

Two Chinese treatises on calligraphy. Introduced, translated, and annotated by Chang Chung-ho and Hans Frankel. Hew Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995. Pp. xv, 144.

This book consists of annotated scholarly translations of two essays: *Treatise on calligraphy (Shū Pǔ)* by Sūn Qiánlǐ (687 AD) and *Sequel to the 'Treatise on calligraphy' (Xù Shū Pǔ)* by Jiāng Kuí (ca. 1155-1221). Sūn's essay attempts to communicate his thoughts on calligraphy through revealing anecdotes, powerful metaphors, and his own introspections, while Jiāng's concentrates more on technical pointers, e.g. the relative advantages of copying over tracing when practicing calligraphy. The original Chinese texts of both essays are clearly transcribed by Chang Chung-ho in the back of the book, and a photocopy of the original *Shū Pǔ* text in Sūn Qiánlǐ's hand is reproduced in a separate section. The book also includes very useful 'Persons mentioned' and 'Glossary of calligraphic terms' sections plus a bibliography and index. The translations themselves take up only 29 pages.

At first glance, the subject matter of this book suggests a highly limited audience. A further 'put off' is the relative stuffiness of the translations. These drawbacks aside, the book is rewarding enough for the reader who is looking for information on Chinese views of what constitutes good – and poor – calligraphy. Jiāng tells us that 'brushwork is like bent hairpins, like traces of a leaky roof, like lines made by an awl in the sand, like cracks in a wall' (p. 22).

The texts can, however, also be read more broadly as an exposition of what it is to be truly good at anything. Through his discussions of outstanding works of calligraphy and of profiles – filled with sensitive psychological insights – of the people who produced great calligraphy, Sūn describes the multifarious interactions of human ambition, talent, persistence, pureness of spirit, as well as mediocrity, arrogance, lack of dedication, competition, jealousy, plagiarism, and, most importantly, how to recognize solid, disciplined substances vs. empty, uninspired form. These apply to any human pursuit and are encapsulated and analyzed in a remarkable way through this close study of one specific endeavor.

However stilted the translations may feel, readers who refer to the Chinese originals will be impressed at how C & F were able to extract all the meaning they did and express it so articulately and precisely in English. The translations clear up numerous obscure allusions and difficult phrases in the Chinese. The stiffness can perhaps be written off to scholarly meticulousness and the deep disparities between classical Chinese conventions and modern English style. An unfortunate omission is that of tone marks over the Chinese words in Pinyin romanization.

The dust jacket design, which features a sample of calligraphy ascribed to Jiāng Kuí, is quite attractive with its contrasts of tan, red, and black. The hard-to-read fonts chosen for the English title, however, detract from the overall pleasing effect, as does the odd style of the boldface and italicized words in the main text – ironic defects in a work on calligraphy. These do not, however, cancel out the notable contribution this work makes to Sinology and general scholarship. [Karen Steffen Chung, *National Taiwan University*.]