

Chinese Calligraphy Teach-Yourself Series

# A SELF-STUDY COURSE IN OFFICIAL SCRIPT

義祭



SINOLINGUA BEIJING

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# **A Self-Study Course in Official Script**

Compiled and written by Huang Quanxin

**SINOLINGUA  
BEIJING**

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封面设计 朱 丹 黄全信

图书在版编目 ( CIP ) 数据

隶书自学教程 / 黄全信编著。 - 北京: 华语教学出版社, 1997. 3

(中国书法自学丛书) ISBN 7-80052-455-8

I. 隶... II. 黄... III. 汉字 - 隶书 - 自学参考资料 IV. J292.11

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 ( 97 ) 第 00816 号

中国书法自学丛书—隶书自学教程

黄全信 编著

\*

©华语教学出版社

华语教学出版社出版

(中国北京百万庄路 24 号)

邮政编码 100037

春雷印刷厂印刷

中国国际图书贸易总公司发行

(中国北京车公庄西路 35 号)

北京邮政信箱第 399 号 邮政编码 100044

1998 年 ( 16 开 ) 第一版

(汉英)

ISBN 7-80052-455-8 / H · 547 (外)

03500

9 - CE - 3193P

**First Edition 1998**

**ISBN 7-80052-455-8**

**Copyright 1998 by Sinolingua**

**Published by Sinolingua**

**24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China**

**Printed by Chunlei Printing House**

**Distributed by China International**

**Book Trading Corporation**

**35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, P.O. Box 399**

**Beijing 100044, China**

***Printed in the People's Republic of China***

## Foreword

Chinese calligraphy, the core of the Oriental arts, reflects the temperament of the Chinese nation. The black and white, dots and lines are an expression of the spirits and images of Nature, reflecting a calligrapher's feelings and knowledge. Calligraphy's profound artistic essence lies in the combination of feeling and rationale, form and spirit, rich structure and vivid rhythm – a perfect balance between the form and the ideological content expressed in a character. Though devoid of color, calligraphy is variously colored as painting; and without sound, it contains melodies just like music.

Chinese calligraphy has a long history, ranging from the keeping of records by tying knots before Cang Jie invented writing, to the characters on earthenware discovered at Dawenkou and inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th-11th century BC). Like a long running river, Chinese calligraphy has evolved during thousands of years, characterized by simplicity and unsophistication in the Shang and Zhou dynasties (c. 16th century-221 BC), splendor in the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BC-AD 220), graceful bearing in the Wei and Jin dynasties (220-420), magnificence in the Sui and Tang dynasties (581-907), radiating vigor in the Song and Yuan dynasties (960-1368), prosperity in the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911) and grandeur in the current era.

Chinese characters fall into the following styles: regular, running, grass, official and seal scripts. Seal scripts may be divided into large and small characters; official scripts, into Qin and Han styles; grass characters, into *Zhang* (cursive official), *Jin* (modern) and *Kuang* (wild) scripts; and regular characters, into Wei and Tang scripts. Chinese calligraphy not only reflects the character of individual calligrapher, but also presents the styles and flavors of different regions and eras.

China has always regarded calligraphy as the quintessence of Chinese culture and a national treasure as well. Calligraphy is a required course at school and every educated person must study calligraphy.

The art of Chinese calligraphy is unprecedentedly prosperous now. Various kinds of calligraphy model books have been published; however, it is hard to find one which can scientifically instruct people in learning calligraphy. An old saying goes: "If one owns the best book, one may obtain medium-level knowledge; and if one has a medium-level book, one may only absorb low-level knowledge." Anyone who wishes to have a good command of Chinese calligraphy must have a good teacher and a good book. At the present time when it is hard to find a good teacher, good teaching materials are even more important.

To meet the demands of the people who are interested in Chinese calligraphy, Professor Huang Quanxin has compiled the *Chinese Calligraphy Teach-Yourself Series* in six books: *A Self-Study Course in Regular Script*, *A Self-Study Course in Wei Stone Inscriptions*, *A Self-Study Course in Running Script*, *A Self-Study Course in Grass Script*, *A Self-Study Course in Official Script*, and *A Self-Study Course in Seal Script*. Each book consists of the following chapters: A Brief Introduction, Techniques, Strokes, Radicals, Structure, The Art of Composition, Creation, Copying, and Appreciation, which should help beginners learn the rudiments, and other learners improve their calligraphy techniques.

With standard model characters, systematic theories for self-study, illustration and texts, the *Chinese Calligraphy Teach-Yourself Series* is well formatted, informative and interesting. Student may appreciate Chinese calligraphy while practicing the models in the books to improve their accomplishments and techniques. We sincerely wish they are of help with the study of Chinese calligraphy.

**Editor**  
**October 1994**

## About the Author

Huang Quanxin is a senior teacher of fine arts in the Middle School Attached to Beijing Normal University and a member of the Chinese Calligraphers' Association. In his childhood, he took up the study of calligraphy and paintings, and read a large number of poems. His father was a student of Kang Youwei (a famous reformist in the late Qing Dynasty). For many years, he has lived in Liulichang (an ancient cultural street in Beijing), taken many famous calligraphers, scholars and experts as his teachers, and immersed himself untiringly among calligraphy and painting. When he was a middle-school student, he won first place in a calligraphy contest. Later many more works won awards at important calligraphy competitions and have been exhibited at home and abroad. In addition, he has inscribed the titles of many newspapers and magazines. He is named as an eminent person of the contemporary era by the Calligraphy Association of Wang Xizhi's hometown, included in the book *Famous Calligraphers in Beijing* by the Beijing Calligraphers' Association, as well as in *A Dictionary of Chinese Artists of the Present Age* and *Who's Who in the World*.

Huang Quanxin is also a member of the Chinese Society for Fine Arts Education and a standing council member of the district society. In his youth, he compiled teaching materials for the fine arts, painted color picture-story books, and created hanging paintings, which were named by the State Education Commission as excellent works. He visited Taiwan as a member of the artists delegation from mainland China and held a one-man calligraphy show in Japan. Many of his calligraphy works and paintings have been sent by the government officials to foreign guests as gifts, enjoying a high reputation both at home and abroad. Hence he is included in the book *Famous Chinese Painters*.

Huang Quanxin has served as teacher for thirty years, with students from all over the country and some in foreign countries. Quite a number of his students came out top at many domestic and international calligraphy and paintings competitions.

Huang Quanxin founded the first parents' school in Beijing and has served as head of the National Excellent Parents' School for many years. He is a consultant of Beijing primary and middle-school education, a former host of an education program of Beijing Broadcasting Station, one of the compilers of the teaching materials and courses of the Beijing Parents' School, a member of the Beijing Research Association of Family Education and a council member of the district research association. He is also interested in various aspects of Chinese traditional culture and arts, and serves as a council member of the Association for Developing Beijing and Kunqu Operas.

Huang Quanxin has devoted his spare time to the study of calligraphy, paintings and other Chinese traditional culture and arts as well as to the education of arts. Up to now more than thirty of his books have been published, including *Grand View of China's Auspiciousness Series*, *The Series of Authentic Characters of Fu (fortune)*, *Lu (emoluments)*, *Shou (longevity)* and *Xi (happiness)* by *Famous Calligraphers of Past Dynasties*, *Modern Inscriptions*, *A Copybook of Ancient Chinese Poems*, *An Intense Course for Practical Fountain Pen Handwriting*, and *Elementary Handwriting for Young People*. In addition he has been a designer for many books. Huang Quanxin, who enjoys a high reputation in China and abroad, is included in the *Directory of Eminent Literary Personnel of China* by the Research Institute of Literature of the China Academy of Social Sciences.

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# Chapter I Official Script

## 1. Origin and Development

Official script, which derived from seal characters, was in the bud in the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), came into being in the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC), developed in the Western Han (206 BC-24) and reached its prime in the Eastern Han (25-220).

The appearance of official script was an important reform in the history of the Chinese characters and calligraphy, which led to the modern form of Chinese writing. Grass characters, running and regular scripts all evolved from official script. Hence official script is the origin of present-day Chinese characters.



## 2. Qin Official Script

Qin official script is also known as ancient official script. In the Qin Dynasty, though small seal characters were designated for use in official and governmental documents, a cursive, swiftly-written and simplified form of seal characters, later known as official scripts, was widely used among the people.

Qin official script is similar to seal characters in structure, but it differs from seal characters in the strokes. As official script stressed convenience and speed, curving lines in seal characters were replaced by straight lines in Qin official script; and round cornering strokes, by square cornering ones. These are the most important differences between Qin official script and small seal characters.



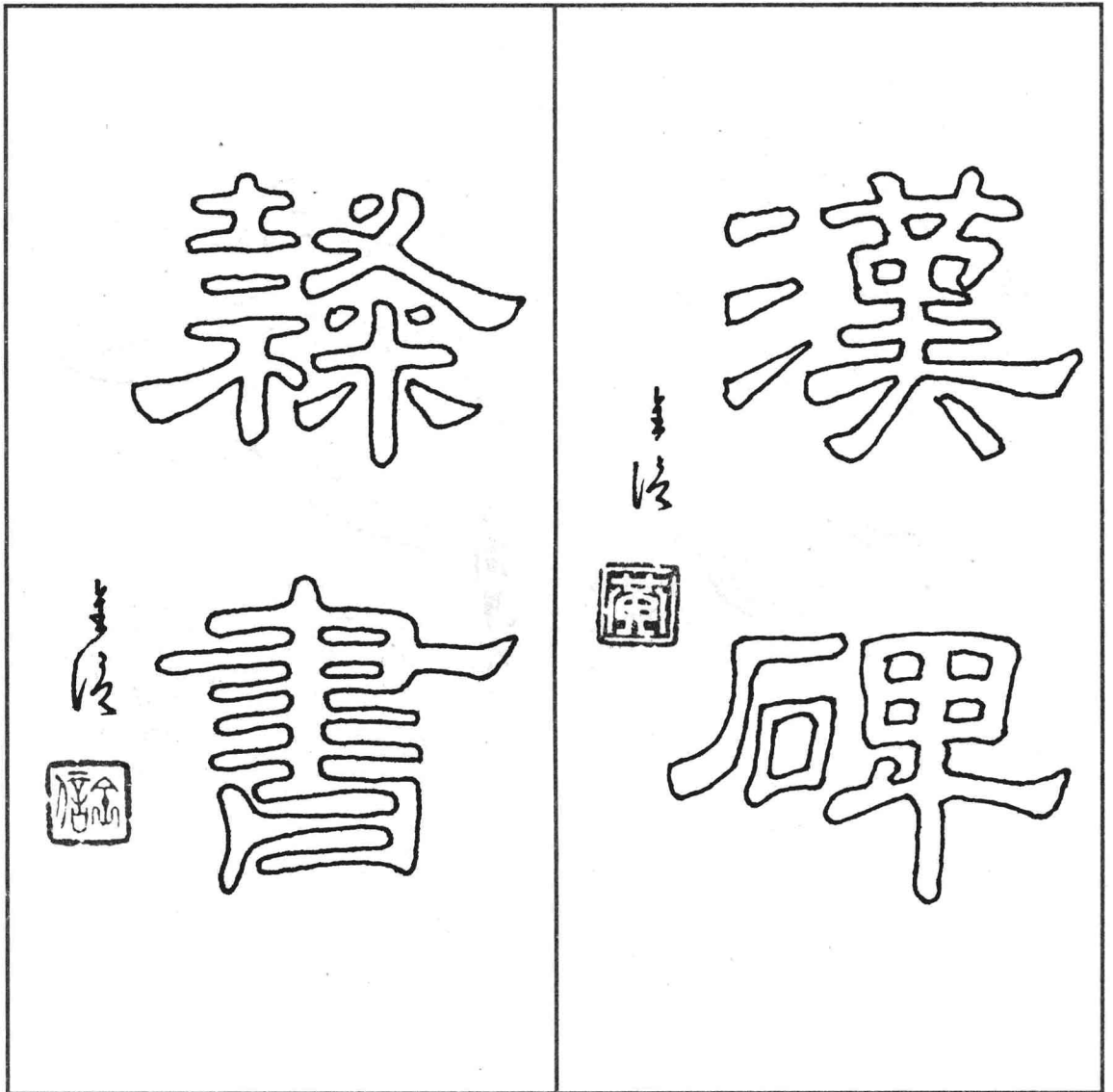
### 3. Simplified Han Official Script

The official script in the Western Han Dynasty was represented by simplified Han official script. Qin official script is the cursive form of small seal characters, and in many respects remains the overall form. In spite of the influence of seal characters, official script developed quickly in the Western Han. Highlighted by simplified and neaten character structure and reformed character composition, official script, instead of small seal characters, became commonly used for writing in the Western Han Dynasty.



#### 4. Han Official Script

Gradually the writing of official script became an art in the later Western Han Dynasty. All horizontal, left-falling and right-falling strokes show a rising trend, the end of a stroke becomes thick and the closing of a stroke is slightly lifted up. The Eastern Han Dynasty witnessed the appearance of a large number of stone inscriptions and official script reached its height. Each stone inscription displays its own distinct style. Some were simple and unsophisticated; some, square and beautiful; and others, elegant and graceful.



# Chapter II      Techniques of Writing

## 1. Sitting Position

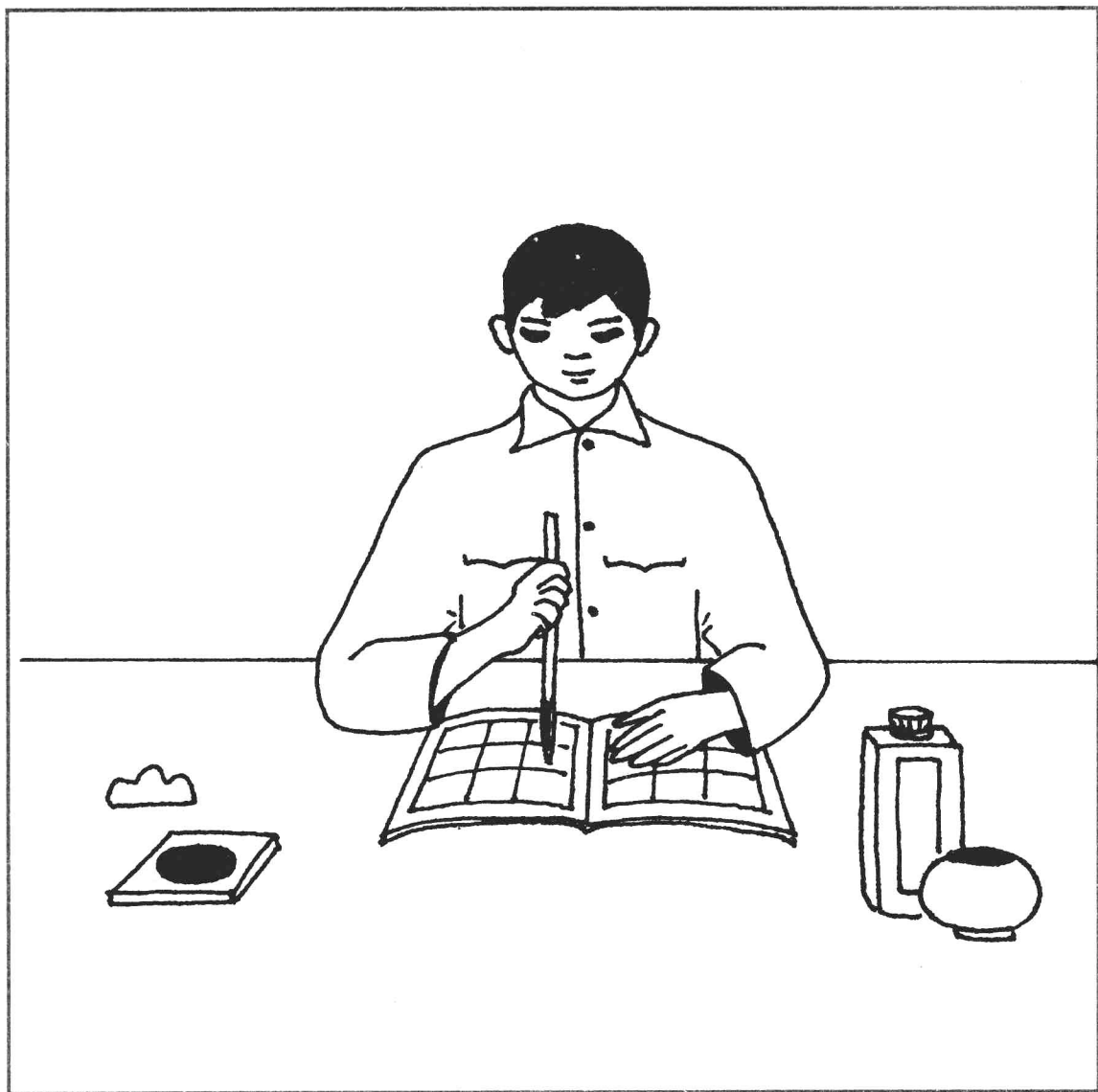
Requirements for one who sits to write:

The head: One should hold the head straight, inclined slightly forward, look at the copybook and keep the mind peaceful.

The body: One should sit straight, keep the shoulders level and the waist stiff, and should not touch the table with the chest.

The arms: One should relax one's arms, the left hand resting on the paper and the right hand holding the brush.

The feet: One should rest one's feet parallel on the floor, the legs relaxed and the body stable.



## 2. Standing Position

One should stand to write large Chinese characters, with a suspended elbow.

Hold the head straight, incline the body slightly forward, look at the copybook and keep the mind peaceful.

Hold the brush with the right hand, place the left hand on the table, and suspend the elbow while writing characters to freely express one's feeling.

Place the right foot slightly forward and the left foot slightly back, and rest the soles flat on the floor with the center of gravity on the right foot.

Write characters with the strength from the waist and the roots of the feet to make every stroke penetrate the paper.



### 3. Holding the Brush

Hold the brush straight with fingers, the palm relaxed.

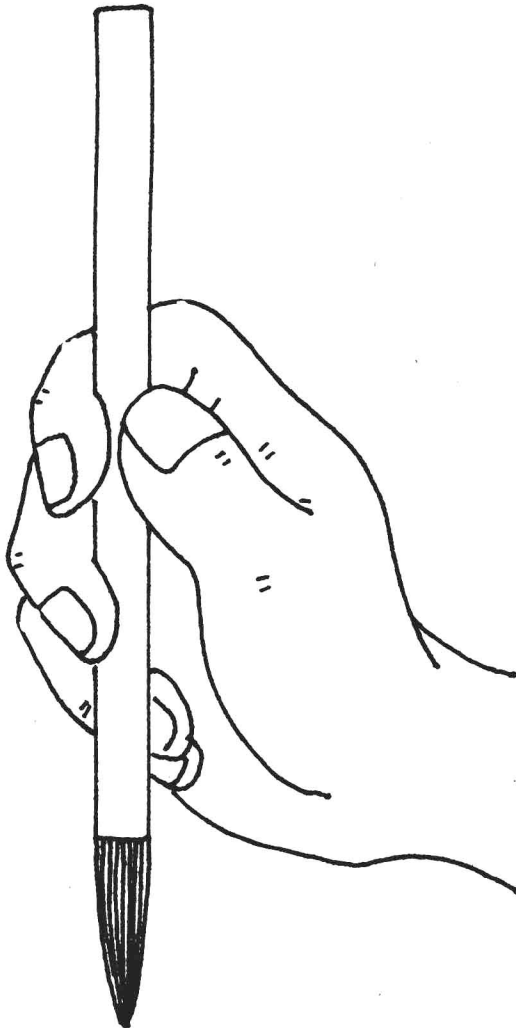
Pushing down: The thumb pushes the brush from inside to outside.

Pressing: The index finger presses the brush from outside to inside.

Hooking: The middle finger pulls the brush from outside on the left to inside on the right.

Squaring: The ring finger pushes the brush from inside on the right to outside on the left.

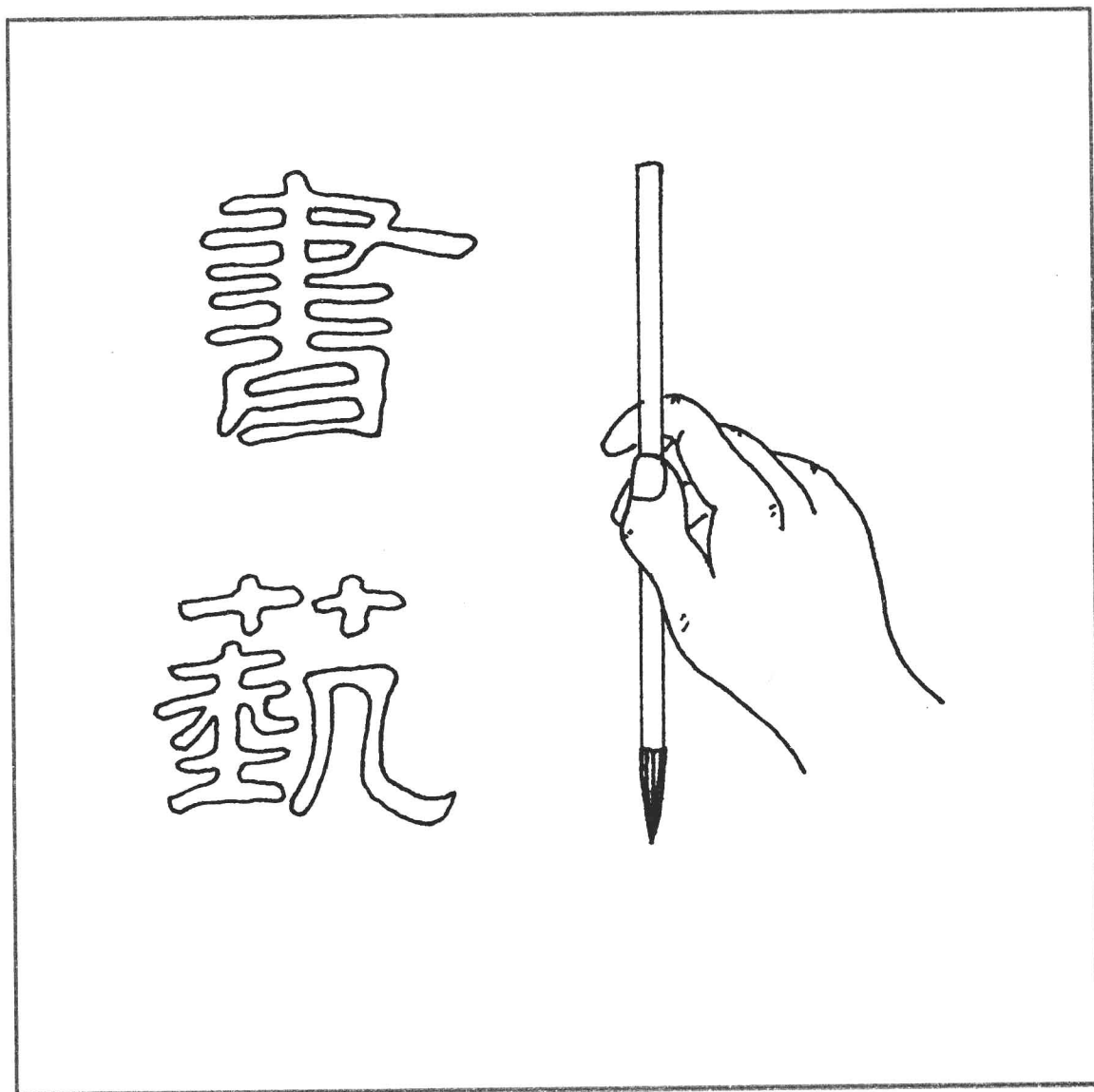
Supporting: The little finger gives auxiliary strength to the ring finger.



#### 4. Movement of the Brush

A saying goes: Moving the brush with the wrist. If the middle point of the brush is used in the movement of the brush, all strength will be concentrated on the writing brush and strokes will be full of spirit. One should use the contrary-point method to start a stroke; the middle-point method, to move the brush on; and the hidden-point method to close a stroke.

The “swallow-tail” right falling stroke is particular to official script. With a round beginning like a silkworm's head and a square end in the shape of a swallow's tail, the curving right falling stroke is vivid, like flowing water. There are little changes in the other strokes of official script.





# Chapter III Strokes

The single movement of the brush is commonly known as one stroke. One who wants to write good calligraphy must learn to write strokes well.

## 1. Basic Strokes

There are eight kinds of basic strokes: horizontal, vertical, left-falling, right-falling, hooking, rising and cornering strokes and dots.

