

Exhibition catalogue:

THE ORCHID PAVILION.

THE ART OF WRITING IN CHINA

eds Fan Di'an, LaoZhu, Fu Hongzhan, Yang Yingshi, Jean-Marie Simonet and André Kneib

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'A script should have spirit, breath, bones, flesh, blood; if one of these five elements is lacking, it will not be calligraphy.'

Su Shi (1037–1101)



On a fine day in the year 353 a group of scholarly friends were enjoying a meal together in the Orchid pavilion. Wine and the atmosphere inspired the diners to write. Wang Xizhi was the first to pick up the brush and wrote the foreword to the collection of poems which would result. The beauty and sensitivity of this calligraphy made it the greatest masterpiece of the history of Chinese calligraphy. Later the manuscript disappeared in a tomb of a Chinese emperor. The work acquired a mythical appeal. Hundreds of later generations devoted themselves to copying the brilliant calligraphy. The foreword of the Orchid pavilion – which would continue to inspire all Chinese calligraphers, from the Tang Dynasty to present-day masters – forms the connecting theme in this book, which reveals the origin, the importance and the evolution of the script and the calligraphy in Chinese culture. Just as you don't have to be able to read a score to appreciate music, so you don't have to understand Chinese script to appreciate calligraphic work fully and take a dip into this unknown but fascinating world.

Fan Di'an is director at the National Art Museum of China (NA MOC), Beijing.

LaoZhu (Zhu Qingsheng) is professor at the University of Beijing.

FU Hongzhan is director of the Painting and Calligraphy department of the Palace museum (Forbidden City).

Yang Yingshi is head of programme and curator at the NAMOC in Beijing.

Jean-Marie Simonet is emeritus curator at the Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, Belgium.

André Kneib is lecturer at the Ecole des langues orientales and at the Sorbonne in Paris IV, France.

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