Dwiggins formed a wholly imaginary ‘Society of Calligraphers’ (an early practical attempt having failed to win sufficient supporters) and issued beautiful certificates of honorary membership to a number of people in the field of publishing and graphic arts whom he thought worthy of such recognition. But the contact with Britain continued. In 1913 Ernst Frederick Detterer (died 1947) of Chicago came to London to take private lessons with Edward Johnston. After his return to America he began to establish a calligraphic tradition of formal penmanship, especially in the Mid-West, and in 1931 became Curator of the John M. W. Kellogg Foundation at the Newberry Library in Chicago where he founded a Calligraphy Study Group which greatly influenced the development of American calligraphy. A very versatile calligrapher was John Howard Benson (1901–1956) from Rhode Island who studied in New York at the National Academy of Design at a time when lettering had not yet gained a recognised place in art education. In 1950 he published a manual (Elements of Lettering) and five years later a translation (the first in English) of Arrighi’s La Opera (see p. 71). Other influential teachers and calligraphers were Arnold Blans (born 1908), Edward Karr (born 1909), Paul Standard (born 1896), and Lloyd Reynolds (Italie Calligraphy and Handwriting 1969). In 1958 Reynolds went a step further and mounted an exhibition at the Portland Art Museum entitled ‘Calligraphy: the Golden Age and its Modern Revival’ which was the result of many years of historical study, research and practical work. Another influential exhibition (mostly works of British calligraphers) was organised by P. W. Filby in 1959 at the Peabody Institute Library in Baltimore on ‘Calligraphy and Illumination’; this was followed, two years later, by ‘Calligraphy and Handwriting in America, 1710–1961’. Filby was also connected with an exhibition on ‘Two Thousand Years of Calligraphy’ held in 1965 at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, which was accompanied by a detailed and scholarly catalogue.

Today calligraphy-related activities concentrate themselves mainly around well-known teaching centres (such as New York, Rhode Island, Chicago, Portland, Oregon, Boston, California), a wide use of fine writing in commerce (much more pronounced and more positive than in Europe), it encourages experiments), and individual circles where calligraphy is practised and taught both as an art form and a traditional craft. On the whole calligraphy is increasingly alive, widely practised and appreciated; there are now more groups, more conferences, more exhibitions, and more periodicals produced by influential societies, such as Alphabet (for the Friends of Calligraphy, San Francisco), Calligraphy Idea Exchange (a quarterly magazine), and Calligraphy Review [151]. There are also more courses at art schools or run by private individuals and groups (some of them formal and structured, others less so), more national and international conferences, and a good deal more general awareness of calligraphy than in Europe. One of the reasons lies perhaps in the fact that in America there is less divide between calligraphers, artists, designers and amateurs. The role of amateurs should not be underestimated: the writing masters of previous centuries did, after all, keep the tradition alive by teaching to all who were willing to learn. After the 1950s, which saw a general regrouping of ideas and resources, an additional stimulus was provided by some prominent British calligraphers [151] such as Sheila Waters, David Howells and (most of all) Donald Jackson [see Plate XII] taking up teaching appointments at American centres, stimulating workshops and the foundation of new societies which in turn created a further need for tutors. There has also been an increase in media coverage, a large number of books covering special aspects of calligraphy, and periodicals promoting both an interest in formal historical scripts while at the same time introducing new trends and new practitioners to the audience.
152 A branch of plum blossoms and a poem written in fine curvate calligraphy, woven into one design. From the Japanese work Uta-e by Kamakura Sekka (1566-1942AD). Printed from wood blocks, 1934. BRITISH LIBRARY. DEPARTMENT OF ORIENTAL AND INDIAN OFFICE COLLECTIONS, OR 30/280

153 In April 1986 a group of 27 professional calligraphers (all key members of the Sagen Bukkai School of Calligraphy) visited the Oriental section of the British Library. They were led by the distinguished master calligrapher Kanoko Otsu, the founder of the Sagen Bukkai School of Calligraphy. BRITISH LIBRARY VISITORS' BOOK, WITH AN EXAMPLE OF KANOKO OTSU'S CALLIGRAPHY IN THE UPPER SECTION OF THE PAGE, AND THE SIGNATURES OF SOME OF HIS GROUP IN THE LOWER ONE.

Eastern continuation

In the Islamic countries and in the Far East the situation has always been rather different. There, printing did not inaugurate a break with tradition, and in consequence, calligraphy never became a disenchanted art. Without any Industrial Revolution there was also no definite rupture in the fabric of society, and traditional values continued. Western influence, despite long periods of political and economic dominance, was in the final instance peripheral. Moreover, calligraphy had never been a craft bound to form and function but an expression of deeply felt sentiments connected with the inner life of the people. In Islam this meant the message of the Koran, and in the Far East the individualist essence of an otherwise communal culture (for as the contemporary Japanese calligrapher Naruse Eizan puts it: 'when you write calligraphy you are portraying yourself on paper').

Today calligraphy continues to thrive in Japan [152, 153] where it is not only a major art form but also a lucrative business. Prices for a good piece of calligraphy start very often around £4,000, while items sold during one of the large and prestigious exhibitions which are staged regularly in the big cities can change hands for as much as £1,000,000. In the West nobody would be prepared to invest such sums in a fine piece of writing.

Calligraphy has retained its position, practically unchanged, within the environs of Buddhist and Zen monasteries. But it is also taught as a subject at university level. There are special schools of calligraphy, and university professors and teachers act as advisors or trustees to the main exhibitions. Together with sculpture and painting, calligraphic items are represented at the annual Government-sponsored Nitten exhibitions. Works of calligraphy are displayed in most major museums (a new trend since traditionally calligraphy has always been displayed in the home). There are at present many prestigious societies and circles practising calligraphy. It is also taught as part of the school curriculum; those who have not acquired a good handwriting by the time they reach adulthood often feel embarrassed about it. Unlike
in the West, good handwriting is still important. Children are taught how to write, how to handle the brush and how to sit properly. 'Well written' still implies calligraphic aspirations, not just textual excellence [154].

Traditional styles of calligraphy are of course widely practised and many modern calligraphers look for inspiration in forms of writing used in China [155] at the beginning of the Christian era. But, in addition, a number of new, partly experimental styles have emerged, especially in the post-war period. One such style is Zen’ei shodo, an abstract avant-garde form of calligraphy, done at great speed (rather like Western action painting) and with abstract titles (sometimes only numbers) which can be written in Roman letters. Zen’ei shodo has its own masters but it is not universally admired and not truly within the tradition. Other trends come from various directions: the Modern Poetry Movement, Single Character Calligraphy, or calligraphy using only kana, or a mixture of kana and kanji signs. There are also prominent modern Zen and Siddham masters (such as for example Hisanatsu Sinschi and Yokoyama Gijun respectively) whose work is much valued, aesthetically as well as financially.

How then does calligraphy fare in Communist China? There are without doubt certain ideological difficulties when it comes to accommodate what was for so long an elitist art form. Information China, a ‘comprehensive and authoritative reference source of New China’ organised by the Chinese
Academy of Social Science and published in three large volumes in 1989 devotes altogether only two pages of volume three to the subject of calligraphy. When it comes to contemporary trends it states that:

"In recent years there has arisen a craze for calligraphy in the cities. Most prominent are the calligraphic activities of old people. They hold exhibitions and found publications, playing a considerable role in giving publicity to the effectiveness of calligraphy in practising moral culture, moulding temperaments and building both physical and mental health. A calligraphic contest jointly held by the Central TV Station and the Chinese Calligraphers' Association in 1986 attracted numerous lovers of calligraphy and aroused their enthusiasm for the art. Master calligraphers of modern times include She Yinbo (1885-1971), Sha Menghai and Lin Sanzhi."

The entry concludes, somewhat ruefully, that 'to develop Socialist fine arts on the basis of the national heritage is the historical mission of people of the present era, but there is no ready formula to follow to achieve this goal.'

But in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution calligraphy does tentatively flourish, and not only amongst 'old people'. Good writing has a place in the school curriculum though not perhaps in quite the same way as in Japan (there is of course less leisure time and, given the predominantly rural character of China, a much lower level of literacy). But encouragement is not altogether lacking; there are children's competitions with prodigies being feted and even sent abroad to demonstrate their skill in front of foreign audiences. Calligraphy is also taught at art schools and some artists, such as Wang Jianan (who recently visited London), are experimenting with new ideas and new styles in a manner which would not have been possible in pre-Communist China. Calligraphy may no longer be an elite art form (the old elite has long since gone) but it is now making inroads into many aspects of everyday life. Calligraphers are hired to design notepaper heading, head boards for houses and commercial buildings; they are employed to write menus for restaurant owners, and publishing houses use their services for writing book titles and chapter headings. There are still schools of calligraphy where traditions are preserved and the art of seal carving is very much alive. Also alive is the time-honoured habit of conserving the calligraphy of famous statesmen for posterity, if no longer always in stone, then certainly in printed form. During Mao's ascendancy examples of his handwriting (1956) were widely published, and characters written by him were on the mast-head of the People's Daily.

For many countries which have been under colonial rule, the latter part of the 20th century has been one of patriotism and rediscovery, enabling them to re-evaluate their own identity. Contemporary Islamic calligraphy is thus greatly influenced by a growth in awareness among Muslims which has engendered a strong sense of ethnic, religious and national identity. Today calligraphy flourishes in the Muslim countries of North Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia (especially Malaysia). There are well-known exponents of various schools, frequent exhibitions, societies (sometimes state-encouraged and/or state-funded), and there are also (as has always been the case with Islamic calligraphy) a good many patrons. Most interesting, however, is the fact that apart from traditional forms of calligraphy, there is a rich harvest of new ideas and experiments. Many calligraphers accept a certain amount of what one must call non-Muslim influence from their surroundings rather than relying entirely on geographical or national elements, but such elements are on the whole subordinated to the calligrapher's awareness of Islam.

At present a number of definite trends can be observed and isolated within Islamic calligraphy (159). Traditional forms [see 68] have of course continued, and their main exponents and patrons can be found (though by no means exclusively) within the sphere of religious Muslim schools. But many modern calligraphers have studied at Western universities and come into contact with Western concepts of art [159]. Since Muslim countries are now politically independent such influence is in a way more easily accepted and absorbed. It is also nearly always modified, given a truly Islamic (and often also local) flavour, and, most importantly, it is hardly ever purely imitative. One such trend is to be seen in a form of figurative calligraphy in which calligraphic and figurative elements are integrated in a fashion which makes it..."
157 Modern Arabic calligraphy by Nab Mahdouni (born 1937), calligraphy is based on the script of the Arabic calligrapher, and at the Atelier L'Abre in Carthage, 1980s. Mahdouni was born in Tunisia and studied at the Atelier L'Abre in Carthage. In this work, he uses Kufic letterforms to create an explosive composition; the words themselves have no meaning.

BRITISH MUSEUM, DEPARTMENT OF ORIENTAL ANTIQUITIES, OA 1991.6-38

158 Calligraphic silk screen print by Ahmed Moustafa; a composition based on the script of the Arabic calligrapher, dated 1958.

BRITISH MUSEUM: AO 1887 6-4, 04
impossible to separate one from the other. Another school is a certain type of expressionistic calligraphy which, though related to contemporary Western ideas and movements, uses a decisively Islamic ‘vocabulary’ in this style emotional elements are expressed through distortion and exaggeration. Another style turns letters and words into symbols which can then be used to express ideas [158]. Finally, a form of abstract calligraphy exists where letters and geometrical shapes are used only for their outward form, quite divorced from the tradition and also from any verbal message [157]. This, of course, is a radical departure from the original purpose of Islamic calligraphy which has only one objective, namely that of conveying the message of the Koran.

Nationalism and feelings of national identity have also influenced the development of contemporary Korean calligraphy. After the middle of the 20th century Korea saw not so much a revival but a definite revitalization of its calligraphy and, even more important, for the first time a form of calligraphy which developed along strictly nationalistic lines. Up to then Korean calligraphy had been largely derivative, first (since the beginning of the Christian era) from Chinese ideas and then, after 1920, from Japanese concepts of calligraphy. Today many modern calligraphers [160] no longer rely entirely on the Chinese script but use, increasingly, King Sejong’s truly Korean alphabet (see p.116).

159 Modern Arabic calligraphy by Hassan Massoudy (born 1944); Al-Sabha, 1982. Massoudy was born in Iran and trained in Baghdad as a calligrapher. In 1969 he attended the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. His composition is made up of the Arabic word for desert (al-sahra) superimposed on the following lines of poetry: ‘take me back to the desert, I only like to be faced by the dry wind’.

BRITISH MUSEUM, DEPARTMENT OF ORIENTAL ANTIQUITIES, OA 1987.1-190

160 An example of the work of Kim Ki Seoung as shown at the ‘30th exhibition of Calligraphy by Kim Ki Seoung’ in Seoul, 1980. Kim Ki Seoung, one of Korea’s leading contemporary calligraphers, studied Chinese painting and calligraphy in Shanghai and after his return to Korea opened the Daereung Calligraphic Institute which encouraged calligraphy as well as research into the subject. He has taught at the Seoul National University College of Fine Arts, the Sukmyong Women’s University and the Sungmyung Women’s University. In his own work he makes extensive and imaginative use of the National Korean alphabet (Wangguk); in 1966 he published (in Korean) a much needed and long overdue ‘History of Korean Calligraphy’.

REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION OF KIM KI SEOUNG
Symbiosis?

What then of the future? Judging from present trends what direction is calligraphy likely to take?

For Eastern as well as Western scribes the middle of the 20th century marked not so much a turning point as a pause, and with it a chance to take stock. The newly found confidence in their national identity not only encouraged Islamic calligraphers to express themselves in a manner which was both traditional and inventive, but also enabled them to come to terms with ideas some of their young people had assimilated at Western universities and art schools. But Western artists and calligraphers, too, have been influenced by their Eastern counterparts [161]. Already in the 19th century the architect and designer Owen Jones had published The Grammar of Ornament (1856) in which he drew attention to Islamic design by examining Eastern and Western motifs. His ideas were not lost on William Morris and his successors.

By the end of the 19th century Western painters began to appreciate and study Eastern concepts such as an awareness of the problem of two-dimensional design and the overall quality of pattern; in fact, French Impressionists owe much to Oriental concepts, especially to Japanese Ukiyo-e ('Floating World') paintings. As the 20th century progressed a number of individual artists felt increasingly more drawn to Eastern concepts and began to make use of Oriental techniques in their own work.

One artist whose work transformed itself greatly under the influence of Chinese and Japanese calligraphy was the American Mark Tobey (1890–1970). Originally a portrait painter, Tobey travelled to China in the 1930s and began to work on calligraphy under the influence of the Chinese artist Deng Xiu. Though a stay in a Zen monastery in Kyoto failed to provide him with the obligatory enlightenment, he was profoundly moved by the similarity of spiritual intensity in most Western as well as Oriental art and in consequence rejected both perspective and three-dimensional reality, using, in his own words, 'the calligraphic impulse to carry...work into some new dimension'. After the 1960s Oriental culture and Eastern philosophy became a growth industry among certain groups of Western artists and intellectuals and a good number of Western calligraphers tried to master Chinese or Japanese calligraphy, form circles and teach their own disciples. Not all such ventures were entirely successful. Tobey had wisely realised that he himself would always remain a Westerner and that any successful symbiosis has to be based on the acceptance of one's own identity. However, the new ideas proved greatly stimulating, successfully challenging some of the most basic concepts of Western calligraphy: the classical formality, the reliance on form and function and the absolute need for legibility ('unambiguous communication').

The logical step from calligrams (see 96), text pictures (162), and calligraphy to text

161 Ingo Jaukum Burgert (born Berlin, 1938), a calligrapher, painter and musician, comes close to the traditional Chinese concept of calligraphy. In some of his brushwork lines take their inspiration from nature. An example from his book Ludwig Schäfer: III (1969) which reads 'Gefangen mitten in Ufern von Gras sind die Blumen' (But imprisoned he banks of grass are the flowers). REPRODUCED WITH THE BÜRGER'S PERMISSION
A text picture (line-cut) by the American artist Meierud. 
Graiglied making use of Yves’s Assail’s prayer. Produced 
during the time when Graiglied was still a Benedictine nun, it 
forms part of a calligraphic series called ‘Poet’s of God’ 
(c. 1970s). The basically regular shape of letters has been hacked into 
crude forms which are welded into a rough unity. Graiglied, who is also a painter, has 
used the figures of birds, trees and flowers to illustrate the page in 
manier reminiscent of medieval traditions. Property of the 
Author.

PHOTOGRAPHY NOW

A painting by Wendy Yeo making use of calligraphic brushwork. Yeo was born in 
Hong Kong but trained at the Slade School in London and now lives 
and works in England. Her paintings combine 
Western and Chinese 
techniques and traditions. 
Reproduced with permision of M. Wendy 
Yeo.

Graphic paintings led to ‘painting with words’; to a link between the visual 
expression of emotions and calligraphy. Calligraphic compositions are 
now often conceived as wall hangings (a Far Eastern concept; Western and 
Islamic traditions base themselves on the book) and looked upon in the same 
way as paintings. Letter-sculpture, like the ones produced by Hans Schmidt 
(see p. 211) moves calligraphy into the third dimension. The rigid ‘Trajan’ 
orthodoxy no longer dominates the scene as letter carvers create
their own style, often integrating their work into the concept of a building (a good example is Ralph Beyer’s lettering in Coventry Cathedral). At the same time as Eastern calligraphers started to experiment with abstract art, Western calligraphers began to discover the possibilities of creating visual images with the help of letterforms, colours, materials, writing instruments (pencil, brush, spray-can or felt marker being used in addition to the pen), and an original management of space in order to express their ideas and feelings. In some ways these various new forms of Expressive Calligraphy [164] which break the boundaries of traditional lettering are moving away from being simply a craft (which in Johnston’s words provides serviceable and useful things) towards the realm of art (which exists in its own right). At the beginning of the century Rudolph von Larisch had made a tentative step in the same direction; German calligraphy, too, had, early on, opted for inventiveness. Already Rudolf Koch had felt that the revival of calligraphy was more likely to come from a new beginning than from a study of historical forms. Out of this a number of new trends have emerged. There is for example the tendency to link letters with images that draws on both medieval Western traditions and the Far Eastern integration of painting and calligraphy. Another new experimental trend, Polylineal calligraphy [see PLATE AI], goes a step further by not just interpreting but actually altering the text, in some cases making it illegible, communicating visually not just verbally; sometimes patterns are formed reminiscent of Islamic or Far Eastern calligraphy. Graffiti [165] is another important mode of written expression which uses a variety of letterforms, sometimes plain capitals, sometimes hardly legible cursive forms of script (graffiti appeals indirectly, it is not an inscription), sometimes purposely obscured characters and
abbreviations. Graffiti is mainly an urban art form, and there are at present in
cities like London and New York groups of practitioners which centre around a 'teacher' and his style. Graffiti has of course a long history; we have only to
think about the notices found in the ruins of Pompeii and Herculanenum in
Italy (1st century AD) or those on the wall up to the rock fortress of Sigiriya in
Sri Lanka (6th century AD). It can also be used as a political tool— for example
the wall writings of students in China during the unrest which led to
Tianamen Square.

The place most open to change has been America where calligraphy has
always depended on outside influence: first on English copy-books and
immigrants, then on Edward Johnston, to a lesser extent on other European
movements, and eventually also on trends coming from China and Japan.
There is the danger that self-expression and inventiveness without any tradi-
tional basis will soon lose themselves in a search for shallow effects. British
calligraphers have never quite deserted their sound grounding and the disci-
pline imposed by historical letterforms, and today the various forms of Free
or Expressive Calligraphy exist side by side with traditional [166] and cere-
monial work; indeed the best contemporary calligraphers are equally pro-
ficient in both [167].

If you let what is written sink in then you will discover that there is more
written than just the written words. Only when you can see through the
surface crust of words and lines does the text reveal its true secrets, its
deeper meaning. And that is what is really written.

ARIÉ TRUM

166. Julian Waters, Lit-
tera scrita manet (let-
ters made by hand); Roman Capitals in
watercolours written
with a large handmade
horsehair pen.
Waters was born in
England in 1587
but now lives and
works in the United
States. 'I seek at let-
tering as a huge palette
which includes calli-
graphy, type-forms,
and everything in
between. The colours of
that palette can be
mixed into an infinite
variety of blends'.

167. In the Land of
Mordor where the
Shadows lie, Variation
3 by Donald Jackson;
1980. From J.R.R. Tol-
ken's The Lord of the
Rings. Written with
black Chinese ink on
hand-made paper.
Underneath the free-
dom and originality
there is still an echo of
traditional discipline
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JACKSON'S PERMISSION
ABBOTT, NAJIA. The Rise of the North Arabic Script and its Kuficic Development With a full description of the Kor'an manuscripts in the Oriental University, Chicago. Chicago, 1939

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