Memorable arts: The mnemonics of painting and calligraphy in Late Imperial China

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Chapter 4

Looking Through a Grid

Anyone who has attempted to practice Chinese calligraphy will be familiar with the "nine palaces" grid (*jiu gong ge* 九宮格). It is not hard to find practice paper with a grid composed of nine squares printed in red, which helps the student to copy characters by drawing attention to their composition and inner balance. The "nine palaces" are regarded as an indispensable pedagogical tool. Its basic function is akin to that of the grid used by European painters when copying or transferring a small sketch or model to a canvas, or to Tang cartographers who relied on grids to reduce the size of maps.[288] The outlines of the grid are taken as reference to locate the elements in the model and transfer them accordingly to the new surface. A grid segments anything seen through it into visual units. It allows the painter "to halt that movement of interpretation" of forms, and "instead of a picture of a house, he will see squares filled with white and grey paint."[289] In a similar fashion, the "nine palaces" flattens what is seen through it, and at the same time invites the user to place any model within its boundaries. One can then commit the visual content framed within each segment and the relation of the elements to the internal borders to memory. The flexibility of this method allowed scholars from different periods to employ it for different purposes. In this chapter, the different approaches and understandings of the "nine palaces" will be discussed in connection to the esthetic and intellectual trends of each period. The first section is devoted to the developments during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, a period of dissemination, followed by a section on the changes and innovative approaches of Qing scholars, whose new hopes for the field of calligraphy and even political agendas guided their use of the grid.[290]

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[288] While a grid-like layout can be seen in early maps, these were not necessarily used as a visual aid for scaling maps in relation to the perceived world. Instead, the lines were understood as "warp and weft," used to organize space according to cosmological principles. On the layout of early maps and the nine palaces, see Dorofeeva-Lichtmann. 2007. "Mapless Mapping." During the Han dynasty, Chinese cartographers used measures to indicate distances on maps, yet the first known map to depict a grid is the *Yuji tu* 禹跡圖 (Map of the tracks of Yu), carved on a stele in 1136. On the use of the grid as a cartographic tool, see Yee. 1994. "Taking the World's Measure," 124-126.

[289] Gombrich. 1972. *Art and Illusion,* 248.

[290] The use of grids to draw scaled maps became common during the late Qing, as can be gleaned from several local gazetteers that also provide instructions on how to produce

The *Classic of Calligraphy* (*Shujing* 書經) is the earliest known source to mention the "nine palaces" as a tool to evaluate and study model calligraphy. The *Classic of Calligraphy,* short for *The Amended Classic of Calligraphy* (*Shujing buyi* 書經補遺), was compiled in 1351 by the Yuan scholar Lü Zongjie 吕宗傑. However, Lü does not claim to be the creator of the method. According to the preface, his compilation comprises two manuscripts from the mid-fourteenth century that Lü corrected, appending his own comments. One of these manuscripts, an essay titled *The Original Representation of Calligraphy Models* (*Fashu benxiang* 法書本象), was penned by Chen Yizeng 陳繹曾 (style Bofu 伯敷, ca. 1286-1351), a literary theorist and instructor at the School for the Sons of the State. According to Lü's preface, he first met Chen in 1346 and was instantly inspired by his calligraphic skill. Lü obtained Chen's teachings on calligraphy and included the text in his compilation. His compilation thus points to Chen as the earliest scholar to explain the use of the "nine palaces" in writing.

Chen's essay is divided into twelve sections, each devoted to a different type of script, from large seal script to flying white. The sections, despite varying greatly in length, address the origin of the different scripts and discuss the different principles of character composition, also providing some technical pointers to master them. The "nine palaces" are introduced in the section devoted to the small regular script (*xiaokai* 小楷) in order to explain the use of smaller or thinner strokes for characters of slightly larger proportions. The section ends with advice to the student:

> First, use a tablet made of fish head-bone[291] and adhere to the eight methods to copy the model. Then, use fine writing paper, and according to the nine palaces, copy the model. When your skill has been refined, variations will naturally follow.

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scaled maps. This use, however, will not be addressed here, as it is not related to the development of the "nine palaces grid."

[291] Another Yuan scholar, Kong Qi 孔齊, comments on the use of epistolary tablets that had commonly been used by earlier scholars to protect and seal letters when sending them to friends. He describes them as square tablets, with each side measuring about 25cm in length, which could be made out of ivory, red lacquer, or fish head-bone. The last, he adds, were especially good for copying model calligraphy, which could be related to the smoothness and slight transparency of the material. The tablets might have been used to weigh down the paper and serve as a straightedge for the copyist. Kong. [n.d.] *Jingzhai zhi zhengzhi ji*, juan 2, Yushen zuojian entry, unpaginated.

先用魷版依八法模搨，次用楮紙准九宮臨倣。功夫精熟，變化自由矣。[292]

This final comment confirms that in the earliest sources in which the "nine palaces" method is mentioned, it was not only used for balancing the blank spaces within a character, but was also conceived as a visual aid for copying models.

Lü's attribution of the text to Chen provides the context to ascertain Chen Yizeng's authorship of a second text in which the "nine palaces" method is described in even more detail. The *Essential Formula of the Hanlin Academy* (*Hanlin yaojue* 翰林要訣), provides particularly clear instructions on how to employ the "nine palaces" grid. It began to circulate broadly in print during the Ming dynasty, with the earliest surviving printed edition published in 1603 as part of Hu Wenhuan's[293] collectanea *Famous Books of the Hundred Schools* (*Baijia mingshu* 百家名書, also known under the alternative title *Gezhi congshu* 格致叢書). There is overwhelming evidence that the *Essential Formula of the Hanlin Academy* was authored by Chen. In the preface of *The Original Principle of Calligraphy Models,* included in Lü's compilation, Chen states that he often wrote and distributed notes to aid his students, claiming that one of his manuscripts of an "Essential Formula for Calligraphy Models" (*Fashu yaojue* 法書要訣), circulated among the people. The preface lists a set of 12 categories related to "calligraphy models." These correspond to the sections in the *Essential Formula of the Hanlin Academy* but have no connection to the *Original Principle*, which was limited to the description of the twelve types of script. This is a clear indication that Chen regarded the two works as complementary.

A third Yuan text that also points to Chen as the first scholar to record and transmit the "nine palaces," Sheng Ximing's 盛熙明 (fl. 1333-1361) *Study of Calligraphy Models* (*Fashu kao* 法書考), allows us to narrow down the date by which Chen had written his instructions to before 1334, the date of the work's preface. Sheng included parts of Chen's explanation verbatim in his section on composition (*buzhi* 佈置), which includes a small graph of the grid [Fig. 4.1]. The instructions are not directly attributed to Chen, but he is mentioned in other sections of Sheng's text. Thus, Chen seems to have been

[292] Lü. 1926. *Shujing buyi*, juan 2, 4b-5a.
[293] Hu is discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

the center from which the "nine palaces" method began to spread in the Zhejiang area during the second half of the Yuan dynasty.

Only a few decades later, Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (fl. 1360-1368) also mentions the *Essential Formula of the Hanlin Academy* in his *Essentials of a History of Calligraphy* (*Shushi huiyao* 書史會要); and in a note, the Ming painter and calligrapher Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639) recounts how, in 1595, he found a manuscript copy of the book at a marketplace and decided to rescue it from that deplorable environment, just a few years before the earliest known publication of Chen Yizeng's work.[294] Chen Yizeng first transmitted the "nine palaces" method to his students, orally and as short notes. They circulated in the form of manuscripts, and were most likely only disseminated in print during the Ming.

In the 1603 edition, Chen's instructions for the "nine palaces," described under the section titled "Square Method"[295] (*Fang fa* 方法), are very straightforward:

> The nine palaces: the dots and strokes of the eight sides must all bow to the center.
>
> Structural composition: Regardless of whether a character has many or few strokes, whether its composition is dense or loose: each has inner divisions. Make a nine by nine, 81-squared grid and space the lines uniformly. First, take the models of Zhong [You], Wang [Xizhi], Yu [Shinan] and Yan [Zhengqing] and use a seal with the grid pattern and stamp it in red on them. When this is done, look at the segments of the characters and strokes in the model. One by one, copy these, paying close attention to the variations of curvature and straightness and to the original intention. Thus, you will not stray by the slightest bit. The styles of the four calligraphers must be mastered, and then you can broaden your study to various masters. If the characters in the model are large, use a small stamp to shrink each one according to the segments [i.e. proportionally]. If the characters on the model are small, use a large stamp to enlarge them according to the segments. Thus, even if you copy characters from the "Scripture of the Yellow Court" or the "On General Yue Yi" [famous model calligraphy by Wang Xizhi], the characters can also be enlarged to cover a square *zhang* [ca. 3.2 m^2]

[294] Chen. 1606. *Nigu lu*, juan 2, 17b.

[295] In the preface to the *The Original Principle of Calligraphy Models*, the section is listed only as "square" *fang* 方, following a section titled "round" *yuan* 圓. In the text both section titles indicate that a method is being explained, with the added character fa 法.

each!

九宮：八面點畫，皆拱中心。

結構：隨字點畫多少疏密，各有停分，作九九八十一分，界畫均布之。先於鍾、王、虞、顏法帖上，以朱界畫印，印訖，視帖中字畫分數一一臨擬，仍欲察其屈伸變換本意，秋毫勿使差失。四家字體既熟，方可旁及諸家。法帖字大，以小印分數蹙之。法帖字小，以大印分數展之。雖以《黃庭》、《樂毅》展為方丈可也。[296]

Chen is quite particular about the steps to be taken when copying model calligraphy from rubbings: the student should create a stamp with a fine grid with 81 sections and use this to partition every character on the rubbing. The masters mentioned in text were all known for their regular script, which was suitable for applying the grid method due to their square shape. Chen emphasizes that the student must pay attention to each character individually, each dot and each stroke, in order to copy and memorize the character according to the inner balance of blank and filled areas. After discussing the use of the grid for regular script, he proposes a second method:

Another method is to take the red-line-gridded seal and print it on paper, or use a block of Yew wood and apply lacquer on it [to create the grid].[297] One takes Xu Shen's *Explanation of Graphs and Analysis of Characters* as a template and proceeds to copy each, one by one, partitioning them according to the method. There is no doubt this will make it much simpler to become proficient. [Your characters will possess] outer beauty and inner strength, and each and every one will naturally be marvelous.

又以朱界畫印，印紙，或棐板漆之，取許慎《說文》偏傍字樣，一一依法區處，務要簡易精熟，外妍美而內遒健，各各自佳矣。[298]

[296] Chen and Hu. 1603. *Hanlin yaojue*, 9a-9b.

[297] Asian Yew (*fei* 棐) yields a very light-colored wood. Although it is not clear how the woodblock was to be used, it does not seem to be intended for printing, as no carving is mentioned. Most likely, the woodblock was placed under the thin paper. From the context, it is possible to imagine that the lacquer applied to the wood would contrast with the light color of the wood and thus make the grid visible through the paper to aid the copying of models. If the woodblock were intended for printing, there would be no point in specifying the type of wood, nor in selecting one that differs from the types regularly used for printing. For types of wood used for printing, see Needham et al. 1993. *Science and Civilisation in China*, 196.

[298] Chen and Hu. 1603. *Hanlin yaojue*, 9b.

The “nine palaces” is thus introduced as a tool to help students emulate compositions. A graph of the nine palaces and another of a grid with 36 divisions are included later in the manual [Fig. 4.2]. The appearance of the grid with 81 squares for a stamping tool is provided in later publications that reproduce Chen’s instructions [Fig. 4.3].

In the *Explanation of Graphs and Analysis of Characters* (*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字), the Han scholar Xu Shen 許慎 (f. 58-147) sought to preserve the appearance of characters in small seal script as they had been written. In his text, it is unlikely that Chen is referring to a specific rubbing or model, but instead to works that reproduced the 540 character components from the *Explanation of Graphs* on steles. One such stele, still extant today, is the “Seal Script Stele of the List of Character Components and Origins” (*Zhuanshu mulu pianpang ziyuan bei* 篆書目錄偏旁字源碑), dated 999. It was carved in the calligraphy of the Northern Song Buddhist monk Mengying 夢英 (fl. 964-999), who excelled at seal script. This stele was only one of Mengying’s works produced to guarantee the transmission of small seal script to later generations.[299] One other model that Chen might have had in mind is Guo Zhongnu’s 郭忠恕 (d. 977) *Origin of Characters of the Explanation of Graphs in Small Characters* (*Xiaozi Shuowen ziyuan* 小字說文字源), which is no longer extant but was recorded during the Song.[300] The extant rubbing illustrates that Mengying’s seal script was regular and even and fit within a rectangular grid, making it suitable for Chen’s “nine palaces” method. Chen’s suggestion of this source as copying material would not have struck his contemporaries as unusual, since by the time he wrote his treatise, the “return to antiquity” (*fugu* 復古) movement had already inspired many to follow the calligraphic tradition of the Tang scholar Li Yangbing 李陽冰 (fl. 760-765) when studying seal script. Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254-1322) and his followers, for example, preferred the neat and precise style of more recent calligraphers over ancient models, and Mengying’s small seal script fit within Li’s tradition.[301] It is thus noteworthy that Chen saw no limitations to the use of the grid for writing regular script. The “nine palaces” could potentially be used to partition any type of model writing that fit into a square, including the archaic seal script.

This inclusive use of the grid to copy any model was welcomed during

[299] His most famous work, carved in 965, rendered the *Thousand Character Essay* in small seal script. See Ho. 1996. “The Revival of Calligraphy in the Early Northern Sung,” 68-70.
[300] Ouyang. 1782. *Jigu lu*, juan 10, 151a-151b.
[301] Fu. 1977. *Traces of the Brush*, 45-46.

the Ming dynasty, when seal script experienced a revival and rapidly became popular for titles of printed books and even for prefaces, mostly due to its esthetic appeal as an unusual and marvelous (*qi* 奇) script. Those who devoted themselves to the study of different types of calligraphy still relied on the dominant and widespread practice of copying rubbings. Although anonymous works offering alternative educational approaches, such as the *Hundred-Rhyme Song* discussed in the previous chapter, circulated widely, copying rubbings continued to be one of the main practices that helped students memorize the composition of characters in different styles. However, even though the method of the "nine palaces" was regarded as useful for copying and Ming artists were aware of it, it is mentioned only rarely in texts of the period. This lack of attribution can be explained by the goal Ming calligraphers hoped to reach when copying rubbings. Instead of attempting to recreate the model calligraphy and ancient scripts, they hoped to grasp their spirit and develop an individual style out of it. As an essentially mechanical and precision-oriented learning method, the "nine palaces" did not receive widespread attention in the individualistic discourse of the elite.

The Ming scholar Zhao Yiguang[302] 趙宧光 (1559–1625), who held the opinion that texts such as the *Hundred-Rhyme Song* were rather unrefined but nonetheless useful,[303] still preferred the practice of copying rubbings as a method of instruction. In his *Cold Mountain's Broom Talk*[304] (*Hanshan zhoutan* 寒山帚談) he explains:

> When you start copying model calligraphy, there will be resemblance to the model. You must not be constrained by the model, since this will make it hard to succeed and you will quickly tire. You should copy it several times, without [succeeding to] achieve formal

[302] One character used for the author's name varies. He is also known as Zhao Huanguang 趙宧光, and has been identified this way in previous scholarship, such as in Clunas. 2004. *Superfluous Things*, 176. See also Fu and Fu. 1977. *Traces of the Brush*, 51. However, according to the signature on his own work and reprinted editions of his works, his name used the character *yi*.

[303] Zhao. [17th c.] *Hanshan zhoutan,* fu lu, 16a. In his manual, Zhao reproduces the categorization of pedagogical texts for writing provided earlier by Xu. 1995. *Xushi yimou size*, 29b.

[304] The broom in the title is a reference to the anecdote in which Cai Yong (132-192) created the flying-white script from clerical or *bafen* script after observing men refurbishing the gate of the city and using their broom-like brushes for applying plaster to write large characters on it. The anecdote is contained in the *Shuduan* 書斷, under the heading "Flying White." The treatise has been translated into French. See Escande. 2010. *Traités chinois de peinture et de calligraphie, Vol. 2.*

likeness, and then you must closely inspect the ancient model. Seek the strengths in its writing and seek the weaknesses in your own. Compare the two to see where they do not correspond. Then, according to a stroke in the model, you add one stroke; follow the curve and imitate the straight; copy meticulously. You will not cease if a single character lacks resemblance; you will not cease if a single stroke lacks resemblance. By repeating this procedure several times, each and every character will be imprinted in your memory, not a stroke will be forgotten. Thus, you will reach a point at which you do not have to think about it and no longer make mistakes. Then you will no longer be conscious of your own brush, and pleasing and wonderful characters will naturally appear before your eyes.

臨仿法書，始而彷彿，不必拘泥，拘則難成而易倦。數臨不得形似，然後細閱古帖，求彼好處，求我惡處，參照相左在於何所，逐筆逐畫，依曲效直，詳細描寫，一字不似不已，一筆不似不已。如是數過，字字記憶，筆筆不忘，至不用意亦不誤時，然後著念自己筆端，自有一得意佳字在我眼中矣。[305]

Although the practice of copying as described by Zhao includes striving for likeness as the second step in the learning process, he cautions his reader not to become a slave to the model. The “nine palaces” could have been employed at this stage, but likeness was not one of the main concerns highlighted in Zhao’s text. Instead, the student should internalize the models through repetition and later be free to innovate by seeking to include qualities from other scripts in different types.

The artistry of transformation is marvelous. It does not matter if one takes large characters to make small ones, small characters to make large ones; if one takes the style of Ouyang Xun and makes it into Yu Shinan’s, or takes Yu Shinan’s and turns it into Ouyang’s; if one takes the Han and Wei dynasty style and makes it into Jin and Tang styles, or takes the style of the Jin and Tang and turns it into the Han or Wei style. If this wonderful idea is expanded, one can take seal and clerical script and use it to make regular and cursive script, take regular and cursive and make seal and clerical. One can go as far to take calligraphy to make painting.

[305] Zhao. [17th c.] *Hanshan zhoutan*, juan shang, 51a.

化工之妙，無論取大作小，取小作大；亦無論取歐作虞，取虞作歐，即漢、魏可以作晉、唐，晉、唐可以作漢、魏。推此微言，取篆、隸作真、草，取真、草作篆、隸，以至取文字作繪畫。[306]

According to Zhao, copying attentively was a crucial part of studying, but the essential goal of this exercise was to internalize a variety of styles so these could serve as inspiration and be harmonized in the mind to find the essence of writing. Zhao believed one should never pluck out one individual style or model from the flow of changes that had taken place in the development of calligraphy and narrow one's view by striving to imitate only a single model. To Zhao, this amounted to becoming a slave to the model and thus muddling the true method of calligraphy. Only a broad study of sources would help one on the path to become a master.

Zhao's work stands out for his distinction among proper models for each different type of script: those seeking to learn seal script should base their studies on bronzes and stone drums, while those aiming to learn clerical script should use Han dynasty steles as models, and so forth. Yet, as can be inferred from his statement above, he did not take a purist approach to these different styles. The goal behind learning scripts from different periods and styles was to find one's own method that combined all positive qualities from the pool of transmitted calligraphy, a syncretic approach that resembled the approach to painting proposed by his contemporary Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636).[307] Zhao encouraged the calligrapher to draw on essential features of different types of script and incorporate them into one's own. Zhao also believed that a true calligrapher should know the origin of the different styles in order to write them properly.

If regular script is not imbued with qualities of small and large seal script, if running and cursive script do not follow early cursive [*zhangcao* 章草] and *bafen* [八分, derived from clerical script], it is like a person who eats grain and is clothed in silk but does not know that these come from silkworm cocoons and crop seedlings. Every time I encountered an odd hook, a strangely pulled stroke or a graph that struck me as unusual in the famous models of the Jin and Tang dynasties, I always suspected they were mistakes. Then I looked at ancient written

[306] Zhao. [17th c.] *Hanshan zhoutan*, juan xia, 29b-30a.
[307] Fong. 1992. "Tung Ch'i-ch'ang and Artistic Renewal."

traces and suddenly I found clarity. Looking back, all my assumptions turned into illusions.

真書不師篆、古，行草不師章、分，如人食粟衣絲，而不知蠶繭禾苗所出也。晉唐名帖，每有奇鉤怪引、轉盼非常之文，未始不疑其闕誤。及觀古跡，宛然恍遇，回視前日，都成夢幻。[308]

Zhao was one of the few calligraphers of the Ming to specialize in seal script.[309] He developed his own style, called "cursive seal," which combined flying white with seal script and distinguished his calligraphy as a style liberated from previous models.[310] His treatise, directed at students, emphasizes the search for the origin of script types, reflecting one of the reactions to the lack of trust in transmitted texts and calligraphy models (*tie* 帖). This was, as seen in the previous two chapters, also one of the motivations for scholars to seek new calligraphic standards. The waning authority of the calligraphy canon that established Wang Xizhi's style as normative was accompanied by a growing desire to seek new and more reliable models. Yet, as concern grew about the accuracy and reliability of the calligraphy models that had been repeatedly recut and carved, scholars not only turned to the past, but also began to seek inspiration and new standards in the work of contemporaries.

Albums featuring rubbings of model calligraphy published during the Ming dynasty began to shift their focus from the classical models of the Jin dynasty to model calligraphy by calligraphers of the time. This trend began with the *Antique Model Calligraphy Assembled in the Hall for Treasuring Worthies* (*Baoxiantang jigu fatie* 寶賢堂集古法帖), published by the King Jing of Jin (Zhu Qiyuan 朱奇源, 1450-1501) in 1489, followed by the *Letters of the Halting Cloud Hall* (*Tingyunguan tie* 停雲館帖) by Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559), published by his sons in 1560.[311] By the late Ming, the inclusion of contemporary calligraphy had become the rule for most collections of rubbings, with some publications being solely devoted to the reproduction of

[308] Zhao. [17th c.] *Hanshan zhoutan*, juan shang, 3b.

[309] The most renowned calligrapher to have perfected his seal script during the mid Ming dynasty was Wen Zhengming. After Wen, many scholars followed suit and specialized in it.

[310] Fu. 1977. *Traces of the Brush*, 52. This volume by Fu Shen also includes an image of Zhao's cursive seal script.

[311] Ng. 2013. "Challenging the Calligraphy Canon: The Reception of Rubbing Collections in Ming China," 94. For a detailed account of the publication of the *Baoxiantang* models, see Clunas. 2013. *Screen of Kings*, chapter 3.

traces by Ming calligraphers. The practice of including works by living contemporaries was perceived as an innovative quality even during the Ming, and was met by scholars with both enthusiasm and disdain.[312]

The painting theorist Dong Qichang is the earliest known example of a scholar who decided to collect his own calligraphy and have it published in the form of rubbing collections during his lifetime.[313] Dong supervised the publication of several albums, which, most likely due to his fame, received great attention from the public. One striking feature of several of his collections, such as the *Model Calligraphy from the Hall of the Frolicking Goose* (*Xihongtang fatie* 戲鴻堂法帖, 1603) in which he copied old texts in his own hand, was that he included numerous colophons and comments among the calligraphy models intended/designed to be carved in stone together with the model calligraphy.[314] This way of flaunting personal expertise and connoisseurship within the text gained vast popularity among Ming-era publishers.

One of the comments from the *Hall of the Frolicking Goose*, published by Dong in 1603, discusses the "nine palaces" grid as a tool employed by "calligraphers" (*shujia* 書家) in general, indicating that by the mid Ming, the method was well known. Dong's comment attests to the fact that the method was received positively even before it was made accessible through print.[315] Still, Dong raises points that resemble Zhao's view on learning and innovating:

> Calligraphers, when dividing rows and arranging blank spaces, call this the "nine palaces." Someone from the Yuan dynasty wrote in the *Classic of Calligraphy* that the '"Scripture of the Yellow Court" has

[312] Ng mentions the *Baohanzhai guochao shufa* 寶翰齋國朝書法, from 1569, and the *Jinling mingxian tie* 金陵名賢帖, dated 1615, as examples of collections that solely reproduced works by Ming calligraphers. She points out that not all members of the elite accepted these publications as superior to the transmitted canon. 2013. "Challenging the Calligraphy Canon: The Reception of Rubbing Collections in Ming China," 96-98.

[313] Ng. 2013. "Challenging the Calligraphy Canon: The Reception of Rubbing Collections in Ming China," 100.

[314] Adding hand-written inscriptions, comments and notes to rubbings was already standard practice during the Song dynasty. The inclusion of additional comments and even postfaces as carved text on the stones or woodblocks prepared to make the rubbings, however, was unusual. One rare example is the *Album of Authentic Calligraphy and Lü Gong Calligraphy by Huai Su* (*Huai Su shu cangzhen, lügong ertie ce* 懷素書藏真、律公二帖冊), dated to the Song dynasty. Depicted in Shi. 2008. *Mingtie shanben*, entry 24: 83-86.

[315] Dong frequently commented on technical qualities such as method and composition when discussing earlier models. Some of his comments have been translated in Xu. 1992. "Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's Calligraphy," 105.

"nine palaces" that measure six *fen* (about 1,9cm); the "Cao E Stele" has "nine places" of four *fen* (about 1,2cm). Today, when I look at the *Thousand Character Essay* by Ouyang Xun, [I see that he] really had the complete characters in his breast [before beginning to write]. It is like the construction of the Linyun terrace: bit by bit, everything is composed after evaluating and measuring. Mi Fu praised his regular script as being equal to Wang Xizhi's; that statement can be vouched for. This version has been transmitted as part of the family collection of Yang Buzhi,[316] so it was carved in its entirety. If one desires to study calligraphy, one must first establish the inner structure of the characters, and then one can be unbridled and bold, changing what is appropriate.

書家以分行佈白，謂之九宮。元人作《書經》云：《黃庭》有六分九宮；《曹娥》有四分九宮。今觀信本千文，真有完字具於胸中。若構凌雲台，一一皆衡劑而成者。米南宮評其真書到內史，信矣。此本傳為信本真跡(楊補之家藏)，勒其全文。欲學書先定間架，然後縱橫跌蕩，惟變所適耳。[317]
[Fig. 4.4]

In his comment on Ouyang Xun's *Thousand Character Essay* in regular script, Dong praises the meticulous and paced composition of the characters, stressing that Quyang had clearly internalized the composition of each single character before setting brush to paper. His statement, as well as the examples used in it, concern practices for learning and memorizing the composition of characters in regular script. His advice to first carefully study models and then give creativity free reign echoes the beliefs of his contemporary Zhao Yiguang. While Zhao does not mention the "nine palaces" in his treatise, Dong Qichang emphasizes its role as a method that underlies the internalization of harmonic compositions. Although Dong's comment glosses over the relation drawn between stroke thickness and character size in the source he quotes, the *Classic of Calligraphy*, he claims the "nine palaces" helps calligraphers balance the gaps between characters and harmonize the blank spaces within each character. Dong, like his contemporary Zhao, was convinced that relying on memory was necessary to bring forth innovation On

[316] Yang Buzhi (1097-1169) was hailed as a master of the ink plum, also mentioned in the next chapter.
[317] Dong. 1603. *Xihongtang fashu*, folio 4, after *Qianziwen*, unpaginated. Another version of this statement that is taken from a printed edition of Dong's comments on painting states that "it is Ouyang's genuine work" instead of attributing it to Yang's collection. Dong. 1782. *Huachanshi suibi*. juan 1, 33b-40a.

another occasion he drew a poetical comparison of writing freely from memory to playing a zither without strings—a practice which could bring forth the true expression of the stirrings of one's heart.[318]

The broad circulation of Chen's method was most likely indebted to its adaptability. While Chen himself suggested it be used for learning to copy both regular and seal script meticulously, Ming scholars such as Dong Qichang, who were known for striving to achieve "rawness" in their work and often made free copies of calligraphy models, also embraced the use of the grid as a creative aid. Even those who no longer saw copying mainly as a means to uphold a tradition, but as a vehicle for innovation and invention, did not discard the "nine palaces."[319] Thus, it should come as no surprise that a method as flexible as the "nine palaces" was received with new enthusiasm during the mid Qing dynasty by "metal and stone" (*jinshi* 金石) scholars, who had no qualms about repurposing the grid.

The New "Nine Palaces" Grid

Calligraphers of the Ming continued to employ the "nine palaces" to emulate past models, even though this played a less central role in shaping their practice due to the emphasis on the esthetic ideals of rawness and strangeness. The method continued to be transmitted, yet no Ming scholar made substantial claims about its function or suggested innovative uses. During the second half of the Qing, however, the use and perceived function of the grid changed, as two paths developed from the previous method. While both paths were shaped by epigraphic scholarship, one relied on the perpetuation of family teachings and affirmed the traditional use of the nine palaces for copying model calligraphy, while the second broke away from the traditional models of the great Jin masters to introduce innovation in the field of calligraphy.

The connection between the study of inscriptions on "metal and stone" (bronzes and steles) and Ming dynasty loyalists, who refused to serve the new and foreign ruling house of the Qing, has been expertly drawn by Bai Qianshen in his study of Fu Shan's calligraphy. According to Bai, many loyalists went on trips to visit ancient steles to mourn fallen dynasties, a practice that was

[318] Xu. 1992. "Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's Calligraphy," 118. The zither is a reference to Tao Yuanming, who owned a stringless zither and saw a transcendental quality in it, believing it to best express his spiritual depth.
[319] On Dong's views on copying, see Bai. 2003. *Fu Shan's World*, 35.

directly connected to their own feelings of loss. Scholars turned to ancient writings for moral reasons, hoping to recover the roots of their own culture.[320] But although loyalists were often described as recluses, their survival outside of the bureaucratic system relied on patronage by those who served the Qing government. This led to the development of informal social networks and reliance on varied contacts as sources of information.[321] Empirical research, which began to develop as an intellectual trend in the late Ming, became a fully blown movement during the mid Qing, especially in the Qianlong 乾隆 (1735-1796) and Jiaqing 嘉慶 (1796-1820) reigns.[322] Qing evidential scholarship (*kaozheng xue* 考證學) changed the way calligraphy was created and studied. Through evidential scholarship, calligraphers took one more step toward discarding the tradition of Wang Xizhi and his son, shifting attention to more reliable materials, such as recently discovered steles and inscriptions on cliff façades. During the Qianlong reign, several scholars took the initiative to survey various regions to gather information from steles, later publishing their findings. Among these were, for example, Qian Daxin 錢大昕(1728-1804), Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733-1818), Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1730-1797) and Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764-1849).[323] It was in this context of rediscovery of ancient inscriptions that the grid made its comeback as a pedagogical tool.

The official Jiang Heng 蔣衡 (1672-1743), who specialized in seal script, was one of the first Qing scholars of ancient inscriptions to comment on the "nine palaces." Jiang Heng and his descendants shaped the first path that marked the development of the "nine palaces" during the Qing. They traced the "nine palaces" method back to the Tang dynasty and advised the student to observe the rubbings from this period diligently. Their emphasis on the Tang was tied to the acknowledgement that this was the period when rules for regular script became fully developed. The Jiangs also sought to introduce such regularity to seal script, firmly connecting the use of the grid to its study. The consecutive innovations introduced to the method by members of the

[320] Bai. 2003. *Fu Shan's World,* 179.

[321] Polachek traces the late Qing practice of forming loose study groups or associations to the late Ming. 1992. *The Inner Opium War*, 26. Brown provides an example of how late Qing scholars suggested that the master should be replaced by friends and mentors. 2011. *Pastimes*, 37-38.

[322] Stumm. 2020. "Conceptualizing Authorship in Late Imperial Chinese Philology."

[323] Shimonaka addresses such publications. Ruan Yuan, for example, published a volume of inscriptions from Shandong province, titled *Shanzuo jinshi zhi* 山左金石志. Shimonaka. 1961. *Shodō zenshū*, 16.

Jiang family led to an increasingly methodical use of the grid that addressed contemporary needs and perpetuated the family's learning.

Jiang Heng's seal script style had been approved by the Qianlong court, which granted him an appointment to write the *Thirteen Classics.* His calligraphy was later carved on steles erected in the Imperial Academy in 1791.[324] Prior to his comments on the "nine palaces," it seems only reproductions of Chen Yizeng's book had been circulating.[325] To Jiang, the creation of the "nine palaces" was directly tied to calligraphic practices of the Tang dynasty. He followed the arguments of earlier scholars in claiming that the Tang style was always guided by rules and thus consistently regular and tidy. His comments on the study of calligraphy betray his indebtedness to earlier theoreticians, such as Zhao Yiguang, discussed in the beginning of this chapter. Like Zhao, Jiang Heng believed it was necessary to study first and then innovate, and also to look to the past to understand later styles of calligraphy.

> When it comes to copying models, one must let the brush be guided by one's own intention. Examine the unique differences [in the calligraphy] of the people from the past, and strive for what they have in common. It is like when several famous calligraphers each copy the "Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Gathering" [by Wang Xizhi]—none of the renderings will be alike. What distinguishes them is where the innate tendencies of the calligraphers came to fruition, while what they share is what has been transmitted from Wang Xizhi. If one uses this approach in this pursuit, I say that is half the battle won. Also, when writing regular script, use the intention of running or cursive script; when writing running or cursive script, use the method of regular script.
>
> 臨帖須運以我意，參昔人之各異，以求其同，如諸名家各臨《蘭亭》，絶無同者，其異處各由天性，其同處則傳自右軍。以此求之，思過半矣。又正書用行草意，行草用正書法。[326]

Jiang objected to copying models too closely, and like scholars of the

[324] Hummel. 1943. *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing period*, 199.

[325] Reproduced, for example, in Feng Wu 馮武 (1627-ca. 1707) *Shufa zhengchuan* 書法正傳. Feng claims Chen's *Hanlin yaojue* and Li Puguang's "eight methods" (i.e. *Xue'an ziyao*), mentioned in chapter 2, were among the best sources available for studying calligraphy and were thus reproduced in his collection of standard calligraphy. [1750?] *Shufa zhengchuan,* fan lie, 1a.

[326] Chen. 1874. *Yongjianzhai biji*, juan 5, 3a-3b.

early Qing, also condemned unbridled and ahistorical innovation, a flaw often perceived in works from the Ming dynasty. The early Qing critic Feng Ban 馮班 (1602-1671), for example, expressed his concern about applying recent methods to ancient script types because the method had a direct impact on what was being learned. How something was studied was far more critical than the calligraphy model under scrutiny.[327] That is why calligraphers like Wen Zhengming and even Zhao Mengfu came under fire for their rendering of seal script that was too neat and imposed methods from regular script on ancient forms. Thus, dating compositional methods—in essence, the filters through which calligraphers perceived script—became an important task for scholars who were concerned with historical progression. In keeping with this trend, Jiang Heng pinpoints the origin of the "nine palaces" to the Tang dynasty:

> The calligraphy of people from the Wei and Jin dynasties was natural, unrestrained and leisurely. The people of the Tang always relied on method. Thus, there was the "nine palaces" method, which divided [characters] into center, left, right, upper and lower segments by means of borderlines. This allowed students to easily make progress. I suspect that it qualifies as what is called an orally transmitted formula.
>
> 魏晉人書天然宕逸，唐人專用法。遂有九宮，分中左右上下界畫，使學者易趨。竊疑所謂口授訣卽此也。[328]

For Jiang Heng, the "nine palaces" method was conceived as an aid for students, transmitted from a master to his followers during the Tang dynasty. Although Dong Qichang had praised the evenness of Tang calligraphy, he had made no claims to tie the method to a dynasty. Jiang then expounds on his theory of an "orally transmitted formula" (*koushou jue* 口授訣) by proposing four terms of his own to aid composition: Centering (*zhong* 中), regularity (*zheng* 正), spirit (*ling* 靈) and stillness (*jing* 靜). His instructions for these four principles are provided together with the names of steles by Tang dynasty calligraphers that he believes students should consult, and also serve as visual proof of his proposed principles. Jiang Heng's attempt to recover ancient principles thus relies on his observation of selected steles from the specific period. This "see-for-yourself" approach is so central to Jiang Heng's

[327] Bai. 2003. *Fu Shan's World,* 196-198.
[328] Chen. 1874. *Yongjianzhai biji*, juan 5, 2b.

presentation of the principles that for the last one, "stillness," he simply tells the reader that only someone who is thoroughly familiar with the specific steles will comprehend this principle. He claims that the calligraphy by scholars from the Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties lacked stillness, but provides no further instructions or explanation of the concept.

What began with Jiang Heng's dating of the method and somewhat vague comments about the use of the grid was expanded by his son, Jiang Ji 蔣驥 (1714-1787), who was instructed in calligraphy by his father. Jiang devoted an entire treatise to explicating the method: *New Approach to the Nine Palaces* (*Jiugong xinshi* 九宮新式). The treatise, posthumously re-published by his son in 1794, is written in plain language and provides four graphs of new approaches to the "nine palaces." The treatise opens with an explanation of these graphs, first outlining the use and function of the grid. Jiang praises it as being flexible and adaptable to any situation, including both small and large characters and says it can be used anywhere, at any time, while also warning students not to stray from it. He proceeds with an explanation of its historical development which begins with the Tang dynasty. This was doubtless derived from his father's beliefs, but he then jumps ahead to the Yuan dynasty to acknowledge Chen Yizeng's contribution in explaining how it should be used, and jumps again to the Qing dynasty to praise his father's efforts in transmitting it. He suggests that the old method has actually been improved:

> The old system of the nine palaces was made with sections counting nine by nine (81 square segments), which established a very rigorous and accurate method, but easily dazzled the eyes of beginners. Today, the way to partition the nine palaces is to insert dividing lines in the shape of the character *shi* [十, i.e. a cross] within each of the nine palaces, creating 36 square segments. This method aims at evenly decreasing the number of segments. It is easier to understand and makes the system clearer. I took special care to make these drawings and stored them at our home school in order to transmit [the method].
>
> 然舊制九宮，作九九之數。雖去立法精嚴，初學者易於眩目。令分九宮，每宮中界十字，為三十六格。此法于均方減數之旨，簡易明白，繩墨子然。特繪之家塾，以遺後人云爾。[329]

[329] Jiang. 1794. *Jiangshi youyi milu jiuzhong*, juan shang, Jiugong xinshi, 1a-1b.

He continues to explain how the new method can be adapted according to the students' needs. For characters that are elongated, the two columns of segments on the outer sides can be left blank. For characters that are squat, the student should simply avoid the two rows of segments at the top and bottom, while for small characters and square-shaped characters, one can use the second and most central inner squares formed by the segments as reference [Fig. 4.5]. Thus, when practicing a style of calligraphy, the student can keep these shortcuts in mind for the perfect placement and sizing of characters with varying structures.

The lower number of segments and the selective use of segments were the two main innovations of Jiang Ji's "nine palaces." He closes his comments on the graphs by repeating some of Chen Yicheng's suggestions, such as the use of the grid to resize characters. Jiang presents one of Chen's suggestions, however, in a slightly altered form. While Chen referred to models that reproduced the 540 components from Xu Shen's *Explanation of Graphs* without making specific distinctions, Jiang suggests that students should copy these and explicitly says that doing so goes beyond using model letters (*tie*). The distinction between model letters and inscriptions from steles (*bei* 碑), which was an ongoing debate when Jiang published his work, must have prompted him to point out that there were other sources worth copying beyond model letters. One author who produced reference works that studied and reproduced earlier rubbings of the 540 components was Jiang's contemporary, Wu Zhao 吳照 (fl. 1786-1794), who published two volumes on the subject in 1786 and 1792.[330] Jiang Ji's son also wrote a brief essay on the components and their development and produced a chart that used the categories of the "three realms" (heaven, earth, man) to classify them.[331] This organized categorization of the components and derivative characters helped students memorize these connections and the visual components of seal script. A similar emphasis on memory is evident in his discussion of the "nine palaces," which is also employed to help students master seal script and understand the origin of Chinese writing.

Jiang Ji appends a discussion of important tips for beginners to the end of his comments on the "nine palaces." He summarizes lessons learned from his father and cites additional sources to explain how to use the brush and

[330] Wu. 1786. *Shuowen pianpang kao,* and Wu. 1792. *Shuowen ziyuan kaolue.* The most influential work on Xu Shen's book, however, was Duan Yucai's multi-volume commentary, published in 1813-15.

[331] Jiang. 1794. *Jiangshi youyi milu jiuzhong,* juan 2, Shuowen ziyuan biao.

admonish the student about incorrect postures, also commenting on composition and strokes. Close to the end of the discussion, he returns to the "nine palaces" to assure readers that even the dullest mind can benefit from using this method.

> If a beginner relies on the "nine palaces" method to copy five to ten characters daily, paying attention that the manner of the dots and strokes does not deviate by the slightest, then a clever person will comprehend its principle within less than a hundred days. Even a dull-minded person will, if disciplined, easily make progress. If the strokes are numerous, make the blank spaces even; if the strokes are few, be guided by the intention. Even if strokes are numerous, there will still be empty areas within the palaces; one who is capable can then also be guided by intention. Thus, all sections that are empty will be filled, and all sections that are crowded will have open space. By adjusting the voids and the filled areas, everything will be appropriate.
>
> When the ancients studied calligraphy, they took the composition and variations of the components from Xu Shen's *Explanation of Graphs* as reference and in their hearts became thoroughly familiar with them. It was like a carpenter building a house. The rafters and beams are first cut and sanded, and then the structure of the hall can be put together. As soon as one has succeeded [to grasp] this method, it will be the greatest shortcut.

> 初學者每日依九宮法學五字或十字，點畫體勢須使毫髮不爽，智者不待百日可解其理，即質魯者亦磨礪易進也。筆劃多者，使其佈白停習。筆劃少者，運用意思。蓋筆劃雖多，宮分仍有虛處，蓋會者能以意運之，則虛處皆實，實處皆虛，虛盈伸縮，無不合宜矣。古人學書，將許氏《說文》偏旁字樣，分佈開合，熟悉胸中，如梓人作室，榱桷櫨梁先為斫削，則堂構湊合即成，此法最是捷徑。[332]

Here, Jiang emphasizes the role of memorization in the study of calligraphy, which goes beyond learning the correct shape of strokes. He claims it is as vital as the carpenter's skill to put together the wooden structure of a building. What is most striking, however, is that Jiang connects the pedagogical efficacy of the "nine palaces" to Chen's comment on the method as a tool to learn seal script from rubbings. The grid's function to facilitate memorization should help the student internalize the composition

[332] Jiang. 1794. *Jiangshi youyi milu jiuzhong*, juan shang, Jiugong xinshi, 4b-5a.

and the unfamiliar shapes of seal script. The student must memorize the unique qualities of seal script in order to develop their calligraphic skills.

In fact, Jiang implies that seal script constitutes basic knowledge that must be acquired when studying character composition, and that there is no better method to tackle this than with the "nine palaces." The associations of the pedagogical method of the "nine palaces" with models that are not included in the model letter tradition begin with Jiang. This emphasis on seal script is not present in Chen's original comment, but resonates with the intellectual and esthetic trends of the Qianlong period.

Since the mid-eighteenth century, it had become more common for calligraphers to openly reject the model letter tradition. Especially in Yangzhou 揚州, painters such as Jin Nong 金農 (1687-1763) began to explore the esthetic appeal of carved calligraphy in their inscriptions.[333] Deng Shiru 鄧石如 (1743-1805), known for his seal script, is said to have copied Xu Shen's *Explanation of Graphs* twenty times within six months, and Jin Nong stated in a poem that when it came to learning calligraphy, he refused to be a slave. He claimed: "The stone slab from Mount Hua is my teacher."[334] It had become increasingly common even for beginners to learn calligraphy by copying models that did not come from the model letter tradition. Thus, seal script and clerical script had become essential parts of a students' curriculum. Jiang Ji's son, Jiang He 蔣和 (fl. 1782-1794) also advocated that students start by learning seal and clerical in order to understand later scripts.[335] The need to teach calligraphy to children through seal script became so ingrained and accepted that later pedagogical books, such as the 1838 *Primer on Graphs and Characters* (*Wenzi mengqiu* 文字蒙求) and the 1849 *Copy-Book of Collected Characters from the Thirteen Classics* (*Shisan jing jizi moben* 十三經集子摹本), introduced seal script characters together with regular script, having them function as a visual aid for understanding the origin of characters.[336]

Jiang He followed his father and grandfather in disseminating the "nine palaces" grid. In 1782 he republished his father's treatise under the title *The*

[333] For a more detailed account on the work of Yangzhou calligraphers, see Huang. 2012. "Calligraphic Style in Eighteenth-Century Yangzhou."
[334] Jin. [1747.] *Dongxin xiansheng xuji,* juan 1, 12b. On Deng's practices for learning ancient scripts, see Ho. 2012. "Calligraphy of the Mid to Late Qing Epigraphic School," 306, or Ledderhose. 1970. *Die Siegelschrift (Chuan-Shu) in der Ch'ing-Zeit*, 70-71. A stylistic reading of Deng's calligraphy can also be found in Ledderose. 1998. "Calligraphy at the Close of the Chinese Empire."
[335] Jaing. 1989. *Xizi mijue*, 96-97.
[336] For an image of the *Shisan jing jizi moben*, see Yu. 2012. "Character Recognition," 22.

Newly Established "Nine Palaces" Grid (*Chongding jiugong ge* 重定九宮格), but reformulated his father's text and provided additional examples.[337] He praised the new "nine palaces" method for making it easier to focus on the characters without becoming mesmerized by the grid, as had been the case with the traditional method formulated by Chen. However, he suggests that the student can simplify the grid even further, without subdividing it into Jiang Ji's 36 sections, and still achieve accuracy.[338] He adds a note to the end of the text, explaining that he has boiled the method down to its essence, intending it to aid the beginner. He assures the student that simply by copying repeatedly and relying on the "nine palaces" method, he will make great strides. Despite these small adjustments, Jiang He stays close to his father's approach in the republished treatise. It is only in his own texts that Jiang He's innovations for the simplified grid are made explicit.

Jiang continued to develop his father's approach, but began to depart from his father's premises. In the essay titled "Complete Graph of Dots and Strokes" (*Dianhua quantu* 點畫全圖), the grid is no longer reserved for the composition of individual characters or their balance within written texts, nor does his discussion emphasize the use of the grid for seal script. He suggests that not every character requires a grid with nine palaces or sections, and at the same time begins to use grids to section individual strokes or common components. For example, he introduces a four-squared grid with additional diagonals connecting the centers of the upper and side borders of the square. This grid, he claims, is enough to achieve balance for characters that have similar falling diagonals in their composition, such as *xia* 下 or *he* 合 [Fig. 4.6]. Another example is his adaptation of the nine-squared grid to create guiding lines that move away from the corners of the central square toward the outer corners of the grid, used for characters that are broad at the top and bottom, like *feng* 風.[339] He encases certain components, like the three dots for water 氵, within an elongated grid of two by four sections, explaining their balance with terms that resemble those used for the "nine palaces" method [Fig. 4.7]. His partitioning of strokes is not limited to square segments, and several graphs that cut up strokes into rectangular sections illustrate the essay to demonstrate their desirable proportions. Most striking, however, is that he provides written instructions on how the brush should move for every

[337] *Shufa zhengzong* 書法正宗 was the original title, later republished as *Xizi mijue* 習字秘訣.
[338] Jiang. 1989. *Xizi mijue*, 89.
[339] Jiang. 1989. *Xizi mijue*, 44.

different section, thus also segmenting the movement of the hand and brush.[340]

All three members of the Jiang family adopted the grid as a basic tool for teaching children—one that will help the student internalize compositions and components—and not merely as a tool for copying. This use of the grid is often mentioned in pedagogical texts of the early-to-mid 19th century, such as those by Zhou Xinglian 周星連 (ca. 1816-1878), Yao Mengqi 姚孟起 (fl. 1881) and Wei Xizeng 魏錫曾 (fl. 1863-1882). Wei, for example, published his instructions for children under the title *First Things to Hear on Studying Calligraphy* (*Shuxue xuwen* 書學緒聞) He presents the grid as a tool for children above the age of ten to study the inner composition of characters. He suggests using a sheet of oiled paper to allow the tracing of the characters from a model and to apply a red grid over the traced characters. Then the student can playfully explore the composition within the grid on a separate sheet.[341] This next generation of scholars who discussed the "nine palaces" cast off the complex grids that required students to use more than nine segments, following Jiang He's simplified approach.

While Jiang He moves away from the discussion of steles, he claims to be transmitting the method developed by his father and grandfather, who strove to expound the proper calligraphic standards of the Tang dynasty.[342] The "nine palaces" grid became a method closely tied to the calligraphic expertise of the Jiang family and their understanding of the historical development of script. Both Jiang Heng and Jiang Ji strove to broaden the spectrum of what could be copied by the student. By changing what was to be seen within the grid, they also changed what should be remembered—opening up a new pedagogical path for calligraphy.

Even though each member provided revised instructions on how to use the grid, their method was indebted to Chen Yizeng's—focusing on individual characters and regulating internal composition—and they continued this earlier tradition. The Jiangs' discussion of the "nine palaces" shows that they were aware of both the historical development of script and of the transmission of calligraphic method.

Despite their innovations, the views of the Jiangs appear tame when compared to those of their slightly younger contemporaries, who criticized all model letters and disparaged Dong Qichang's calligraphy for being too elegant

[340] Jiang. 1989. *Xizi mijue*, 30; 34. For a detailed description of movements, see *Xizi mijue*, 23.
[341] Cui. 2011. *Ming Qing shulun ji*, 1273.
[342] Jiang. 1989. *Xizi mijue*, 2-3.

and tidy. The most significant changes introduced to the use of the grid occurred as part of ongoing intellectual debates about scholarship.[343] Late Qing scholars who brought the "nine-palaces" grid into their debates on calligraphy appropriated the method to make new claims about its historical origin that corresponded to their ambitious theories about empirical knowledge.

Challenging the Transmitted Method

The trend of evidential scholarship that motivated scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to gather ancient stele rubbings for study led to a repurposing of the grid that went beyond a focus on seal script and the search for the origin of script. One scholar in particular, Bao Shichen 包世臣 (1775–1853), emphasized the relevance of the "great nine palaces" to challenge the transmitted use of the method and to trace its origin back to a pre-dynastic period. Unlike the Jiangs, Bao did not seek to promote regularity in script. He used the grid to challenge the authority of past canons and shape the future developments of calligraphy.

A heated debate in favor of a distinction between the traditions of model letters and stele inscriptions had been going on for some time before it was first theorized by Ruan Yuan in 1823. As mentioned above, Ruan Yuan was one of the many philology enthusiasts who published collections of newly discovered inscriptions.[344] His most influential writings, however, were two essays published in 1823, titled "On the Northern and Southern Schools of Calligraphy" (*Nan bei shupai lun* 南北書派論) and "On Steles in the North and Model Letters in the South" (*Bei bei nan tie lun* 北碑南帖論). In these texts, he created a framework to dichotomize two traditions in terms of the "southern and northern schools" of calligraphy.[345] Ruan Yuan argued that these distinct schools of calligraphy were branches of a linage that had split

[343] Zhou discussed the grid as a tool for the inner composition of characters and copying in a short note in his *Linchi guanjian* 臨池管見. Yao, of whom very little is known, wrote a treatise titled *Zixue yican* 字學臆參, in which he mentions the method. All three treatises are reproduced in Cui. 2011. *Ming Qing shulun ji*, 1211-1220; 1271-1273; 1275-1283.

[344] Several Qing discoveries are listed in the notes of Ledderose's translation of Ruan Yuan's essays. See Ledderhose. 1970. *Die Siegelschrift (Chuan-Shu) in der Ch'ing-Zeit,* especially notes on pages 173-174.

[345] In his published doctoral thesis, Ledderose provides a full translation of both essays with commentary in German. Ledderhose. 1970. *Die Siegelschrift (Chuan-Shu) in der Ch'ing-Zeit*, 155-211.

during the Han dynasty. The northern school was represented by writings on steles, while the southern school, which he disparaged as corrupt, embodied the stiffened esthetic of carved and re-carved model letters. According to Ruan, the decline of calligraphy began during the Tang dynasty, especially due to Tang Taizong's 唐太宗 (r. 626-649) admiration of Wang Xizhi's style, but the southern school only came to dominate during the Song dynasty, when model letters were carved by the court and widely disseminated. Ruan Yuan reserved his highest praise for the steles and inscriptions of the Northern Wei dynasty because they, he claimed, retained the original intention of ancient script. Despite being mostly written in regular script, Northern Wei steles were described as reminiscent of the earlier clerical script.[346]

Following Ruan's rendering of the development of calligraphic styles as a north-south dichotomy, the inscriptions from the northern dynasties, usually written by unidentified calligraphers, began to receive the most attention from Qing scholars.[347] Ruan Yuan also argued in his second essay that anonymous writers of the Jin dynasty, such as simple potters who made roof tiles, did not follow the whims of fashion, and thus did not corrupt the style of their writing with that of Wang Xizhi's *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Gathering*.[348] Accepting this line of reasoning, many scholars began to value the work of anonymous inscription carvers over that of transmitted model letters by famous scholars, contributing to the creation of a new orthodoxy of calligraphy.[349]

The next scholar to comment on the uses of the "nine palaces" was a contemporary of both Ruan Yuan and Jiang He. Bao Shichen,[350] who helped disseminate the method among scholars of epigraphy, was the student of the famous seal and clerical script master Deng Shiru. For most of his life, Bao did not hold an official position, but was often tasked with special assignments by

[346] For a description of the stylistic features of the calligraphy on steles of the Northern Wei, see Lu. 1999. "Calligraphy of Stone Engravings in Northern Wei Loyang."

[347] For an account on how Zhao Zhiqian became obsessed with steles from the northern dynasties after reading Ruan Yuan's work, see Ho. 2012. "Calligraphy of the Mid to Late Qing Epigraphic School," 317.

[348] Ledderhose. 1970. *Die Siegelschrift (Chuan-Shu) in der Ch'ing-Zeit*, 186.

[349] Bai. 2003. *Fu Shan's World*, 260.

[350] The traditional dates for Bao Shichen are 1775–1855. One inscription by a close friend on a posthumous portrait of Bao reads: "...during the winter of the *guichou* year [1853], when Juanweng was seventy-nine *sui*, he passed away in Haizhou" (癸丑冬李，倦翁年七十九，殤於海州). This clearly indicates that Bao died in 1853. An inscription written by a close friend may be assumed to be more reliable than later accounts. See Ruitenbeek. 2017. *Faces of China*, 307 n243.

men who served the government. Despite not having an official appointment, Bao engaged the intellectual debates of his time and had many close ties to officials and scholars. During the late Qing, the gathering of cliques became a common practice for scholars. They sought to be mentored on practical subjects, such as antiquarian calligraphy and art practice, which were not addressed by the traditional curriculum, and found their mentors and teachers outside of the traditional teaching system. Looser social connections and casual networks characterized the environment in which scholarship was conducted.[351]

Bao is now best known for his hands-on attitude to solving social and economic problems, yet his contribution to the field of calligraphy should not be underestimated.[352] Bao's own calligraphy was not especially innovative, but his theories on the practice and development of calligraphy were widely read by his contemporaries and by later generations.[353] His most influential work was *Two Oars for the Boat of Art* (*Yizhou shuangji* 藝舟雙楫), in which he collected notes on calligraphy and ancient inscriptions, as well as on literature. This book, first published in 1846 and reprinted in 1851, makes it clear that he was indebted to Ruan Yuan's analysis of the two schools of calligraphy. Bao developed the theory even further, however. Via Bao, the rejection of Wang Xizhi's style and endorsement of inscription from the northern dynasties, and specifically from the Northern Wei, moved from a general framework to a specific and more concrete study program. One important contribution was Bao's record of the study process of his master, Deng Shiru, hailed as the first calligrapher to take Ruan Yuan's theories to heart and develop his calligraphy according to the northern style. Deng's fondness for ancient scripts did not conflict with the grid pattern and regular compositions. In fact, a grid layout was often reproduced in his work and influenced later calligraphers.[354] By listing all the proper models his master had used and copied, Bao set a curriculum for students of seal and clerical script, which no doubt contributed to the establishment of a new canon and stylistic direction.[355] Bao's work not only listed the works Deng Shiru had copied, but also recorded esthetic evaluations of some of the inscriptions. For example, Bao was the first scholar to comment on three inscriptions from the

[351] Brown. 2011. *Pastimes*, 39-40.
[352] For a clear description of Bao's practical orientation, see Rowe. 2014. "Bao Shichen and Agrarian Reform in Early Nineteenth-Century China."
[353] Ye. 2005. *Beixue xiansheng*, 45-88.
[354] Ledderose. 1998. "Calligraphy at the Close of the Chinese Empire," 200-204.
[355] Ledderhose. 1970. *Die Siegelschrift (Chuan-Shu) in der Ch'ing-Zeit*, 82.

Longmen grottoes, after having visited them in person in 1819.[356]

In *Two Oars for the Boat of Art*, Bao claims that he himself also learned calligraphy by using the "nine palaces" method. The text he first copied in his youth was the renowned "Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Gathering." He describes how he used the method to transfer the characters from the model, practicing four characters each day and copying each character over a hundred times in a row until they resembled the model.[357] In the section dedicated to calligraphy, he goes into detail on how the model should be used. Like Jiang Ji, he believes a student should first learn the basic strokes before composing characters. Therefore, he dedicates the first part of his discussion on calligraphy to the "eight methods" and the movements of the brush for each type of stroke. His discussion of the "nine palaces," is worth quoting in full because it illustrates the transition from the customary use of the grid to what Bao terms the "great nine palaces":

> When it comes to characters, there is the nine palaces [method]. For the nine palaces, one makes a square grid for each character. The outer borders are much thicker, while the inner borders of the grid are drawn with thin lines in the shape of the character *jing* 井. It is used to evenly distribute the dots and strokes.
>
> Every character, no matter if its constitution is sparse or dense, tilted or straight, will have a spot in which its spiritual vitality gathers and concentrates. This occurs in the central palace of the character. It may be that the central palace is characterized by filling strokes, but also by empty blanks. Either way, it must be where the spiritual vitality of the character is concentrated, and the arrangement [of the strokes] should be according to the central palace within the grid. Only then should the character's head, eyes, arms and legs be distributed in the eight palaces on the sides. This way, what is long or short, filled or blank, and what is above or below, left or right, will all be in concordance.
>
> Within three columns, the adjacent nine characters also form the 'great nine palaces'. The character in the center is the central palace, and it must govern over the eight characters above, below and on the sides. These eight characters must all be oriented towards it in a manner

[356] McNair. 2007. *Donors of Longmen*, 164. While Bao Shichen seems to have been the first to comment on the inscriptions, Jin Nong already commented on the sculptures at Longmen. Hay. 1999.
"Culture, Ethnicity, and Empire in the Work of Two Eighteenth-Century 'Eccentric' Artists," 211-212.

[357] Bao. 1846. *Yizhou Shuangji*, juan 5, 1b.

of reverence, bowing to it, as if moving their gaze toward the central character. When both the great and the small palaces are satisfactorily accomplished, then there will be a harmonic beauty in the upward and downward curvatures, and the marvelous appeal will emerge in its fullest.

The "nine palaces" were first discussed during the Song dynasty. The method was used for charting out characters while maintaining dimensions, and spoken of only in terms of scaling down characters from old models. They did not know how to seek proper arrangement within the character itself, and thus, since the Song, calligraphers have not been able to follow the nine palaces [method].

Genuine stone-carved calligraphy from the two Jin dynasties [Western and Eastern, 266-420] has not been transmitted. The steles from the northern Wei dynasty and the Southern Liang I have seen amount to dozens or hundreds. I have poured my heart into examining them and comprehended them, thus attaining the method of both great and small nine palaces. Based on it I evaluated the earlier stone-carved writings in seal script and clerical script from the Zhou, Qin, Han, Wei and both Jin dynasties that are still extant, and there was none that was not consistent with it. It becomes clear that Zhong Yu and Wang Xizhi invested their efforts into it.

Among the rubbings that circulate today, such as the "Victory Felicitations," "Scripture of the Yellow Court", "Encomium on a Portrait of Dongfang Shuo", "Spirit of the Luo", none has horizontal grid lines, yet the layout of every character is wonderfully unrestrained, and, at the same time, thoroughly planned. Truly, when the entire text is taken together, it forms the large nine palaces. Like the writing on the bronze bells and tripods of the three dynasties [Xia, Shang and Western Zhou], their running script, such as that of the "Orchid Pavilion", "Yu Run," "White Horse," "Pursuing," "Farewell," "Wuxing," "Traveling Outside" and other models, presents myriad transformations of fish and dragons, yet conforms to rules, not deviating in the slightest.[358]

During the Tang dynasty, the knowledge and talent of calligraphers did not match that of the ancients. Thus, their stone-carved running script always has horizontal grid lines. Among them, those who studied the nine palaces were Xu Hao 徐浩 [703-782], Li Cai 李邕 [678-747], and Zhang Congshen 張從申 [fl. 766-779]; these three were the ones closest to it. Of all of them transmitted writings exist. I

[358] The text provides a weight measure that took 10 grains of millet as standard to describe the discrepancies, which can thus be understood as tiny.

scrutinized and examined them carefully and found they can be trusted to have no flaws.

字有九宮。九宮者，每字為方格，外界極肥，格內用細畫界一井字，以均布其點畫也。凡字無論疏密斜正，必有精神挽結之處，是爲字之中宮。然中宮有在實畫，有在虛白，必審其字之精神所注，而安置於格內之中宮。然後以其字之頭目手足分布于旁之八宮，則隨其長短虛實而上下左右皆相得矣。每三行相並至九字，又爲大九宮。其中一字卽為中宮，必須統攝上下四旁之八字，而八字皆有拱揖朝向之勢，逐字移看。大小兩中宮皆得圓滿，則俯仰映帶，奇趣橫出已。九宮之說始見于宋，蓋以尺寸算字，專為移縮古帖而說，不知求條理於本字，故自宋以來書家，未有能合九宮者也。兩晉眞書碑版，不傳于世，余以所見北魏南梁之碑數十百種悉心參悟，而得大小兩九宮之法，上推之周秦漢魏兩晉篆分碑版存于世者，則莫不合於此，其為鍾、王專力可知也。世所行《賀捷》《黃庭》《畫贊》《洛神》等帖，皆無橫格，然每字布勢，奇縱周緻，實合通篇而爲大九宮。如三代鍾鼎文字，其行書如《蘭亭》《玉潤》《白騎》《追尋》《違遠》《吳興》《外出》等帖，魚龍百變而按以矩矱，不差累忝。降及唐賢，自知才力不及古人，故行書碑版皆有橫格。就中九宮之學，徐會稽、李北海、張郎中三家為尤密，傳書俱在，潛精按驗，信其不謬也。[359]

Although Bao's account resembles Chen Yizeng's description of the grid in the beginning, it later becomes clear that the connection of the method with ancient steles and their layout, which was insinuated by Jiang Ji, is represented as an undisputable truth by Bao. His description of the grid shifts the focus to the layout of the characters on the writing surface, and based on this approach, he is able to argue that the principle of the "nine palaces" was present even in ancient inscriptions and bronzes. Ruan Yuan's idealization of calligraphy that predated the Tang is clearly evident in the text. Bao perceives the transmitted comments of "Song scholars"—most likely a reference to Chen's *Essential Formula of the Hanlin Academy*—as a reduction of the actual method.

Bao's questioning of methods proposed by Song scholars was typical for late Qing scholarship. Qing evidential scholars often sought to confront

[359] Bao. 1846. *Yizhou Shuangji*, juan 12, 9b-10b.

transmitted ideas that lacked objectivity and obscured ancient teachings.[360] Like his fellow researchers, Bao strove to return to these ancient teachings by studying the earliest sources available. The information he gathered from the empirical study of ancient rubbings and steles, he claims, has a much higher value and is much more reliable than the transmitted texts by these misguided calligraphers. Thus, he is able to discard the assumption that the "nine palaces" method was created during the Tang, and pushes its use back to the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BCE), firmly connecting it to antiquity and the ancient principles of writing. Other scholars also commented on the grid pattern on steles, justifying Bao's association of the method with ancient inscriptions.[361] Bao Shichen continues his discussion with several quotes by ancient calligraphers to prove that they valued vigor and strength in their writing, ending the section with a warning to students: All calligraphers should avoid the frailty of Dong Qichang's writing as well as the disarray of Su Shi's, who both failed to reach the ancients because they did not properly study the "nine palaces."[362]

The grid was thus upgraded from a tool for copying rubbings of steles and model letters to the key to understanding ancient writing principles. Bao used the "great nine palaces" to questioned two traditions that the Jiangs had supported. First, the main function of the grid was no longer to copy previous models, and second, Song scholars should not receive any credit for their erroneous description of the method. Questioning the authority behind transmitted knowledge had been a key strategy employed by Qing evidential scholars.[363] By denying the authority of Song scholars, Bao is able to introduce his own interpretation of how the "nine palaces" should be used and what their purpose was. Bao claims authority to refashion the "nine palaces" through his direct study of ancient steles and the dating of the method to pre-imperial times. He can thus distance himself from the regulated script of Tang masters and later models.

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[360] Elman. 1984. *From Philosophy to Philology*, 29-32.

[361] Several entries in catalogues of inscriptions record the use of a grid on steles and bronze objects, showing that scholars paid attention to this feature. One of these comments was recorded by Gu Yanwu (1613 – 1682), translated in McNair. 2007. *Donors of Longmen*, 162. One later scholar, Ye Changchi 葉鞠裳 (1849-1917) even dedicated a comment to the matter. His discussion "On the Square Grid on Steles" is recorded in the *Miscellany of Petty Matters of the Qing* (*Qingbai leichao* 清稗類鈔). He claims, for example, that before the Tang dynasty, all good steles had square grids, but that the pattern on many had vanished due to wear and repeated rubbing. Xu. 1917. *Qingbai leichao,* jianshang lei (72), 155.

[362] Bao. 1846. *Yizhou Shuangji*, juan 12, 11b.

[363] Stumm. 2020. "Conceptualizing Authorship in Late Imperial Chinese Philology," 165.

Bao could not have made the centrality of the method in refashioning writing practices more explicit, and this left its mark on discourses about calligraphy. Several treatises published by epigraphy enthusiasts in the years that followed Bao's bold claims often mentioned the "nine palaces."[364] In accordance with his master's high esteem of the grid, Bao's student Wu Xizai 吳熙載 (1799-1870) claimed to have combined the intention behind the ancients' "eight methods" with that of the "nine palaces" in a description of his own accomplishments.[365] In 1871, Chen Jieqi 陳介祺 (1813-1894) wrote the *Formula for Practicing Characters* (*Xizi jue* 習字訣), in which he laid out a calligraphy curriculum for his grandson. After praising the overall visual composition of inscriptions on ancient bronzes, he claimed that,

> up to the regular script of Zhong [Yu] and Wang [Xizhi], later people have taken the "nine palaces" to pursue it [i.e the overall composition]. It means every nine characters—three characters in a row by three characters in each column—are all connected. From the Tang dynasty onwards, writing could no longer follow that [principle], let alone the overall composition [of bronze inscriptions].
>
> 至鍾、王楷法，後人以九宮求之，謂凡縱三橫三九字習聯貫，唐以來書即不能如此，無論大段矣。[366]

Chen Jieqi mirrored Bao's views in both his disapproval of Tang calligraphy and in his high esteem for the "nine palaces," which he deemed worthy of transmitting to his grandson.

The most noteworthy individual who chose to discuss the "nine palaces" because of Bao Shichen was Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927). Kang's comment on the grid was published in his 1889 volume *The Extended Pair of Oars for the Boat of Art* (*Guang Yizhou shuangji* 廣藝舟雙楫), which was conceived as a response to Bao's volume. Kang's work has been described as an unprecedented attempt to link calligraphy with other socio-historical phenomena, including politics. His view that "the way of calligraphy and the way of government are similarly liable to change" was the guiding motto behind his theories. He strove to show that changes in calligraphy were not

[364] Examples that quote Bao's text are common, such as in Zhen. 1908. *Guochao shuren jilüe*, juan 8, 12a-12b.
[365] Zhao. 1977. *Qingshi gao*, juan 503, yishu zhuan 2, 5a.
[366] Cui. 2011. *Ming Qing shulun ji*, 1207-1208.

the outcome of individual style, but grew "from the collective wisdom of practitioners."[367] In *The Extended Pair of Oars,* Kang provides a list of rubbings that should be acquired and copied by the student.[368] In his short comment on the "nine palaces" it is clear that the models he has in mind are ancient inscriptions:

> When learning calligraphy, it is appropriate to use the "nine palaces" grid to copy it. One should enhance the length and thickness [of the strokes], exhaust the momentum, and give it free reign. All rubbings of writings and scriptures carved in stone will have deficient areas. Copy them by enhancing them, and thus completely attain the intention of the ancient's original calligraphy.
>
> 學書宜用九宮格摹之。當長肥加倍盡其筆勢而縱之。蓋凡書經刻石摹搨，必有瘦損加倍臨之乃僅得。[369]

Given the widespread use of the grid, Kang spares himself the trouble of explaining how it should be used, confirming and responding to Bao's theory of a large and small nine-palaces grid in his work instead.[370] The focus of this specific comment is the materiality of the stone and the influence it has on the rubbings that are used as models. It is interesting to note, however, that while he urges students to take ancient inscriptions as models, they are free to "enhance" what is seen in an attempt to bring the ancient writing to life, which can be achieved by using the grid. This comment can be regarded as parallel to Kang's oft-repeated ideas about not being restricted by the model and not limiting oneself to only a few models.

In line with Ruan Yuan's theory, Kang emphasized the use of inscriptions by anonymous hands, and later claimed that studying one hundred rubbings was the minimum for a student of calligraphy, defending a "more is more" approach to copying. Kang went as far as to claim that "it is better to buy a large number of stone rubbings than to seek teachers."[371] Such a declaration in favour of the personal inspection of steles over the guidance

[367] Wong. 2016. *The Other Kang Youwei*, 11-12.
[368] A translation with images for each rubbing referred to in Kang's text has been published by Wang and Kang. 2017. *The Mirror of Writing*.
[369] Kang. [1889]. *Guang Yizhou Shuangji*, juan 5, 14a.
[370] Kang. [1889]. *Guang Yizhou Shuangji*, juan 5, 8b-9a.
[371] Wang and Kang. 2017. *The Mirror of Writing*, 5-6. Bai has written a wonderful commentary on the prices of rubbings during the Qing. 2017. "Circulation of Rubbings and the Late-Qing Art and Scholarship," 164-172.

of a so-called “erudite” went hand in hand with his political push for educational reforms.

The “nine palaces” grid, which was initially conceived as method for meticulously copying masterworks and developed for this purpose into the Qing dynasty, was gradually altered and repurposed by late Qing scholars to serve new pedagogical functions. They envisioned it as a tool for creating relative balance between characters and for enhancing the emaciated writings of the past. By creating a link between the grid and antiquity, reformers like Bao and Kang were able to put the old method to use in their efforts to change the trajectory of the development of calligraphy. As their new standards challenged the source of authority of the method and shifted the attention of the student to anonymous calligraphy of craftsmen, they hoped to direct how future generations would learn and teach.

Conclusion

The “nine palaces” grid became an increasingly common tool for learning and memorizing calligraphic compositions from the time it was first recorded during the Yuan dynasty. Calligraphers were generally quicker to embrace ideas about stylistic changes than to adopt those changes in practice. Bai makes this case with the example of Fu Shan 傅山 (1607-1684), who lived during the Ming-Qing transition and carried over many stylistic features of Ming calligraphy into the Qing, even after substantial changes in his intellectual environment and stance occurred.[372] Ledderose makes a similar claim about Bao Shichen, who only came in contact with Deng Shiru late in his life and was quick to adapt his theories, but not his calligraphy. The case of the “nine palaces” serves to show that changes in pedagogical practices followed similar tendencies.[373] The three generations of the Jiang family illustrate how a pedagogical method and its practice were continuously transmitted. Although each member introduced changes to how the method should be used, the practice itself was sustained.

Even Bao Shichen and Kang Youwei, who sought to radically alter the direction calligraphy should take, perpetuated the method by adapting it to

[372] Bai. 2003. *Fu Shan's World*, 129.

[373] Ledderose suggests that because Bao met Deng Shiru late in his life—in 1802—it might have been too late for Bao to change his writing style. His theories, on the other hand, were avant-garde and quickly adapted to the input from his master. Ledderhose. 1970. *Die Siegelschrift (Chuan-Shu) in der Ch’ing-Zeit,* 84 n175.

their needs and making new claims about its origin. They must have been aware that education and habits have a lingering influence on how calligraphy develops.[374] Kang's suggestions to choose rubbings over selecting a teacher and to use the grid to copy ancient inscriptions greatly encouraged autodidactic calligraphers and challenged the idea of calligraphy schools and lineages. Kang's belief in the changing power of practitioners was the impetus behind his refashioning of practices for a future generation, which could enhance the spread of his reformist ideas for calligraphy. Through the implementation of new a curriculum that the student could follow independently and the internalization of a practice that relied on the "small" and "great nine palaces," future students distanced themselves from both narrow familial learning, as defended by the Jiangs, and from limiting master-student relationships.

As a pedagogical tool, the grid is so flexible that it lends itself to being repurposed. During the Qing, several pedagogical publications for calligraphy began supplying students with pre-printed grids next to characters, often simplified with only four squares [Fig. 4.8].[375] Jiang Ji even suggested the "nine palaces" should be employed by portrait painters, expanding its use to another field (see chapter 6). The status the grid was granted through the numerous publications of prominent scholars who embedded it into their theories surely also helped to turn the grid into an esthetic element in calligraphy. Although works of calligraphy on paper with drawn-on grid patterns have been produced since at least the Song dynasty,[376] Qing scholars employed it to generate an unprecedented esthetic appeal in their works. Many of them drew out the grid in red paint, only to allow substantial parts of their strokes to cross over its borders or be slightly misaligned, creating an interesting tension between pattern and script.[377] The "nine palaces" grid

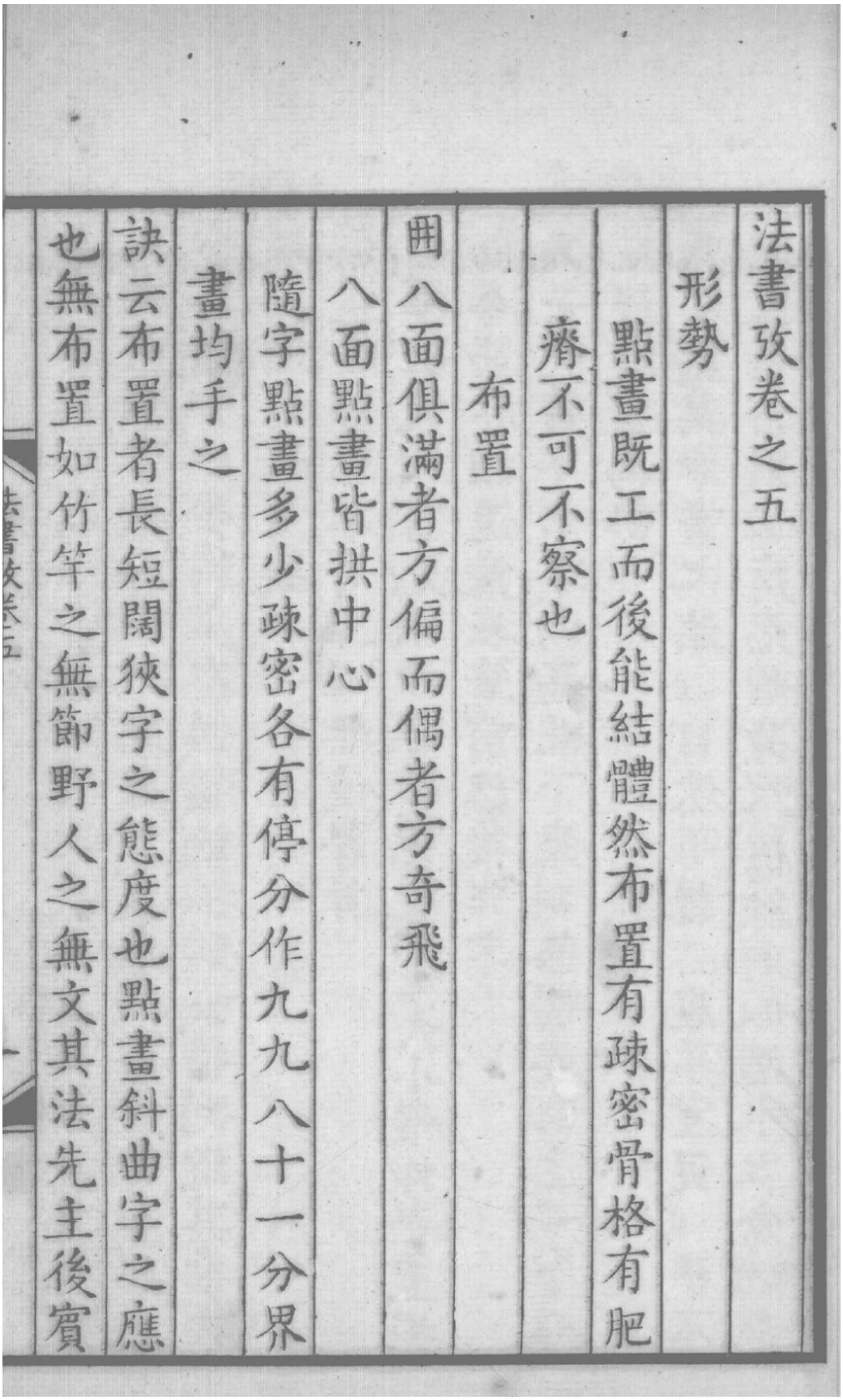
[374] Practice and training remained a constant concern of Qing scholars. Bai discusses how Qing scholars attempted to overcome the influence of Tang dynasty rules that had been ingrained in calligraphic practices up to the Ming dynasty. 2003. *Fu Shan's World*, 192-201.

[375] There are several booklets of this kind in the collection of the British Library, bound together into one volume titled *Youtong xizifa* 幼童習字法.

[376] Examples from various dynasties include Zhao Ji's (1082-1153) *Thousand Character Essay*, depicted in Ouyang and Fong. 2008. *Chinese Calligraphy*, 266-267. Zhao Mengfu's frontispiece to "Record of the Huaiyun temple," depicted in Fu. 1977. *Traces of the Brush*, 45. Wen Zhengming's colophon on "The Studio of True Connoisseurship" depicted in Clunas. 2004. *Elegant Debts*, 137.

[377] For works that share this quality, see Knight and Chang. *2012. Out of Character: Text in Clerical Script* by Jin Nong, 281; *Master Chen's Admonitions on Seeing, Hearing, Words and Deeds* by Deng Shiru, 324-325; *Yang Xiong's Prefaces to Model Statements in Clerical Script* by Zhao Zhiqian, 333.

even became an element to be celebrated in an “eight brokens” (*bapo* 八破) painting by Zhu Wei (1836-after 1908) [Fig. 4.9]. This genre of paintings collected torn paper elements reminiscent of the pre-Taiping-War past (discussed in chapter 7). In this particular work, Zhu depicts a sheet of paper used for practicing calligraphy which reproduces the “nine palaces” grid printed in red. The torn red grid thus becomes one of his symbols of the past. Far from becoming the relic Zhu alludes to, however, the practice of the “nine palaces” withstood the ravages of time as well as intellectual shifts, and it continues to shape the practice of calligraphers today.


法書攷卷之五

形勢

點畫既工而後能結體然布置有疎密骨格有肥瘠不可不察也

布置

囲八面俱滿者方偏而偶者方奇飛

八面點畫皆拱中心

隨字點畫多少疎密各有停分作九九八十一分界畫均手之

訣云布置者長短闊狹字之態度也點畫斜曲字之應也無布置如竹竿之無節野人之無文其法先主後賓

Fig. 4.1 Small graph of a grid and explanation on how to create a nine-by-nine square grid in the composition section of Sheng Ximing's 盛熙明 *Study of Calligraphy Models* (*Fashu kao* 法書考). Source: Shen. 1921. *Fashu kao*, juan 5, 1a.

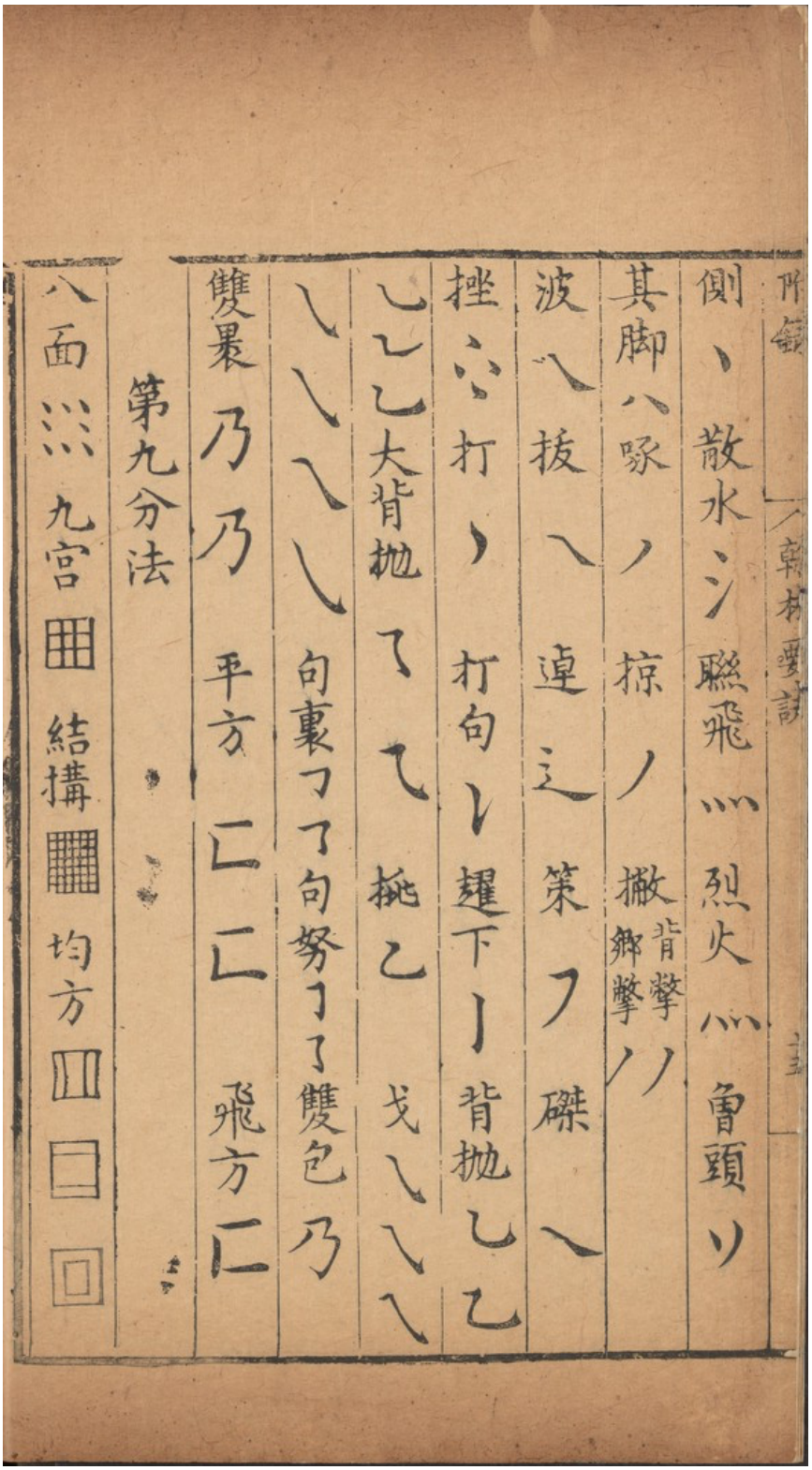


Fig. 4.2 Small graphs of the nine palaces and composition modes in a Ming edition of Chen's *Essential Formula of the Hanlin Academy* (*Hanlin yaojue* 翰林要訣). Source: Chen and Hu. 1603. *Hanlin yaojue*, 9b.

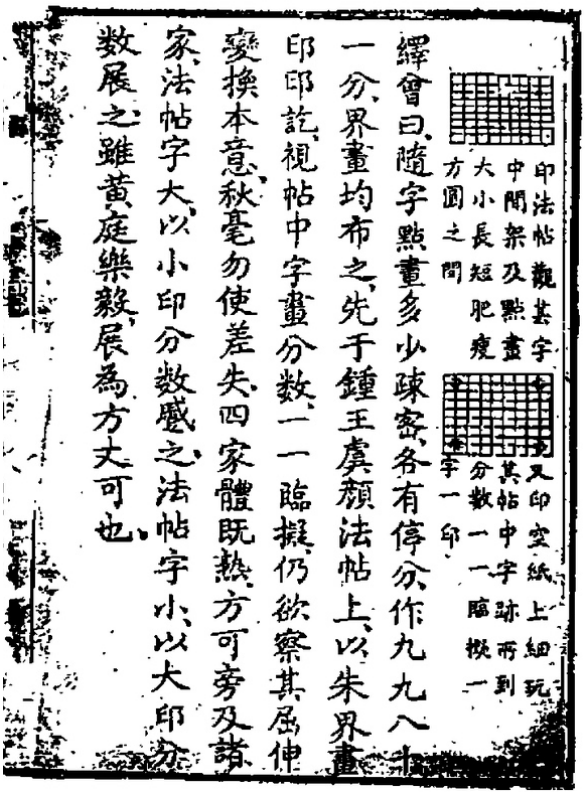


Fig. 4.3 Model for a stamping tool provided by Wang Xihou 王錫侯 in his rendering of Chen Yizeng's instructions on the nine palaces. Source: Wang. 1771. *Shufa jingyan*, 5a.

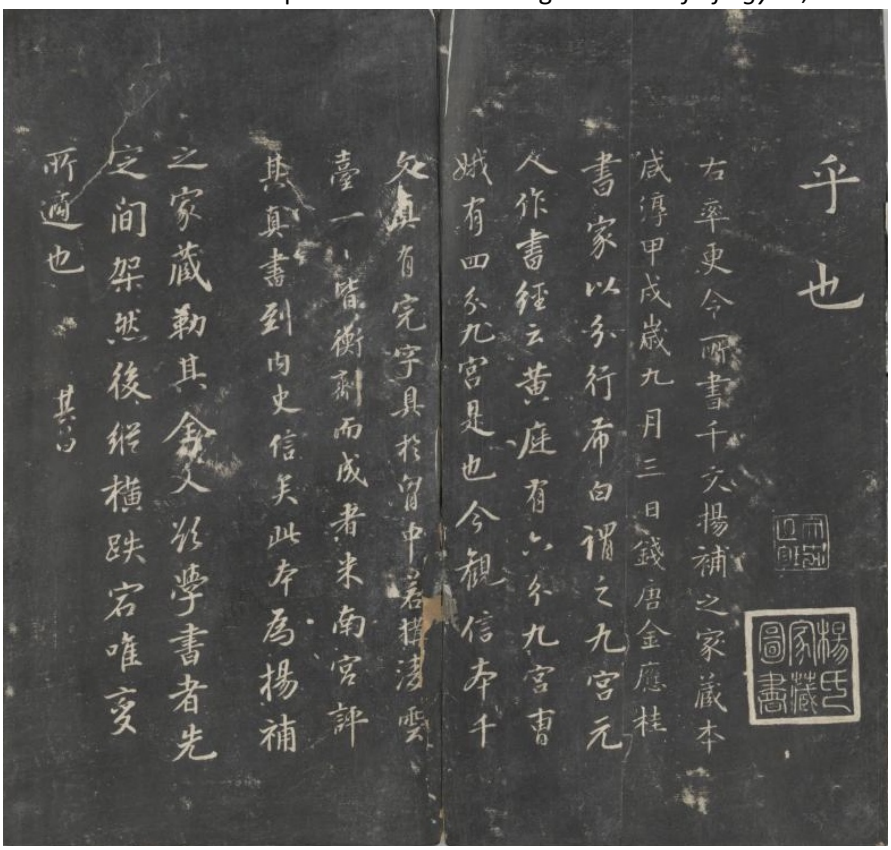


Fig. 4.4 Dong Qichang comments on the use of the nine palaces in his collection of rubbings, the *Model Calligraphy from the Hall of the Frolicking Goose* (*Xihongtang fatie* 戲鴻堂法帖). Source: Dong. 1603. *Xihongtang fashu*, folio 4, comment following *Qianziwen*, unpaginated. Image source: UTokyo Digital Archives Project.

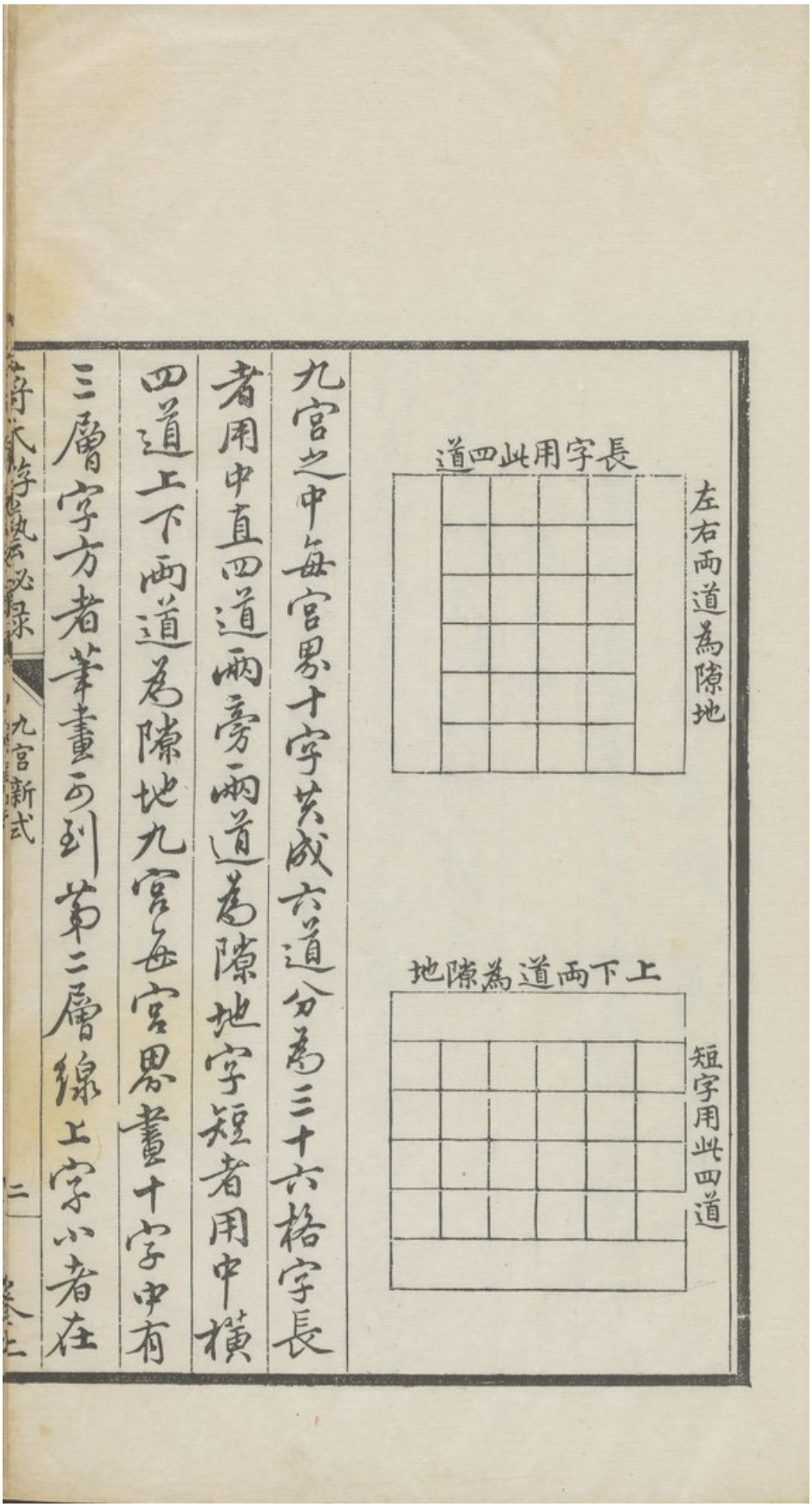


Fig. 4.5 Jiang Ji's adapted grids for narrow and flat characters. Source: Jiang. 1794. *Jiangshi youyi milu jiuzhong*, juan shang, Jiugong xinshi, 1a-1b. Image source: Harvard College Library, Harvard-Yenching Library.

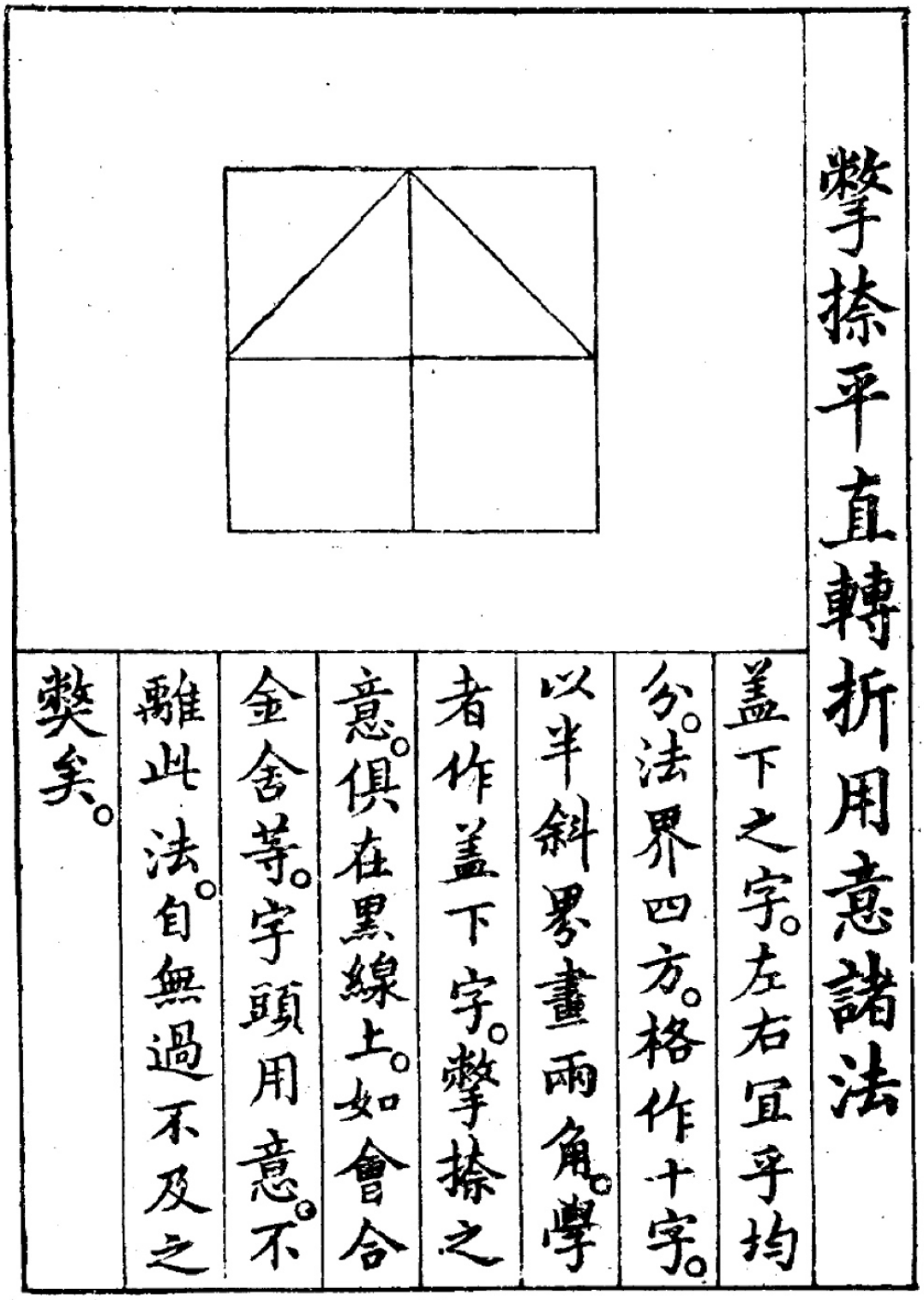


Fig. 4.6 Jiang He's grid for characters that have a triangular top, such as *he* 合. Source: Jiang. 1989. *Xizi mijue*, 42.

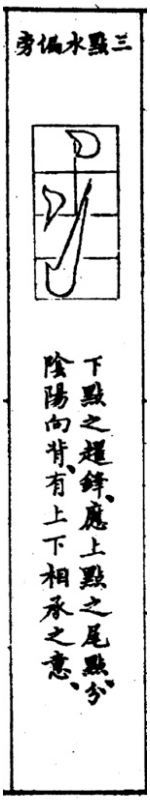


Fig. 4.7 Jiang He's narrow grid for the character component "water." Source: Jiang. 1989. *Xizi mijue*, 30.

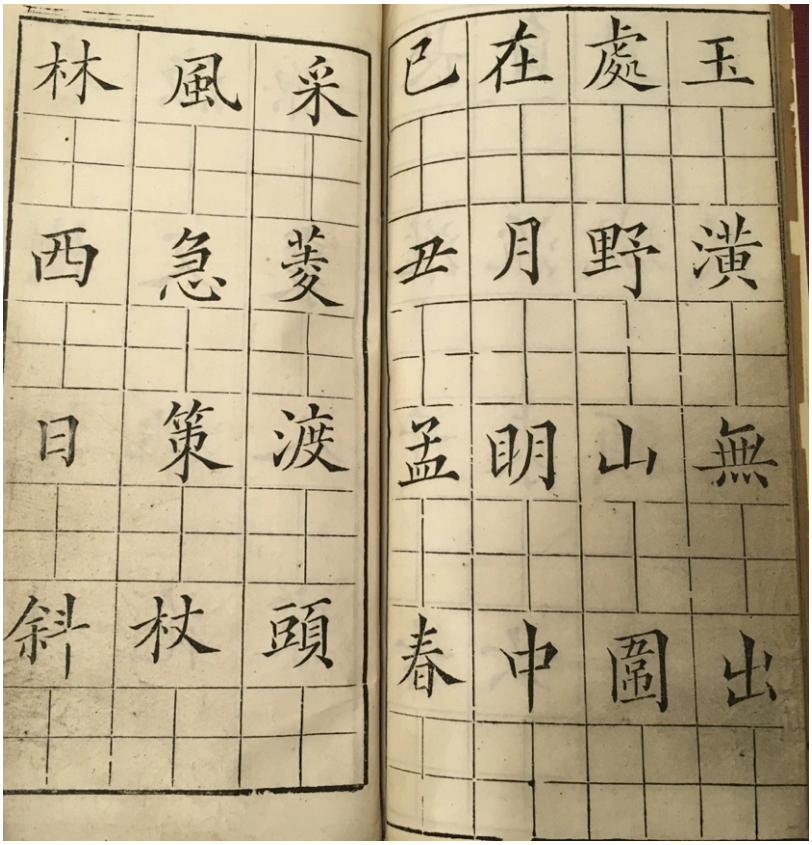


Fig. 4.8 Grid in Qing practice booklet for children. Source: *Youtong xizifa* 幼童習字法. [n.d.] . Unpaginated. Bound volume with several booklets in the collection of the British Library. Photo by author.

Fig. 4.9 Detail from Zhu Wei's eight brokens (*bapo* 八破) painting depicting a practice sheet with a printed nine palaces grid in red. Source: Berliner. 2018. *The 8 Brokens,* 1.