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

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Citation

Klasing Chen, M. (2020, December 16). *Memorable arts: The mnemonics of painting and calligraphy in Late Imperial China*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/138671>

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Issue Date: 2020-12-16

Propositions

1. During the sixteenth century, publishers in China sought out knowledge from practitioners of various crafts from different social backgrounds and adapted it to cater to broader audiences, reproducing it in cheap compilations and encyclopedias.
2. In order to make knowledge accessible in a society where the majority was illiterate, authors and publishers broke it down and packaged information in rhymed formulas that were easy to memorize.
3. Authors and publishers bypassed elite concerns with transmission lineages and artistic traditions in order to establish accessible canons: the focus of formulas shifted toward cumulative learning and schemata to present more effective learning strategies.
4. What practitioners and artists in China deemed valuable to be remembered changed over time. While Ming authors valued the usefulness of the presented content, Qing dynasty practitioners also valued family memories and social identity when discussing their craft and practices.
5. The focus on masters' paintings and material culture in Art History does not allow us to fully answer questions regarding the development of artistic pedagogy. A study of manuals and their reception enables us to understand how practices of production and teaching changed over time.
6. Memory studies and the study of *ars mnemonica* can be fruitfully combined. Chinese mnemonics demonstrate how collective memory is used to support individual memory in the development of new skills by weaving together existing and new knowledge.
7. The traditions of painting and calligraphy were closely intertwined in late imperial China. Although the two fields were distinguished by Chinese elites, art historians should study them in tandem.
8. Memory studies should not constrain itself to the study of trauma and rituals. Memory and practices of remembering permeate the field of art and play a constructive role in the codification of knowledge. Its study is central to understanding the intellectual history of different societies.
9. Codified knowledge and memorization are not hindrances to, but preconditions of creativity. Only the solid understanding of the basics provided by these means afford practitioners the tools and opportunities to develop new approaches.
10. Texts, just like video tutorials, can substitute personal interaction with a teacher to a great extent. Authors, editors and teachers can fruitfully explore the uses of memorization, repetition and recitation to engage their readers and students through printed media and video.