

Hold the Brush:

Reprinting and Adapting Chinese Painting Manuals in Nineteenth-Century Japan

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Abstract

The first illustration that appears before the readers' eyes when they open *Meijin ranchiku gafu* (*Painting Manual of Orchids and Bamboo by Famous Painters*, 1804) is of a hand holding a brush. The book first presents readers with motifs broken down into brushstrokes and then leads them to fully-fledged compositions. Yet, serious students of Chinese painting would detect that illustrations within were selectively extracted from *the Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual* and *Ten Bamboo Studio Manual of Calligraphy and Painting*, renowned imported painting manuals from China. When these two Chinese manuals first arrived in Japan in the mid-eighteenth century, they were only available to the cultural and social elites. Once Japanese publishers began to publish reprints, the audience of the books gradually increased, involving less educated readers. By the nineteenth century, publishers further expanded their consumer base by separating text and image. The bifurcation resulted in annotations without images for more specialized audience and image-only books like *Meijin ranchiku gafu* for the less knowledgeable consumers. Scholars have often approached painting manuals as models for artists to create their own works. I argue that a book like *Meijin ranchiku gafu* was not simply intended to impart technical skills to its readers, such as to hold a brush or paint a line, but rather to introduce images of Chinese paintings to the uninitiated who aspired to learn about Chinese culture.