A Narrative on Calligraphy
by Sun Guoting

Revised and Enhanced Edition

英譯書譜
增訂版

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In Loving Memory of Our Beloved

Pui Luen Nora TSANG (曾佩鑾)
永和九年歳在癸未暮春之初會
於會稽山陰之蘭亭脩禊事
也群賢畢至少長咸集此地
此地有峻嶺茂林修竹又有清流激湍
列坐其次雖無絲竹管絃之盛
一觴一詠上足以暢叙幽情
是日也天朗氣清惠風和暢仰觀宇宙之大俯察品類之盛
遂自驚懼足極目以窮覽之盛

A portion of KS Vincent Poon’s model of Wang Xizhi’s (王羲之)
Lanting Xu (蘭亭帖)
Semi-cursive script (行書)
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INTRODUCTION

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, or Sun Qianli 孫虔禮) of the seventh century and is regarded to be one of the most important narratives in studying the art of Chinese calligraphy. The 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 temperaments/conducts in writing good calligraphy. Therefore, it
A NARRATIVE ON CALLIGRAPHY is a must-read for anyone who is interested in studying Chinese calligraphy or traditional Chinese culture.

(III)

This book is the revised edition of my 2018 book of the same title and delivers an even more precise translation with 20 titled thematic paragraphs that is based on Kwok Kin POON’s *The Vernacular Chinese Translation of Sun Guoting’s A Narrative on Calligraphy* (孫過庭書譜白話對譯. Toronto: The SenSeis, Feb. 2019).

This book has three parts. Part one is the annotated line-by-line English translation of the original text. Part two highlights the translation’s explanatory footnotes that are written by referencing numerous historical texts; these footnotes not only include in-depth elaborations, but also illustrate the many fundamental misinterpretations made in the translations by Chang Ch’ung-ho & Hans H. Frankel and Pietro De Laurentis. Finally, part three is a model (臨寫) of *A Narrative on Calligraphy* scribed by myself.

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 2019

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

iv. 啟功〈孫過庭書譜考〉。《啟功叢稿》北京: 中華書局, 1999, pp.105-108。

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