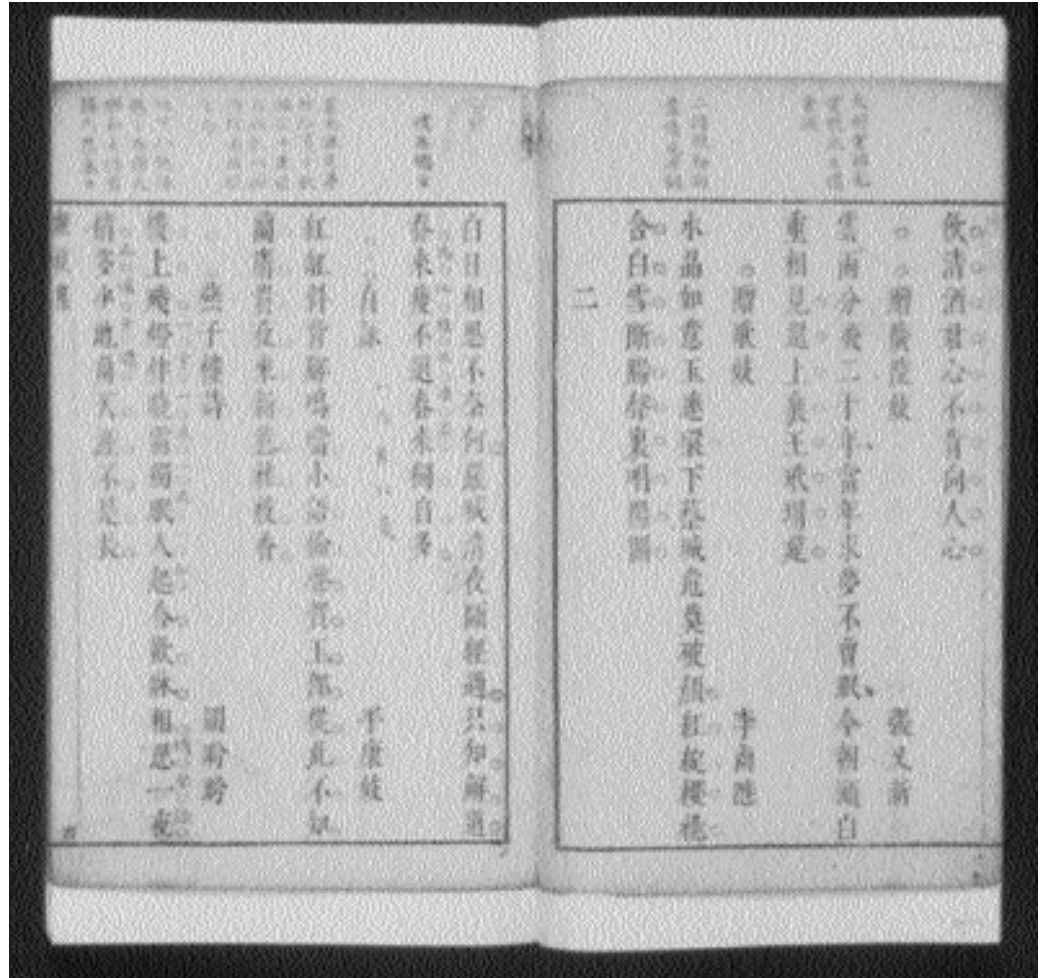


Theme 5 Traces of the Self: Expressing Individuality Through Poetry and Calligraphy

How can you “paint a poem?” That’s exactly what Chinese calligraphers tried to do. Writing expressed not only the meaning of the words but the inner feelings and personality of the writer, whose poem became a work of visual as well as textual beauty. Symbolizing the effort toward integration and harmony, written texts and paintings also tried to exemplify both Confucian and Daoist values.

Traces of the Self introduces students to several beautiful Chinese poems and imparts the importance of calligraphy in Chinese life. The background essay, “**Writing as a Means to Express and Cultivate the Self,**” provides specific information about the poems students will be asked to consider and examines them in a historical context. The second essay, “**Chinese Calligraphy,**” not only explains how a calligrapher works but offers insight into how and why calligraphy has been so important. Explaining how a Chinese viewer looks at a work of calligraphy teaches us to do the same. The first activity, **Expressing the Self Through Word and Image**, asks students to analyze several poems carefully and then to translate them into paintings. Students are then asked to write their own poems and make paintings of them. The second activity, **The Expressive Brush**, leads students to look for examples of how writing, not what is written, carries meaning.



The Exemplars of the Beautiful and the Refined in Tang Poetry

Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Tianqi period (1621–1627).

Compiled and edited by Yang Zhaozhi (17th century).

Wucheng, Zhejiang province; Wucheng Min Yishi, 1621.

8 columns per half folio; single-line borders; printed in black and red ink; overall dimensions of volumes: 30.0 x 18.2 cm.

English translation of poem from this manuscript:

From a swift horse prancing proudly through fallen petals,

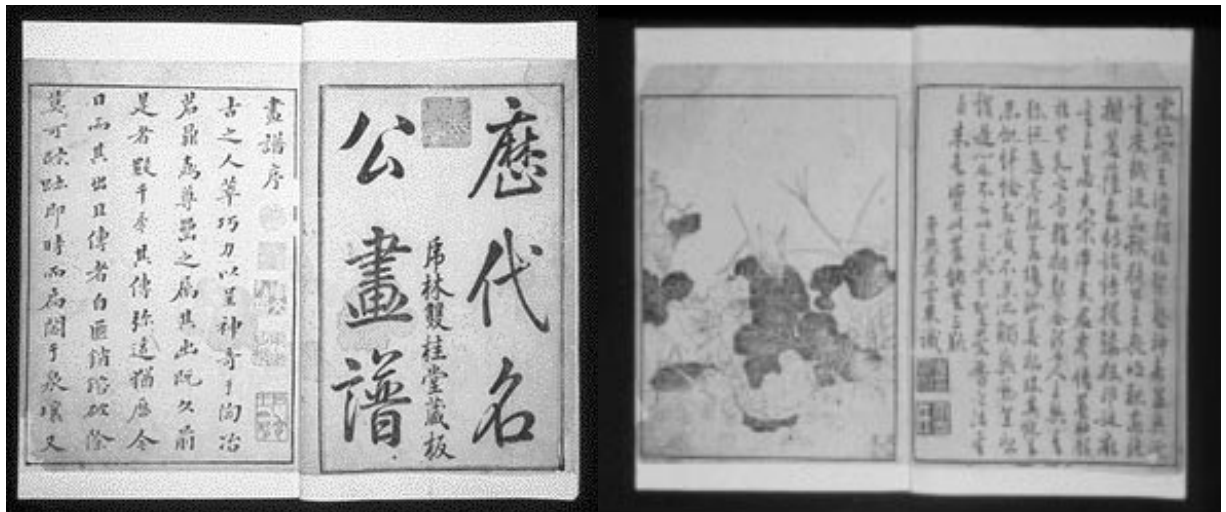
He brushes his whip against a cloud-covered chariot.

A lovely woman, smiling, raises the pearl curtain—

“My home is there,” she says, pointing off at a red tower.

—Translation by Professor Stephen Durrant

- Introductory Questions
- What are the adjectives in this poem?
 - Does the poet seem to be describing real or fantastic events?
 - What might be lost in the translation from Chinese to English?



Manual of Paintings by Famous Masters of the Successive Periods

Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Wanli period (1573–1619).

Compiled by Gu Bing (fl. 1594–1603); proofread and edited by Xu Shuhui; engraved by Liu Gangxin. Hulin (Hangzhou), Zhejiang province; Shuanggui tang, 1603.

White folding margin at center of folio; single-line borders; overall dimensions of volumes: 33.4 x 22.7 cm; block sizes of text: approx. 27.1 x 19.2 cm; block sizes of illustrations irregular; stitched binding.

Introductory Questions

- In the example of calligraphy on the left, what materials did the calligrapher need?
- What materials did the artist need in order to create the painting on the left from the same book?
- Might these have been done by the same person?
- Do you think it would be possible to correct a mistake while one was writing or painting?
- Do you think that the same person could have done both the calligraphy and the painting?