A Narrative on Calligraphy
by Sun Guoting

英譯書譜

KS Vincent POON（潘君尚）
BSc, CMF, BEd, MSc

Kwok Kin POON（潘國鍵）
BA, DipEd, MA, MPhil, MEd, PhD

附白話錯譯舉隅
In Loving Memory of Our Beloved

Pui Luen Nora TSANG (曾佩鑾)
# Contents

Introduction 3

PART ONE:  
English Translation of *A Narrative on Calligraphy* 7

PART TWO:  
Footnotes 63  
Bibliography 137

PART THREE:  
Appendix - 《書譜》白話錯誤舉隅 141

Images: KS Vincent POON’s *A Model of A Narrative of Calligraphy*
Introduction

(I)

A Narrative on Calligraphy (書譜, pronounced as Shu Pu) was written in 687AD by the renowned Tang dynasty calligrapher Sun Guoting (孫過庭, 648-703AD) and is often regarded today to be one of the most important narratives in examining the traditional art of Chinese calligraphy. The original Chinese title, 書譜, is translated into English by others as Treatise on Calligraphy or Manual of Calligraphy, yet “Treatise” or “Manual” is far less accurate than “Narrative” in translating the word “譜” in this context, as both words do not bear the meaning of “recording and narrating”.

The presumable original masterpiece of A Narrative on Calligraphy can be observed in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan. However, whether this is a partial, complete or simply the preamble of Sun Guoting’s A Narrative on Calligraphy, is still in question.

(II)

Aside from its aesthetic beauty, A Narrative on Calligraphy is an early document that analyzes and details the art of Chinese calligraphy in a relatively more systematic manner. Hence, its textual content is often considered to be an important resource for studying and understanding Chinese calligraphy. Drawing from traditional Chinese values and philosophies, Sun Guoting provided a narrative that outlined the aesthetics and techniques in calligraphy as well as his deliberation on the importance of one’s tempera-
ments/conducts in writing good calligraphy. Therefore, it is a must-read for anyone who is interested in studying Chinese calligraphy and traditional Chinese culture.

(III)

This book is divided into three parts. Part one provides an accurate, annotated, fluent, and line-by-line English translation of *A Narrative on Calligraphy*. Part two contains detail footnotes and bibliography for the English translation; these footnotes include in-depth explanations of classical Chinese words and terms in the original text, as well as illustrating the many serious and fundamental interpretation mistakes made in the two past English translations by Chang Ch’ung-ho & Hans H. Frankel\(^\text{vi}\) and Pietro De Laurentis\(^\text{vii}\). Part three is a short critique, written in Chinese, by Kwok Kin POON that focuses on the myriad of major misinterpretations in the most prevalent vernacular Chinese interpretation of *A Narrative in Calligraphy* by Ma Guoquan (馬國權).\(^\text{vii}\)

It is our sincere hope that this book can help readers to achieve a more in-depth, correct, and clear understanding of Sun Guoting’s philosophies towards Chinese calligraphy.

KS Vincent POON
March 2018

---


iii. The word “譜” in Kangxi Dictionary (《康熙字典》) is defined as “籍錄也(to record and narrate)”.


v. Chang Ch’ung-ho & Hans H. Frankel, ibid.


PART ONE:

English Translation of *A Narrative on Calligraphy*
English Translation of A Narrative on Calligraphy

KS Vincent POON (潘君尚)

1. 夫自古之善書者, 漢魏有鍾張之絕, 晉末稱二王之妙。
   Alas, since a long time ago, those who were regarded to have penned great calligraphy\(^1\) were Zhong (Zhong Yao 鍾繇, 152–230AD) and Zhang (Zhang Zhi 張芝, ?-192AD) of the Han-Wei Period (206BC-265AD), both of whom produced unrivaled masterpieces, as well as the Two Wangs (Wang Xizhi 王羲之, 303–361AD; and Wang Xianzhi 王獻之344–386AD) of the late Jin dynasty (265-420AD) who both produced works of exquisite beauty.

2. 王羲之云: 「頃尋諸名書, 鍾張信為絕倫, 其餘不足觀。」
   Wang Xizhi once said, “I have searched and reviewed various renowned works of calligraphy and concluded that only Zhong and Zhang’s works are truly superior and unrivaled; works by others are unremarkable and so not even worth studying.”\(^2\)

3. 可謂鍾張云沒, 而羲獻繼之。
   Hence, it can be said that after the death of Zhong and Zhang, Xizhi and Xianzhi were the ones who had truly succeeded them.

4. 又云: 「吾書比之鍾張, 鍾當抗行, 或謂過之。張草猶當鴈行, 然張精熟, 池水盡墨, 假令寡人耽之若此, 未必謝之。」
   Wang Xizhi further commented, “If one were to com-