CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Chinese calligraphy, 書法 shū fà in Chinese, has been considered the quintessence of Chinese culture because it is an art that encompasses Chinese language, history, philosophy, and aesthetics. The term’s literal translation, “the way of writing” (shū, “writing,” and fà, “way” or “standard”), identifies the core of the art, which has close bonds with Chinese written signs, on the one hand, and painting, on the other. In China, adeptness in brush calligraphy is among the four traditional skills that cultivate the minds of the literati, along with the ability to play qín (a stringed musical instrument), skill at qí (a strategic board game known as “go” in the West), and ability to produce huà (paintings). In the modern age, shū fà is known worldwide as a unique type of art, representing one of the most distinctive features of Chinese civilization.

To people in the West, Chinese calligraphy symbolizes a complex, distinct, remote, and mysterious cultural heritage. These perceptions stem in part from differences between Eastern and Western worldviews, but the written signs themselves also present a seemingly insurmountable barrier. However, Chinese calligraphy is also fascinating and attractive in Western eyes. Recent advances in communication between China and the rest of the globe have piqued interest in China’s culture, language,
worldview, and way of life. Both within China and elsewhere, knowledge of Chinese calligraphy is seen as a mark of education, creativity, and cultural sophistication.

**THIS BOOK**

This book introduces Chinese calligraphy and its techniques to anyone with an interest in Chinese brush writing. It does not presuppose any previous knowledge of the Chinese language or writing system. The chapters are designed with the following objectives: (1) to describe in detail the techniques of Chinese brush writing at the beginning level, (2) to provide high-quality models with practical and interesting characters for writing practice, and (3) to introduce linguistic, cultural, historical, and philosophical aspects of Chinese calligraphy. In the discussion comparisons are made with Western culture and characteristics of the English language and calligraphy. The book consists of fourteen chapters of text supplemented in an appendix with models for brush-writing practice.

Detailed instruction in brush-writing techniques form the heart of the book. A standard training procedure is outlined first, followed by a detailed examination of three fundamental elements of Chinese calligraphy: stroke techniques, the structure of Chinese characters, and the art of composition. Training in brush writing begins with brush strokes in the Regular Script. According to the traditional Chinese training method, domestic calligraphy students always spend a substantial amount of time mastering the Regular Script before moving on to other styles. Learners in the West, however, generally prefer to have the opportunity to learn about and practice writing various scripts. Therefore, this book focuses on basic brush writing skills in the Regular Script in the first half and then introduces Small Seal Script, Clerical Script, and Running/Cursive styles in the second half.

Learners are exposed to a diversity of script styles. They are not expected to master them by the end of this book, although some students, with repeated practice, may be able to write some characters in a particular script quite well. Some learners or instructors may prefer not to practice all the scripts introduced in this book. Instructors or individual learners can decide the number of additional script types to be included in the course of study, whether hands-on writing practice is done for all of them, and the amount of time to be devoted to each script. Serious students will no doubt need further training and practice in order to gain competence in artistic and creative production. For this purpose, the reading list at the end of this book provides some resources for further study in English.

The book also describes in detail the formation of Chinese characters, their stroke types, stroke order, components, and major layout patterns. Many of the explanations given here are not found in other calligraphy books. The book title *Chinese Writing and Calligraphy* well reflects this special feature. The history of the Chinese calligraphic art is presented through a review of early Chinese writing, the
development of different writing styles, the ways in which calligraphy is adapting to
the modern age, and the ongoing debate on the future of the time-honored traditio-
nal art. Cultural aspects discussed in the book include writing instruments (their
history, manufacture, and features), Chinese names and seals, the Chinese world-
view (for example, the cyclic view of time), and the Daoist concept of yin and yang
as a fundamental philosophical principle in Chinese calligraphy.

Model sheets for brush-writing practice are designed to accompany the discus-
sion in the chapters and to provide opportunities for hands-on writing practice.
Learners are guided from tracing to copying and then to freehand writing. Single
strokes are practiced before characters, which are followed by the composition of
calligraphy pieces. Writing skills are developed in the Regular Script first. Then op-
portunities are provided for learners to write characters in Small Seal, Clerical, and
Cursive styles so that they can explore and identify their personal preferences. The
selection and arrangement of model characters reflect a number of considera-
tions. Preference is given to characters that serve practical teaching and learning goals or
characters that frequently appear in calligraphy pieces. Repetition of characters,
either in the same or different scripts, also serves specific pedagogical functions.
Since no two calligraphy courses are the same, instructors or individual learners may
decide to repeat or to skip certain pages depending on their specific goals.

On the model sheets for brush-writing practice, each character is marked with
its meaning in English and the stroke order in Regular Script. The model characters
are also sequenced by level of difficulty. After individual characters, well-known
phrases are also practiced. The brush-writing models in the four script types are
all based on works of Wang Xizhi (303–361 CE), the calligraphy sage of the Jin
dynasty whose writing represents the peak of the art. As is traditional and to avoid
confusion, Chinese personal names throughout the book are presented with the
family name first, followed by the given name; the Chinese characters presented in
this book are in their full (traditional) form. The romanization of Chinese terms is
in Pinyin.

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, Chinese calligraphy is written on absorbent
paper. Following that tradition, the learner is advised to use absorbent paper, ideally
“rice paper,” for writing practice. Nowadays, such paper (even with a printed grid
specifically for Chinese calligraphy practice) can be purchased online or in art stores.
Rice paper, which is quite transparent, can be laid on top of the model characters
provided in this book for tracing.

THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 first describes the instruments used in Chinese brush writing, including
their history, manufacture, features, and maintenance. Elementary training issues
are dealt with next, including steps of the training procedure, the management of
pressure, and the roles of moisture and speed in writing. Other rudimentary issues such as brush preparation and arrangement of writing space are also discussed.

*Chapters 3, 4, and 5* expound upon the basic skills in writing individual strokes. First the techniques of pressing down and lifting up of the brush are discussed and illustrated, followed by an overview of the eight major stroke types. Step-by-step instructions on how to write each stroke type are then laid out and amply illustrated. The discussion also includes variant forms of each stroke type, techniques involved in writing, stroke-order rules, and common mistakes made by beginning learners. Models for writing practice are provided. To prepare learners for producing calligraphic pieces and one's signature, cultural topics related to calligraphy are also discussed. Chapter 4, for example, offers a discussion of Chinese names, including how a Chinese name is chosen for a person based on his or her original Western name.

The next chapters proceed to the actual formation of Chinese characters. *Chapter 6* describes the nature of Chinese written signs and categorizes characters in terms of their composition. *Chapter 7* delineates the internal layout patterns of characters and some basic principles of writing. The cultural topics for these two chapters are dating in Chinese according to the Western calendar and the themes and content of calligraphy pieces.

Historical factors that molded Chinese calligraphy are presented in *Chapters 8 through 11*. Since this evolution started more than three thousand years ago, the discussion only summarizes the major line of development, emphasizing the events and calligraphy masters with a profound influence on the art. Each of these chapters deals with one script type (Seal Script, Clerical, Regular, and Running/Cursive). Together these chapters seek to foster an understanding of the historical development of the calligraphic art, to build a knowledge base for distinguishing and appreciating the various script styles, and to provide opportunities to practice the major scripts. Discussion concentrates on how each script was developed, how it differs from other styles, its main characteristics, and life stories of major calligraphers. Illustrations and model sheets are also provided. For the Regular Script, the personal styles of the three greatest masters, Wang Xizhi, Yan Zhenqing, and Liu Gongquan, are compared in Chapter 10, so that learners have a chance to examine subtle differences within one major script type. For a cultural topic, *Chapter 9* describes the Chinese traditional time-recording method commonly used to date calligraphy works.

Composing a calligraphy piece is the topic of *Chapter 12*. Details of components and layout patterns are described, followed by a discussion of the making and use of the Chinese seal. *Chapter 13* explores the Daoist concept of yin and yang, and its significance in Chinese culture. This chapter also discusses how to appreciate a calligraphy piece and the relation of calligraphy and health: it will be shown that calligraphy practice is a healthy union of motion and tranquility. The motion of calligraphy writing not only corresponds to rhythms of the physical body, such as breathing and
heartbeat, but also accords with the writer’s moods and emotions. *Chapter 14*, the last chapter, examines how calligraphy, as a traditional art form, is adapting to the age of modernization and globalization.

**WRITING AND CALLIGRAPHY IN CHINESE SOCIETY**

All languages serve the practical function of communication. In different cultures and societies, however, language and its roles are perceived differently.

According to Jewish and Christian cultures, God created language (human speech). In Chinese culture, however, the origin of speech is never accounted for; instead, the historical emphasis has always been on writing. To the Chinese, the creation of language means the creation of Chinese characters. Credit for this invention is given to a half-god, half-human figure called Cang Jie, who lived about four thousand years ago. The ancient Chinese believed that Heaven had secret codes, which were revealed through natural phenomena. Only those with divine powers were endowed with the ability to break them. Cang Jie, who had four eyes (Figure 1.1), had this ability. He was able to interpret natural signs and to transcribe the shapes of natural objects (e.g., mountains, rivers, shadows of trees and plants, animal footprints, and bird scratches) into writing. Legend has it that when Cang Jie created written symbols, spirits howled in agony as the secrets of Heaven were revealed. Since then all Chinese, from emperors to ordinary farmers, have shared a tremendous awe for written symbols. They have venerated Cang Jie as the originator of Chinese written language. Today shrines to Cang Jie can be found in various locations in China. The one in Shanxi Province, not far from the tomb of the Yellow Emperor, the legendary ancestor of the Chinese people (ca. 2600 BCE), is at least 1,800 years old. Memorial ceremonies are held every year at both shrines.

*Figure 1.1. Cang Jie, creator of Chinese characters (legendary). [FROM ZHOU, HANZI JIAOXUE LILUN FANGFA, P. 5, WHERE NO INDICATION OF SOURCE IS GIVEN]*
One reason for the great respect for the written word in China has to do with
the longevity of Cang Jie’s invention: the written signs he created have been in
continuous use throughout China’s history. This written language unites a people
on a vast land who speak different, mutually unintelligible dialects. It is also the
character set in which all of the classics of Chinese literature were written. Using
these characters, the Chinese were the first to invent movable type around 1041 CE.
It is estimated that, until the invention of movable type in the West, no civilization
produced more written material than China. By the end of the fifteenth century
CE, more books were written and reproduced in China than in all other countries
of the world combined!

The central, indispensable role of the written language in China nurtured a
reverence for written symbols that no other culture has yet surpassed. Written char-
acters hold a sacred position, being much more than a useful tool for communica-
tion. As we will see throughout this book, characters have been incised into shells
of turtles and shoulder blades of oxen; they have been inscribed on pottery, bronze,
iron, stone, and jade; they have been written on strips of bamboo, pieces of silk,
and sheets of the world’s first paper. They are on ancestral worship tablets and for-
tuneteller’s cards; they appear at building entrances and on doors for good luck.
When new houses are built, inscriptions are put on crossbeams to repel evil spirits.
Significant indoor areas or the central room in a traditional residence always have
brush-written characters visible at a commanding height. Decorating such halls
and rooms with calligraphy is a ubiquitous tradition in China, which should not be
compared to the Western tradition of hanging framed biblical admonitions, printed
in Gothic letters, on the wall of an alcove. The importance of the latter resides much
more in its message, whereas that of the former is predominantly its visual beauty.
(See Figures 1.2–1.4).

Written characters are also an integral part of public scenes in China. Simply by
walking down the street, one can enjoy a feast of numerous calligraphic styles on
street signs, shop banners, billboards, and in restaurants and parks. During festivities
and important events, brush-written couplets are composed and put up for public
display. There are marriage couplets for newlyweds, good-luck couplets for new
babies, longevity couplets on elders’ birthdays, spring couplets for the New Year,
and elegiac couplets for memorial services. Calligraphy works written in various
styles can be purchased on the street or in shops and museums; these may feature
characters, such as 福 fú, “blessings,” and 壽 shòu, “longevity,” written in more than
one hundred ways. (See Figures 1.5–1.8).

The decorative function of Chinese calligraphy is a common sight in China.
At tourist attractions, writings of past emperors and calligraphy masters or famous
sayings and poems written by famous calligraphers are engraved on rocks or wood
to enhance the beauty of nature. They can even be found on sides of mountains,
where huge characters are carved into stone cliffs for all to view and appreciate
Figure 1.2. Entrance of the Yuelu Academy 岳麓书院 in Changsha (established 1015 CE), one of the four great academies of Northern Song China. The horizontal inscription bearing the name “Yuelu Academy” was bestowed by Emperor Zhenzong. The couplet, which reads vertically from right to left, says: “Promising scholars gather on the land of Chu; the majority of them are here.” [PHOTO BY WENDAN LI]

Figure 1.3. Central room of a traditional Chinese house, where everything of spiritual value to the owner is displayed and worshiped, from Buddha to national leaders to photos of deceased family members. Brush-written couplets are indispensable to such a display. Photo taken in rural Guangxi. [PHOTO BY WENDAN LI]

Figure 1.4. Living room in a modern urban residence with a piece of calligraphy carved on wood hanging on the wall. [PHOTO BY WENDAN LI]
Figure 1.5. Wallpaper in a restaurant with 福 (blessings) in various styles. [ PHOTO BY WENDAN LI ]

Figure 1.6. Restaurant sign Brocaded Red Mansion 銅織紅樓 in Small Seal Script. [ PHOTO BY WENDAN LI ]
Figure 1.7. Welcome sign 賓至如歸 (guests coming home) in Small Seal Script at the entrance of a modern hotel. [ PHOTO BY WENDAN LI ]

Figure 1.8. A wall decorated with characters at Beijing International Airport. The large character 和 in the middle means “harmony.” [ PHOTO BY WENDAN LI ]
(Figures 1.9–1.12). The Forest of Monuments in the historic city of Xi’an and the inscriptions along the rocky paths of Mount Tai are the largest displays of Chinese calligraphy. Places well-known calligraphers visited and left such writing are historic landmarks protected by the government today.

The importance of writing in Chinese society and, more specifically, the importance of good handwriting are apparent to students of Chinese history. Before the hard pen and pencil were introduced to China from the West in the early twentieth century, the brush was the only writing tool. Brush writing was a skill every educated man had to master. In the seventh century CE, the imperial civil service examinations were introduced in China to determine who among the general population would be permitted to enter the government’s bureaucracy. Calligraphy was not only a subject that was tested, but also a means by which knowledge in other subject areas (including Confucian classics and composition) was exhibited. In theory at least, anyone, even a poor farmer’s son, could attain a powerful government post through mastery of the subjects on the exams. This new system standardized the curriculum throughout China and offered the only path for people with

![Figure 1.9. Daguan (Grand View) Peak inscribed wall at Mount Tai (1). Calligraphy written by emperors and famous calligraphers was carved into cliffs to praise the natural beauty and the scenery. The two large red characters on top left (meaning “peaks in clouds”) were the calligraphy of the Kangxi emperor (1654–1722) of the Qing dynasty. The text below was written by the Qianlong Emperor (1711–1799), also of the Qing dynasty.](PHOTO BY WENDAN LI)
talent and ability to move up in society. Accordingly, success in the civil service examinations became the life dream of generations of young men, and calligraphy was virtually a stepping stone. From a very early age, students would start practicing calligraphy and studying the Confucian classics. For thirteen centuries, the civil service examinations were central to China’s political and cultural life. They created

Figure 1.10. Daguan (Grand View) Peak inscribed wall at Mount Tai (2). This lengthy prose text commemorating his visit to the scenic spot was written by Li Longji (685–762), a Tang dynasty emperor known for his calligraphy. Carved into the cliff in 726, it stands 43.6 feet high and 17.4 feet wide and consists of 1,008 characters. Each character is 6.5 x 10 inches in size, written in the Clerical Script. The other carvings were added later during various dynasties. [PHOTO BY WENDAN LI]
FIGURE 1.11. The Chinese character longevity engraved on mountain cliffs near Qingdao, Shandong Province. [PHOTO BY WENDAN LI]

FIGURE 1.12. Calligraphy and poem by Guo Moruo, a well-known modern Chinese scholar, displayed outside the Guo Moruo Museum in Beijing. [PHOTO BY WENDAN LI]
a powerful intelligentsia whose skills in composition and calligraphy were highly valued. Consequently, in traditional China, excellence in learning, superb handwriting, and an official post were a common combination.¹

This tradition is carried on in modern China. Today, during important events or official inspection tours, government officials often write or are asked to write words of encouragement and commemoration in calligraphy to be presented to the public. A person’s learning is judged, at least in part, by his or her handwriting. A scholar’s essay, however wise, is considered poor if the handwriting is inferior. Although the civil service examinations were abolished at the beginning of the twentieth century, China remains a society where good handwriting is uniquely valued.

China’s rulers have played a role in promoting calligraphy. Numerous past emperors were masters of calligraphy and left their works for later generations to appreciate. Figures 1.2, 1.9, and 1.10 illustrate the calligraphy of Chinese emperors. Figure 1.13 below shows the calligraphy of Emperor Huizong (1082–1135) of the Song dynasty, who created his own style called “Slender Gold,” which is still among the most popular and well-known calligraphic styles. Figure 1.14 was also written by a well-known ruler-calligrapher, Emperor Qianlong (1711–1799) of the Qing dynasty.

Writing takes place every minute of the day in every corner of the world, but in China it is elevated to a fine art that pervades all levels of society. The art of calligraphy is held in the highest esteem, surpassing painting, sculpture, ceramics, and even poetry. Yet, Chinese calligraphy is more than an art. It is a national taste, nourished in everyone from childhood on, that has penetrated every aspect of Chinese life. In China it is believed that a person’s handwriting reveals education, self-discipline,
and personality; it measures cultural attainment and aesthetic sensitivities; and it even relates to physical appearance. Thus the instinct to judge or comment on a person’s handwriting is as common as the instinct to judge people’s appearance and personality. In a way, handwriting is like a person’s face: everyone tries to keep it at its best. For the same reason, good handwriting brings satisfaction, confidence, self-esteem, and respect.

In modern China, calligraphy is not only a regular part of the school curriculum (Figure 1.15); it is practiced by people of all ages and from all walks of life. Although the practical function of brush writing is diminishing in modern society, calligraphy remains a widely practiced amateur art for millions of Chinese—an enjoyable pastime outside of work and daily chores. Along with calligraphy clubs, associations, magazines, and local and national competitions at all levels, prominent newspapers also publish columns on Chinese calligraphy.

Visitors to China today often notice a unique cultural phenomenon: In every town and city, in the early morning when a new day is just starting, people, old and young, male and female, gather in parks or even on sidewalks to do morning exercises. Many bring a special brush tied to a stick and a bucket of water; then they
find a quiet spot and start wielding their brushes on the pavement. A new name, “ground calligraphy” or “water calligraphy,” has been given to this new way of both practicing calligraphy and doing morning exercises (Figure 1.16). As will be discussed in Chapter 13, medical research has indicated that regular, sustained practice of calligraphy may improve body functions and is thus a good way to keep fit.

Chinese brush writing once served as the primary means of written commu-
nication. During thousands of years of practice, it developed into a fine art. In modern Chinese society, because of its combination of artistic characteristics, cultural underpinnings, and health benefits, calligraphy continues to flourish and break new ground. Love for the written word is not only present among the literati and promoted by the government, but also deeply rooted in the populace. The art of calligraphy has also spread to nearby countries such as Japan and Korea, where it is practiced and studied with great enthusiasm.

Why is writing so important to the Chinese? What makes it special and different from the writing of other languages? To answer these questions, let's look more closely at the nature of Chinese writing and then compare it with Western calligraphy.

**THE ARTISTIC QUALITIES OF CHINESE WRITING**

Chinese is one of the few languages in which the script not only is a means of communication but also is celebrated as an independent form of visual art. The best of Western calligraphy, for example, the scriptures written on parchment by monks in the Middle Ages and the letters written in golden ink by scribes at Buckingham Palace, exemplify its primary function as a means of documentation and communication. One might ask why Western calligraphy didn’t evolve from the functional to the purely artistic, as Chinese calligraphy did. The answer has a lot to do with the nature of the scripts (see Figure 1.17).

![Figure 1.17. “Word” versus 字 (Chinese character).](image)

Alphabetic writing consists of an inventory of letters that correspond to speech sounds. Sound symbols are simple in structure and small in number, ranging from about twenty to fifty for a particular language. The English alphabet, for example, has twenty-six letters. Each is formed by arranging one to four elements. The letter “o” has only one element; “i” has two, a dot and a vertical line; and the capital letter “E” has four elements. These elements are generally various lines, curves or circles, and dots. In writing, letters are arranged in a linear order to form words and texts. Because of the small number of letters, their frequency of use is high. Furthermore, the same letter repeated in a text is always supposed to be written in exactly the same way, except for larger or more ornate capital letters at the beginning of texts. Consequently, Western calligraphy concentrates on repetitive lines and circles.

Chinese is entirely different. Its written signs, or characters, are meaning
symbols, each functioning roughly as a single word does in English. Characters are also formed by assembling dots and lines, but there are more such elements with more varied shapes. Each element, a dot or a line, as a building block of Chinese characters, is called a stroke. In writing, strokes of various shapes are assembled in a two-dimensional space, first into components and then by combining components into characters. In the example in Figure 1.17, the character 乖 zi has two components, 冫 and 子, arranged in a top-down fashion. The component 冫 consists of three strokes, as does the other component 子. Generally speaking, the number of characters required for daily functions such as newspaper reading is three to four thousand. As meaning symbols, the characters have to be distinct enough for visual decoding. Therefore, they cannot all be simple in structure. Some are relatively simple with a small number of strokes, while others can be quite complex with more than twenty or even thirty strokes. Each character has a unique internal structure. The components making up these characters, for example, can be arranged in a top to bottom, left to right, or even a more complex configuration.

In calligraphy, the soft and resilient writing brush is used to vary the shape and thickness of each stroke. This tool, combined with ink on absorbent paper, makes each character distinct. When characters are put together to form a text, additional techniques create coordination and interplay not only between adjacent characters, but also among characters that appear in different parts of a text. Instead of striving to produce a uniform look, Chinese calligraphers make every effort to keep characters recurring in a text different from one another.

Generally speaking, Western calligraphy reflects an interest in ornamenting words on the page. It stresses perfection and rigidity; mastering exact duplication of letters is considered the pinnacle of the art. More modern works do overcome the traditional boundaries and allow for personal expression, but this is most often seen in high art and is hard to find from the average calligrapher. Thus calligraphy in the West is generally considered a minor art that tends to curb spontaneity. Chinese calligraphy, by sharp contrast, is an art form in which variation is the key. The freedom of personal expression or personal emotion that emanates through the work is its goal.

The ability to reach this goal depends on the nature of Chinese writing, the writing instruments, and the skill of the calligrapher. Together, these elements provide enormous opportunities for artistic expression. While creativity is the life of any art, the complex internal structure of Chinese characters and the unique writing instruments have allowed ample space in multiple dimensions for Chinese calligraphy to develop into a fine art whose core is deeply personal, heartfelt expression.

Another important aspect of Chinese calligraphy is the astounding variety of uses it serves. Western calligraphy is typically reserved for formal use such as in wedding invitations, certificates and awards, and other special documents. Its historical linkage with organized religion also places it outside the realm of ordinary human activity. In addition, its preindustrial origins and prevalence throughout medieval
and early modern Europe visually relegate it to the past. All of this is in stark contrast to China’s continuous fascination with calligraphy, which is still a part of everyday life.

ABILITIES THAT CAN BE ACQUIRED BY PRACTICING CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY

“What can I learn by practicing Chinese calligraphy?” you may ask. First, practicing calligraphy cultivates sensibility and nourishes one’s inborn nature. We know that our brains have two hemispheres, or parts. The left brain is verbal, analytical, logical, and linear, whereas the right brain is nonverbal, synthetic, spatial, artistic, and holistic. A balanced use of both hemispheres allows one to reach full potential, grants strength in problem solving, and encourages a healthy perspective on life. Traditionally, Western culture has been associated with left-brain habits and therefore places a stronger emphasis on reasoning and verbal abilities. Modern education also focuses more on analytical abilities, logical thinking, and verbal skills. Chinese calligraphy, which is both language and art, requires a balanced use of both sides of the brain. Using the right brain for visual imaging, spatial perception, and holistic thinking also provides a good opportunity to develop creativity.

In your study of Chinese calligraphy, you will learn to use your eyes to observe the details of writing as an art form, to discover the crucial features of a stroke, a character, and a piece of writing as a whole. You will learn to coordinate your mind with your hand and to maneuver the brush to produce different shapes and lines with the quality you want. In addition, you will also be trained in image memory, artistic thinking, and creativity, as well as visual expression, endurance, discipline, and hard work.

The purpose of education is to develop human potential. In today’s world, globalization plays an increasing role in how we experience life. It has become essential to learn about other cultures and alternative ways of thinking, and to be trained to bring together all our mental and physical faculties, in order to meet today’s challenges.

The principles of calligraphy contained in this book reflect Chinese philosophy, which can be widely applied to life anywhere in the world. Understanding the way of the brush increases appreciation of Eastern principles such as space dynamics, black and white contrast, and emphasis on consensus and models. Practicing calligraphy is also a good way to study Chinese history and language. Any degree of skill in the art is a sign of cultural exposure. For those of strongly artistic bent, Chinese calligraphy helps develop aesthetic vision through the basic elements of line, proportion, and space dynamics. It teaches you a way to appreciate and participate in a visual view of the world.
INTRODUCTION

TO LEARNERS WITH NO BACKGROUND IN THE CHINESE LANGUAGE

The spirit of a foreign culture is often difficult to understand. It does not lend itself to easy expression. To many people in the West, Chinese culture is baffling and elusive. And the Chinese have such a complicated writing system that each character seems to be a mystery, a maze of lines. In this book, however, you will see that Chinese characters are well organized and based on inner logic. You will learn ways to look at them and understand their internal organization and aesthetics.

One does not have to learn the Chinese language in order to enjoy or even to write Chinese calligraphy. Calligraphy is a visual art, a unity of drawing and writing that appeals more to the eye than to the ear. While it is true that speakers of the language can appreciate the textual content, it is perfectly possible to enjoy and practice calligraphy as an abstract art without knowing the language. Calligraphy is much like music in that it can be enjoyed by different people in different ways. Some play musical instruments; some compose and analyze music; others simply enjoy listening to it. In China, many native speakers of Chinese today do not know how to write with a brush or to read cursive writing. But they may still enjoy calligraphy and the Cursive Style.

If you cannot read Chinese, do not be intimidated by the language barrier. Do not let the lack of verbal literacy hold you back. Learn to see the characters rather than read them. In this book, you will be introduced to brush writing gradually from the simplest dot to the full range of strokes, then to the writing of characters and calligraphy pieces. Each character in the writing model will be marked to indicate its meaning in English and the sequence of its strokes. You may choose for yourself what characters to practice writing and how many of them to learn by heart. The most important thing is to keep learning: to focus on your practical goals, to relax, and to move forward one step at a time.

For learners in the West, a course on Chinese calligraphy is like a journey to discover the unknown and the unfamiliar, and to find unknown qualities within yourself. Art can only be known through experience. What you will learn from this experience depends on how you approach the task. This book is a guide to equip you with the ability to appreciate the unfamiliar by looking at it with fresh eyes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is Chinese calligraphy different from, for example, English calligraphy in terms of scripts, writing instruments, and societal roles?
2. What do you hope to learn by using this book? Having clear goals in mind will help you achieve them.