PART II

The Calligrapher's Memory

Chapter 2

Forgetting to Remember

As ideals and intellectual trends within a society change, what was once considered important can cease to be valued and eventually forgotten.[139] Both a shift in attention toward new and more exciting issues and reinterpretation of what has been transmitted from the past necessarily include acts of forgetting.

During the mid Ming dynasty, a shift in pedagogical practices was underway—one which was marked by an act of forgetting. The representation of calligraphic strokes in pedagogical texts was adapted through a selective processing of methods from the past. At the same time, the way in which practical knowledge was presented reflected a changing perception of authorship and teaching. In contrast to authors from earlier periods, mid-Ming practitioners put less emphasis on shaping texts to affirm their identity, believing the practical knowledge codified in the text to be socially relevant on its own.

This process of selection and the devaluation of the author's identity increased the accessibility of textual pedagogies. A man named Gao Song 高松 (fl. 1549-1554) and his widely disseminated instructions for calligraphy in regular script played a key role in this shift. Gao adapted the use of analogies in practice-oriented texts for calligraphy in order to develop a more detailed system that relied on well-known references for the uninitiated audience. Despite the popularity of his work, however, Gao Song's most memorable feature was, as pointed out by Qing dynasty (1644-1911) scholars, to have been forgotten. This act of forgetting was closely tied to the standard techniques that he offered in his work. In fact, the erasure of his personal trace from the content of his manual advanced the transmission of practical knowledge.

Gao Song was a native of Wen'an county (in current-day Hebei province) and lived during the Jiajing 嘉靖 (1522-1566) and probably early Wanli 萬曆 (1572-1620) periods of the Ming dynasty. Gao Song, whose style (*zi* 字) was "escaped to the mountains" (*dunshan* 遯山), took part in the civil service examinations, but never passed. Eventually he purchased the low-

[139] Halbwachs discusses general dynamics of forgetting in societies. 1992. *On Collective Memory*, 172-173.

ranking post of "Usher of the Court of State Ceremonial" (rank 9b) sometime in the Jiajing reign, without ever serving in it.[140] He most likely made a living from teaching and selling his works of calligraphy and painting, as well as from the publications of his practical manuals, several of which have survived to this day.

He supposedly rivaled the famous scholar-painters Shen Zhou 沈周 (1472-1509) and Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559) in painting and calligraphy skills, so that even Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636) visited him to request paintings.[141] The earliest known record mentioning him is a short and formulaic entry in the Ming publication *Essentials of the History of Painting* (*Huashi huiyao* 畫史會要), with a postface dated 1631. The text describes him as proficient in painting chrysanthemums, pines, orchids, plum, bamboo and landscapes in the style of Mi Fu 米芾 (1051-1107), and declares him a master of cursive, regular, seal and clerical script. The only personal information this early biography provides is that Gao found no joy in the bureaucratic life and thus happily maintained a humble lifestyle.

In contrast to this brief and dry description, Qing scholars praised Gao as a great talent of the middle of the 16th century, who had, unfortunately, been forgotten by most. What we know about Gao Song comes mainly from the short biographies that were included in local gazetteers of the Qing dynasty. In a gazetteer compiled in 1703, the writer of an exceptionally long biography of Gao laments that Gao's accomplishments had been erased within the span of half a century, and his paintings, valued in the past, had been destroyed when the dynasty fell. One of the anecdotes records how Jing Fu 井焯 (d. 1644), who ended his life together with his wife and sister when the Ming dynasty fell, attempted to recover paintings by Gao Song in the early 17th century, after being asked about any extant works by Gao in his native village in Wen'an.

> I remember how Jing "Lanxi"[142] stayed in the capital during the years of 1636 and 1637; renowned officials such as Zhou Fengxian (*jinshi* of 1628) welcomed Jing and all asked: "In your village, there is a master Gao Daoshan [Song] who is famous for his painting manuals. How many

[140] During the Ming, it became possible for commoners to purchase low degrees and office posts through an official institution. The practice is well documented for the Qing, but not the Ming. For a study of a Qing case, see Zhang. 2013. "Legacy of Success."
[141] Cui. 1673. *Wen'an xianzhi*, juan 3, 12a-13b.
[142] Jing Fu was known as "Lanxi" for having served as an official in Lanxi county.

of his paintings are still extant?" Upon which Jiang replied, ashamed: "I don't know." Zhou laughed: "Daoshan's name is known throughout the land, yet he is not known in his own hometown?" When Lanxi returned home, he began to inquire about Gao's descendants, asking his close acquaintances to purchase surviving paintings. However, Gao's descendants were all farmers, weak and thin, who had no clue about what painting was. One merely said: "There are some papers stacked in some shelves. They have been there for a long time, they might well be paintings." Jing immediately wanted to get his hands on them for inspection, and thus traded the pile of paper for several pecks of rice. When he received the case, he opened it to take a look, finding it contained [among smaller works,] dozens of large paintings. Jing took them to the capital to have them mounted. He presented them to a number of people, who all admired and praised them greatly. The most beautiful among them he selected for his own private collection.
Yet, not long after that, with the fall of the dynasty in 1644, just like the pair of magical swords,[143] they all vanished. Was this like when the painter Zhang Sengyou (active 490-540) dotted the eyes of the dragon, only for it to fly away? How come the marvels created by heaven are not allowed to remain in this world for long?

猶憶井蘭溪於崇禎丙子、丁丑間過都。縉紳名流如周巢軒諸君迎問：「貴邑有高遯山先生者名登畫譜，其遺跡尙幾何？」井謝：「不知。」周笑曰：「遯山名徹海內，而迺不足比閭耶？」蘭溪歸始訪其後裔，令所親轉購之，後人單弱農野，不知丹青爲何物，但云：「家有累紙積庋閣間，歷年已久，未審是否？」亟檢取，遂以數斛米易之，發函啓視，片幀尺幅尙可十數種，井持至長安裝潢之。分餉諸人，大相稱賞，又擇精美者珍爲家藏。未幾，甲申之變，隨與豐城之劒，而偕逝矣。豈僧繇之龍點睛飛去，天生神物不令久留世上耶？[144]

The anecdote was recorded by Ji Jiong 紀炅 (1625-1708), also a native of Wen'an and best known for his contribution to the field of poetry. Ji begins with the statement "I remember how...", as if recollecting events from a long gone past. He seems to have known little about Gao Song himself, and in order to acquire the information needed to write the biography, he relied on

[143] Refers to a Jin dynasty (265–420) legend about the Longquan 龍泉 and Tai'e 太阿 swords that vanished.
[144] Yang. 1708. *Wen'an xianzhi*, juan 7, 32b-33a.

oral accounts and on the manuals Gao had published during his lifetime.[145] He laments the loss of memories of the wonderful artist from Wen'an, comparing it to the loss of the two mythical swords that vanished from the world of men by their own will. This form of praise was commonly used to describe persons of great talent whose achievements were yet to be acknowledged. In the biography, Ji also claims that the single bamboo painting by Gao he had seen was of exquisite quality. He asserts that Gao's talent remained unparalleled during the intervening centuries. The perceived value of Gao's works is reinforced by the second reference to Zhang Sengyou, whose wall painting of a dragon was allegedly so life-like that it gained a life of its own and ascended to heavens as soon as the pupils of its eyes were filled in. The loss of Gao's legacy with the fall of the dynasty was preceded by the short-lived recovery of his works of art, similar to Zhang's dragon that vanished after completion.

Unlike his artworks or the memory of the man himself, Gao's legacy was not lost, as the content of his manuals was continuously reproduced during the two centuries that followed his death. The instructions taken from his manuals became famous largely because of how they helped the student cultivate memory. Ironically, however, even though many later compilations included the content of his manuals wholesale, they made no reference to Gao.

Gao's painting manuals describe practical steps for painting bamboo, chrysanthemums and birds, while a reprint of his pedagogical work on calligraphy has also survived. The content of his painting manuals, discussed in Chapter 5, was widely disseminated though daily-use encyclopedias and copied by later compilers of how-to manuals, such as in Zhou Lüjing's 周履靖 (fl. 1578-1597) *Extensive Documents from the Secluded Residence* (*Yimen guangdu* 夷門廣牘). Indeed, the content of his manuals constituted a core part of such encyclopedias into the late Qing. The same can be said of Gao's manual for calligraphy practice, titled *Origins of Brush Methods* (*Bifa yuanliu* 筆法源流), which was originally published in 1554. It was partially reproduced in several encyclopedias, such as the 1614 *Complete Book of the Combined*

[145] Despite the temporal distance, Ji praises Gao Song profusely. It was common to praise fellow scholars who came from the same region. Ji Jiong, who refused to serve the foreign Qing government and to take the special examinations of 1679 (*boxue hongci* 博學鴻詞), might also have identified with Gao's decision to abstain from serving the state. Ming loyalists often identified with historical figures that decided to find other means to make a living. Ji claims he has corrected the character used in Gao Song's name based on his research from 嵩 to 松. However, it might also be possible that Gao's name was written with different homophone characters even during his time.

Ten Thousand Treasures of the Five Carts (*Wuche hebing wanbao quanshu* 五車合併萬寶全書), and reprinted in several Ming compilations on calligraphy; it was also reproduced as a single volume in 1727 [Figs. 2.1-2.3].[146]

What rendered Gao's manuals so unique and appropriate for wide dissemination was the way he presented knowledge. All of his manuals make extensive use of mnemonic formulas to describe the clearly devised practical steps to the "beginner." His manuals instruct the reader to develop practical skills by going through defined stages of learning, aided by mnemonic rhymes. The rhymes facilitate the memorization of the new typologies of strokes he presents, as well as the steps for constructing characters. Gao Song perceived knowledge as something that could be built up step by step, and he made sure his manuals were structured accordingly. Thus, it is Gao's innovative understanding of knowledge that distinguishes his manuals from earlier sources that addressed practical matters.

Gao's manual on calligraphy shows that he took additive and cumulative learning as a premise, dealing with bits of knowledge as if they were building blocks to construct a house. The more blocks are added on top of a base, the higher the walls can become. In his *Origin and Development of Brush Methods,* Gao devotes the most effort to the presentation of his typology of strokes, which is based on the eight strokes necessary to write the character *yong* 永, commonly referred to as "eight methods of the character Yong" (*Yongzi bafa* 永字八法). Unlike earlier typologies, however, Gao's relies on terms related to animals and plants to describe not only the shape of strokes in calligraphy, but also to present a coherent system for composing each character. His approach presented an accessible framework and the tools necessary for the early-modern student to learn calligraphy. In order to understand how Gao Song envisioned the process of learning and how he introduced innovations based on earlier discourses on calligraphic practice, it is necessary to trace the origins of the concepts that define the framework of his *Origin and Development of Brush Methods*.

[146] The strokes and character compositions from Gao's manual are usually reproduced in the lower segment of the encyclopedias, forming a substantial part of the calligraphy section (*Shufa men* 書法門). Sakai et al. 2001. *Gosha Banpō Zensho,* 268-277. The 1727 edition is taken as the main reference because it reproduces the original preface. See Gao. 2004. *Bifa yuanliu*, 479-482. Ming editions, including one that was published only fourteen years after the original, in 1568, under the title *Chongke neige michuan zifu* 重刻內閣秘傳字府 replace the original preface with comments by the editors.

The framework Gao chose for presenting his innovative approach was based on the connection of calligraphy to cosmic order, which was inherent to the discourse on the creation of calligraphy. His typology of strokes relied on the selective appropriation of the transmitted tradition. Yet his use of analogies differs from earlier texts in ways that made his approach particularly suited to early-modern students of calligraphy.

Early accounts on the mythical origins of script describe graphs and composite characters as the creation of Cangjie 倉頡, who observed natural phenomena and animal patterns by looking up to the skies and down to earth. He investigated the appearance of constellations and of imprinted patterns left by dragons, serpents, animals and birds to create script.[147] These initial graphs underwent changes after they came into the hands of humans, who created different types of script. One of the earliest sources that discusses calligraphy, the *Momentum of the Four Types of Script* (*Siti shushi* 四體書勢) compiled by Wei Heng 衛恆 (d. 291), describes how even after going through several processes of change and simplification, different types of script retained their connection to natural patterns.[148] According to Wei Heng, the perceived momentum of natural processes captured in characters was maintained even as script developed into clerical (*li shu* 隸書) and cursive script (*cao shu* 草書).

In this early text, graphic effects are described by means of colorful analogies to natural patterns. One section, which quotes Cui Yuan's 崔瑗 (78-143) "On the Momentum of Cursive Script" (*Caoshu shi* 草書勢), describes how cursive script resembled "a startled bird about to fly; a crafty beast that is suddenly surprised and about to dash off" (獸跂鳥跱，志在飛移；狡兔暴駭，將奔未馳), or how the "dots (of a character) could be attached in a slanted position, like a cicada clinging to a branch" (旁點邪附，似螳螂而抱枝).[149] Cui

[147] Most early sources describe Cangjie as creator of script (such as the *Siti shushi* of the Jin, and the later *Bisui lun* and *Shupin hou*) but some attribute this achievement to the Yellow Emperor (passages of the *Shu duan* of the Tang, which only survives as a reconstructed record, refer to both the Yellow Emperor and his historiographer Cangjie as creators.) See Escande. 2003. *Traités chinois de peinture et de calligraphie*, 1*,* 113, and Escande. 2010. *Traités chinois de peinture et de calligraphie,* 2*,* 44; 143; 210; 223-224.

[148] On Wei Heng's life and other writings, see Goodman. 2010. *Xun Xu and the Politics of Precision in Third-Century AD China,* 314-316. A full translation of the treatise is available in French in Escande. 2003. *Traités chinois de peinture et de calligraphie,* 1, 113-139.

[149] *Mosou.* 1888. 51b.

Yuan's descriptions for seal script are equally vivid, with compositions so dense that they resemble "coiling and twisting snakes or insects."[150] Around the same time as Wei Heng, Suo Jing's 索靖 (239-303) "On the Appearance of Cursive Script" (*Caoshu zhuang* 草書狀) employed comparable language to discuss calligraphy. According to Suo, cursive script could be

> like a stallion straining in fury against the bridle,
> or the billowing sea foaming up in breakers, [...]
> like black bears crouching across mountain peaks,
> or swallows chasing one another along the water.[151]

Similar analogies that describe movement and tension in script dominated calligraphy texts in the following decades. Interestingly, however, these descriptions were not directed at specific strokes or characters. The analogies instead pointed to the interconnectedness of script and cosmic patterns. In fact, such descriptions of objects and their parts as sentient beings or natural patterns also found parallels in other practical fields, such as weaving, most likely due to the belief that heaven or universal principles engendered movement in beings. [152]

The belief that movement was engendered by the cosmos could explain why early texts on calligraphy contained no explicit instructions on writing. Within compositions, the writer was to derive momentum and dynamism from natural processes. Theorists did not present abstract rules and procedures to reach esthetic goals. Instead they used analogies to indicate the general approach to writing.[153] This use of analogies was later appropriated to describe individual calligraphers' styles and to provide specific instructions.

By the sixth century, it had become common to describe the styles of individual calligraphers with nature analogies. Examples can be found in Yuan Ang's 袁昂 (461-540) "Appraisal of Ancient and Contemporary Calligraphers" (*Gujin shuping* 古今書評). He describes the calligraphy of Xiao Ziyun as being

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[150] Chen. [13th c.?] *Shuyuan jinghua*, juan 3, 6b-7a.

[151] Translation by Cong. 2008. "An Overview of Ancient Calligraphic Theories," 417.

[152] Zürn. 2020. "The Han *Imaginaire* of Writing as Weaving," 383. The Rhapsody of Women Eavers offers several examples, including "heavenly bodies", "a flowing stream," "steeds" or "rabbits." Kuhn. "Silk Weaving in Ancient China," 99-101.

[153] For a parallel argument describing the use of the particular to make general statements in early mathematics, see Chemla. 2009. "On Mathematical Problems as Historically Determined Artifacts."

"like spring flowers in the imperial park: gaze far and near, no place fails to bloom" (如上林春花，遠近瞻望，無處不發). Zhong You's calligraphy, he writes, is "full of impulse and secret beauty, like a wild goose in flight playing above the ocean; a dancing crane playfully roaming the heavens" (意氣密麗，若飛鴻戲海，舞鶴遊天). Xiao Sihua's calligraphy "is of ink strides and connected silk. The momentum of his characters is of outstanding strength, like a dragon leaping over the heavenly gate; a tiger crouching on the phoenix tower" (走墨連綿，字勢屈強，若龍跳淵門，虎臥鳳闕).[154]

The powerful images evoked in Yuan's descriptions, however, were not used to describe only the work of Xiao Sihua. Such descriptions became pervasive, so that one analogy was used for different calligraphers, regardless of the type of script they used. The same analogy of the leaping dragon and the crouching tiger is repeated in later sources to describe the writing of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361), first as a statement attributed to Emperor Wu of the Liang 梁武帝 (r. 502-549), and later also to Tang dynasty critics, including Emperor Taizong 唐太宗 (r. 626-649).[155] A remarkably similar analogy can be gleaned from an inscription on stone in a eulogy to yet another calligrapher, the monk Seng'an Daoyi. On a cliff façade, datable to around 580, his calligraphy is described as being "like a dragon coiling in the mist, like a phoenix soaring through clouds."[156] The frequent use and recycling of analogies to describe calligraphy by different people shows how praise of calligraphic achievements came to rely on tropes that spread widely and became formulaic.

Systematic comparisons between specific strokes and natural imagery became common during the Tang dynasty, and the significance of analogies to cosmic and natural patterns increased. In his "On Calligraphy Models" (*Fashu lun* 法書論), Cai Xizong 蔡希綜 (fl. 742-756) claims that

> in constructing a character, the form must not be conceived *in vacuo* but should, instead, be representative of some material thing, such as bird flock formations, insect holes in wood, mountains or trees, or clouds or mist. Each calligraphic shape, one way or another, should be thus

[154] Chen. [13th c.?] *Shuyuan jinghua*, juan 5, 3b-4b.

[155] The quote is attributed to the Tang emperor in the manuscript "Pelliot chinois 3871" in the collection of the Bibliothéque National de France. Attributed to the emperor Wu of Liang in the *Shuyuan jinghua*, see above. Tang collections of tales would later use the expression to describe Wang himself instead of his calligraphy. See Liu and Mather. 1976. *Shih shuo hsin-yu*, 338.

[156] Harrist. 2008. *The Landscape of Words,* 195-196; 335n136.

derived.[157]

Cai promotes a simplified process of observing nature. Instead of having to infer complex patterns and striving to imitate creation itself, as his slightly younger contemporary Li Yangbing advocated, he tells the reader to simply observe the shapes of things and emulate them when delineating a stroke or composing a character.[158] For Cai, writing was no longer perceived as a natural pattern, but became an imitation of the shape of observable objects instead. This provided a clearer and more concrete way to approach calligraphy: observing shapes required less intellectual involvement on the part of the learner and could be translated into practical instructions. Increased circulation of practice-oriented texts attests to the popularity of this simplified approach among many aspiring calligraphers during the Tang.

Texts that provided instructions for practicing calligraphy based on shapes had already begun to appear during the 7th century, slightly before Cai described his vision-based process. As can be gleaned from the many versions and the composite—or patchwork-like—quality of the texts, these ideas were not the products of individuals, but were shared by many and constructed over time. In his *Treatise on Calligraphy* (*Shupu* 書譜), dated 687, Sun Guoting 孫過庭 (fl. 648-687) comments on two of these texts, both attributed to none other than Wang Xizhi, who by this time had been canonized as the master of calligraphy. Although the content of the texts he refers to most likely does not correspond to the extant text with the same title, scholars believe these to be early manuscript iterations of the transmitted versions.[159]

On the "Battle Formations of the Brush", also rendered as "Tactics of the Brush," (*Bizhen tu* 筆陣圖) Sun notes:

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[157] Qian. 1998. *Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters*, 93.

[158] Li Yangbing, the 8th century scholar and calligrapher, believed he had recovered the sages' writing standards by observing the movements and patterns of nature himself. He described his process in writing, in which observing the shape of objects was just one of the steps to grasp the principles of writing. Scholars of the period believed that restoring seal script was an important means to understand the past because the ancient characters were like the blueprints of creation set down by the sages. The political background for such undertakings and a translation of Li's process are lucidly explained in Wagner. 1997. "Art as an Instrument for Political Legitimation during the Tang," 171-173. See also McNair. 1995. "Public Values in Calligraphy and Orthography in the Tang Dynasty."

[159] There is disagreement about the correspondence of the text mentioned by Sun and the transmitted text with that title. Barnhart dismisses the connection. 1964. "Wei Fu-jen's Pi Chen T'u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy." Tang and Zhang provide convincing arguments to discuss the historical development of the text. Tang. 2000. "Bizhentu fuhua jieduan ji qi neirong." Zhang 2009. *Zhang Tiangong xian Tang shuxue kaobian wenji*, 122-128.

> For some time there has existed a work called *Tactics of the Brush*, with a total of seven lines. It contains three pictures of hands, illustrating different positions of holding the brush. The drawings are distorted, the dots and lines unclear and wrong. It circulates all over the country, south and north... Although its authenticity has not been established, it can be used as an elementary tool for instructing the young. [...] Critical writings on calligraphy by various authors are mostly frivolous and insubstantial; without exception, they are concerned merely with the outer form and go astray in regard to the inner principle. I make no use of them in this treatise.[160]

Sun's statement shows that this text had already begun to circulate widely during his time, and it is clear that he regarded texts that are "concerned merely with the outer form" and do not grasp the "inner principle" as inferior.[161] But at the same time, he acknowledges that such texts could be useful, especially as pedagogical tools. His next comment is on the text titled "Treatise on Brush Technique" (*Bishi lun* 筆勢論):

> For generations there has been handed down a *Treatise on Brush Technique* in ten chapters, supposedly by Wang Xizhi, addressed to his son Wang Xianzhi. The diction is vulgar and the reasoning flimsy, the meaning perverse and the wording stupid. A careful examination of its content and style shows it definitely not to be by Wang Xizhi. Wang Xizhi's position in life was important and his talent lofty; his personality was pure and his verbal style refined. His fame has not been extinguished, and his calligraphy is still extant. To compose every piece of writing, to explain every subject, he always made a thorough study [first], drawing on ancient sources even when he was in a hurry. When a father gives instructions to his precious son and heir in order that his conduct be harmonious and his morality correct, how could style and content possibly be as decadent as they are in this treatise? [...] The work has neither the quality of exhortation nor the authority of a classic. We must reject it![162]

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[160] Chang et. al. 1995. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*, 7-8.

[161] Barnhart argues that the appearance of texts that had a "how-to" approach to calligraphy began to proliferate in the late sixth or early seventh century. Barnhart. 1964. "Wei Fu-jen's Pi Chen T'u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy," 19.

[162] Chang et. al. 1995. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*, 9

Sun's critical comment indicates that the scholarly elite, following Confucian ideals, rejected such texts for their utter lack of moral or social value. They could not aid scholars in their search for the origin of ancient script and to the ancient way of the sages embodied in it. However, the wide dissemination and popularity of the text is confirmed, not only by Sun's opening comment that it had been circulating "for generations," but also by the existence of an early manuscript recovered from the library cave in Dunhuang 敦煌. The undated fragment of the manuscript corresponds to Sun's description of a text with "ten chapters," instead of the twelve chapters of later printed editions, and is thus regarded by modern scholars as an earlier version of the text.[163]

Both texts criticized by Sun Guoting focused on practical instructions, providing information on how to hold the brush and how to produce specific strokes. Sun comments that the "Battle Formations of the Brush" contained illustrations of hands holding the brush, as well as descriptions of seven different kinds of stroke.[164] Four early versions of the text survive today. Unfortunately none of the editions reproduces illustrations of hands, but each presents seven standard strokes for calligraphy, with some variations in the text.[165] These are contained in: the *Quintessence of the Garden of Calligraphy* (*Shuyuan jinghua* 書苑菁華), preserved as an early Southern Song edition; the *Swamp of Ink* (or *Assemblage of Calligraphy*, *Mosou* 墨藪), which was originally published sometime after 841 but only survives in Ming editions; the *Essential Records on Calligraphy Exemplars* (*Fashu yaolu* 法書要錄), compiled sometime around 847, but extant as Ming editions; and the *Collection from the Pond of Ink* (*Mochi bian* 墨池編), published in 1066 and extant as a Ming

[163] The final sections of the versions are similar, indicating that the tenth chapter of the fragment is the last. Compare Pelliot chinois 4936 in the collection of the Bibliothéque National de France and the longer printed versions in the *Mosou* 墨藪 and *Mochi bian* 墨池编. These include additional content, including a colophon (*hou* 後), which is considered to be later additions.

[164] Unfortunately, no Tang examples of illustrations of hand postures for holding the brush have survived. During the Ming and Qing such illustrations abounded and were included in Ming encyclopedias and in Qing manuals attributed to Wang Xizhi that specialize in hand postures.

[165] Tang compares the sets of different versions contained in the *Fashu yaolu* and the *Mochi bian*. 2000. "Bizhentu fuhua jieduan ji qi neirong," 77-78. Zhang provides a chart correlating the different titles according to content similarity. 2009. *Zhang Tiangong xian Tang shuxue kaobian wenji*, 124.

edition from 1568.[166]

Barnhart provides a translation for these seven principles, as recorded in the *Essential Records on Calligraphy Exemplars*:

> Like a cloud formation stretching a thousand li; indistinct, but not without form.
> Like a stone falling from a high peak, bouncing and crashing, about to shatter.
> The tusk of an elephant or rhinoceros (thrust into and) broken by the ground.
> Fired from a three thousand pound crossbow.
> A withered vine, ten thousand years old.
> Crashing waves or rolling thunder.
> The sinews and joints of a mighty bow.[167]

Although is not clear whether the analogies describe the shape of the stroke or the movement of the brush, the text shows that referring to nature in order to address specific strokes was regarded as effective. The fourth and the seventh lines, however, rely on analogies to weapons, which most likely became popular during the Tang dynasty. The figure commonly credited with using battle analogies to describe calligraphy was the Tang emperor Taizong, who allegedly claimed that he learned the principles of calligraphy by observing men engaged in battle during his youth.[168]

The second text Sun Guoting criticized, the "Treatise on Brush Technique," as well as the colophon to the "Battle Formations of the Brush," also included analogies to battle.[169] With the dissemination of anecdotes promoting analogies to combat and weapons, they also began to appear in

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[166] Barnhart (1964. "Wei Fu-jen's Pi Chen T'u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy."), Laurentis (2014. Origin, Authorship, and Interpretation of Yong Zi Bafa.") and Tang (2000. "Bizhentu fuhua jieduan ji qi neirong) discuss extant editions of these works in their studies. The title under which the "Battle Formations" can be found in the *Mochi bian* is "Discussions on Calligraphy" (*Shu lun* 書論), while the text included under the heading "Battle Formations" is usually titled "Colophon."

[167] Barnhart. 1964. "Wei Fu-jen's Pi Chen T'u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy," 16.

[168] This connection is drawn by Tang. 2000. "Bizhentu fuhua jieduan ji qi neirong," 76-77. He believes this to be another indicator that these texts appeared during the Tang, when the anecdote of Taizong had become popular. See *Mo Sou*. 55a-b, and Li. 1936. *Taiping yulan*, 301, 3b-4a.

[169] The section of the "Treatise on Brush Technique" that included the battle analogies varies according to the edition. In the *Mo Suo*, it is listed as the ninth, 1888. 29a. In the *Shuyuan jinghua* it is the first. Chen. [13th c.?]. *Shuyuan jinghua,* 1, 10a.

appraisals of calligraphy. Ouyang Xun's 歐陽詢 (557-641) calligraphy was described as being "intimidating like lances and halberds from weapon stocks."[170] One text recorded during the Song dynasty describes how a "Tang critic" claimed that Wang Xizhi's calligraphy was "like a brave warrior unsheathing his sword to dam the waters and stem their flow." The appraisal continues with a set of familiar analogies:

> A dot he placed at the top is like a rock falling down from a high precipice. A horizontal stroke he made is like a cloud sweeping across a thousand miles. A slanting *na*-stroke he dashed is like the roar of wind and thunder. A vertical stroke he wrote is like a ten-thousand-year-old withered vine.[171]

The scholarly elite, however, continued to express distrust of texts that made use of analogies. As concerns with individual expression and virtue had crystalized at the center of calligraphic practice, which became associated with self-cultivation, scholars became weary of descriptions that relied on convoluted analogies. A statement by the Northern Song scholar Mi Fu captures their objection to the lack of specificity when discussing calligraphy:

> As we look to the past and to how the sages discussed calligraphy, we find that they made use of evasive and far-fetched words, making odd and overelaborate analogies, like "a dragon leaping over the heavenly gate, a tiger crouching on the phoenix tower." What kind of talk is this?
> This use of language that strives to be overelaborated is completely removed from the proper methods and does a disservice to those who study [calligraphy]. Thus, in my own discussions, making things intelligible to people is my priority, and I thus avoid such abstruse wording.
>
> 歷觀前賢論書，徵引迂遠，比況奇巧，如「龍跳天門，虎臥鳳闕」，是何等語？或遺辭求工，去法逾遠，無益學者。故吾所論要在入人，不為溢辭。[172]

[170] Wang. 1999. "The Taming of the Shrew," 149.
[171] Translation in Wang. 1999. "The Taming of the Shrew," 144. Original passage in Chen. [13th c.?]. *Shuyuan jinghua*, 5, 5a.
[172] Mi. 1501. *Haiyue mingyan*, 1a.

Such interjections that discarded this type of analogy as convoluted and excessive were far from unusual among the Song elite. As the practical texts attributed to Wang Xizhi had been circulating as manuscripts for a long period of time, many readers had had the opportunity to access and amend the transmitted texts according to their needs. By the time they were reproduced in printed collectanea during the Song, what had begun with the descriptions of seven strokes had developed into the well-known "eight methods of the character *yong*." The focus of the discussions on calligraphy thus began to shift away from abstract descriptions of shape and movement that seemed to lack in objectivity and meaning. Scholars began to describe strokes and gestures more consciously, providing readers practical guidelines instead.

The first version of the "eight methods" was most likely formulated during the late Tang or early Song. The earliest extant version of the "eight methods," as well as textual references to it, can be dated to the 11th century. This version of the text continues to attribute the mixed and convoluted bits of collated content to key figures in calligraphy, such as Li Yangbing of the Tang and Wang Xizhi of the Jin.[173] In the *Quintessence of the Garden of Calligraphy,* the "eight methods" were accompanied by an anecdote about Wang Xizhi, who was said to have practiced solely this single character *yong* 永 (eternal) for fifteen years, and only then started writing sentences.[174] Although the Song public might have perceived this account as spurious, it indicates there was a sustained belief that repetitive practice of specific strokes could be used as a basis for learning calligraphy.

The choice of the character *yong* for describing the eight methods was most likely related to Wang Xizhi's most famous work, the "Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Gathering" (*Lanting xu* 蘭亭序), which begins with this character and was a standard model for copying.[175] The standardization of the strokes as a set of eight that could be combined into a single character surely helped the student to visualize how the strokes should look. Tying them to a specific character narrowed down the possible variations for each stroke and provided a sequence.[176] Each stroke was also given a name: *Ce* 側 (lit. slanted), *Le* 勒 (lit. bridle), *Nu* 弩 (lit. bow), *Yue* 趯 (lit. to jump), *Ce* 策 (lit.

[173] Laurentis cites passages that describe the reception and comments on the "eight methods". 2014. Origin, Authorship, and Interpretation of Yong Zi Bafa," 116-118.
[174] The anecdote seems to first appear in Chen. [13th c.?]. *Shuyuan jinghua*, juan 2, 6b.
[175] Ledderose. 2000. *Ten Thousand Things*, 11.
[176] The *Shuyuan jinghua* depicts the construction of the character with each added stroke. Chen. [13th c.?]. *Shuyuan jinghua*, juan 2, 6a-b.

whip), *Lüe* 掠 (lit. to plunder), *Zhuo* 啄 (lit. to peck) and *Zhe* 磔 (lit. to tear apart). The names were often paired with concrete terms, such as "dot" for *Ce* (側), or "vertical stroke" for *Nu*.[177] These strokes did not correspond directly to the seven strokes described earlier, with five similar strokes and two (*ce* and *zhuo*) that used different brushwork, and one (*yue*) that described a hook ending and replaced two of the strokes in the set of seven that ended in inward and outward hooks. The descriptions that accompanied the strokes were also quite different from the previous set of seven, as they avoided analogies and instead sought to expand and specify the content by describing the strokes in more concrete terms.

The organic growth of texts about the "eight methods" continued well into the Song and Yuan, when several versions circulated simultaneously. As the texts circulated, explicit practical instructions became more frequent and detailed, most likely due to the spread of the standards of the scholarly elite. The instructions were usually composed as short notes on the appearance or movement required to create the strokes, sometimes accompanied by an image of the character. For example, one formula states: "the *Nu* stroke, if exceedingly straight, will lose in strength" (弩過直而力敗), and "for the *Zhe* stroke, move quickly in a slanted position in order to spread open [the hairs of the brush]" (磔趯趙以開撑). Short descriptions were often followed by a lengthy paragraph on each type of stroke, which further explained the method for wielding the brush and provided an oral formula. In some versions, such as in the *Quintessence of the Garden of Calligraphy,* the formula was followed by a question and answer section on each specific stroke and its brushwork.[178]

Although the descriptions of the strokes became more elaborate, both sets of seven and eight strokes still served as general reference and did not cover the vast variety of strokes that are actually used in writing. The formerly popular descriptions based on analogies to nature and battle only survived as residual references in the names of individual strokes, which still retained notions of weapons in motion or animal movement, and in some passages where the previous references were picked up. The use of a syncretic image of the character *yong* also distinguished the "eight methods" from the seven strokes that were sometimes depicted in print, but always regarded as individual units.

The image of the character *yong* is not present in the earliest extant

[177] Chen. [13th c.?]. *Shuyuan jinghua*, juan 2, 6b-7a.
[178] Both variations of the instructions recorded together in Chen. [13th c.?]. *Shuyuan jinghua*, 2, 7a-11a.

editions from the Song, but became common during the Ming dynasty. The earliest known illustration can be dated to the early Ming. It is featured in the first edition of the *Essentials of the History of Calligraphy* (*Shushi huiyao* 書史會要), dated 1376. The illustration itself also underwent changes over time.[179] The 1376 edition shows that the strokes were put next to each other. This hints at the configuration of the character, but the strokes were not yet assembled into a unit as they are in later editions. The earlier composition is an abstract graph that emphasizes the distinct strokes, while the later ones depict a standard character as a unit. Thus, the suggestion that the character serves as a memory aid for the set of eight variable strokes is more explicit in the early graph, as the strokes depicted would generate an unbalanced character *yong* if put together.[180]

The visual disjunction of strokes became widespread during the Song dynasty, with variations of stroke groupings according to script being discussed in compilations like the *Collection from the Pond of Ink* (*Mochi bian* 墨池編).[181] During the Yuan dynasty, these general combinations were then translated into a more concrete typology, focusing on regular script. The calligrapher and monk Xue'an (雪庵), also known by his lay name Li Puguang 李溥光 (fl. 1299-1317)[182] did so, for example, expounding on the "eight methods" in his *Xue'an's Essentials for Characters* (*Xue'an ziyao* 雪庵字要, preface d. 1308)[183] and proposing 32 stroke variants from the eight generic categories of strokes.

The Ming painter and calligrapher Gao Song adopted a similar approach to strokes, presenting a useful typology of seventy-two variants in his *Origin and Development of Brush Methods*.[184] Unlike his predecessors, though, Gao

[179] This edition, unlike other books that were composed earlier, is not a late reprint.

[180] Tao. 1376. *Shushi huiyao*, juan 9, 2b. The illustration in the first edition is different from the image depicted in the *Siku quanshu* edition. The National Palace Museum in Taipei holds a copy of the 1376 edition. Laurentis has suggested that the earliest illustration was printed in the *Mochi bian*, from 1568, but that is not the case. See Laurentis. 2014. "Origin, Authorship, and Interpretation of Yong Zi Bafa," 123.

[181] Zhu. 1782. *Mochi bian*, 3a-9a. The *Shuyuan jinghua* also suggests 24 kinds of stroke or groupings. Chen. [13th c.?]. *Shuyuan jinghua*, juan 2, *hanlin milun*, 2a-6a.

[182] Su Xianshuang argues Li was born around 1237 and died before 1327. 2014. "Yuan shujia Li Puguang ji qi sufa, lun kaoshu," 50.

[183] Unfortunately, the earliest version of the manual is the *Sibu congkan* print from 1920, which is described as reproducing a now lost Ming manuscript. Li. 1920. *Xue'an ziyao,* postface, 1. The content of the manual is also attributed to Li and reproduced in Feng. [1750?] *Shufa zhengchuan*.

[184] There are some overlaps between the types of strokes presented in Li's manual and Gao's. While most stroke names in the former are present in the latter, their shape and

Song took the "eight methods" to develop a coherent pedagogical approach to writing, embedding it in an encompassing system for character composition. Gao describes the strokes as building blocks that are put together into characters and uses complete characters and composition instructions to enlighten the student. He returns to the use of analogies to nature and war to introduce the broad range of strokes needed for writing. Yet his use of the analogies differed from that of earlier texts, as he transformed them into principles that guided the composition of characters. Gao presented the information in a structured and cumulative manner, adapting the instructions for the practice of calligraphy to printed media. This enabled him to reach a broad audience of aspiring calligraphers who had no access to private teachers, including autodidacts. This approach ensured the lasting popularity and utility of Gao's contribution, even as he himself faded into obscurity.

The *Origin and Development of Brush Methods*

Gao opens the *Origin and Development of Brush Methods* with a lengthy preface. He describes the origin of script according to the traditional accounts described above: after the creation and use of knotted ropes and the eight trigrams, the Yellow Emperor ordered Cang Jie to create writing by observing natural patterns. This ancient script, he writes, went through a set of stages and developed into the six types of script. He incorporates the content of anecdotes that had been passed down through the ages into his narrative, including one that attributes the recording of the "eight methods" to the Han official Cai Yong 蔡邕 (ca. 133-192), who was said to have received the oral precepts of calligraphy from a divine visitor (*shenren* 神人). These precepts were presented to him as twelve formulas, of which the fifth was the "eight methods of the character *yong*." This was then transmitted to Cui Yuan, Zhong Yu 鐘繇 (ca. 151-230), Madame Wei 衛夫人 (ca. 272-349) and, finally, to Wang Xizhi. Wang's devotion to practicing this single character for fifteen years is also woven into this narrative of transmission. Gao, full of awe and

categories do not always correspond. Considering that Li was a native of Datong 大同, close to Gao Song's hometown in the North, it is not unlikely that Gao either saw a copy of Li's manual or received oral instructions on Li's typology from a local teacher. The circulation of Li's book, at least in manuscript format, is confirmed by several early Ming sources, including the bibliographical catalogue of Chao Li (*Baowentang shumu* 寶文堂書目), a contemporary of Gao Song. Yet, Li is not mentioned in Gao's work.

amazement, writes that Wang "was thus able to master all characters!" (以其能通一切字也！). He laments, however, that the oral precepts provided by the divinity slowly degraded as they were transmitted over time, eventually becoming obscured. This sad fact becomes Gao's cue to discuss his own approach to the "eight methods," claiming that he took what had been transmitted and "ignorantly transformed it into seventy-two [stroke] methods" (愚變七十二法).

What follows is his brief but telling description of his creative process behind the seventy-two strokes:

> One by one I made corrections and improvements to obtain the shapes;
> one by one I arranged the shapes to create characters;
> one by one I connected the characters to create songs.
>
> 一一檃栝成形，一一拾形成字，一一聯字成歌。[185]

Gao makes clear that in the creation of his books, he engaged in a process that entailed cumulative steps. Bit by bit, he built on what had been handed down since antiquity. Gao consciously designed the content of his manual with accessibility in mind. His own process of creation is reflected in the systematic order in which information is presented in the manual. Yet, Gao concludes his preface in an apologetic tone, presenting his view of knowledge construction and transmission:

> How foolish it is "to take a bamboo straw to measure the sky and a ladle to measure the ocean," to be "an insect in a jar, a frog at the bottom of the well;" but how can one hope to stride over the boundaries of this world? One can comprehend other categories by following the correspondences between them; it is that simple! My greatest hope at the moment is to aid those who share my aspirations, and I offer this as a means not only to avoid the loss of the ancients' truly great achievements, but also to satisfy the desires within my foolish heart.
> Written in 1554, during the full moon of the first month, by Gao Song.

[185] Gao. 2004 [1727]. *Bifa yuanliu*, 2a.

愧愚！「管窺、蠡勺，難測海天之量」、「甕蟪、井蛙」，奚度穹壤之疆矧？乃相從觸類而已矣。萬希姑以增益意與同志者，共茲不惟不泯古人允臧之善，抑且了愚心中所欲也。嘉靖甲寅歲春望正月。高松書。[186]

Gao acknowledges that there are boundaries that limit one's study, yet claims that through inference, one can learn things that are not directly accessible through mere observation. By the Ming dynasty, claims about the interconnectedness of the different areas of life, or "categories" of matter, had become common in the high strata of society through both Neo-Confucian and Daoist teachings, not to mention the popular belief in the interconnectedness of all beings with the cosmos.[187] Gao, who had trained for the imperial examination yet lived as a recluse, must have been exposed to both Neo-Confucian and Daoist ideals. His view that by learning one thing, one will eventually grasp greater meanings by drawing new connections in the mind is thus not surprising. Yet, Gao employs this rhetoric to discuss the usefulness of practical skills, often disregarded by scholars. He indicates that, as trivial as it may seem, what he is presenting in his manual—knowledge of a practical nature—will eventually lead to greater realizations.

The manual itself is structured according to the ideals presented in the preface. It is conceived as an aid to the student of calligraphy, and suggests the progression of knowledge in its structure. It begins with the eight basic methods, which Gao calls "ancestors" (*zu* 祖), and in the next pages expands them into sets, ranging from four to seventeen variants for each stroke. Gao claims that the total of seventy-two strokes—which also include composite strokes—cover the entire range required for writing common characters.[188] Every variant is given a catchy name referencing the shape of the strokes, mostly describing shapes that can be found in nature (animals and vegetation), objects used in combat and occasionally household objects. For example, for the first stroke, which has fourteen variants, the first four are

[186] Gao. 2004 [1727]. *Bifa yuanliu*, 2b.

[187] Gao uses the phrase *xiangcong shulei* 相從觸類. One example of a similar passage (*xianglei xiangcong* 相類相從) used in the Daoist context is recorded in the Song encyclopedia *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤. Zhang. 1934. *Yunji qiqian*, juan 66, cong 6, 6. The architectonic grasp of things by Zhu Xi is addressed in Berthrong. 2010. "Zhu Xi's Cosmology," 156. Forms of popular divination, such as physiognomy, also relied on the belief of a correlation of men and cosmos.

[188] Gao. 2004 [1727]. *Bifa yuanliu*, 4b. Gao repeats this claim at the end of the composition section. 2004 [1727]. *Bifa yuanliu*, 19b. He describes the eight methods as ancestors in his description of the basic strokes. 2004 [1727]. *Bifa yuanliu*, 1b-2a.

called “curious rock,” “dragon claw,” “almond” and “plum pit” (*guai shi* 怪石, *long zhua* 龍爪, *xing ren* 杏仁, *mei he* 梅核). For the seventh stroke, with only four variants, he chooses the names “bird’s beak,” “frolicking butterflies,” “wooden man” and “coiling dragon” (*niao zhuo* 鳥啄, *xi die* 戲蝶, *mu ren* 木人, pan long 蟠龍). Each stroke is accompanied by a textual explanation laid out to follow the curvature of the stroke’s contour in the illustrations, indicating which movements of the brush are required to create the stroke.

Gao conceived of these exhaustive variants as building blocks. In a rhyme opening the next section, “Diagrams of the Use of the Seventy-two Strokes to Create Characters,” he states that the student should “take these brush methods to compose the characters” (筆法移來結構字), which would, if properly arranged according to the inner frame of each character, result in proper compositions.[189] His diagrams are introduced in the same order as the strokes. He thus begins with the “curious rock,” continues with the “dragon claw,” then the “almond,” and so on, presenting each stroke variant in use within a character. Each character is flanked by rhymes describing its composition. In these rhymes, which vary in length, Gao makes ample use of the vocabulary introduced in the first section of the manual. For the “almond-stroke,” a leftward falling stroke, he provides this description for composing the character *yue* 樂 (music):

> Take “white” (*bai* 白) as master, with “coiling dragons” (幺) as assistants on each flank;
> Centered below “white” comes a hook, with two dots as supporters of rank.
>
> 以白為主，左右蟠龍。
> 正白一勾，輔弼二點。[190]
> [Fig. 2.4]

Although the “almond-stroke,” which is represented by the two dots at the bottom of the character, is featured in the heading, the rhyme also includes the “coiling dragon” stroke to describe the composition. This shows the advantage of giving the different types of strokes and compositions short denominations, since long descriptions of the stroke would hamper the

[189] Gao. 2004 [1727]. *Bifa yuanliu*, 8b.
[190] Gao. 2004 [1727]. *Bifa yuanliu*, 9a.

creation of mnemonic rhymes.[191] Some of Gao's descriptions also emphasize the even distribution of the strokes. For the "falling needle" stroke, a variant of the third stroke from the "eight methods" contained in the character *guai* 乖 (crafty), he writes:

> Insert "thousand" (*qian* 千) into "north" (*bei* 北);
> Equally wide the blanks must be!
> Horizontally, one counts five strokes;
> Vertically, one sees only three.
>
> 北字插上千，空眼一般寬。
> 橫數真顯四，豎數只見三。[192]

Based on the graphical qualities of the character *guai*, Gao breaks it down into other characters that can serve as mnemonic components. His descriptions not only rely on the visual segmentation of characters into sub-parts and sections, but are playful at times. The character *gui* 龜 (turtle), for example, serves as a model for the "dragon-tail-stroke," a variant of the fourth stroke of the "eight methods." In this particular rhyme, the meaning of the character is also brought into play:

> The "turtle's head" and tail make ten times a trace;
> blanks and hollows truly form its scaly carapace.
>
> 龜頭龜尾共十畫，
> 空白空眼真鱗甲。[193]
> [Fig. 2.5]

The rhyme focuses on the layout and distance between the strokes, but makes reference to the meaning of the character both in its use of other turtle-related strokes and in the playful reference to the final carapace pattern that is achieved when the strokes are evenly distributed.

These three examples of rhymes show how Gao made use of the vocabulary he coined to name strokes in his rhymes for composition. Not only did he connect the variations to visual references in nature to aid the student

[191] The next chapter also addresses the use of components in the *Hundred-Rhyme Song Formulas for Cursive Script.*
[192] Gao. 2004 [1727]. *Bifa yuanliu*, 10b.
[193] Gao. 2004 [1727]. *Bifa yuanliu*, 11a.

in the learning process, but he took this vocabulary as the base of the rhymes. As described in the preface, his own creative process involved taking individual elements to develop characters and rhymes. This also became his pedagogical strategy to convey the teachings in his manual. Gao takes cumulative learning as a premise by first introducing interchangeable building blocks and then suggesting how they should be assembled to form the desired "house" with rhymes.

The concept of "building" characters with "parts" is present in one of the six composition modes he describes towards the end of the manual, after a lengthy rhyme that lists characters according to his seventy-two stroke types and a reproduction of theories transmitted from antiquity. Gao calls this mode "building a house." Here, Gao describes the elements of characters in architectural terms, each being set up one after the next. The example he uses is the character *ji* 齎, meaning "to give, hand over". His components, listed on the left, are described according to their structural importance for the "building":

亠	點為房脊	the dot is the ridge of the roof
丫	為中柱	is the central column
刀	為左插梁	is the left secondary beam
仄	為右插梁	is the right secondary beam
丿	為左柱	is the left column
丨	為右柱	is the right column
二	為横梁	is the lintel
目	為正中門戶	is the central door
八	為門傍門枕	is the bearing stones on the sides of the door[194]

In the manual, the explanation of this composition principle is followed by a question from an imaginary interlocutor who wonders: "Not speaking in terms of dots and strokes and instead using 'beams, columns and door' to discuss composition, how can that be?" (不言點畫勾撇名目，而言梁柱門戶者，何也？). Which is followed by Gao's reply: "The reason is that the

[194] It is interesting to note that the order provided here corresponds to the standard order for writing the character today. Gao was certainly not the first to discuss the order of strokes for writing. The "eight methods" were already provided an order and earlier manuals of the Yuan, such as the *Hanlin yaojue* 翰林要訣, also provided the writing steps for several other characters.

ancient carpenter's[195] principle for building houses and that for writing characters is the same" (比及古魯造宇與寫字理一然也) [Fig. 2.6].[196] He makes a similar statement about another composition principle, which he calls "weaving a fabric." Just as in the "building a house" principle, the principle behind women's weaving practices is the same as the principle of writing characters—they are thus interchangeable. One pays attention to the gaps between the strokes and makes sure these are evenly distributed, which is just like paying attention that the silk threads are even when weaving fabric. Gao takes the character for "embroider" (*xiu* 繡) as an example and segments it into strokes and components, yet cautions the student that "one does not speak of them as strokes, but only of warp and weft" (不言筆法，只言經緯).[197]

While Gao's rhymes for composing individual characters and his typology of strokes make reference to natural patterns, his general principles for character composition take this connection further by establishing a connection to cosmic order. His approach of inferring knowledge from other practices, such as building and weaving, and employing it to explain calligraphy is based on his claim that these fields are all related and share the same "principle" (*li* 理). The understanding that crafts shared a common principle or Way (*dao* 道) was common in Daoist and neo-Confucian sources, which Gao was surely familiar with. When Gao equates the composition of characters with the creative processes of other crafts, he goes beyond the social contexts in which these crafts normally took place. For example, weaving was a craft predominantly associated with women and female virtue, but this cultural distinction is disregarded in order to describe a unifying

[195] Reference to Lu Ban 魯班, a carpenter who lived during the 5th century BCE. He later became known as the patron saint of carpenters. The "Cassic of Lu Ban" (*Lu Ban jing* 魯班經), a carpentry manual that claimed to transmit ancient standards of carpentry, including information on how to build houses, circulated during the sixteenth-century. On the history and editions of the manual, see Ruitenbeek. 1996. *Carpentry and Building in Late Imperial China*, chapter 2.

[196] Gao. 2004 [1727]. *Bifa yuanliu*, 32a. It is interesting to note the parallel between his approach to "building" characters on paper with the European tradition of building memory palaces. Although both rely on a constructive principle in architectural terms to aid memorization, it is unlikely that these traditions are related, as discussed in Chapter 1.

[197] Gao. 2004 [1727]. *Bifa yuanliu*, 32b. A connection between the practice of writing texts, cosmic order and the Dao was likely established as early as the Han dynasty. This early connection, however, refers to the composition of text, equating textual passages to threads that must be woven together, not to the composition of individual characters. Zürn. 2020. "The Han *Imaginaire* of Writing as Weaving," 374.

principle.[198] His calligraphy manual thus familiarizes the student with several levels of understanding, providing both a micro perspective through his description of strokes and a macro perspective that embeds the practice of calligraphy within a cosmological order.

Gao's constructive approach to knowledge is also present in his other extant works, including his painting manuals for birds, chrysanthemums and bamboo (discussed in chapter 5). In all of them he follows similar principles: One begins by learning the parts of a bird or flower and then memorizes the rhymes to put a "unit" together, only to create full compositions in the end. The mnemonic rhymes he provides in all his manuals describe practical steps that are to be followed in a sequence. Besides prescriptive instructions, Gao presents a set of "things to avoid," describing common mistakes that the beginner should also remember in order to not commit them. These too are captured within a typology that relies on analogies to nature, in both fields of calligraphy and painting. [199] Yet, these prescriptive instructions or admonishments are not meant to limit the student's creativity. In fact, the pedagogical methods Gao developed in his manuals granted the student a freedom that calligraphers of the period had been yearning for: a cohesive system that gave them the opportunity to learn something practical without requiring numerous models or a master.[200]

Valued Knowledge, Forgotten Author

Gao's manuals catered to the social need for a new pedagogical method based on written and visual standards that could be disseminated through print rather than personal interaction. He made the conscious choice to depart from traditional lineages of calligraphic styles and to adopt systematic and clear descriptions of steps and components. His approach to

[198] A similar attitude of overriding gender roles associated to crafts is presented by Zürn in his study of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子. Zürn. 2020. "The Han *Imaginaire* of Writing as Weaving," 371.

[199] The list of mistakes in his calligraphy treatise was most likely appropriated from earlier sources, yet the descriptions added to the strokes are most likely original, as they include terms from Gao's own typology of strokes. His painting manuals also include discussions of common mistakes.

[200] The scholar Lü Kun 呂坤 (1536-1618), probably a generation younger than Gao Song, and Lü's father both believed that the format in which knowledge was relayed affected the teacher-student relationship. The availability of didactic songs would minimize the importance of this relationship, as children could memorize songs and disseminate them on their own. Lü saw this as a positive turn. Handlin. 1983. *Action in Late Ming Thought*, 149.

practical knowledge, as something that can be visually deconstructed and partitioned into specific actions and procedures, enabled the student to grasp basic concepts through emulation. Gao believed that through inference, the student was able to go beyond the models he was given. The student did not only master the characters before him, but also grasped the principles behind them.

The segmented visual elements and partitioned movements were to be internalized through memorization. The role of the analogies was thus to help the student retain the specific building blocks Gao was presenting by referring to their shape, while the mnemonic formulas aided the student in remembering the suggested steps and principles of composition. Compared to the earlier analogies discussed above, which took a holistic approach and referred to movement to describe to the momentum and tension within a character, Gao's analogies target a systematic typology of very specific modules. Thus, although he makes reference to the cosmic connection of the principles behind all practices and things, including writing and script, the modules themselves are singled out as units. These units rely on the common assumption of cosmic relations solely to obtain their names; in every other way they are conceived as a pedagogical tool—as a closed system. The conscious choice to embed his system in a traditional framework that was widely known made the typology easy to remember. At the same time, Gao's system aimed at specificity, thus successfully combining the desire for clarity and the ancient framework for discussing script.

Such a closed pedagogical system was necessary to codify and transmit practical knowledge in print. The systematization of "what to do" and "what not to do" helped obviate the need for oral instruction from a teacher. Gao, who had experience as a teacher, must have developed his standards by interacting with actual students.[201] The versified form of these standards, especially those that involve steps and the interaction of the modules, ensure that the students are be able to recall them during practice. The verses were infused with what he predicted would be challenging for a beginner. By

[201] One account by Gao included in a Ming encyclopedia that follows one of his texts on painting was requested by a student (*menren* 門人) by the name of Chuai Jing 揣經. Unfortunately, no information about this pupil could be found. This entry is included in the painting section (*huapu men* 畫譜門) of an edition titled *Qie jujia biyong wanshi jubaonang zhshu jinyu ji* 鍥居家必用萬事聚寶囊諸書金玉集, juan 12, 9b. It is included in an encyclopedia that compiles volumes from several editions with different titles. The National Diet Library in Tokyo catalogued the encyclopedia under the title *Longtou yilan xuehai buqiuren* 龍頭一覽學海不求人 and as compiled by Zhu Dingchen 朱鼎臣, [n.d.].

vocalizing or repeating the verses in silence, the student could internalize the principles that would guide his practice and shape his habits. The meticulous planning and structured presentation of the content thus minimized the need for feedback from a teacher. By following Gao's program and becoming conversant with the typology and rhymes through repetition and practice, the student was able to infer the greater principle behind calligraphy. Formats that facilitated memorization, such as the rhymed texts and the division of steps and units, were crucial for the student to habituate himself to the lesson and the standards so he could perceive mistakes on his own and improve his work.

Gao's seventy-two strokes, unlike the sets of strokes discussed earlier, were the product of his individual efforts. Not only the way he presented the content of his manuals, but also the way he presented himself defined his coherent work. The absence of the author's identity from a text was unusual for scholars, yet in all of his works, Gao maintains distance from the content. The prefaces in his manuals provide little information about him and do not emphasize his personal involvement with either painting or calligraphy. Nor do the instructions he provides reference his persona or other named individuals. While he praises the achievements of the ancients, he believes that their oral precepts had not been transmitted in a way that could still guide the students of his time. Every preface contains an apologetic note that acknowledges that the content of his manuals will probably be regarded as "base" by other scholars, yet this does not stop him from publishing them. Instead of focusing on his merits as an author, Gao targets the development of the readers' skill. He presents knowledge as an entity that can stand on its own and does not depend on the character of an individual author.

According to Gao, the practical and "base" content he presented in his manuals had to be acquired first, while concerns with individual expression should come after the development of skill. In a postface discussing the painting of birds, which was requested by one of his students, Gao writes:

> First the talent in one's breast must be broadened to describe the marvels of the character. Why do I insist on this matter?
> Surely they will marvelously converge and it will resemble nature itself.
> It is only for this end that I discuss beaks, claws and feathers—it is the reason why I pull out my ignorant brush and capture these immense vulgarities.

啟胸中之才，寫本然之妙，奚有蹈於斯哉？定然妙合天成而已矣。因謂嘴爪毛羽之端，故伸出愚之筆，鹵拒俗惡也。[202]

This statement, which shows that Gao took a defensive stance to present the pragmatic content of his manuals, firmly vouches for the acquisition of practical skills through training. Gao suggests that practical training eventually becomes habit, and from that point on, limitations to individual expression cease to exist. In the same passage he explains that the issue he is addressing is not intellectual in nature; a person's limited technical skill is often what hampers development. In order to enable the student to engage in such artistic endeavors, his writings were dedicated to providing a firm practical foundation.

Gao Song's manuals were most likely a product of his economic situation and one should not ignore the financial benefits his manuals may well have brought him. Nonetheless, his commitment to presenting the content in a manner that catered to the needs of an early-modern society with fluid social boundaries is emblematic of the period. By presenting standards, segmenting and systematizing knowledge and detaching himself from the content, he was countering the traditional method of teaching calligraphy, which relied on the copying of models. However, this was no longer regarded as a sustainable didactic method. Observing rare works of calligraphy and practicing with a renowned master was beyond the means of most people. Copying model calligraphy in the style of a specific writer was not necessary for those who only wanted their writing to be functional; and even those who aspired to more could only learn so much from such a method. While members of the scholarly elite still portrayed calligraphy as an intellectual activity that was dissociated from other forms of crafts, Gao provided a solid basis for any student—whether they would use calligraphy for daily tasks or to further develop their individual style.

Gao's endeavor to re-conceptualize the pedagogical approach to calligraphy was very successful. The content of his *Origin and Development of Brush Methods* was reproduced in numerous compilations on calligraphy soon after its first publication. The *Central Drafting Office's Secretly Transmitted Character Treasury* (*Neige michuan zifu* 內閣秘傳字府) was one of the first

[202] Zhu. [n.d.] *Qie jujia biyong wanshi jubaonang zhshu jinyu ji*, juan 12, 9b. He quotes a passage from Li Kan's *Zhu pu* 竹譜, in which the Song painter Wen Tong is praised as the only painter who was able to comprehend the heavenly principles of the bamboo and apply them in his painting. The context in which he uses the expression is different here.

compilations to reproduce Gao's manual in full. The earliest extant edition, with a preface dated 1568 and a postface dated 1573, fully acknowledges Gao's pedagogical contribution. The preface praises the quality of the guidelines and of the calligraphy. According to the writer of the preface, Chen Tong 陳桐 (fl. 1568),

> they are well formulated and of superior beauty; words cannot describe their marvels. If one practices them long enough, in due time there will be rewards. Thus, thinking it would be beneficial if they were shared with the people. [Huang Huaixi, the editor,] and his likeminded younger brother Yue thought of earnestly collating and printing them so they would be handed down forever. Shortly thereafter he asked me: "This is the *Central Drafting Office's Secretly Transmitted Character Treasury*. It contains the true norms of calligraphy! I want to make it widespread and share it with the world."
>
> 精到佳麗，妙不容言！習之既久，充然若有獲焉。遂有善與人同之念，與弟鉞商確校梓以永厥傳。既而請言於余曰：此《內閣書府秘傳》，字學之準繩乎！吾蔣推廣與世共之。[203]

The practical uses of Gao's work are also addressed in the postface, written for a second edition of the compilation. Here, the pedagogical role his work was perceived to play is explicitly addressed. Liu Heng 劉亨 (fl. 1573) describes the dire situation for calligraphers of the sixteenth century:

> Editions of model calligraphy for regular script abound. Even if they retain the form [of the characters], none of them address compositional variations and structure [...].[204] [As a result,] beginners suffer from this. Moreover, over the past several years, continuous and repeated recarvings have led to the form of the script becoming faulty and corrupted. This troubled me deeply. I have long harbored the intention to obtain a formula for calligraphy, and to promote the methods of the veritable tradition in order to make it easier for beginners.

[203] Liu and Gao. 1568. *Chongke neige michuan zifu,* preface, 1b. Parts of the text from this edition were corrupted. Missing characters were taken from the 1894 Japanese edition from the National Diet Library, in which the preface is reproduced in full.
[204] The original page is torn and two characters are missing from the text here.

刊楷字法帖甚多。雖有體格但無布變結構 (...) 於學者病焉。况俱行年既久屢以翻刻躰格差殊。余切感焉。意常慕惟得一書訣布真傳之法以便初學耶！[205]

His account goes on to describe his reaction when he encountered the volume:

I read it and thought it was lovely and that it was worthy of passing on. Looking at master Gao Song's method for the compositional variations of the seventy-two models, I saw the superiority in the form of the characters, the skill in the variations and the balance in the structure—it is like a good craftsman with proper standards and correct guidelines—what would he not be able to achieve?

His large characters are useful for writing rhyming couplets [to be hung next to the door]; his medium-sized characters are handy for instructing children; his small characters are suitable for writing letters and documents. These three methods are like a skilled chariot driver holding the reins and maintaining control to stay on course within the tracks. Everywhere one finds rewards in it. For this reason, I beseeched [Huang, the editor,] to print it again and to make it widely available in all four directions. The gentleman and those who are knowledgeable may judge it themselves.

余閱之可愛，可傳。觀其宗高松布變七十二列之法，體式之高，變化之巧，結構之勻，猶之良工端準繩而正規矩，何事不成？夫其大字利聯對，中字便蒙學，小字益文翰。此三法猶之巧御執轡束以循軌轍。在在有獲。余因懇求重梓以廣其傳。四方君子、識者自辨。[206]

Liu's account describes how society can benefit from a work that provides trustworthy calligraphy standards that can replace the corrupted models. Repeatedly copying model calligraphy by ancient masters from rubbings and following instructions by a master, who was often a close family member, had been the prevailing method to learn calligraphy. Yet, as Liu points out, rubbings could provide neither a general reference to composition nor a broad understanding of the principle behind calligraphy. Gao's instructions did.

[205] Liu and Gao. 1568. *Chongke neige michuan zifu,* postface, unpaginated.
[206] Liu and Gao. 1568. *Chongke neige michuan zifu,* postface, unpaginated.

Liu also praises the content of Gao's manual by connecting it to concrete uses of writing, from the production of popular couplets to teaching and everyday use. Liu believes Gao's manual provides the proper standards for all these activities, indicating that it would benefit not only children learning to write, but also experienced readers. This unpretentious take on pedagogical materials stands in stark contrast to the elite discourses that calligraphy should be spontaneous and expressive to mirror the writer's moral character. By consciously dissociating himself from the content of his manual, Gao was most likely intentionally detaching himself from the standards he hoped would stimulate a more general education.

Gao's understanding of practical skills as sharing a single principle is also embraced by Liu. His claim that Gao's calligraphy standards are equal to a craftsman's guidelines or a chariot conductor's skill implies that Gao has gained knowledge of the principle through his practice and encapsulated it. Understanding the principle and drawing on it when responding to various concrete situations had long been a concern in Chinese elite discourse.[207] The standards and principles offered by the manual are praised as responding to needs of society, which could no longer rely solely on antiquated models.

Along with Gao's instructions, the *Secretly Transmitted Character Treasury* included practical instructions on how to create a "fabric-bed" (*bengchuang* 絣床) that could be used by students to practice writing, underscoring the practical orientation of the compilation.[208] It was most likely the practice-oriented approach of Gao's instructions that led to the publication of several reprints of his material. The second edition of the *Secretly Transmitted Character Treasury* was not the last, and many copies were printed over the subsequent centuries, including in Japan. Daily-use encyclopedias of the Wanli period also reproduced sections of Gao's manual,

[207] Responding to situations in accordance to the Way was expressed as a goal of governance in various early texts. See, for example, Zürn. 2020. "The Han *Imaginaire* of Writing as Weaving," 371-372. Song scholars also supported similar views, but placed more emphasis on the role of the heart-mind in grasping the principles. During the Ming dynasty, scholars such as Wang Yangming argued the principle was inherent to the heart-mind, which resonated with the principle of things outside. See, for example, Ivanhoe. 2010. "Lu Xiangshan's Ethical Philosophy," 253; Tien. 2010. "Metaphysics and the Basis of Morality," 302-303.

[208] "One should take pinewood sticks and make a frame, stretching a piece of silk over it. One proceeds to dye the silk with ink until it is blackened and dry, upon which the student can use plain water to practice writing on the blackened silk. As the water dries, it can be reused without wasting paper." Liu and Gao. 1568. *Chongke neige michuan zifu,* last page, unpaginated.

greatly extending its dissemination.[209] Yet, as positive as the reception of Gao's approach to knowledge segmentation and codification was, later editions rarely mentioned Gao Song as the creator of their content. His name was stripped from the headings inside the publications and he was no longer mentioned in prefaces. In fact, by the Qing dynasty, it was no longer known who had authored the "seventy-two variations." By the eighteenth century, the connection to Gao had been erased, and the imperial compilation *Collection of Graphs and Writings of Ancient and Modern Times* (*Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成) tentatively attributed a rubbing of the variations to the calligrapher Jiang Ligang 姜立綱 (fl. 1444-1499).[210]

The man Gao Song was quickly forgotten. Even scholars from his county had no recollection of his life or deeds. His contribution to the broad dissemination of knowledge can be described as an early iteration of a trend that became even more pronounced during the Wanli period. Not only his manual on calligraphy, but also his works on birds, chrysanthemums and bamboo constituted core texts of the daily-use encyclopedias, which began to be printed during the late sixteenth century but continued to be reproduced into the late nineteenth century. The segmentation of strokes he had devised became common knowledge and was further adapted by others. In 1749, for example, one pious son recounts how his mother carved the basic calligraphic strokes out of bamboo so he could practice the composition of characters even before he was able to hold the brush.[211]

Gao Song did little to associate his person and character with the content of his manuals. His focus lay on promoting knowledge, which was indeed remembered for several generations. His principle-based instructions and rhymes remained standards for painting and calligraphy for more than three hundred years, proving that his conception of knowledge was something that could stand on its own. In fact, Gao's efforts foreshadowed the trend of disseminating factual knowledge in plain and rhymed language to broader audiences among erudite followers of Wang Yangming's teachings during the late Ming dynasty.[212]

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[209] Chapter 5 of this study is dedicated to the discussion of Ming encyclopedias.

[210] Chen. 1726. *Gujin tushu jicheng*, lixue, zixue, juan 86, ce 649, 60.

[211] Bauer. 1990. *Das Antlitz Chinas*, 516.

[212] Scholars came to value the transmission of content and of Confucian practices over their choice of words. For example, Lü Kun composed songs that relayed aspects of filial duty and ancestral worship to members of his family. Lü believed that he could mend society by spreading education and took a fact-centered approach to teaching. Handlin. 1983. *Action in Late Ming Thought*, 146-147; 204.

Conclusion

Gao Song authored several practical manuals that made painting and calligraphy knowledge available and accessible through printed media. He withdrew himself from the content of the manual to focus on the presentation of his composition system, which provided the student a micro and macro view of calligraphy. His withdrawal led to him being forgotten twice: first during the late Ming, when the content of his works was reproduced by commercial printers without his name attached to them, and once again during the mid Qing, following the efforts of his fellow countryman Ji Jiong to reconstruct Gao's biography and recover his paintings. However, the innovative and accessible content from his manual took on a life of its own.

Under Gao's brush, the pedagogy of calligraphy underwent a process of systematization and encoding in order to better convey information to student readers. This codification process was marked by the creation of typologies, which frequently referred to objects as well as elements from fauna and flora. The function of such animal and plant references, however, differed greatly from early analogies. His *Origin and Development of Brush Methods* moved from the general description of tension and momentum to a specific system focusing on the pedagogical potential of the analogies. Gao embraced the connection of calligraphic strokes to cosmic patterns to anchor the new typology in a traditional system of knowledge. He went beyond previous attempts to present typologies of strokes by introducing analogies that described guiding principles for composition and created a coherent system. Together with the popular anecdotes he used to introduce the topic, he rendered the practice and content accessible to a broad audience, overhauling elitist conventions. Thus, his adaptation and interpretation of the past addressed the concerns and demands of the period. The valorization of practical pursuits and the search for a common principle behind distinct matters, as proposed by Neo-Confucian thinkers, inspired professionals like Gao Song to reformulate pedagogical approaches to their fields.

The introduction of knowledge units and modules for calligraphy was rooted in Ming society's need for more accessible sources of knowledge, as explained by the editors who reproduced Gao's work. His rhymes, steps and compositional units that referred to natural elements all helped the student to memorize new information and internalize the compositional principles for calligraphy. Formulating knowledge in these schematic and visual terms was necessary to transmit practical instructions through printed media. This

development cannot be dissociated from the social and intellectual context of the Ming dynasty, during which the demand for printed books surged. In his seminal work, Ledderose takes ‘modules’ as the base for his conceptual approach to Chinese writing and material culture. His study provides an interesting framework and compelling arguments but does not address the historical development of the notion of “module” and how segmentation was the result of intellectual efforts of individuals. Both stroke typologies and analogies that fulfill a pedagogical function were the creation of invested teachers such as Gao.

Fig. 2.1 Left: Reproduction of Gao Song's instructions on character composition in the lower layer of the encyclopedia *Complete Book of the Combined Ten Thousand Treasures of the Five Carts* (*Wuche hebing wanbao quanshu* 五車合併萬寶全書) from 1614. Source: Sakai et al. 2001. *Gosha Banpō Zensho,* 277.
Right: Reproduction of Gao Song's seventy-two strokes in the 1597 encyclopedia *Plucked Brocade from the Five Carts* (*Wuche bajin* 五車拔錦). Source: Sakai et al. 1999. *Gosha bakkin*, 463.

Fig. 2.2 First page of Gao Song's calligraphy manual reproduced in the Ming compilation *Central Drafting Office's Secretly Transmitted Character Treasury* (*Neige michuan zifu* 內閣秘傳字府). Source: Liu and Gao. 1568. *Chongke neige michuan zifu*, 19a. Image source: Library of Congress.

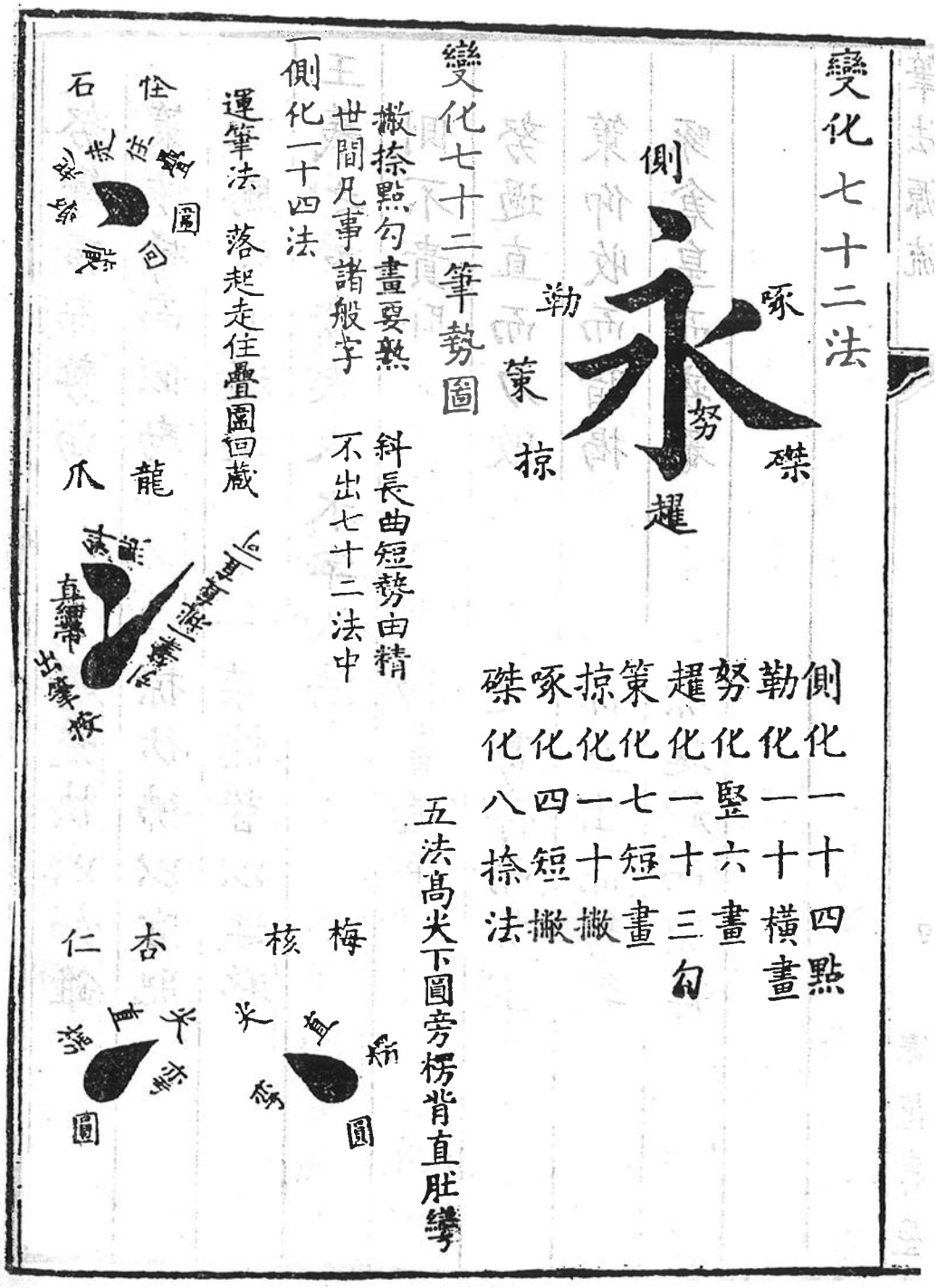

Fig. 2.3 Introduction to Gao Song's seventy-two strokes in the 1727 reproduction of the *Origins of Brush Methods* (*Bifa yuanliu* 筆法源流). Source: Gao. 2004. *Bifa yuanliu*. Reproduced in *Guojiatushuguan cang guji yishu leibian*, vol. 14, edited by Xu Shu, 496.

Fig. 2.4 Character *yue* 樂 from Gao Song's calligraphy manual reproduced in the Ming compilation *Central Drafting Office's Secretly Transmitted Character Treasury* (*Neige michuan zifu* 內閣秘傳字府). A user of the book copied one of the lines of the rhyme. Source: Liu and Gao. 1568. *Chongke neige michuan zifu*, 32a. Image source: Library of Congress.

Fig. 2.5 Character *gui* 龜 from Gao Song's calligraphy manual reproduced in the Ming compilation *Central Drafting Office's Secretly Transmitted Character Treasury* (*Neige michuan zifu* 內閣秘傳字府). Source: Liu and Gao. 1568. *Chongke neige michuan zifu*, 50b. Image source: Library of Congress.

Fig. 2.6 Gao Song's "building a house" method for character composition. Source: Liu and Gao. 1568. *Chongke neige michuan zifu*, 68a. Image source: Library of Congress.