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It is like the Tai Chi performed by many early in the mornings. Knowing every move after years of practice, movements come naturally, without a second thought. When I studied in Beijing in 1994, the calligraphy teacher demonstrated the movements of the brush with his whole body, he looked like a dancer. Constraining the power in every move, ending with one last powerful kick with his foot, representing the last dot of the brush. “*Liliang*” 力量 [power], he said, is the most important factor to make the soft brush leave a strong impression.

This book takes the student by the hand, for a step by step explanation of the form and practice of the brush strokes in Chinese calligraphy. At the same time it lays a base for a better understanding of the importance and historical connection of calligraphy to the history of China. As Wendan Li puts it: “Chinese calligraphy, 書法, *shufa* in Chinese, has been considered the quintessence of Chinese culture because it is an art that encompasses Chinese language, history, philosophy and aesthetics.” [p.1]

Based on a collection of his teaching materials, Wendan Li sets a thorough guideline for people with no specific Chinese background. “Detailed instruction in brush writing techniques form the heart of the book.” [p.2] The most famous brush strokes in China serve as examples throughout the chapters. The materials are another important aspect. In chapter 2 we find the ins and outs of the famous “four treasures” of a Chinese Study: brush, ink, paper and ink-stone. The hairs of the brush can come from goats, weasels, rabbits and horses, but also from badgers, foxes, chicken, cats and deer. The most commonly used types are discussed in more detail; the soft white goat hair and the more resilient and elastic weasel hair. But there is more to it, often different types of hair are combined in one brush, and hairs of differing lengths are used in one brush to form an ink reservoir inside, and so on. As in other places in the book drawings support the text. We learn about black ink in the form of ink sticks and the way they must be rubbed on the ink stone in order to develop a rich black ink. The various types of paper and the characteristics of each type are explained. Paper, ink and brush all work together in the training of the beginning student of calligraphy. [p.27] Tracing and copying on transparent paper and on pre-printed examples further develops the skill. The whole posture of the body, wrist and writing hand are part of the training and the drawings show how to correctly hold the brush.

In the following chapters, while learning the brush technique and basic strokes, there are detailed examples of each movement. Spread throughout the book along with all the concrete and tangible aspects, are five sections with information of a different nature called 'Chinese Culture'. In the section 'Chinese names' we see what names can tell you about the generations of a family. Ten major surnames are shared by 40 percent of the population. A table

of characters that are commonly used in given names is included and divided into three columns for typical neutral, male and female characters in names. There is one section about: 'What is written in Chinese calligraphy?' and the one that looks at 'Chinese Seals'. Two of these valuable insertions about Chinese culture concern the traditional Chinese calendar and the major differences with western variants.

The later part of the book starts with the history and development of the different scripts. Small seal script, for example, only uses two kind of strokes: straight and curved, while other scripts with up to 8 different strokes are more complicated to execute. [pp.111-113] Several famous calligraphers are discussed. By far the most famous piece of calligraphy in China is the 'Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection' by Wang Xizhi. It was written at the prime of his calligraphy career, in 353 CE, when he was 51 years old. He invited 42 literati of the Jin dynasty to the Orchid Pavilion. A drinking game decided who had to compose a poem, and Wang Xizhi spontaneously wrote a preface. This is the stunning evidence of Wang Xizhi's script that served as an example for every calligrapher since that time.

The last part of the book looks at composition of the components of a text and the Yin and Yang of calligraphy pointing at opposing concepts used in calligraphy. There is not only a physical aspect but also an emotional concept in the practice of writing. The book finishes with the traditional art form and its implications for, and incorporation in, modern Chinese art. Xu Bing, to name just one, is a striking example of the younger generation of Chinese artists who work with and comment on the traditional art form of calligraphy.

At the end of each chapter there are discussion questions and writing exercises. In the appendixes there are brush writing exercises, a pinyin pronunciation guide and a Chinese Dynasty timeline. A glossary in English-Chinese-Pinyin is very useful. This whole book forms a serious basis for the study of calligraphy. I think it can be used by individual students but it can also serve as guideline for teachers.