must restore their specific personality expression and visual form and avoid including one's personal style, because if one's personal style is included, [the result] will be a tasteless [work]. [However,] after becoming skilled and having attained the various features [of ancient calligraphic models], one cannot lack the presence of the self, otherwise [the result] will be confused (*za*) [due to the excess of variety].[14]

[64] There are no such ancient stelae which cannot be studied. For example, [although] it is impossible to copy rock inscriptions of the Han dynasty by means of tracing by hand [because their brushstrokes are not clearly visible due to the rough surface], one can still copy them through mental resonance, so that once the mind has understood the subtleties [of these inscriptions], the hand will surely follow. [15]

[65] [The calligraphy of the] Tang dynasty stelae is the hardest to study [because] each brushstroke and each character has its own position. [If] one brushstroke deviates [from its intended position], this will create a fault in the entire character; [if] one character deviates [from its intended position], this will create a fault in the entire piece. [As we can see from the calligraphic works of] the Han dynasty and the Six Dynasties (220–589), [calligraphers] were able to adjust [characters or works]

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[13] 臨漢碑, 宜有石氣, 然非拳曲之謂也. 問: "何謂石氣?" 曰: "不可說." *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 49.

[14] 學漢、魏、晉、唐諸碑帖, 須各各還他神情面目, 不可有我在, 有我便俗. 迨純熟後, 會得眾長, 又不可無我在, 無我便雜. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 51.

[15] 古碑無不可學, 如漢代諸摩崖, 不能摹, 可摹以心, 心識其妙, 亦從之. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 52.

successfully in response to flaws and to display their skillful brushwork [in the process of coping with] these difficulties, unlike [the calligraphy of] Tang dynasty, in which there are no such adaptations.[16]

There are also six entries regarding the calligraphic style of Ouyang Xun and his representative work *Jiuchenggong liquan ming*. At the same time, Yao Mengqi compares the style of Ouyang's calligraphy with that of Chu Suiliang and Yan Zhenqing. The flollowing are these six entries:

[12] The visual form of [Chu Suiliang's] *Stele of the Three [Buddha] Shrines (Sankan bei)* is very square and rigorous but its connotation is flexible, which is similar to [Ouyang Xun's *Jiuchenggong*] *liquan ming*.[17]

[32] The calligraphic style of Chu Suiliang is lofty and clear, while that of Ouyang Xun is profound and subtle. [When someone] fails to learn Ouyang's style, it is like depicting a swan as a duck [but when someone] fails to learn Chu's style, it is like drawing a tiger as a dog.[18]

[33] [When writing] a character with many brushstrokes, short strokes should be tightened and long strokes should be stretched, as in the case of the characters *jian* 鑒,[19] *tai* 臺 and *ying* 縈, etc. from *Jiuchenggong* [*liquan ming*].[20]

[43] Sparse configurations do not need replenishment, but dense configurations should be replenished [by changing some strokes to keep their balance]. In *Jiuchenggong [liquan ming]*, the [heavier] upper [horizontal] stroke of *sheng* 聖 and the [longer] lower dot stroke of *shun* 舜 are both

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[16] 唐碑最難學, 一畫有一畫之步位, 一字有一字之步位. 一畫走作, 即為一字之累, 一字走作即為通幅之累. 若漢與六朝, 自可因失得救, 因難見巧；非若唐碑之一無假借也. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 53.

[17] 《三龕碑》形極方嚴, 意極靈活, 與《醴泉銘》異曲同工. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 13.

[18] 褚書高明, 歐書沉潛. 學歐不成, 刻鵠類鶩；學褚不成, 畫虎類狗. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 27.

[19] Since the characters discussed by Yao Mengqi regard their visual form and not their linguistic meaning, I will not provide the English translation of these terms.

[20] 筆劃極繁之字, 當促其小畫, 展其大畫, 如《九成宮》 "鑒" "臺" "縈" 等字皆是. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 29.

examples of replenishment. [Although] the top left and lower right parts of characters like *nai* 乃, *li* 力 and others are both empty, their configurations need not be replenished.[21]

[58] The calligraphic style of Ouyang Xun has a squared appearance but its connotation is round; that of Chu Suiliang has a soft appearance but its connotation is hard; and that of Yan Zhenqing has a stern appearance but its connotation is mild.[22]

[70] The brushwork of Ouyang Xun is neither [totally] square nor [totally] round: it is at the same time [both partially] square and round. When practitioners bend their mind to squareness, it will easily [lead to] stiffness. When practinoners bend their mind to roundness, it will easily [lead to] oilyness. The variations of [squareness and roundness] should be subtly comprehended.[23]

6.4 Formal Analysis of Ouyang Xun's original and Yao Mengqi's Copy

6.4.1 Analysis by Clear Characters

Although Yao Mengqi tried to achieve the above-stated principles in his copy of the *Jiucheng gong Inscription*, long strokes such as the left-falling and right-falling strokes of the character *jian*, and the horizontal-hook strokes of *tai* and *ying* show several faults that do not conform to his statement, both in terms of the adjustment of the brush-tip in order to change the direction as displayed in the original work and in the interpretation of the dialectical relationship between the components of the characters. For example, as can be seen from Table 3, the long left-falling strokes in the two configurations of the character *jian* written by Ouyang Xun experience a process of moving downward first and then turning left, so that there is a visible slight curve in all of them, whereas

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[21] 疏勢不補, 密勢補之. 《九成宮》 "聖"字上畫、 "舜"字下點, 皆補法也. 若"乃""力"等字, 左上右下皆缺, 勢無可補. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 35.

[22] 歐書貌方而意圓, 褚書貌柔而意剛, 顏書貌厲而意和. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 47.

[23] 歐書用筆不方不圓, 亦方亦圓. 學者欲其方, 易板滯; 欲其圓, 易油滑. 此中消息, 最宜微會. *Zixue yican jinzhu jinyi*, p. 56.

Yao Mengqi's left-falling strokes are too straight and rigid. Similarly, the inception and the termination of the right-falling stroke in the original *jian* (13/33) is obvious, but Yao Mengqi's copy lacks those nuances.

Ouyang Xun's right-fallings strokes in *jian* (9/49) and *jian* (13/33) are very different from each other. The upper parts of these two configurations of the character *jian* are not same: the former has four short strokes and the latter has seven. This implies different arranging devices in order to keep the character structure cohesive. The two dot-stokes are not only much lighter in terms of visual weight than the left upper part in *jian* (9/49), but they are also separated elements, lacking marked visual axes. Therefore, in order to achieve the cohesion of the character structure, the two dots are written closer to the left part of the character rather than symmetrically positioned on the right. In this way they lean towards the component *chen*, increasing the oblique arrangement of the upper part of the character. As a consequence, the inferior component, *jin* 金, requires an oblique configuration, which is evident from both its oblique strokes and horizontal strokes. In contrast, in *jian* (13/33) the right upper part of the character is a much heavier component, that fundamentally counterbalances the weight of the left part *chen*, thus influencing the configuration of the *jin* 金 component as well, which in this case is much more level than in *jian* (9/49).

More specifically, the left-falling stroke and last horizontal stroke of 9/49 *jian* stretch leftwards and this is because they follow on the oblique configuration started in the upper part. In order to complete the entire character, however, because of the tension accumulated by the slanted strokes of the upper and left parts, a very strong right-falling stroke is needed, and indeed, the right-falling stroke of the *jin* 金 component in *jian* (13/33) is much longer and heavier than in *jian* (9/49). Likewise, the vertical stroke in *jin* 金 is inclined rightwards, whereas in *jian* (9/49) it is in an upright position; this difference, too, derives from the specific balancing requirements arising from the arrangement of these two different components.

As we look at Yao's Mengqi's copy, however, it is plain that the complexity and richness in variations of *jian* (9/49) and *jian* (13/33) that we admire in Ouyang Xun's original are severely simplified in the copy by Yao. Not only is the component *jin* 金 written in the same way in both *jian* 9/49 and *jian* (13/33), but the only appreciable difference is the detachment of the right-falling stroke in *jian* (13/33). In a word, Yao Mengqi's copy of these two highly elaborated configurations is only a very scholastic rendition of their structure, very likely influenced by the heavy standardization of the standard script during the Qing dynasty.[24]

Among three configurations of the character *tai* 臺 from the original work, it is noticeable that the dot stroke in *tai* (6/3) is considerably longer. Obviously, Yao Mengqi will have seen the difference, and it can be inferred that he thought the length irrational, maybe caused by weathering of the stone, as he changed the direction at the end in order to minimise the difference in the process of his copying. However, the key is that, on the one hand, the previous right-rising stroke in *tai* (6/3) is pressing and therefore the dot stroke should be pressed and lengthened, and on the other, the last horizontal stroke is stretched to underpin the visual weight above. All of the strokes in one character relate to each other naturally in the original. The lengthening of the dot-stroke may seem strange at first sight, but it is rational and, in fact, successful.

The change in the direction of the dot stroke in *tai* (6/3) in Yao Mengqi's copy is unsuccessful because the space between the dot stroke and the previous right-rising stroke is too big, making it seem to drift away from the integrated whole character. In contrast, as we can see from the *tai* from *Huangfu Dan Stele* written by Ouyang Xun, the dot stroke is also leftwards but is very close to the centre, consistent with the slight oblique structural configuration.

In most cases, it is true, as Yao said in his book *Zixue yican*, that "[when writing] a character with many brushstrokes, short strokes should be tightened and long strokes should be stretched",

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[24] The origination and development of the bureaucratic Standard script (*guangeti* 館閣體) during Ming and Qing dynasty (1368–1911), see Liu Heng (2009), p. 121.
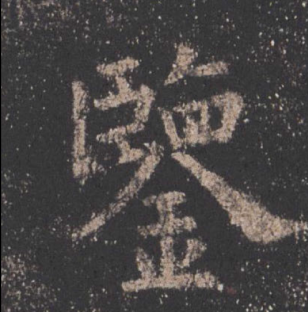
but this principle is not immutable. Sometimes, in exceptional cases, some short strokes also need to be stretched according to their relationship with other strokes, as for the dot stroke in *tai* (6/3) of Ouyang Xun's *Jiucheng gong*.
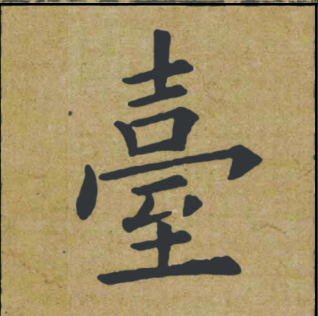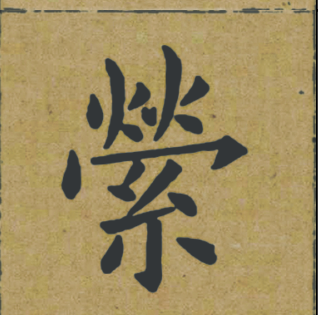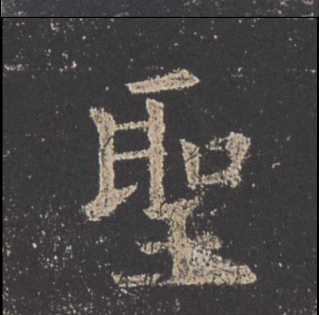
If we compare the horizontal hooks in *tai* (3/6; 6/3; 11/40) and *ying* (13/9), it is evident that the longest horizontal strokes in *tai* are straighter than those in *ying*. The four horizontal hooks in Yao Mengqi's copy, however, look the same.

As a famous calligrapher, Cui Yuan (77–142), explains in his *Description of the Cursive Script* (*Caoshu shi* 草書勢), "[in terms of] profound subtleties, [practitioners of calligraphy should] adjust [brushwork and configuration] properly according to the situation".[25] Although Cui Yuan is referring to the cursive script, the reasoning can be applied to the writing of all scripts.
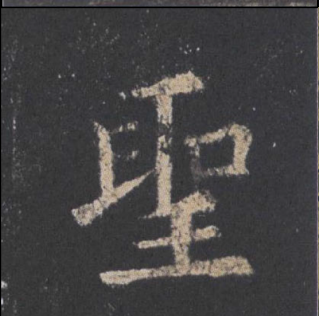
Table 3: Comparison of the Characters *jian* 鑒, *tai* 臺, *ying* 縈, *sheng* 聖, *shun* 舜, *nai* 乃 and *li* 力 in the Original Work by Ouyang Xun and in Yao Mingqi's Copy
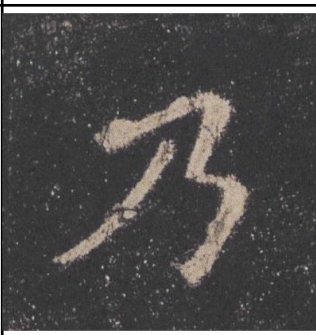
Character	Position	Original work by Ouyang Xun	Yao Mingqi's Copy
jian 鑒	9/49		
	13/33		

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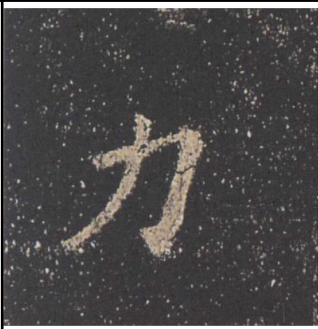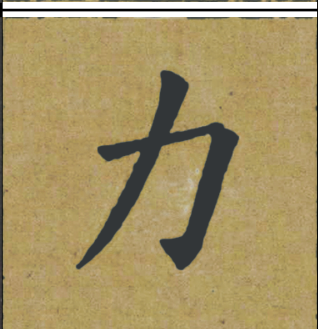
[25] 機微要妙, 臨時從宜. *Caoshu shi* is an article collected in the *Shi on the Four Calligraphic Scripts* (*Si ti shu shi* 四體書勢) by Wei Guan 衛恆 (252–291), quoted extensively in his biography in the *Jin shu* 36.1066.

tai 臺	3/6		
	6/3		
	11/40		
ying 縈	13/9		
sheng 聖	8/2		
	10/21		

	11/15		
	14/45		
	16/19		
	19/38		
shun 舜	19/20		

nai 乃	12/26		
	17/25		
	19/37		
	19/39		
li 力	8/8		

	10/27	力	力
	11/12	力	力
	20/47	力	力

6.4.2 Analysis by Blurred Characters

The colophon in smaller characters that concludes Yao Mengqi's imitative copy reads simply "In the ninth year of the Guangxu reign(1883) [I,] Yao Mengqi copied the Northern Song ink rubbing [of the *Jiuchenggong*] (光緒九年姚孟起臨北宋本). From this note we know that the version that he took as his model was an ink rubbing dating from the Northern Song. Today, there are at least four ink rubbings of this inscription that scholars date to the Northern Song, although they differ in terms of quality and so belong to different periods of the 160 year long history of this dynasty (960–1127).[26] The best of these rubbings is the so-called "Li Qi's Rubbing." This rubbing has twenty-one blurred characters, which are caused by cracks in the original stone already present by the late tenth

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[26] See Yang Zhenfang (1982), p. 5.

century. Five of these characters occur only once in the inscription, whereas the rest appear more than once. This means that Yao Mengqi had to rely on his own understanding of Ouyang Xun's calligraphic style in order to write these five characters as though they had been copied from the original complete inscription. Moreover, as the final colophon is also written in the calligraphic style of the inscription, Yao Mengqi also had to work out how to write the characters that are not found in the inscription (*yao* 姚, *xu* 緒 and *song* 宋) in a credible way. These eight characters are thus the most effective test in order to assess whether Yao Mengqi had acquired the style of the original by the time of this copy and was hence able to create a brand new calligraphic work in the original style of the *Jiuchenggong* (see Table 4).

Table 4: Non-extant Characters in the Original Work by Ouyang Xun Present in Yao Mingqi's Copy

Character	Position	Yao Mengqi's Copy
xu 緒	24/26	緒
yao 姚	24/29	姚
song 宋	24/34	宋

Judging from the way in which Yao Mengqi adjusts the components and executes the brushstrokes of the characters that were absent or unreadable in the original rubbing, it is clear that his understanding of Ouyang Xu's subtle principles of calligraphic creation was not complete. As can be seen from Table 5 and Table 6, this is despite the fact that some of the characters that he wrote could be composed by adapting components from other characters, such as the character *chou* 躊 (11/48), which is made from *zu* 𧾷 —the restricted form of the character *zu* 足 used as a component—and *shou* 壽, one component and one character that are quite common in the inscription: *shou* 壽 appears twice (2/24 and 15/36) and the component *zu* 𧾷 appears in five other characters: *zhi* 趾 (22/3), *kua* 跨 (2/35), *yu* 踰 (5/38), *dao* 蹈 (19/35) and *chu* 躇 (12/1).

The character *chu* 躇 (12/1) has a similar structure — mainly short horizontal strokes in the right part — as the blurred *chou* 躊. In Yao Mengqi's copy of *chu* 躇, it is evident that the horizontal strokes are more oblique than those in the original. In fact, the general impression given by Ouyang Xun's calligraphic style is one of steepness (*xianjue* 險絕); this steepness is expressed through the subtle adjustment of strokes, as can be appreciated from the contrast created between the different short strokes and the long left-falling stroke in the character *chu* 躇. However, Yao Mengqi seems to have simply equated steepness with the obliqueness of the horizontal strokes, a common defect in calligraphy practitioners. Stability is the main achievement in the composition of a character's structure, as brilliantly explained by Sun Guoting in 687:

As for beginners who study the structure of characters, they should pursue above all balance and stability; once they are acquainted with balance and stability, they should aspire to steepness and boldness; once steepness and boldness are possessed, they should return to balance and stability.[27]

On the basis of Yao Mengqi's copy of Ouyang Xun's calligraphy we can affirm that he went beyond the first phase of the study of calligraphy and focused too much on the expression of steepness.
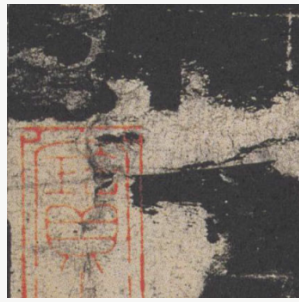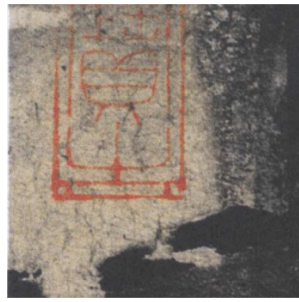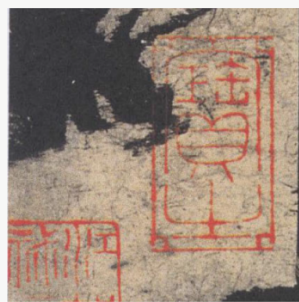
Amongst the six characters that have the component *zu* 足, *chou* 躊 has a similar composition to the characters *chu* 躇, *kua* 跨 and *yu* 踰, with the *zu* 足 positioned in the upper left; the position of the *zu* 足 in *dao* 蹈 and *zhi* 趾, however, is visually aligned with the right side, and Yao Mengqi's copy achieves visual alignment in this respect. Nevertheless, by comparing the component *shou* 壽 in Yao Mengqi's copy of the character *chou* 躊 with the complete character *shou* 壽 that appears in the *Jiuchenggong*, we can see that Yao Mengqi's copy seems to have simply combined the component *zu* 足 with the character *shou* 壽 (2/24), without adapting the details of the strokes to the new structure: 足 ＋壽.
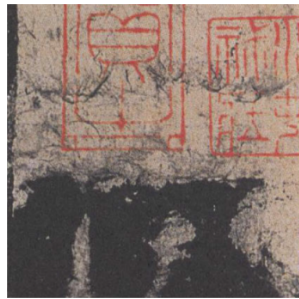
Table 5: Blurred Characters in the Original Work by Ouyang Xun and Their Rendition in Yao Mingqi's Copy

Character	Position	Original work by Ouyang Xun	Yao Mingqi's Copy
li 醴	1/4		

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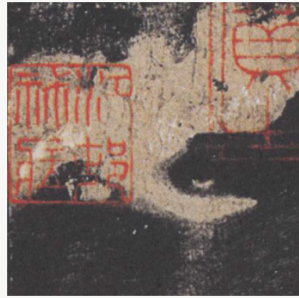
[27] 至如初學分布, 但求平正. 既知平正, 務追險絕. 既能險絕, 復歸平正. *FTQJ,* vol. 3, p. 95.

liu 六	2/4		
xing 姓	7/5		
ai 愛	8/4		
chou 疇	11/48		
hu 乎	11/6		

fu 俯	12/6		
chuan 穿	13/6		
zhi 之	13/50		
ji 及	14/50		
chu 出	15/50		

zhong 中	15/7		
ji 疾	16/7		
tui 推	16/48		
shu 属	17/17		
zhi 之	18/8		

cheng 承	19/27		
shu 書	19/49		
guan 冠	20/8		
zi 資	21/8		
yi 溢	23/49		

Table 6: Characters in the Original Work by Ouyang Xun Misinterpreted in Yao Mingqi's Copy

Character	Position	Original work by Ouyang Xun	Yao Mingqi's Copy
chu 躊	12/1		
kua 跨	2/35		
zhi 趾	22/3		
dao 蹈	19/35		

yu 踰	5/38		
chou 躊	11/48		
shou 壽	2/24		
shou 壽	15/36		

1. Imitative Copying and Tracing Copying as Complementary Means for the Achievement of Calligraphic Understanding

Imitative and tracing copying became a traditional method for learning calligraphy as it developed into an independent art form after the Eastern Han dynasty. This practice has continued as an active tradition in China to this day. When writing evolved in people's minds from being merely a practical tool for copying classics, scriptures and official documents to an art form that could express personality and showcase one's artistic taste and skills, the practice of imitative copying and tracing copying from existing masterpieces became an essential path. Due to the unique contributions and achievements of Eastern Jin calligraphers in the maturation of calligraphy as an art, the works of calligraphers such as the Two Wangs, and particularly Wang Xizhi, have become outstanding models for future generations. These works have maintained a dominant position in calligraphy and continue to serve as exemplary standards to this day.

Imitative copying and tracing copying initially served entirely different purposes. In the early stages, tracing involved replicating the outlines first and then filling in the ink while verifying against the original calligraphy; its primary purpose was the reproduction and preservation of works. Later, the emergence of ink-rubbings of stone inscriptions in the sixth century further accelerated the dissemination of calligraphy models. With the widespread use of printing after the tenth century, collections of engraved calligraphy, such as the official model books *Chunhua getie* and *Daguan tie*, facilitated even wider distribution. However, the cost of this extensive dissemination was a reduction in fidelity to the original works during the transfer and engraving processes and, in some cases, even a distortion of the originals. In this process, the labor-intensive practice of tracing copies gradually lost its status as the primary method for preserving and disseminating original works. At the same time, tracing became an important learning method to

help beginners to master the structure and visual form of calligraphy models. Even experienced calligraphers of the Song, Ming and Qing dynasties, when encountering unfamiliar calligraphic works or wanting to study classic models in detail again, would often use the method of double-line tracing. Initially, tracing involved placing a sheet of paper over the model, but once the outline was completed, the model would be placed next to the paper for further observation while filling in the ink. This second step is similar to the objective operation of imitative copying, which is an important reason why the two practices merged semantically, establishing them as important methods for learning calligraphy.

In contemporary society, due to the advanced development of photography and scanning technologies, the function of preserving and disseminating large-scale engraved model-books has largely been replaced by digital and printed collections. Practitioners can easily access these resources. However, ink-rubbings retain their unique and irreplaceable value even in an age where image reproduction technology is highly advanced. This is because ink-rubbings preserve the rich, three-dimensional details of the inscriptions in their original proportions and because the clear contrast found in them between positive and negative space enhances the shape of the characters. As a result, ink-rubbings remain an important source of calligraphic models for calligraphy practitioners to this day.

2. The Phenomenon of "Having Grandiose Aims but Puny Abilities" and Instant Recognition through Visual Perception from the Master's Manifestation of the Principles in Calligraphic Practice

In calligraphic training, practitioners are very often able to recognise the visual forms of the calligraphic model that they are studying but are unable to copy them accurately. This phenomenon is usually referred to with the phrase "having grandiose aims but puny abilities" (*yangao shoudi* 眼

高手低). This idiom originates from a letter that Chen Que 陳確 (1604–1677) wrote to Wu Zhongmu 吳仲木 (1622–1656),[1] in which it was used to describe those engaged in literary creation who focus solely on studying the principles of writing without actually putting pen to paper. This leads to a situation where their vision and standards are high but their practical skills are severely lacking (*yangao shousheng* 眼高手生). Over time, it has become an idiom used in various fields to describe similar phenomena. This is exemplified by the Qing dynasty calligraphy teacher Yao Mengqi and his precise copying of the *Jiuchenggong*. A close examination of his meticulous copies reveals that he did not fully adhere to the specific structural rules of certain characters that he himself mentions in his calligraphy theories. At times, his understanding of the *Jiuchenggong* appears very mechanical, falling far short of the original's balance between precision and flexibility. Even Sun Guoting, who left behind the masterpiece *Shupu*, which exemplifies the unity of calligraphy theory and practice, cannot be said to have fully achieved the ideal state that he describes in his text—perfectly mastering both the cursive and standard scripts, as well as balancing slowness and heaviness with speed and vigour. In the *Shuduan*, Zhang Huaiguan highly praises Sun's skill in the cursive script for its strong, precise brushwork and bold, firm strokes.[2] Mi Fu also praises Sun Guoting's cursive script, which was very impressive for its mastery of Wang Xizhi's brushwork and could be regarded as the first in the Tang dynasty.[3] However, Zhang Huaiguan notes that Sun's standard and semi-cursive scripts were inferior to his cursive. Moreover, in contrast to his friend Wang Shaozong, who struggled with slowness in his writing, Sun's weakness lay in being too rapid. Zhang Huaiguan laments that if the two could have learned from each other's strengths, they would have achieved perfection. Zhang Huaiguan himself is also representative of having grandiose aims but puny abilities. Although he is well-known as a calligraphy theorist and critic in the history

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[1] *Qianchu ji* 1.153.

[2] *Shuduan*, in *Fashu yaolu jiaoli* 9.471.

[3] See Mi Fu's *History of Calligraphy* (*Shushi* 書史), in *SHQS*, vol. 1, p. 969.

of calligraphy, no calligraphic works have survived as a model for calligraphy learners. The calligraphy collection catalogs, such as *Rhapsody Discussing Calligraphy* (*Shushu Fu* 述書賦)[4] by the Tang critic Dou Ji 竇臮 (*fl.* second half of eighth century) and *Xuanhe Shupu*,[5] do not mention Zhang Huaiguan's works, which is likely because his works did not receive attention from Tang and Song collectors. In the preface to *Sequel of [Zhang Huaiguan's] Judgements on Calligraphy* (*Xu Shuduan* 續書斷), Zhu Changwen's 朱長文 (1039–1098) only regards him as a critic and does not mention anything about his calligraphic works.[6] This reminds calligraphy practitioners that even the authors of the assertive claims found in historical treatises might not have fully realized those ideals themselves, which is a common aspect of learning calligraphy.[7]

It is, therefore, inadvisable to believe blindly in theories or discussions about brushwork techniques and methods. Some calligraphy treatises merely repeat what earlier theorists have said or express overly biased personal opinions, which need to be carefully discerned. For calligraphy training, the most effective approach is the traditional family-based teaching method of the Eastern Jin dynasty, where skills were passed down through both personal demonstration and oral instruction. Having a teacher who demonstrates the techniques and provides timely feedback based on the learner's progress is crucial for mastering the basics of calligraphy. This aligns with the idea of instant recognition through visual perception from the master's manifestation of the principles. Particularly at the foundational stage of learning calligraphy, it is essential to have a teacher who can guide and help to interpret the techniques demonstrated in the models, laying a solid foundation for future personal creativity.

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[4] *Shushu fu*, in *SHQS*, vol. 2, pp. 472-483.

[5] *Xuanhe shupu*, in *SHQS*, vol. 2, pp. 4-59.

[6] *Xu shuduan*, in *SHQS*, vol. 1, p. 277.

[7] Another common dilemma of calligraphy is "seeing the moral character of the man in his calligraphy", see Egan (1989).

3. Diversity in Traditional Calligraphy Training

Traditional calligraphy training has historically included both official education and family-based instruction. The establishment of the first art school in 178 during the Han dynasty, Hongdu menxue, marked the beginning of officially run special calligraphy schools, setting a precedent for subsequent dynasties. However, with the strengthening of imperial power after the fourteenth century, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the rise of the imperial style occupied a dominant position. The emperor's preference for certain calligraphers increasingly influenced the official aesthetic of calligraphy, particularly in the standard script used in the civil service examinations and official documents, leading to a gradual stagnation in style.

Family-based education, exemplified by father-son pairs like Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi and Ouyang Xun and Ouyang Tong, achieved remarkable success. The second generation often received foundational training from their predecessors in early childhood and, through personal effort and talent, managed to build upon and evolve their forebears' styles, ultimately developing their own distinct approaches to calligraphy.

In addition, most calligraphers improve their skills through apprenticeship under a master and by exchanging insights and techniques with peers and friends. For personal development, studying the masterpieces of ancient calligraphy is a fundamental, lifelong practice. Moreover, maintaining a sensitive and open-minded attitude is crucial. Drawing inspiration from nature, the diverse aspects of daily life and other forms of art also plays a significant role in calligraphy training.

4. Modern Interpretations of Calligraphy and Multiple Roles of Calligraphic Training Today

Today, calligraphy training benefits from easier access to high-quality electronic and printed resources as models. The sources of these models have also become more diverse, maintaining the tradition of studying the masterpieces of ancient calligraphers while also incorporating newly

unearthed early calligraphy manuscripts and stone inscriptions. This approach offers a better reconstruction of the actual traditional practice of calligraphy. Calligraphic relics from before the seventh century are particularly important for understanding the development and maturation of the art of calligraphy. However, the widespread use of digital text and hard pens has led to a significant decrease in the amount of writing practice, which has greatly exacerbated the problem of having grandiose aims but puny abilities.

The development of contemporary cognitive and experimental psychology has inspired some scholars to explore calligraphy from the perspectives of systematic visual cognition, brain function and bodily behavior. This approach is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, scientific analysis can provide new, clearer insights that differ from traditional interpretations; on the other hand, it risks oversimplifying and reducing calligraphy to geometric interpretations, which fall short of fully capturing its richness and uniqueness. Moreover, without a solid foundation in modern scientific disciplines and experimental paradigms, the application of psychological theories can easily become forced or superficial. While contemporary interpretations of calligraphy have yielded some results, they also show signs of immaturity. For future research to achieve significant breakthroughs, scholars or research teams need to possess both a solid foundation in calligraphy theory and practice and rigorous training in contemporary scientific disciplines.

Past research into the underlying brain and behavioral mechanisms of calligraphy copying suggests that tracing copying requires more attention than imitative copying. This experimental finding seems to contradict traditional theories on calligraphy and has not yet been fully explained or further validated. If future studies can more precisely differentiate and refine the operational steps of tracing copying and imitative copying, and systematically explore the cognitive characteristics of these practices, they could provide new insights for both calligraphic education and creation.

Calligraphy has been shown, in many experiments, to activate brain functions and promote a more peaceful mind and body. This has given calligraphy practice a new role beyond artistic creation, becoming an effective therapeutic method for various physical and mental illnesses. For ordinary people, regardless of prior experience with calligraphy, practising Chinese calligraphy with Chinese brushes for a certain amount of time can help them feel calmer and enhance attention, memory and other cognitive functions. This is one of the unique charms of calligraphy and future academic developments may uncover and validate even more of its distinctive benefits.

5. The Ultimate Goal of Calligraphy Education and Imitative Copying

Traditional Chinese education aimed to cultivate gentlemen who possessed both moral excellence and scholarly talent. At the core and root of this educational system was the study of the Confucian classics. Objectively speaking, from ancient times to the present, the initial stages of calligraphy education have always been closely intertwined with literacy education, with the two being mutually dependent. This objective connection with the ideal of becoming a gentleman has led men of letters who are passionate about calligraphy to experience a conflicting mindset: they deeply love calligraphy and aspire to achieve excellence in it, yet they also worry about neglecting more practical and socially relevant studies. This point is vividly illustrated by the example of Yan Zhitui. In his family instructions to the descendants of the Yan clan, he explicitly advises against becoming known for calligraphy. However, various details, such as his meticulous collection and evaluation of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy and his authorship of works on the techniques of brush and ink, clearly reflect his deep involvement in and love for calligraphy, which stand in obvious contradiction to the advice that he gives to his descendants.

Moreover, a calligrapher's moral character and cultivation are also crucial criteria by which later generations evaluate their level of calligraphy. For traditional men of letters, calligraphy was never purely an artistic pursuit. The issue here is not whether the art of calligraphy can be isolated

and judged on its own, but rather that when a learner chooses a particular piece of calligraphy as a model or when a collector decides to acquire a work, they are not merely studying or admiring the technical skill it exhibits; they are engaging in a dialogue with the calligrapher and experiencing the connections between the calligraphic expression, the content of the text and the personal character of the calligrapher. The visual form and personal expression of calligraphic art are always inseparable: two sides of the same coin.

The artistic education and creative philosophy promoted by the Ministry of Education and the China Calligraphers Association continue this tradition, placing great emphasis on cultural understanding and personal cultivation. At the same time, they encourage contemporary expressions and innovative spirit emerging from cultural roots. Although, due to the changes that have taken place over time, Chinese students now are not as familiar with traditional literature and history conveyed through classical Chinese texts and traditional Chinese characters as they once were, and although there are still various practical challenges in fully implementing this concept in actual calligraphy education and creation, this trend and cultural ideal remain unwavering.

Copying ancient masterpieces has always been an essential and crucial path in calligraphy learning throughout history. In the early stages, practitioners strive for precise imitative copying, seeking to approximate closely to the original works through methods such as collating characters from existing calligraphic works and imitating the style of the model. There are even some examples where the imitations are nearly perfect. However, if a practitioner's journey in calligraphy remains limited to imitation, hiding behind the models without developing an individual style, their work risks being labelled enslaved calligraphy.

The ultimate goal of imitative copying is to transition from the phase of acquiring the style of the original to discarding the influence of the original. This process involves learning fundamental calligraphic techniques through the study of various exemplars, eventually leading to

the creation of a personal style. As Sun Guoting described, it is about achieving harmony without the constraint of rules:

Express thoroughly one's varying states [of mind] through the tip of the brush and amalgamate one's sentiments onto paper. With no separation between mind and hand, and forgetting patterns and rules, then it will be naturally possible to keep distance from [Wang] Xi[zhi] and [Wang] Xian[zhi] and be without failure, as well as to leave Zhong [You] and Zhang [Zhi] and still be skilful.[8]

Interestingly, even after a calligrapher has developed their own style and achieved fame, they continue to practise imitative copying. Excellent calligraphic masterpieces are revisited and deeply appreciated at different stages of a calligrapher's life. On the one hand, any advanced skill requires constant practice to maintain a seamless harmony between mind and hand; calligraphy models serve as a kind of musical score for practising various techniques and offer a regular opportunity to engage in a dialogue with ancient masters. On the other hand, because of the deep bond between calligraphy and Chinese characters, copying the classics was not seen as mere drudgery but as an excellent opportunity to repeatedly engage with the content of the scriptures and to practise calligraphy. This explains why figures such as Emperor Gaozong of the Song dynasty, Zhao Gou and his Empress, Xiansheng née Wu, engaged in handwriting stone classics and why Wang Yun continued to enjoy copying texts in his later years. The most wonderful realm of calligraphy is described as follows: "when comprehension and mastership are obtained, both the man and his calligraphies have reached a venerable age" (*renshu julao* 人書俱老).[9] This

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[8] 窮變態於豪端, 合情調於紙上. 無間心手, 忘懷楷則, 自可背羲、獻而無失, 違鍾、張而尚工. The Chinese text and English translation in De Laurentis (2011b), p. 39, p. 60.

[9] It is proposed by Sun Guoting. The phrase and its English translation are in De Laurentis (2011b), p. 37, p. 56.

completeness encompasses not only technical mastery but also the ever-enduring cultivation of character and knowledge.

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