

The Kangxi Emperor's Brush-Traces

Calligraphy, Writing,
and the Art of
Imperial Authority

Chapter 11

Jonathan Hay

Chinese imperial portraits have recently attracted increasing attention from art historians. Modern means of mechanical reproduction are making some of these images familiar, and the names of the major Chinese emperors may soon be associated, at least in the minds of specialists, with a face. In some cases, that face will be known as it evolved over time; there exist several portraits of the Kangxi 康熙 emperor (Xuanye 玄晔, 1654–1722; r. 1662–1722), for example, painted at different moments in his life (see Fig. 11.1).¹ Our growing acquaintance with these images may cause us to forget that such depictions of the imperial body and visage originally had rather restricted audiences. In the Qing (1644–1911), portraits of a living emperor were for the most part seen only by those in a position to know his appearance at first hand. Moreover, the ease with which we accept our accelerating familiarity with successive imperial Chinese visages owes everything to expectations created by the pervasive circulation of royal portraits in Western societies over a period of several millennia, a tradition still honored by our political leaders. Not that this would matter, were it not that it risks blinding us to the significance of a well-known feature of the Chinese art of imperial authority: the fact that for many centuries the functional equivalent to the royal portrait in China has been not a likeness but a trace, a trace left by a brush in the emperor's hand. The imperial presence, in other words, has principally been disseminated by means of calligraphy, on a model that owes nothing to mimesis and is more

Fig. 11.1 Unidentified artist. *Portrait of the Kangxi Emperor in Informal Dress at His Writing Table*. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 50.5 x 31.9 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing (SOURCE: *Gu-gong bowuyuan cang wenwu zhenpin quanji: Qing dai gongting huihua* 故宫博物院藏文物珍品全集清代宫廷绘画 [Hong Kong: Shangwu, 1996], p. 3).



presentation than representation. Oversimplifying wildly, one might further dramatize the contrast with Western practice by saying that if the portrait is a noun, the calligraphic (re)presentation is a verb.

After the dynastic system ended in 1911 and emperors were replaced by republican leaders, the modern propaganda portrait did not completely displace the brush trace. On the contrary, the presence of such traces multiplied in China's social and political space.² *Brushes with Power*, Richard Kraus's 1991 study of the post-1949 exploitation of calligraphy by China's political leaders, begins with an eyewitness account of the Kangxi emperor

writing calligraphy.³ This textual counterpart to the early portrait reproduced here (and in *Brushes with Power*) serves emblematically to evoke traditional imperial practice in this domain and to introduce a central theme of Kraus's study: that China's modern leaders have inherited and adapted traditional practices of power.⁴ As in so many studies of the survival of tradition in the modern world, the argument, which ultimately measures Chinese modernity in relation to the implicitly originary and "purer" modernity of the West, depends on a homogenization of the supposedly premodern Chinese past. In reality, Xuanye's practice was anything but representative of the imperial involvement in calligraphy since the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–906). Quite the contrary: alongside his historically belated continuation of that tradition, which has its own limited interest, he initiated a new approach to the political exploitation of calligraphy, which I characterize below as "modern." To be sure, this approach, which wholly subordinated aesthetics to ideology, was inherited and adapted by twentieth-century republican politicians, but one implication of my argument is that, far from representing a survival of tradition, this action on the part of republican leaders from Sun Yatsen 孫中山 to Jiang Zemin 江澤民 is an assumption of an aspect of China's *autochthonous* modern heritage.⁵

The relevance of Xuanye's calligraphy to the double theme of body and face in Chinese visual culture can be illustrated by an incident recorded in the official day-by-day record of significant court events, *Kangxi qiju zhu* 康熙起居注 (Record of the daily activities of the Kangxi emperor). In the late autumn of 1684, one of the emperor's most trusted Chinese officials, the famously fearless censor Wei Xiangshu 魏象樞 (1617–87), retired.⁶ To mark the occasion, the emperor bestowed on him a large-character calligraphy reading "Hall of the Unfading Pine" to be used as a commemorative placard for his studio and a hanging scroll with one of the emperor's poems written in smaller characters. "Not only," said the official, "will your servitor's family cherish [these gifts] as treasures throughout the generations, but on the first and fifteenth days of every month I shall lead my entire family, old and young, in gazing respectfully up at the imperial brush and kowtowing, as if we were approaching the Heavenly Visage [itself]."⁷ Wei's response articulates a rarely expressed but important assumption about imperial calligraphy: that it not only represented the imperial *body* through the mechanism of the brushstroke as psycho-physical trace of the person but also evoked the imperial *face* through the gestalt image of the characters. The connection to the face was founded most obviously on the association of text and voice, although an analogy between the revelatory potentials of handwriting and physiognomy may also have played a role. Conjoining body and face, such calligraphies have much in common with portraits.

In this chapter, I examine Xuanye's calligraphy from a number of different points of view: first, in relation to the emperor's career as a calligrapher; second, as a form of public writing in the service of an art of imperial authority; third, in terms of the diverse functions of imperial gifts of calligraphy; and finally, in the light of the fetishistic character of responses to imperial calligraphies. In the process, I hope not only to demonstrate the modernity of Xuanye's practice in this domain but also to contribute to an alternative history of calligraphy, one that attends to it as *writing*. The latter point requires a brief explanation.

One well-established history of calligraphy conventionally defines it as writing raised to the level of a fine art, notably by the centrality of its aesthetics of expression and self-expression. But this has necessarily been an exclusionary history, leaving out of consideration many anonymous, standardized forms of writing, such as those used for manuscript copies, woodblock printing, or architectural titleboards.⁸ Conversely, it betrays the specific character of other anonymous practices that it does include, such as bronze inscriptions, sutra transcriptions, and stone-engraved mortuary inscriptions (included out of antiquarian interest or because they have been a source of inspiration for calligraphers of recent centuries) by forcing them into the straitjacket of a conventional interpretation as calligraphy and treating them as putative "reflections" of the work of master calligraphers.⁹ Moreover, with some notable exceptions, this exclusionary history has tended to downplay the bedrock role of transcription itself as an activity registered in calligraphic artworks, thereby artificially abstracting aesthetics from function.¹⁰ Conversely, recent studies of bodies of material in which the act of transcription takes on an unavoidable importance—such as the stone-carved sutra transcriptions of the Northern Dynasties (386–581)—have usually been pursued with little reference to the history of calligraphy.¹¹ Thus, the potential contribution of the issue of transcription to an alternative history of calligraphy as writing has, in a sense, fallen between the cracks.

Xuanye's calligraphy also points to this alternative history, but through the issue of standardization, which is central not only to the idea of trademark styles, as in Xuanye's case, but also to anonymous calligraphy of all kinds. Antithetical to the personalized difference conventionally prized in calligraphy, standardization becomes a positive value in a context of writing. Similarly, although Xuanye's practice has at best a marginal place in the conventional history of calligraphy as a fine art, in an alternative and complementary history of calligraphy as writing, its place is central, both paradigmatically and historically. This is probably not an assessment that would have pleased the emperor. Xuanye himself was ambitious—and not a little vain—about his artistic achievements as a calligrapher. For all that

he exploited the potential of calligraphy as public writing, he would undoubtedly have downplayed the importance of that aspect of his practice relative to his artistic ambitions. Xuanye's own criteria of judgment, however, are inadequate to an understanding of what he actually achieved.

Xuanye's Career as a Calligrapher

Xuanye had a life-long interest in calligraphy as a fine art. While still a child, he received his first instruction from two educated eunuchs who, in his words, had "come into contact with fine calligraphers of Ming times."¹² Later, when he was around seventeen or eighteen *sui*, he appointed Shen Quan 沈荃 (1624–84) as a sort of calligrapher-in-residence who acted as his calligraphy teacher for a few decisive years in the early 1670s (Fig. 11.2).¹³ Shen, who before his appointment had worked as a local official in the south, was a native of Songjiang 松江 in Jiangsu province known for his calligraphy in the style of his fellow townsman Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636).¹⁴ Shen's influence on the emperor's style cannot be overestimated: even after Shen's transfer to a new position in 1674, Xuanye continued to seek him out for instruction.¹⁵ Shen's period of attendance on the emperor, in which he was joined by another calligrapher of repute, Li Du'na 勵杜訥, marked the informal beginnings of the emperor's personal coterie of literati in residence.¹⁶ When this finally took more formal shape on Xuanye's personal initiative in 1677 as the Southern Studio, or Nanshu-fang 南書房, the emperor's primary criterion for selection was calligraphic skill. To be sure, some of the members were recommended by Xuanye's advisors for their literary talent, but even the influential Gao Shiqi 高士奇 (1645–1704), appointed in 1677, originally owed his appointment to the reputation as a calligrapher that he had developed in the capital.¹⁷ Later, the importance of calligraphy as a criterion for selection declined, but throughout the rest of the Kangxi reign the Southern Studio would include skillful calligraphers. These were usually followers of Dong Qichang; Zha Sheng 查昇 (1650–1707), a younger cousin of the painter and calligrapher Zha Shibiao 查士標 (1615–98), was perhaps the most notable (Fig. 11.3).¹⁸

Fig. 11.2 Shen Quan (1624–84). *Ode on the Heavenly Horse*, 1680 (detail). Handscroll, ink on paper, running-script calligraphy, 30 x 362 cm. © Christie's Images.

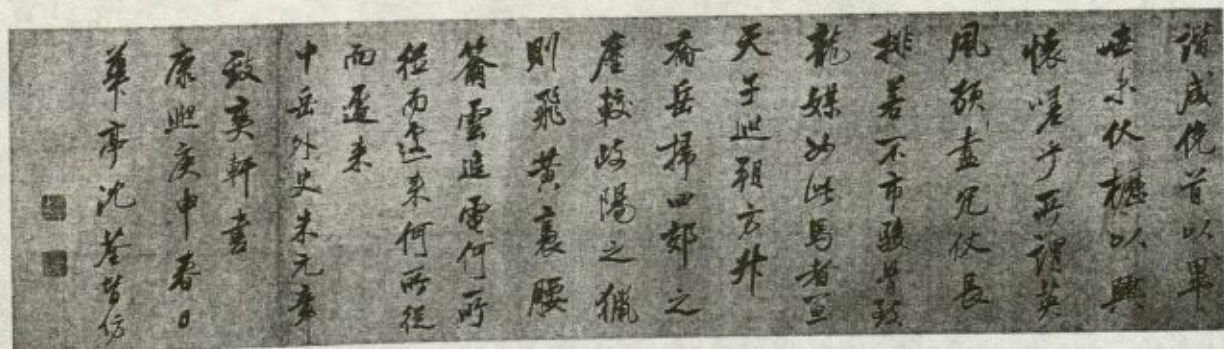


Fig. 11.3 Zha Sheng (1650–1707). *Poem*, undated. Hanging scroll, ink on satin, running-script calligraphy, 147.3 x 48.9 cm. © Sotheby's, Inc.



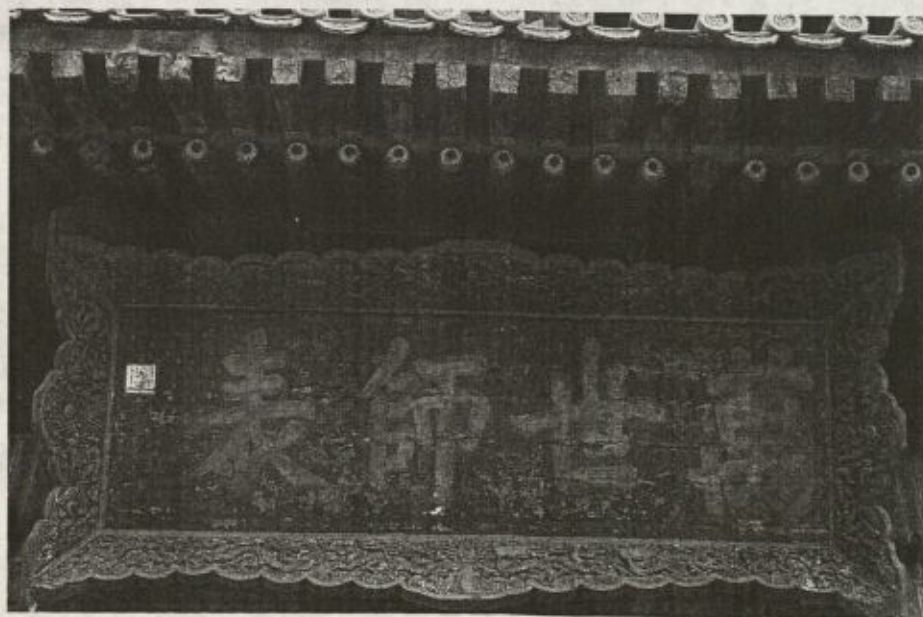
Xuanye's early commitment to calligraphy is vividly illustrated by the portrait of him as a young man introduced above, which James Cahill suggests may have been painted by Gu Jianlong 顧見龍 (1606–87 or later) (see Fig. 11.1).¹⁹ Although unfortunately undated and unsigned, it is unique among formal imperial portraits up to that time in its portrayal of the emperor as calligrapher. Grasping what appears to be a Wanli 萬曆-period porcelain-handled brush, he prepares to write a commemorative placard of

two, or perhaps three, large characters.²⁰ The earliest such placard known to me dates from 1678,²¹ but a more important early effort of this kind was a three-character placard reading "Honest, fearful, hardworking" written in 1682, of which examples were bestowed on each of China's provincial governors.²² A date for the portrait anywhere between the mid-1670s, when he completed his apprenticeship with Shen Quan, and the early 1680s, in other words while he was in his twenties, would correspond well with the youthful face that looks out at us from the painting.

Although Xuanye did have "ghost-calligraphers" at his command and undoubtedly used them as necessary, there can also be no doubt that he produced large numbers of calligraphies himself. Eyewitness accounts are so common that they constitute a minor literary sub-genre of their own.²³ Many such accounts are associated with his six Southern Tours, appropriately so since the first Southern Tour in 1684 seems to have been the moment when Xuanye or his advisors first recognized what an extraordinary political resource his interest in calligraphy represented. Although ostensibly intended as an opportunity for the emperor to inspect the state of water management, the Southern Tours were equally an ideological exercise and, in the case of the first two tours in 1684 and 1689, were essential components of a larger effort to normalize Qing power in the wake of the suppression of the Rebellion of the Three Feudatories. Calligraphy allowed the Manchu emperor to project a Chinese literati persona both through the calligraphy itself and through the texts he wrote out, the latter revealing his ability to write poetry or cite the Classics. During the first tour in 1684, over a period of six weeks or so Xuanye exploited his calligraphy in several different ways that foreshadowed his practice in decades to come, with gifts to individuals, institutions, and famous local sites. For many of these gifts, there survives a record of the recipient's response, and often an official or private exegesis of the event or the text as well.²⁴ The practice continued, indeed was expanded, during subsequent Southern Tours; some specific examples are discussed below in reference to the use of calligraphies as imperial gifts.

Following the 1684 tour, the political exploitation of the emperor's calligraphy accelerated in other contexts. The following year, for example, in response to a memorialized request, he agreed to distribute to the prefectoral and county schools of the empire calligraphies that reproduced the commemorative placard that he had written during the Southern Tour for Confucius's Shrine (Fig. 11.4).²⁵ The enormous number of examples required almost guarantees that on this occasion the substitute brushes in the Nanshufang would have been pressed into service. But this is only one example from his reign of production and distribution on a grand scale outside the immediate context of the Southern Tours. To cite a much later example of a quite different kind, on the eighth day of the eleventh month of 1702 the emperor brought out 1,427 of his calligraphies in a wide variety

Fig. 11.4 Xuanye (1654–1722). *Teachings Expounded for Ten Thousand Generations*. Titleboard to the Hall of the Great Synthesis in the Temple of Confucius, Beijing, carved from a calligraphy presented by Xuanye to Confucius's Shrine at Qufu 曲阜, Shandong, in 1684. Dimensions unavailable (Source: *Zhonghua gu wenming da tuji* 中華古文明大圖集 [Taipei: Yixin wenhua shiye youxian gongsi; and Hong Kong: Letian wenhua gongsi, 1992], 6: 131).



of styles and formats and ordered the most skillful calligraphers among his officials to sort them into categories for presentation as gifts.²⁶ Xuanye's own calculation of his output over a lifetime appeared after his death in the Yongzheng 雍正 emperor's (r. 1723–35) compilation of his father's declarations on a wide variety of topics, *Tingxun geyan* 庭訓格言 (Court admonitions and model words):

I have enjoyed calligraphy since I was a child, always copying the ink-traces of the ancients when I saw them. My copies in hanging scroll and handscroll form will soon pass the ten thousand mark. On individuals I have bestowed no less than several thousand [calligraphies]. When it comes to the famous shrines, Daoist temples, and Chan monasteries of the empire, there is none that lacks a commemorative placard written by my imperial brush; those [calligraphies], I calculate, are also more than a thousand in number.²⁷

A number of titleboards carved from Xuanye's commemorative placards remain in place today, and a huge number of other works have survived as stone carvings or stelae or in the form of rubbings taken from them.²⁸ The two branches of the former imperial collection in Beijing and Taipei still possess many original calligraphies, and other examples—usually from the corpus of gifts—regularly appear on the art market.²⁹ The overwhelming majority of these surviving works are in running script (*xingshu* 行書), but there are also quite a number of *xingcao* 行草 examples in which grass-script characters are mixed in with the running script, as well as a significant number of standard-script (*kaishu* 楷書) calligraphies. More exceptional are the seal-script (*zhuanhu* 篆書) calligraphies that he wrote, for the most part, as formal headings for stelae (see Fig. 11.7 below).³⁰ This vast oeuvre (seal script aside) can be divided into large- and small-character works.



Fig. 11.5 Xuanye (1654–1722). *Its Government Prospered like the Tang and Song Dynasties*, 1699. Stele at the Xiaoling Mausoleum of the first Ming emperor in Nanjing (SOURCE: *Zhonghua gu wenming da tuji* 中華古文明大圖集 [Taipei: Yixin wenhua shiye youxian gongsi; and Hong Kong: Letian wenhua gongsi, 1992], 5: 66).

The majority of the large-character works take the form of commemorative placards. Although some individuals displayed these in their original form as calligraphies, institutional recipients usually had them carved as titleboards (see Figs. 11.4 and 11.11). Some large-character inscriptions were written vertically, to be carved in stone rather than wood, in the form of stelae. Certain works began life as horizontal titleboards but were later transferred to stelae and rearranged vertically: a case in point is the four-character inscription at the Xiaoling 孝陵 Mausoleum of the founder of the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1643) (Fig. 11.5). Xuanye also had his characters carved into the living rock. At Mount Tai, for example, on the occasion of his first Southern Tour in 1684, he ordered local officials to carve two of his characters at the very highest point of the mountain.³¹ At New Year's, large-character calligraphies were useful for auspicious decoration and gifts.³² On a slightly smaller scale, he also produced designs for the vertical boards bearing poetic couplets that were commonly hung on pairs of pillars either side of the central axis in various kinds of building.³³ Finally, large characters were appropriate for writing the titles of small-character handscrolls.

Working with small-scale characters, Xuanye undoubtedly produced more hanging scrolls than any other format. When the texts were not poems of his own, they were often citations from neo-Confucian writers, above all Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200).³⁴ In most cases there is a political point to the text (Fig. 11.6). The next most common examples are stele inscriptions—calligraphies intended for reproduction from the start (Fig. 11.7). The intimate format of handscrolls, on the other hand, made them a particularly special gift; they seem always to have been rare, although perhaps

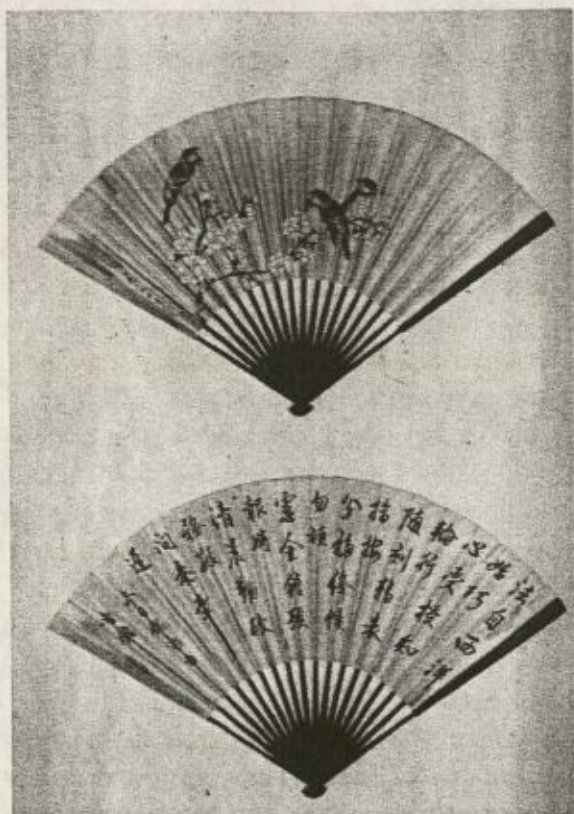


Fig. 11.8 Jiang Tingxi (1669–1732). *Birds and Flowers*, folding fan (obverse), ink and color on gold paper. Xuanye (1654–1722). *Poem in Praise of a Clock*, folding fan (reverse), ink on gold paper, both 48.7 x 14.1 cm. Formerly in the collection of the Palace of Heavenly Purity (Qianqing gong 乾清宮), present whereabouts unclear (SOURCE: *Palace Museum Monthly*, no. 41 [1936]: fig. 15).

transcriptions of Buddhist sutras from the emperor's later years in small standard-script characters.³⁷

Kangxi's commitment to calligraphy as a fine art took a multitude of other forms as well, including some major publishing projects. In 1690, his intense involvement in calligraphy gave rise to an edition of *fatie* 法帖 (models) in 24 *juan* reproducing works by commoners and emperors down the ages, himself included.³⁸ This was followed in 1699 by an eight-*juan* *fatie* edition composed entirely of his own copies of earlier calligraphers' works.³⁹ A quite different measure of his interest is the fact that, during the fifth Southern Tour in 1705, he ordered special examinations to be held that were specifically aimed at scholars skilled in calligraphy; calligraphy, in other words, gave those men the possibility of access to a government career.⁴⁰ On a more personal level, when ten years later, in 1715, he lost the use of his right hand, he continued to practice calligraphy using his left.⁴¹ And at his death, in 1722, among the objects placed in his tomb at his order was a rubbing of one of the versions of the *Thousand-Character Essay* written in Wang Xizhi's 王羲之 (307–65) style by the Sui 隋 dynasty (581–617) calligrapher-monk Zhiyong 智永, who was a descendant of Wang.⁴² By this final, posthumous act, he perhaps intended to identify himself with Tang Taizong 唐太宗 (r. 626–49), who ordered the original manuscript of Wang Xizhi's *Preface [Written at] the Orchid Pavilion* (once owned by Zhiyong) to be buried with him.⁴³ Xuanye surely also had in mind Taizong's reputa-

tion as perhaps the outstanding pre-Song representative of the imperial practice of calligraphy.

Like Taizong, Xuanye did not allow his lifelong involvement in calligraphy to distract him from governing; rather, he incorporated it into his larger practice of rulership. Apparently he realized that calligraphy offered him an opportunity to embody in his person a politically potent ideal of cultivation. This, like his parallel interests in philosophy and theories of rulership, not only provided him with added means to attract literati allegiance within the state and more broadly the ruling elite but also helped to make it possible for him to co-opt for the benefit of his dynasty a literati-cultural authority within society at large. In itself, this policy was not new, except by virtue of the scale of Xuanye's personal involvement, since the sage-king ideal had led many prior emperors from Taizong on to cultivate and publicize their calligraphic (and poetic) skills. But Xuanye was unlike his predecessors in one crucial respect. Here as elsewhere, although he drew on the literati rhetoric of cultural authority, he never allowed himself to be defined by it. His independence may have derived less from his Manchu origins and more from his technocratic approach to government (a model for subsequent Qing rulers). This gave him a certain detachment from the literati assumption of a culture-government continuum. Not surprisingly, his practice of calligraphy differed significantly from that of both his predecessors as emperor and contemporary literati. Even though Xuanye subscribed to the notion that authority in this domain derived from the literati rhetoric of self-expression, the calligraphies themselves tell a different story, one that was partially hidden from the emperor himself. In fact, the complexity of their political function far exceeds any frame of reference that places cultural authority at its center.

An Art of Political Authority

Modern historians have tended to take a supercilious attitude toward Xuanye's interest in calligraphy, making much of his spelling mistakes in private correspondence.⁴⁴ This attitude has a long tradition and dates to early stories that the emperor depended on Gao Shiqi to save him from public embarrassment by suggesting a text to write or by having him change a character when he was running out of space.⁴⁵ Art historians, for their part, have felt justified in dismissing Xuanye's calligraphy on grounds of quality. Since, unlike a number of earlier emperors and empresses, he was no more than competent as an artist, lacking both imagination and technical control, the work has seemed to be interesting only as a historical or sociological phenomenon. Ironically, it is the current democratizing interest in widening the art-historical viewfinder in the name of "visual culture" that finds a place for the emperor's artwork.

Standard criteria of critical judgment assume that calligraphy, conceived in fine-art terms, is an art of interpersonal communication, in which the relationship between calligrapher and spectator is ideally an equal one. To each artist corresponds his perfect viewer, or *zhiyin* 知音; it is the position of the *zhiyin* that the spectator strives toward. Although this model is by no means irrelevant to Xuanye's practice—if only because courtiers sometimes invoked it when he showed them his work—the emperor was more fundamentally engaged in an art of political authority in which the relation between the calligrapher and the spectator was anything but equal. They were in fact separated by an ontological divide, since Xuanye was writing not as an individual but as the emperor in his role as the semi-divine incarnation of political authority and power.

In this respect, Xuanye's practice differs significantly from that of most previous emperors known for their calligraphic skill. The imperial practice of calligraphy can be traced to the first century CE, and Han Emperor Zhangdi 漢章帝 (r. 76–88). By the time of Tang Taizong, art-historically the most important early imperial calligrapher, a significant tradition was already in existence.⁴⁶ Known today for his patronage of leading calligraphers and for his promotion of the style of the two Wangs, Taizong was also a fine calligrapher in his own right and participated in the larger court project of an art of calligraphy embodying the ideological values of the Tang state. Central to that project was the court's co-optation of the aesthetic program of aristocratic scholar-officials, made possible by Taizong's personal identification with that program—an initiative in which he was followed by later Tang rulers, notably Gaozong 高宗 (r. 650–83) and Xuanzong 宣宗 (r. 712–55). Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279) rulers went a step further. From Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100–1125) on, in their activity as calligraphers, they set aside their authority (so far as it was possible to do so) in order to present themselves as individuals.⁴⁷ Adopting the late Northern Song literati model, they worked toward a goal of self-expression, albeit often, in the Southern Song (1127–1279) period, within a stylistic mode modeled on the two Wangs and Zhiyong that harked back to Tang Taizong's practice and was established as the basic Song imperial family style by Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127–62). Other notable imperial calligraphers such as Jin Zhangzong 金章宗 (r. 1190–1208), Yuan Wenzong 元文宗 (r. 1328–32), and Ming Xuanzong 明宣宗 (r. 1426–35) followed the Song literati-derived model, as did, to some extent, Xuanye's predecessor, the Shunzhi 順治 emperor (r. 1644–61).⁴⁸ Even Xuanye himself approached it in the atypical case of the Nanshufang collaborations and invoked it repeatedly in other contexts.

In practice, however, Xuanye's calligraphy is usually a statement of power that demands the response of abject acknowledgment of that power. The historical record confirms this standard response and makes it clear

that the individuals who received the calligraphies did so not as individuals but as exemplary embodiments of abstract virtues such as honesty, efficiency, or the sense of duty. Xuanye's practice as an imperial calligrapher thus marks a break with the past, pioneering its modern, nakedly ideological form as seen in the masthead of the *People's Daily*, which was written by Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976). The fact that Mao cared deeply about the aesthetics of his calligraphy no more contradicts the fundamentally ideological function of such public writing than did Xuanye's own artistic ambitions. The connection between Xuanye and Mao is as much historical as paradigmatic, for it was the Kangxi emperor who provided the model for the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (r. 1736–95) and other rulers as well as, indirectly, through the general practice of Qing emperors, for China's twentieth-century leaders.

In an art of political authority, the highly personalized mastery that the connoisseur recognizes as calligraphic excellence is a distraction; expression gives way to *assertion*. Xuanye's large- and small-character calligraphies achieve this in different ways. The large-character works adopt a basic placard style whose watchwords are strength, clarity, and order. The style can be traced to the Tang dynasty and continues in use today in the typography used for the banner headlines of newspapers. The continuity between imperial calligraphies and carved placards for public places, and between such placards and typography, situates Xuanye's large-character works within a history of standardized public writing styles. Within this history, his achievement has much to do with the extension of certain principles from public writing in large-character formats to small-character formats. Xuanye appears to have approached and mastered calligraphy essentially as a technical system, with the result that he achieved a kind of standardization in his small-character reinterpretations of earlier

Fig. 11.9 Xuanye (1654–1722). Copy of Dong Qichang's Transcription of "Ode on the Heavenly Horse," 1699 (detail). Ink rubbing from an engraved version of a handscroll, with a colophon by Song Luo 宋華 (1634–1713), height 59 cm. (SOURCE: *Beijing tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian* 北京圖書館藏中國歷代石刻拓本匯編 [Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1990], 65: 143–44).

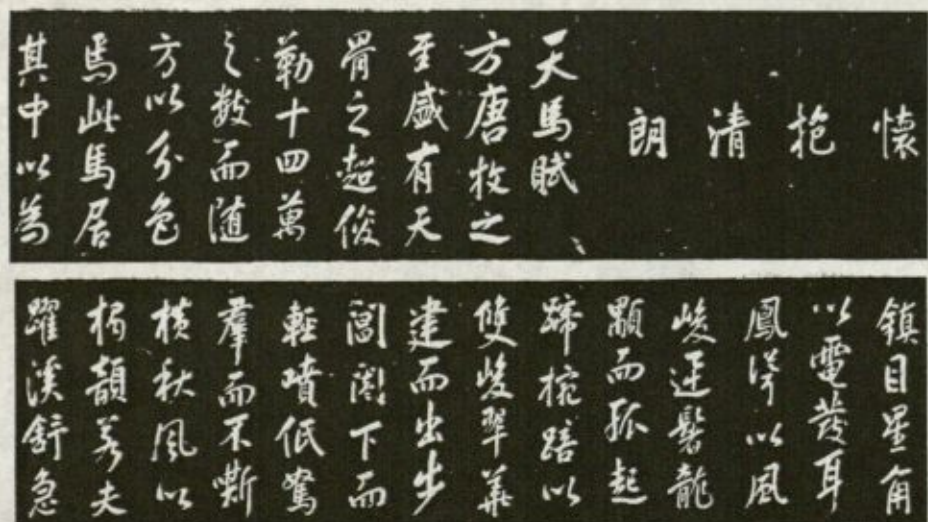




Fig. 11.10 Xuanye (1654–1722). Copy of a Calligraphy by Mi Fu (1052–1107). 1705. Red ink rubbing of a stele inscription carved from a calligraphy presented to Fayu Monastery 法雨寺 at Putuoshan 普陀山 in Zhejiang and housed in the Imperial Stele Pavilion (SOURCE: Ernst Boerschmann, *Die Baukunst und religiöse Kultur der Chinesen* [Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1911], 1: pl. 16).

calligraphers—especially Dong Qichang (Fig. 11.9) and Mi Fu 米芾 (1052–1107) (Fig. 11.10)—that is taboo for the calligrapher as artist. But these very features have their own functional logic and their own kind of visual interest. The hanging scrolls, handscrolls, fans, and stelae demonstrate his ability to standardize across the boundaries represented by calligraphic genres and models and ultimately to strip calligraphy of its expressive component, literally *subjecting* it to his authority. It is true that Xuanye was following

the example of earlier calligrapher-emperors, to the extent that by his choice of calligraphic models he ideally drew to himself all the authority of a cultural tradition, which then became incarnated in his transcendent person. But unlike Tang Taizong and Song Gaozong—possibly his principal models—who identified themselves with the tradition of Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344–88) but were engaged in an artistic dialogue with contemporary aristocrats, courtiers, and literati, Xuanye co-opted for political purposes and for public writing the existing cultural authority of the late Ming calligrapher Dong Qichang, without allowing his own apparent occupation of literati terrain to get in the way. To view his calligraphy otherwise can lead only to seeing Xuanye as a minor Dong Qichang follower, much inferior to contemporaries such as Shen Quan, Zha Shibiao, and Zha Sheng—an observation that is no more art-historically interesting for being true.

The Calligraphic Gift

Xuanye's calligraphic statements of cultural and political authority circulated principally as gifts. Gifting to individuals was an essential aspect of the practice of rulership and a daily feature of imperial life, in part because every attention paid by the emperor to an individual or group was by definition a gift (and was formally recorded as such). Thus, an audience was the gift of proximity to the imperial body and a glimpse of the imperial visage; a banquet invitation was the gift not only of victuals but also of the imperial presence; an invitation to view a garden was the gift of access to something reserved for the emperor. The most common material gifts were food, clothes, money, imperial publications, imperially commissioned decorative objects, and, of course, traces of the imperial brush. Two short texts commissioned by the provincial military commander of Jiangnan, Yang Jie 楊捷 (1617–90), record all the gifts he received from the emperor during the 1684 and 1689 tours.⁴⁹ These chronicles record in excruciating detail every note of imperial favor, down to the number of candied fruit on the table when he was invited for tea and the number of cups of wine poured at a banquet. However, the larger context of gifting evolved over the course of Xuanye's long reign. By the time of the 1705 Southern Tour, his gifts of calligraphy were often part of an exchange; they were the emperor's symbolic response to the lavish presentations of antiques and other objects from his wealthier subjects (of which he accepted only a token portion in each case).

Each category of gift was governed by its own conventions and achieved specific political objectives. By presenting calligraphies to individuals, for example, Xuanye accomplished two things. First, he set himself up as a model for government officials by using calligraphy as a demonstration of his personal embodiment of proper cosmic and moral alignment, or

zheng 正.⁵⁰ Although Xuanye himself was happy to claim adherence to an *aesthetic* of proper alignment, he spoke always as emperor and sage-ruler, and the *zheng* invoked here was the central concept of his ideology of neo-Confucian orthodoxy. Second, he established a personal bond with members of his bureaucracy and furthered his identification with the corps of civil and military officials. Here again the Southern Tours reveal an evolution. In 1684 he used gifts of calligraphy with evident forethought to single out a relatively small number of officials as exemplars. One handscroll, for example, went to Wang Wan 汪琬 (1624–91), who was living quietly in retirement after a fine career.⁵¹ Another went to Yu Chenglong 于成龙 (1638–1700), an active official in a sensitive post (prefect of Nanjing), who was rewarded for being a *qingguan* 清官, an official of exemplary honesty. The emperor himself underlined that this was a special favor, pointing out that such low-ranking officials were usually not supposed to receive such important imperial gifts.⁵² By 1705, however, calligraphies had become a routine gift for the local officials encountered during the Southern Tour. Because a calligraphy could so easily be customized through the text, it was especially suited to developing a bond with subordinates. Thus Yang Jie, being a general, received, in addition to an appropriate two-character commemorative placard, a poem in praise of horses. Calligraphy also had the advantage of its physical immediacy, which could bring the recipient closer to the emperor as a living presence than almost any other gift. Its only rival was clothes made for Xuanye's use. These, however, were rare gifts. A measure of their importance is that on the eve of the Rebellion of the Three Feudatories in 1673, imperial robes were sent to Wu Sangui 吳三桂 (1612–78) and Shang Kexi 尚可喜 (1604–76) as part of the diplomatic negotiations.⁵³ Most of the other examples I have found were also gifts to military men, and the practice may have a special connection to military culture. On the other hand, the recipients of imperial clothing also received other kinds of gifts, including calligraphy.⁵⁴

Institutional gifts of calligraphy served different political purposes from gifts to individuals. They were, in the first place, a means of demonstrating the dynasty's evenhandedness in its attention to regions and to religions. Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian institutions alike were presented with calligraphies to be turned into commemorative placards and stelae (Fig. 11.11). Famous natural sites on the route of the emperor's travels were marked with commemorative placards if there was a building there, with a rock-carved inscription if it was a mountainous site, or with a stela otherwise. Xuanye played no favorites with his thousand or more institutional gifts of calligraphy.

Another purpose to these institutional gifts might be described as that of systematically investing China's social, political, and geographical space with the Qing dynastic presence. Of all the functions of calligraphic gifts,

Fig. 11.11 Ceremonial gateway (*pailou* 牌樓) at Mañjuśrī Temple 大文殊寺 on Lingjiu Peak 靈鷲峰 at Mount Wutai 五臺山, with a titleboard carved from a calligraphy by Xuanye (1654–1722), reading *Outstanding Sight of the Numinous Peak* (SOURCE: Shanxi sheng shangyeting 山西省商業廳 and Lüyou gongying gongsi 旅遊供應公司, eds., *Wutai shan* 五臺山 [Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984], fig. 41).



this deserves the closest attention, because it is where Xuanye's modernity makes itself felt most strongly. The political exploitation of the emperor's calligraphy had long respected two basic principles. The first was *rarity*: because the emperor was ideally hidden from view, the rarity of his appearances (whether in the flesh or in calligraphy) reinforced the power of his inaccessibility. The second principle was *centrality*: that is, manifestations of the imperial presence were calculated according to their location within a symbolically hierarchical geography. The palace, naturally, had the greatest concentration of imperial calligraphy, followed by the capital, followed by the range of outlying imperially connected sites. Without entirely disavowing these principles, Xuanye, aided perhaps by his status as a Manchu outsider, effectively turned the existing system on its head. Although up to a point imperial brush-traces had to be rare in order to have value, the Kangxi emperor multiplied gifts of his calligraphy in order to ensure his omnipresence in social and political life. And on the same principle, although the concentration of imperial titleboards in public buildings in Beijing was much greater than elsewhere, gifts of calligraphy were made to an infinitely wider range of institutions and individuals than ever before and covered a larger socio-political field in terms of both physical and symbolic geography. Commemorative placards, in particular, were supremely visible. So, too, were the stelae, for they were often housed in a special kiosk, known as a *yubei ting* 御碑亭 (Fig. 11.12). In some instances woodblock reproductions of the engraved calligraphy were made.⁵⁵ Xuanye's efforts were continued by his two immediate successors, particularly



Fig. 11.12 The Imperial Stele Pavilion in Fayu Monastery 法雨寺 at Putuoshan 普陀山 in Zhejiang, seen from the southwest (SOURCE: Ernst Boerschmann, *Die Baukunst und Religiöse Kultur der Chinesen* [Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1911], fig. 112).

the Qianlong emperor, who reigned for a similarly long period of time, from 1736 to 1795.

Xuanye's innovative practice both personalized imperial authority, making it less abstract and identifying it with a living human being, and turned the emperor into a public figure in the modern sense of someone literally in the public eye. As a cultural outsider, Xuanye must have been highly aware of the specificity of the mythology of the sage-king surrounding Chinese rulership, and his most brilliant move was to realize that it was possible for him to embody that myth systematically and publicly, thereby opening up a whole new avenue of power—what might be called power through popularity. In order for this strategy to work, the human being that he was had to have a charismatic presence (which was easily enough arranged).⁵⁶ But in order for the strategy to be truly worthwhile, that presence also had to be extended through time and space: the emperor had to be visible. This is the frame of reference within which Xuanye, and later the Qianlong emperor, turned to the ancient institution of the imperial tour of inspection. In the *Qiju zhu* records for 1689, the court chroniclers note with satisfaction that the second Southern Tour of that year allowed over a hundred thousand people to catch sight of the emperor each day.⁵⁷ As one might expect, the visibility of the imperial visage was subject to careful management, but what is striking from today's standpoint is not the hierarchical control exercised over physical access to the emperor, but rather the degree to which Xuanye was prepared to make himself accessible, even stopping to talk with farmers and flood victims in the manner of a contemporary president.⁵⁸ Calligraphic gifts, meanwhile, functioned as an extension of this vivid, personalized

presence of the emperor outside his palace, prolonging it long after he had returned to Beijing.

Moreover, like everything concerned with the emperor's presence in the provinces, imperial brush-traces soon became an object of desire and competition. Starting with the second tour, in 1689, the emperor's physical presence became the focus of intercity rivalry, as the major cities competed with one another to get him to stay the longest, always arguing that there were still many residents who had not yet been able to see the imperial visage.⁵⁹ It took longer for calligraphies to become objects of desire, but by the time of the 1705 Southern Tour, there were numerous requests for calligraphies to be used as commemorative placards for institutions. The possession of such a conspicuous mark of imperial favor quickly became an element in rivalries between competing institutions or cities and an event to be highlighted in local gazetteers. In their massive exploitation of the imperial calligraphic self-presentation, Xuanye and his advisors took something of an entrepreneurial approach, using calligraphy to stimulate political desire and creating a political market for the emperor as a celebrity. In so doing, they effectively divorced the public visibility of an emperor from its previous identification with, and subordination to, ritual and thus contributed to the secularization of the imperial institution.

Thus, in at least two ways Xuanye's practice of calligraphy contributed to the refashioning of the public space of China's early modernity after the Manchus restored the power of the political center, which had been weakened in the latter stages of the Ming dynasty. By helping create political networks, both of people and of sites, and by serving as a privileged medium for the emperor's personalized embodiment of the imperial institution, the calligraphies functioned as a kind of proactive outreach effort. Along with the other mechanisms of outreach such as the Southern Tours, they registered the refusal of the Kangxi state to cede a separate space of public self-definition to any significant section of society, a refusal that was all the more effective for speaking to the deep social ambivalence about such a separation. There would be no public sphere or civil society in quite the same contestatory sense as in Europe, and modernity would consequently develop along very different lines until close to the end of the dynasty. The result was a distinctive heritage of social and cultural dynamics that continues to have ramifications for Chinese modernity today.

Of the various frames of reference that can usefully be applied to Kangxi-period culture, modernity is by far the newest and least well understood, relative to the familiar frames of dynasticism and cultural belatedness. The argument I have sketched out here is not, of course, meant to suggest that Xuanye's lack of ability as a calligrapher (artistically speaking) somehow makes him modern. The modern dimension of his approach to calligraphy instead lies largely in features to which artistic ability was sim-

ply irrelevant—features that define a practice of calligraphy as public writing, which he exploited ideologically in new ways and on a new scale. Nor should one expect this dimension of Xuanye's approach—one dimension among others, but perhaps the one that most justifies attention to his calligraphy today—to correspond neatly to a conscious commitment to modernity on the emperor's part. Modernity, in a period long before modernism, cannot be thought of as a program. It serves as a meaningful concept only when understood as a social condition (or situation) that belongs to a historical process (or narrative) partially hidden to its own participants. This point is equally relevant to the last feature of the calligraphies to be discussed—the fetishistic power of the emperor's brush-traces.

Fetishism

My rather down-to-earth account of imperial calligraphy as a political tool has passed over some less rational aspects of its aesthetics and reception. However, one distinguishing feature of the calligraphy of a living emperor was its capacity to inspire intense feelings or, at least, a rhetoric of intense feelings. Needless to say, this had nothing to do with the quality of his calligraphy in narrowly aesthetic terms; rather, it was bound up with the emperor's charismatic aura. Following the standard interpretation, this was all the more natural since the emperor, as a sage-ruler on the classical model, embodied the quintessence of culture. Since elite culture was defined by *writing*, both as a physical process and as a literary one, imperial writing took on an iconic status corresponding to the emperor's own semidivine nature. However, as the discussion in the previous section has demonstrated, the emperor's aura was no longer defined simply in semireligious terms but also involved the secular phenomenon of celebrity. It seems legitimate, therefore, to link the less rational aspects of reception of Xuanye's brush-traces to the larger question of desire.

The initial reception of the gift of an imperial brush-trace demanded a kowtow. But this was merely the preamble to a more complex ritualized acknowledgment, in which ritual form does not necessarily imply only ritual content. Above I cited Wei Xiangshu's declaration to the emperor that his calligraphy would be the object of a collective obeisance by the family twice a month. In another example, when Cao Yin 曹寅 (1658–1712) received the gift of an imperial calligraphy in 1712, he set up an incense table and kowtowed nine times facing the Forbidden City, which probably means that he placed the calligraphy in the north on the south-north axis.⁶⁰ When calligraphies were carved into titleboards and finally suspended at an institutional site such as a temple, the initial hanging of the titleboard was a ceremonial event presided over by government officials. The semireligious character of the event is evident in the choosing of an auspicious day and

the setting up of an incense table. The ceremonies could be extremely elaborate: in one case, it was accompanied by three days of sutra chanting and opera performances. But the self-abasing act of the kowtow before the calligraphy, echoing the kowtow before the imperial body and face itself, was always the key moment.⁶¹ Another aspect of reception can be seen in the standard formulas used in reports to the emperor by high officials, court chroniclers, and private individuals alike to describe imperial calligraphies and audience reaction to them. The dynamics (*shi* 勢) of the calligraphy is routinely described in terms of "leaping dragons and dancing phoenixes," sometimes accompanied by auspicious, colorful clouds, all these being emblematic signs of imperial authority and presence.⁶² At the sight of an imperial calligraphy, the audience always "jumps up and down with joy." These are clichés, but this does not make them any the less revealing. And when the emperor took up the brush in the presence of others, onlookers did respond in this manner, performing the role that was expected of them. In effect, each production of the imperial brush was interpreted as an auspicious event, a manifestation of divine presence.

These examples suggest that the reception of imperial brush-traces involved a kind of *fetishism*. To speak of fetishism with regard to imperial calligraphy may be rather jarring, especially for Chinese art historians. Perhaps we have internalized more Confucianism than we care to admit, since Confucianism's hostility to "primitive" religious feeling and to declared sexuality surely plays a role in one's instinctive reaction to such terminology as inappropriate, above all in the context of a militantly Confucian ruler's cultural practice. But such normative repressions often mask a hidden recourse to that which is repressed, and this is very much a case in point. I am invoking the idea of the fetish, in what are by now almost old-fashioned terms, as an imaginary substitute to which an inexplicable power is attributed. Some would argue that all artworks partake to some extent of this quality, but in any event it is quite obviously true of one particular category of artworks: religious icons.⁶³ However, whereas the source of the power of the religious icon lies in its imagined capacity to bring about salvation, the power of imperial calligraphies comes from a quite different source. Here I am particularly concerned with the calligraphy as it functioned during the lifetime of the emperor in question—before, that is, it became a relic and took on a different kind of power.

The crucial element is that the brush-traces of the emperor could not be acquired; they could only be received, as the result of an act of imperial largesse. The emperor bestowed (*ci* 賜) the calligraphy, ostensibly as a sign of imperial favor. Ostensibly only, because what the gift signified at a deeper level was the emperor's power over his subjects. The gift reminds the subject that he *is* a subject, because it always implies its opposite: the emperor's displeasure, which in extreme cases in the Kangxi period led not

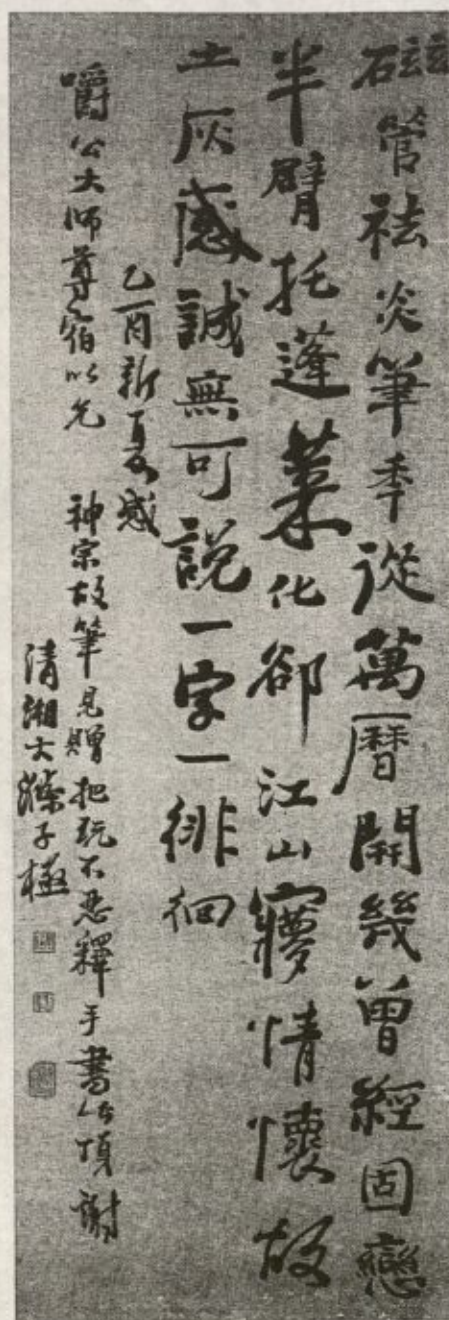


Fig. 11.13 Shitao (1642–1707). *Poem Acknowledging the Gift of a Wanli Porcelain-Handled Brush*, 1705. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 110.3 x 39.4 cm. University of Michigan Museum of Art. The Margaret Watson Parker Art Collection.

only to execution of the person in question but also to the banishment and enslavement of his family. The power of Kangxi imperial calligraphy lay in its naked exposure of power *per se*. Small wonder, then, that imperial calligraphies were received not just as treasures but as objects of fetishistic veneration. They inspired desire and dread: desire for continued favor, dread of the loss of that favor.⁶⁴ This may seem far removed from the modernity that I previously claimed for Xuanye's calligraphic practice, but

there may be a way of understanding it to be, on the contrary, another aspect of that modernity. For as long as the imperial institution defined itself ritualistically, power was in the first instance not functional but revelatory—of the dynasty's fitness to rule and of Heaven's recognition of that fitness. Under the Kangxi emperor, the old ritual rhetoric remained in use but only to mask the fact that power has shifted status, becoming a primarily functional phenomenon ensuring order and thus prosperity. The elite was invited, as always, to become complicit in dynastic power, but in the Kangxi period this took a new form, a demand that the elite acknowledge the emperor as their leader and object of their desire.

I began this essay by evoking a portrait of Xuanye, a Wanli-period porcelain-handled brush in hand. The tip of the brush already dipped in ink, the emperor is about to write. I conclude, by way of contrast, with a calligraphy that was written with just such a Wanli porcelain-handled brush, but not by Xuanye (Fig. 11.13). In 1705, the artist Shitao 石涛 (1642–1707), a descendant of a Ming princely family, received a similar brush as a gift from a Buddhist abbot. In this calligraphy, he acknowledged the gift with a poem of thanks that attests to his veneration of his imperial ancestors; the gift itself in turn attests to a shadowy veneration of Ming imperial descendants like himself. In Shitao's work, the brush and calligraphy share again a fetishistic charge, one that inspires a desire inseparable from loss. Here we are in the domain of the relic, Shitao himself being a living relic. At the opposite pole from Xuanye's unanswerable calligraphic declarations of power, Shitao's emotional hanging scroll owes *its* fetishistic charge to its naked exposure of powerlessness.

Zhonghua, 1987), 1: 166–67. For a discussion of the scroll, see *Im Schatten hoher Bäume: Malerei der Ming- und Qing-Dynastien (1368–1911) aus der Volksrepublik China* (In the shade of tall trees: Ming and Qing paintings from the People's Republic of China) (Baden-Baden: Kunsthalle, 1985), no. 3, pp. 58–65. It is often pointed out that this set of "Returning Home" illustrations by professional artists is not as closely involved with the written text as scholarly versions like Li Gonglin's.

51. Burton Watson, trans., *Su Tung-p'o: Selections from a Sung Dynasty Poet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 92, with one modification: "whistle" for *changxiao*. Watson translates it as "shrill whoop"; A. C. Graham has "a long slicing whistle" (Cyril Birch, ed., *Anthology of Chinese Literature from Early Times to the Fourteenth Century* [New York: Grove Press, 1965], p. 383). See Ronald C. Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Council on East Asian Studies, 1994), p. 248 on Su and immortality in the second Red Cliff poem, and in particular his *changxiao* there.

The first of Su's Red Cliff odes includes a striking passage about the effects of flute music played by a friend, harmonizing with Su's chanting, on their night boatride. In Watson's translation: "The flute made a wailing sound, as though the player were filled with resentment or longing, or were lamenting or protesting. Long notes trailed through the night like endless threads of silk, a sound to make dragons dance in hidden caves, or set the widow weeping in her lonely boat" (*Su Tung-p'o*, p. 88).

52. The whole scroll is reproduced in *Chibifu shuhua tezhan* 赤壁賦書畫特展 (The Red Cliff: special exhibition of calligraphy and painting) (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1984), pl. 11 (with scenes 3–4 and 5–6 misnumbered and out of sequence); the section with Su on the ledge is also reproduced in color (fig. 22). On Wen's model for this scroll, see my "Note on Chao Po-su, Wen Chia, and Two Ming Narrative Scrolls in the Blue-and-Green Style," *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 22, no. 4 (Sept.–Oct. 1987): 1–7.

53. *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Paintings*, no. 53. A young servant, his figure nearly effaced, stands to the left of scholar.

54. For a color reproduction, see *Zhongguo meishu quanji: huibhua bian*, vol. 5, pl. 83.

55. The cup is dated 1345. See Stephen Little, *Realm of the Immortals* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1988), pp. 23 and 46–47 for a color reproduction and comments on the work.

56. See *Suiboku bijutsu taikai* 水墨美術大系 (Complete collection of ink monochrome paintings) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1978), vol. 4, color pl. 5. The painting is titled *Li Bai yinxing* 李白吟行, *Li Bai Intoning as He Walks*.

57. For a color reproduction of Muqi's painting, see *Suiboku bijutsu taikai*, vol. 3, color pl. 9; Li Que's is reproduced in *ibid.*, vol. 4, pl. 46. Several other Song and Yuan pictures of open-mouthed Chan monks (Xianzi, Budai, Hanshan 寒山, and Huineng 惠能) can be found in these two volumes.

58. The album is reproduced in color and discussed in Howard Rogers and Sherman E. Lee, *Masterworks of Ming and Qing Painting from the Forbidden City* (Lansdale, Penn.: International Arts Council, 1988), no. 31 (leaves nos. 15 and 1).

59. On this painting, see Chu-tsing Li and James Watt, *The Chinese Scholar's Studio: Artistic Life in the Late Ming Period* (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), no. 17 and pp. 45–46.

CHAPTER II, JONATHAN HAY, "THE KANGXI EMPEROR'S BRUSH-TRACES"

1. In addition to the early portrait of Xuanye reproduced here, others in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, include a relatively informal portrait of him as a young man in formal military attire; a perspectivally constructed portrait of him as a mature man, sitting cross-legged in his study with a book before him; and a formal portrait of him in court robes as an old man. There are also many likenesses of him in the set of handscrolls (now scattered among different museums) painted under Wang Hui's 王翬 (1632–1717) supervision that document the

emperor's Southern Tour of 1689, as well as the related screen painting by the same artists reproduced here (see Fig. 11.14). For all of these, see *Gugong bowuyuan cang wenwu zhenpin quanji: Qing dai gongting huihua* 故宮博物院藏文物珍品全集: 清代宮庭繪畫 (Treasures of the Palace Museum: Qing dynasty court paintings) (Hong Kong: Shangwu, 1996), pp. 3–68. The Palace Museum also owns another formal portrait of Xuanye in court robes painted during his middle age, which is reproduced in *La Cité interdite: vie publique et privée des empereurs de Chine (1644–1911)* (The Forbidden City: the public and private lives of the emperors of China) (Paris: Paris-Musées, 1996), p. 115. Another portrait in the Palace Museum collection, this one depicting Xuanye in old age as a Buddhist, is reproduced in *Gugong bowuyuan cang Qing dai gongting huihua* 故宮博物院藏清代宮庭繪畫 (Qing dynasty court paintings in the collection of the Palace Museum) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1992), pl. 14.

2. For an example, see Elizabeth J. Remick, *Building Local States: China During the Republican and Post-Mao Eras* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), dust jacket illustration (also reproduced in black and white on p. 128). The illustration shows a tax bureau in a rural township in Guangdong. Atop the building is a row of large, cut-out characters painted bright red reading 中國稅務. The characters were copied from various documents written by Zhou Enlai.

3. Richard Curt Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

4. The account was written by Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648–1718):

From outside I could see into the Palace where there was a table with candles over four feet high. His Imperial Majesty took off his headdress and leaned on the table to write a commemorative placard for the eightieth birthday celebration of the Duke's grandmother, Lady Tao of the First Rank. The Duke and others were kneeling at the bottom of the steps. In a short while, the inscription "Her Virtue Matches That of the Immortal Pine" was completed. Attendants held it up for all the officials to view. The cal-

ligraphy ascended like a dragon and soared like a phoenix; the ink was suffused with fragrance. I was ordered to read it aloud as the Duke and his younger brother knelt and received it, performing three kowtows. (Trans. from Richard E. Strassberg, *The World of K'ung Shang-jen: A Man of Letters in Early Ch'ing China* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1983], pp. 112–13.)

5. It is appropriate to note here Jonathan Spence's prescient conclusion to a 1967 article on Kangxi: "The origins of China's modernity are to be sought no later than the Kangxi period" ("The Seven Ages of K'ang-hsi [1654–1722]," *Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 2 [1967]: 211).

6. On Wei Xiangshu, see Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644–1912)* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943): 848–49.

7. *Kangxi qiju zhu* 康熙起居注 (Record of the daily activities of the Kangxi emperor) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984): entry for 1684/9/26.

8. Cf. a recent discussion of this issue by the contemporary Conceptual artist Xu Bing, in relation to his installation, *A Book from the Sky*:

Xu: . . . I used a typeface invented during the Song dynasty by professional engravers, because over time it has become like the newspaper style of today, which I liked. I didn't want to express my own personality. I wanted there to be a tension between the seriousness of the execution and the presentation and the underlying absurdity that animates the project. Hay: There has been an historical evolution of this kind of woodblock typography, which basically begins in the Tang dynasty.

Xu: When I began *A Book from the Sky*, I was trying to carve standard script characters. But as soon as I started to work with the carving process itself, I found myself developing images that were closer to this preexisting typographical model. I'm not particularly attracted to calligraphy because it is too self-expressive, too individualistic, too emotional for my purposes.

Leung: The typeface you use, because it's associated with books and newspapers, connotes the public, in contrast to calligraphy, which is, as you say, more expressive.

Xu: If I use this public mode of, I don't want to say writing, because it's already changed, but if I use this public mode of communication, it already belongs to everybody, not just to me.

Kaplan: It's not personal.

Hay: You want to get away from saying anything specific. You want to withhold that kind of statement.

Xu: I even want the artist not to be in the work.

(Simon Leung with Janet A. Kaplan, "Pseudo-Language: A Conversation with Wenda Gu, Xu Bing, and Jonathan Hay," *Art Journal* 58, no. 3 [Fall 1999]: 88–89.)

9. For some of the problems that anonymous authorship posed for the traditional history of calligraphy in China, see Amy McNair, "Engraved Calligraphy in China: Recension and Reception," *Artibus Asiae* 77, no. 1 (Mar. 1995): 106–14.

10. Notable exceptions include Fu Shen, "Huang T'ing-chien's Calligraphy and His Scroll for Chang Ta-t'ung" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1976); and Peter Sturman's study of Mi Fu's *Sailing on the Wu River*, in *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997): 106–20.

11. On stone-carved sutra inscriptions, see Katherine R. Tsiang, "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi Dynasty: The Engraving of *Sutras* in Stone at the Xiangtangshan Caves and Other Sites in the Sixth Century," *Artibus Asiae* 56, no. 3/4 (1996): 233–62; Eileen Hsiang-ling Hsü, "The Xiaonanzhai Cave-Chapel: Images of Deeds and aspirations" (Ph. D. diss., Columbia University, 1999); and Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

12. *Tingxun geyan* 庭訓格言 (Court admonitions and model words) (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1994), p. 6.

13. Ibid.; Meng Zhaoxin 孟昭信, *Kangxi dadi quanzhuan* 康熙大帝全傳 (Complete biography of the great Kangxi emperor) (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1987, 1991), p. 56.

14. Xuanye's remarks on Dong Qichang are contained in a colophon to one of Dong's works, recorded in *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書: 430–33:

The calligraphy of Dong Qichang from Huating is a natural talent. Its fresh loftiness and graceful quality have not been attained by others. Its elegant manner,

often revealed through unintentional touches, is like thin clouds gathering and dispersing, or a refreshing breeze blowing, revealing a natural taste. His character structures derive from the style of the Jin dynasty, because he repeatedly copied the [*Chunhua getie* 淳化閣帖]. He learned the method of moving his wrist from the *Lanting* 蘭亭 [*xu* 序] and the *Shengjiao* 聖教 [*xu* 序]; thus, in turning the brush, the brush tip is hidden and the brushwork is archaically forceful, which looks clumsy but is actually ingenious. Is this what calligraphers call *gu chai jiao* 古鈎脚 [ancient hairpin foot]? Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Su Shi 蘇軾, and Mi Fu excelled in calligraphy with their individual qualities of heroism, grandeur, and vigor; they were all rooted in the Jin 晉 style. Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 also concentrated on the style of the Two Wangs. Since Dong Qichang emphasized the same roots as these masters, he could easily capture their ideas while copying their works, and often revealed his own elegant bearing. I greatly admire Dong's curative style, which is also natural and unrestricted. His use of ink is marvelous, and displays various arrangements of lightness and darkness. He made many copies of ancient calligraphy, and often asserted that it is extremely difficult for a calligrapher to have both talent and skill. (Trans. Hui-liang J. Chu, Hans H. Frankel, and Chang Ch'ung-ho, cited in Xu Bangda, "Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's Calligraphy," in *The Century of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, 1555–1636* [Kansas City, Missouri: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1992], 1: 121).

15. Meng Zhaoxin, *Kangxi dadi quanzhuan*, p. 56.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. On the Kangxi-period Nanshufang, see also Zhu Jinfu 朱金甫, "Lun Kangxi shiqi de Nanshufang" 論康熙時期的南書房, *Gugong bowuyuan kan* 故宮博物院院刊, no. 48 (1990 [2]): 27–38, esp. pp. 31–32 on the important role of calligraphy.

19. James Cahill, pers. comm. If it is not by Gu Jianlong, then given the originality of the painting's conception—a compromise between formality and informality—it would be tempting to attribute it to the great Yangzhou 揚州 portraitist Yu Zhiding 禹之鼎 (1649–1702), who became a court painter in 1681.

20. I have not been able to find any examples of early Qing porcelain-handled brushes. The Wanli examples may have been relatively common, 360 having been ordered from the

Jingdezhen kilns in 1584. See Margaret Medley, "Organization and Production at Jingdezhen in the Sixteenth Century," in Rosemary E. Scott, ed., *The Porcelains of Jingdezhen*, Colloquies on Art and Archaeology in Asia no. 16 (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1993), p. 78.

21. Written for a site at Mount Wutai, rubbing in Beijing Library (ge 8988), reproduced in *Beijing tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian* 北京圖書館藏中國歷代石刻拓本匯編 (Rubblings of stone engravings from throughout Chinese history in the collection of the Beijing Library) (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1990), 63: 129.

22. Meng Zhaoxin, *Kangxi dadi quanzhuan*, p. 631.

23. See note 4 to this chapter.

24. At Ji'nan 濟南, in Shandong, he gave a name to a famous natural site by writing the name in public; the calligraphy was then given more permanent form at the site by the local official in charge. He later did the same for a site within the local government compound (*Kangxi qiju zhu*, entry for 1684/10/8). At Mount Tai, after visiting a temple whose titleboard in his calligraphy must have been sent earlier, he returned to the "temporary palace" and wrote out one calligraphy of four characters to be turned into a titleboard for another building at the site, and a second of two characters to be carved into the rock at the very top of the mountain (*Kangxi qiju zhu*, entry for 1684/10/11). In Yangzhou, he wrote titleboards for Pingshan tang 平山堂, thus linking himself with a famous site associated with Song literati. Another titleboard, for Yangzhou's Tianning si 天寧寺, was only the first bestowed on southern temples: others followed later in the trip (*Kangxi qiju zhu*, entry for 1684/10/22). Kangxi also singled out several meritorious individuals (discussed later in this chapter). Local officials had the emperor's essays engraved in stone as stelae in Nanjing, Suzhou 蘇州, and Anqing 安慶. On the way home, an on-the-spot performance—a poem on water management—was presented to an official in charge of water management (*Kangxi qiju zhu*, entry for 1684/11/14).

At Qufu 曲阜, at the shrine of Confucius, he marked his visit with a titleboard design, also presenting to Confucius's descendant a hanging scroll calligraphy of a poem about his visit to the site (*Kangxi qiju zhu*, entry for 1684/11/17–18). The calligraphy was later engraved in stone: for a picture of a rubbing of the resulting stele, see Paul Moss, *Emperor, Scholar, Artisan, Monk: The Creative Personality in Chinese Works of Art* (London: Sidney L. Moss, 1984): cat. no. 17.

25. Meng Zhaoxin, *Kangxi dadi quanzhuan*, p. 636.

26. Zha Shenxing 查慎行, *Jingye tang shiji* 敬業堂詩集 (Collected poetry of Jingye tang) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986): 787.

27. *Tingxun geyan*, pp. 191–92.

28. Many such rubbings are reproduced in *Beijing tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian*, vols. 63–67.

29. See, e.g., Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy*, 6/3/1987, lots 99 and 118; Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy*, 6/1/1989, lot 59; Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy*, 5/31/1990, lot 152 (see Fig. 11.6); Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy*, 11/28/1990, lots 139, 169, 195; Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy*, 12/1/1993, lot 226; Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Paintings*, 11/28/1994, lot 24; Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Paintings*, 9/18/1995, lot 52. Particularly notable is a running-script couplet written on paper with an elaborate dragon design, mounted as a single hanging scroll, which bears an inscription indicating that it was presented to the governor of Yunnan and Guizhou in 1705 (Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy*, 6/3/1987, lot 118).

30. More elaborate examples are reproduced in *Beijing tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian*, 64: 116 and 118 (both dated 1688).

31. *Kangxi qiju zhu*, entry for 1684/10/11.

32. For an example of the emperor's gift of a single character "longevity" calligraphy at New Year's, 1705, see Zha Shenxing, *Jingye tang shiji*, p. 889.

33. See note 29 to this chapter for some examples of the original designs.

34. For stelae engraved with Xuanye's transcriptions of poems by Zhu Xi written in 1702 and 1703, see *Beijing tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian*, 66: 20, 25, 31, 56.

35. See below for his gifts of handscrolls to Wang Wan and Yu Chenglong.

36. For examples of such gifts of fans in 1703 and 1705, see Zha Shenxing, *Jingye tang shiji*, pp. 810–11, 892. In addition to the collaboration with Jiang Tingxi reproduced here (Fig. 11.8), another fan with a painting by Yang Jin 楊晉 (1644–1728) on one side and a transcription of a Tang poem by Xuanye on the other is reproduced in *Palace Museum Monthly*, 38: fig. 15.

37. For one example, written in gold, see Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy*, 6/3/1987, lot 99; and for two others, one written in gold and one a rubbing, see *Zhongguo huangdi shuhua xuan* 中國皇帝書畫選 (Selected examples of imperial calligraphies) (Beijing: Huawen chubanshe, 1990), pp. 231–34.

38. *Mouqin dian fatie* 懋勤殿法帖 (Calligraphy models from the Mouqin Palace) (24 juan).

39. *Mouqin dian fatie* (8 juan).

40. See *Shengzu wuxing Jiangnan quanlu* 聖祖五幸江南全路 (Complete itinerary of the Kangxi emperor's fifth tour of Jiangnan), in *Zhenqi tang congshu chuji* 振綺堂叢書初集 (The Zhenqi Hall collectanea, first collection).

41. Harold L. Kahn recounts the following story by Xuanye's grandson, the future Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (r. 1736–95), illustrating Xuanye's continuing attachment to the practice of calligraphy after that date:

In a note written in 1730 Ch'ien-lung recalls a late summer day eight years earlier when he received an unexpected gift from his grandfather: "In my twelfth year I went with my grandfather, the emperor, on the summer retreat to Jehol. There I attended him day and night. During his leisure moments away from the press of official business he would often browse through the histories or dabble in calligraphy. On one of those latter occasions I was standing off to the side taking it all in, longing in my heart for a specimen from his brush but not daring to ask for

one. Grandfather then looked over at me and said, 'So you like my writing, eh?' Whereupon he presented me with a vertical scroll, a horizontal one, and a fan! He then told father that he should put them in safe keeping for me." (Kahn, *Monarchy in the Emperor's Eyes: Image and Reality in the Ch'ien-lung Reign* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971], p. 99.)

42. "[Zhiyong] spent thirty years producing some 80 versions of the 'Thousand Character Essay' (Qianzi wen) in Wang Xizhi's style, which he then distributed among the monasteries of Eastern Zhejiang" (Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979], p. 20; transliteration changed from Wade-Giles to pinyin).

43. Ibid.

44. See, e.g., Spence, "The Seven Ages of K'ang-hsi."

45. Meng Zhaoxin, *Kangxi dadi quanzhuan*, pp. 62–63.

46. For examples of calligraphy attributed to pre-Tang (and Tang and later) rulers, see *Zhongguo huangdi shuhua xuan*.

47. Two recent studies of Southern Song imperial calligraphy are Chu Hui-liang, "Imperial Calligraphy of the Southern Sung," in Alfreda Murck and Wen C. Fong, eds., *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 289–312; and Hui-shu Lee, "The Domain of Empress Yang (1162–1233): Art, Gender and Politics at the Southern Sung Court" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1994).

48. There are exceptions, however. A placard written by the Shunzhi emperor closely anticipates his successor's practice; see *Zhongguo huangdi shuhua xuan*, p. 222.

49. Dong Wenji 董文騷, *Enci yushu ji* 恩賜御書記 (A record of imperial gifts of calligraphy), in *Zhaodai congshu* 昭代叢書, vol. 2, ed. Zhang Chao 張潮 (reprinted—Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), yiji 乙集: 222–24; Xu Bingyi 徐秉義, *Gongying dajia ji* 恭迎大駕記 (A record of reverently welcoming the imperial carriage), in *ibid.*, pp. 224–25. On Yang Jie, see

Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, pp. 883–84.

50. In his own words:

In general, with calligraphy if the heart-mind is properly aligned, then the brush will be properly aligned, too, whether you're writing large- or small-scale characters. This is what the ancients meant when they said "A properly aligned heart-mind gives harmonized energy," or "The palm should be empty, but the fingers should be full," or "Obtain from the heart-mind, and the response will come in the hand." (*Tingxun geyan*, p. 191.)

51. *Kangxi qiju zhu*, entry for 1684/10/28. On Wang Wan, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, p. 840.

52. *Kangxi qiju zhu*, entry for 1684/11/4. On Yu Chenglong, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, pp. 938–39.

53. Meng Zhaoxin, *Kangxi dadi quanzhuan*, p. 612. On Wu Sangui and Shang Kexi, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, pp. 877–80 and 635–36, respectively.

54. See, e.g., *Kangxi qiju zhu*, entry for 1699/2/29.

55. For a study of the *yubei ting* 御碑亭 at Putuoshan and its inscription, see Ernst Boerschmann, *Die Baukunst und religiöse Kultur der Chinesen* (Architecture and the religious culture of the Chinese) (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1911), 1: 105–11.

56. Two striking visual documents attesting to this charisma are Shitao's 石濤 (1642–1707) 1689 handscroll painted following an imperial audience granted during the Southern Tour of that year, *On the Road to Pingshan* (Princeton University Art Museum), as discussed in Jonathan Hay, *Shitao: Painting and Modernity in Early Qing China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 102–4; and a leaf depicting a dragon in Gao Qipei's 高其佩 *Album of Travel Impressions* (Shanghai Museum), the inscription to which describes Gao's experience of awaiting an imperial audience in 1708. See Klaas Ruitenbeek, *Discarding the Brush: Gao Qipei (1660–1734) and the Art of Chinese Finger Painting* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1992): cat. no. 11, leaf 9.

57. *Kangxi qiju zhu*, entry for 1689/5/18.

58. Ibid., entry for 1684/10/22. See also Zha Shenxing, *Jingye tang shiji*, p. 929, for an account of the emperor walking out into the fields watched by "ten thousand people" during a northern tour in 1706.

59. Naturally enough, the emperor tended to stay longest in the largest cities: Hangzhou, Suzhou, Yangzhou, Nanjing. In 1689 the first southern city where he lingered at all was Hangzhou, but before his departure a civic delegation asked him to stay longer specifically in order for more people to be able to see him. The real reason, however, was probably to bring more glory to the city. He eventually gave in and stayed an extra day. The next day there were two further requests for an extension, both refused. Naturally, when he got to Suzhou the same thing happened, and after four requests he agreed to stay an extra day. In Jiangning 江寧 (Nanjing), it took only two requests to get him to stay two extra days. In Yangzhou, however, the requests were completely turned down. In every case the requests made specific reference to the demand for the Heavenly Visage. All these incidents are recorded in *Kangxi qiju zhu*. Much later, at the time of the 1705 tour, Yangzhou pulled ahead of all the other cities by constructing on its own initiative a palace for the emperor's use; this meant that even when he was not in town a certain imperial presence was retained. On the construction of the Yangzhou palace, see Gugong bowuyuan Ming Qing dang'anbu 故宮博物院明清檔案部, ed., *Guanyu Jiangning zhizao Cao jia dang'an shiliao* 關於江寧織造曹家檔案史料 (Historical materials relating to the case of Cao family of the Jiangning Imperial Textile Factory) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975).

60. Ibid., p. 97.

61. Ibid., pp. 141–42.

62. Appropriately, calligraphies that were turned into stelae were often framed by dragons and clouds.

63. In the Chinese context, the fetishistic power of the icon posed a fundamental problem for the Buddhist church, which was aware that it led to an intensification of the attachment to the phenomenal world from which

Buddhism was trying to free the worshipper. But Buddhism needed to draw on this power to attract worshippers.

64. It is in this spirit that Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 includes imperial calligraphies in the decor of the ancestral temple of the Jia family, in chap. 53 of the eighteenth-century novel *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the red chamber).

CHAPTER 12, ZHANG ZHEN, "PHANTOM THEATER"

EPIGRAPH: Jean Epstein, "Slow-Motion Sound," trans. Robert Lamberton, in Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, eds., *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 141.

1. The Lyric Theater is located at the intersection of Beijing and Guizhou roads in Shanghai. The theater was built in 1934, the same year the Xinhua Company was founded.

2. Gong Jianong 龔稼農, *Gong Jianong congying huiyilu* 龔稼農從影回憶錄 (English title: *Robert Kung's Memoirs of His Silver Screen Life*) (Taipei: Wenxing shudian, 1966–67), 3: 407.

3. Linda Badley, *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp. 8, 11. On horror as a "body genre," see Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," in James Donald, ed., *Fantasy and the Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), pp. 91–133. See also Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," in Barry Keith Grant, ed., *Film Genre Reader II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), pp. 140–58.

4. According to a U.S. Department of Commerce Report from 1930: "The exhibition of the first sound and talking pictures in the Shanghai theaters in February, 1929, took the motion-picture public of Shanghai by storm. Since then no less than 12 theaters in Shanghai have installed or are about to install sound equipment, and most first-class theaters show nothing but sound pictures. Outside of Shanghai, sound equipment has been installed in Hong Kong, Canton, Tientsin, Hankow, Peiping and Nanking" (E. L. Way, comp., "Motion Pictures in

China," Trade Information Bulletin no. 722 [U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, 1930]: 5).

5. Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 41.

6. Hu Die 胡蝶, *Yinghou shengya: Hu Die huiyilu* 影后生涯: 胡蝶回憶錄 (The career of the queen of cinema: Hu Die's memoirs) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1986), p. 96.

7. Mary Ann Doan, "The Voice in the Cinema: Articulation of Body and Space," in Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, eds., *Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 163–64.

8. For an informative and insightful essay on the "modernization" of the Peking opera star (including Mei Lanfang), see Isabelle Duchesne, "The Chinese Opera Star: Roles and Identity," in John Hay, ed., *Boundaries in China* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 217–330.

9. This may have been partly influenced by Hollywood musicals that were shown at first-run sound theaters in Shanghai. The June 1930 issue of the magazine *Xin yinxing yu tiyu* 新銀星體育 (Silverland/sports world) for instance, carried a big advertisement for Warner Brothers' *Show of Shows*. Its Chinese title was *Xi zhong xi* (Play within a play) (p. 14). The magazine regularly published lists of recent American pictures being shown in Shanghai.

10. Hence Hu Die's wordplay on *fang* (square), a homophone of the *fang* in Mei Lanfang, and *yuan* (round), which refers to the shape of a record.

11. The definition of *mise-en-scène* here loosely follows the standard one summarized by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990). Literally meaning "staging an action" in the theater, the filmic use of the French term signifies "the director's control over what appears in the film frame," which "includes those aspects that overlap with the art of the theater: setting, lighting, costume, and the behavior of the figures." (p. 127.) Because