

Harrist "A letter from  
wang Hsi-chih"

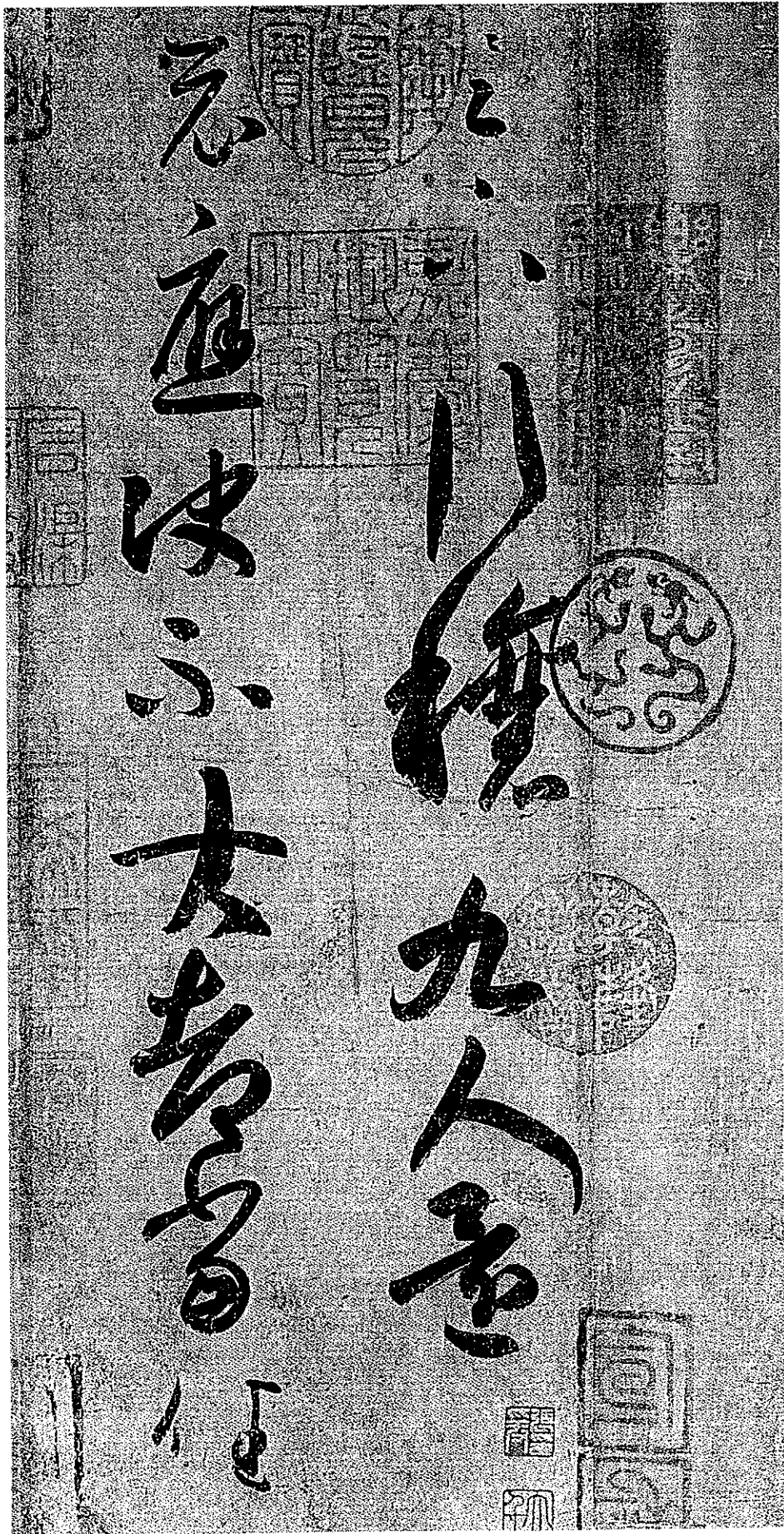
# The Embodied Image

*Chinese Calligraphy from  
the John B. Elliott Collection*

ROBERT E. HARRIST, JR.  
WEN C. FONG

*With contributions by Qianshen Bai, Dora C. Y. Ching, Chuan-hsing Ho,  
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The Art Museum, Princeton University



Wang Hsi-chih (303-361), *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* (cat. no. 2, detail of fig. 1).

# A Letter from Wang Hsi-chih and the Culture of Chinese Calligraphy

ROBERT E. HARRIST, JR.

Around the middle of the fourth century, Wang Hsi-chih (303–361) wrote a short letter in fluid cursive script (*ts'ao-shu*) and dispatched it to a recipient whose name is now unknown. A fragment of this letter, titled *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest*, survives today as a copy mounted in a short handscroll (fig. 1, cat. no. 2). Dozens of seals record the passage of the letter through the hands of imperial collectors and private connoisseurs, and inscriptions by these owners or their friends express their veneration for Wang Hsi-chih's calligraphy. Although contemporary art historical scholarship and theoretical writings challenge the authority of canonical traditions, close study of *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* reveals the remarkable continuity of a classical tradition of calligraphy centered on the art of Wang Hsi-chih.<sup>1</sup> Tracing the history of the letter also illuminates fundamental concepts and practices that constitute what might be called the culture of calligraphy in China. These include the role of imperial taste and ideology in shaping the canon of calligraphic masterpieces, the preservation and reproduction of these works, and the development of a specialized discourse through which ideas about calligraphy were articulated in language.

## A LETTER FROM WANG HSI-CHIH

The story of Wang Hsi-chih's life is well known.<sup>2</sup> He was a member of one of the aristocratic families from north China that fled to the south in the early fourth century as the Western Chin dynasty disintegrated. His family assisted in the founding of a new dynasty, the Eastern Chin, the first of a series of short-lived dynasties that ruled south China while the north was controlled by non-Chinese invaders. Like most men from prominent families of this period, Wang partici-

pated in government service, holding several minor positions and eventually earning the rank of general of the Army of the Right. Despite the martial ring of this title, Wang never actually led troops into battle, but he did engage in debates over whether the Eastern Chin should attempt a military campaign to reclaim the lost territories of north China. While still relatively young, around the age of forty-nine, he retired permanently from government service—a wise choice during an age when miscalculations in public life often led to banishment or execution. The intellectual environment in which Wang Hsi-chih lived was shaped by a fertile composite of beliefs.<sup>3</sup> While Confucianism remained the source of social and ideological norms during the Eastern Chin, Wang and members of his family adhered to a sect of Taoism known as the Way of the Celestial Master.<sup>4</sup> He also counted among his circle of friends Buddhist monks, including the learned cleric Chih-tun (314–366).

What set apart participants in elite culture of the Eastern Chin from those of earlier periods was their intense interest in the arts, above all the art of calligraphy.<sup>5</sup> Although there are clear signs that as early as the Han dynasty, handwriting was treated as the object of aesthetic appreciation, it was during the Eastern Chin that a distinct culture of calligraphy took shape, encompassing the formation of collections, the emergence of an art market, and the production of theoretical and critical writings. As Qianshen Bai explains in his essay in this volume, the most important format for display of calligraphic skill during this period was the personal letter. Often consisting of no more than two or three lines of writing, letters circulating among members of émigré families from the north who dominated the cultural and political life of the Eastern Chin were viewed not simply as literary compositions but as works of visual art.<sup>6</sup>

Colophon by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang

東坡以瑞書於身以十二字書  
歷朝漢三芳以華名此帖之  
其書其名實宜并新

宣和時收在軍生志跋百四十  
有三行穰帖于一也以應化書  
帖不能備載古軍佳書而  
之著不具其覽僅憑御書  
假板故多於此既中推  
漏少帖之帖未海嶽心為  
至多第一種在古帖之外餘  
少知之然人習所從不若物  
海府以海海府或時代有  
先後者浮化時未出而官太  
時以出者亦不可盡以不著  
為口會也此行穰帖存書  
書穰中語列未前百字後  
廟金標正書占西界任聖教  
序一類又有宣和政和印  
書為內殿祕藏無疑於秋  
其以筆蒼勁並描象之  
高維序以復康緒誇名家  
視之畫愧其希代之官

Colophon by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, dated 1604

Seal of An Ch'i

Seal of Wu Tzu

其書

近年見者罕蕭陵三四板以行穰  
帖為第一真偽實也生版  
帖至人常竹藝藝之標故涼者特  
同獲之小齋再一快觀并請

此帖遠合歐陽公書  
名氏漢晉歐陽公書  
風法之正可為心法  
全野遠各之齋在書  
丁集一冬以經而帶人全可月此帖於范香氏書中香港續藏  
全經述也亦不為目疾疾執覽神心之至百餘法

Colophon by  
Chang Ta-ch'ien

Colophon by  
Sun Ch'eng-tse

Figure 1. Wang Hsi-chih (303-361), *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest*, undated, T'ang tracing copy (cat. no. 2).

Northern Sung Palace Seal

Transcription of Wang Hsi-chih's letter by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang

Seal of Emperor Hui-tsung

Seal of the Ch'ien-lung emperor

Seals of the Ch'ien-lung emperor

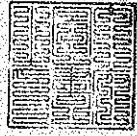
Seal of the Ch'ien-lung emperor

Inscription by Emperor Hui-tsung

Label by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang

Seals of Chang Ta-ch'ien

東坡詩而云兩行十二字者予題大令書畫者先  
以題字字行據帖後當據本觀大令真蹟而書  
字此結字類相近道遠之山當二世其刻也故  
而以上道為盜法也近頃漸大不道其法者  
見所書畫皆謂之真蹟也夫真蹟之在真蹟  
一紙一紙不仲其真蹟也



Colophon by the Ch'ien-lung emperor, dated 1748

Colophon by the Ch'ien-lung emperor, dated 1748

Inscription by the Ch'ien-lung emperor

Label by the Ch'ien-lung emperor

Seals of Emperor Hui-tsung

Seals of Emperor Hui-tsung

Tracing copy of letter by Wang Hsi-chih

此卷在愛  
當有吉祥  
雲霞之但  
肉眼不見  
耳  
已夏之月  
廿有六日再  
觀同觀者

此卷在愛  
當有吉祥  
雲霞之但  
肉眼不見  
耳  
已夏之月  
廿有六日再  
觀同觀者

Colophon by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, dated 1699

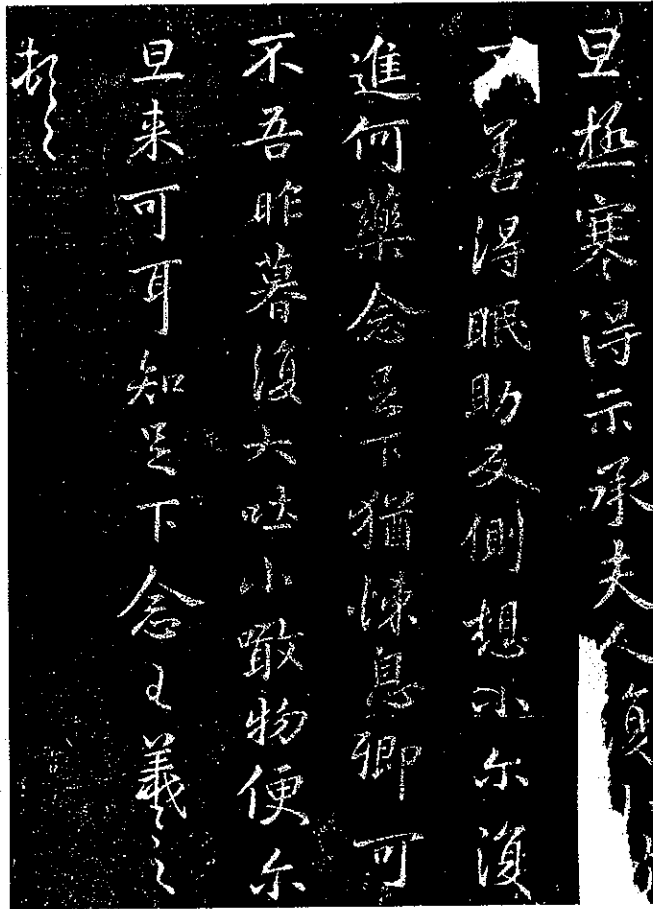


Figure 2. Copy after Wang Hsi-chih, *Extreme Cold*, rubbing from *Model Calligraphies from the Imperial Archives of the Ch'un-hua Era*. From Liu T'ao, ed., *Wang Hsi-chih, Wang Hsien-chih*, in the series *Chung-kuo shu-fa ch'üan-chi* (Peking: Jung-pao-chai, 1991), 18: pl. 73.

Wang Hsi-chih's most illustrious work of calligraphy was a prose essay known as *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection* (*Lan-t'ing chi hsü*), written in the spring of 353 on the occasion of a literary gathering he hosted.<sup>7</sup> His other works transmitted to later centuries include a handful of transcriptions of prose texts composed by various authors.<sup>8</sup> But the great majority of the works on which Wang's fame as an artist rests were letters. Although Wang, like other aristocratic calligraphers of the time, must have realized that his letters would be seen by readers other than those to whom they were written, and therefore worded them with care, early connoisseurs of calligraphy had little to say about the contents of his letters. Nevertheless, these texts, like all works of calligraphy, compel anyone literate in Chinese to decipher what they say. Three samples translated below give some sense of the range of subjects the letters discuss. Perhaps the most common topic in Wang's letters is that of ill health, his own and that of

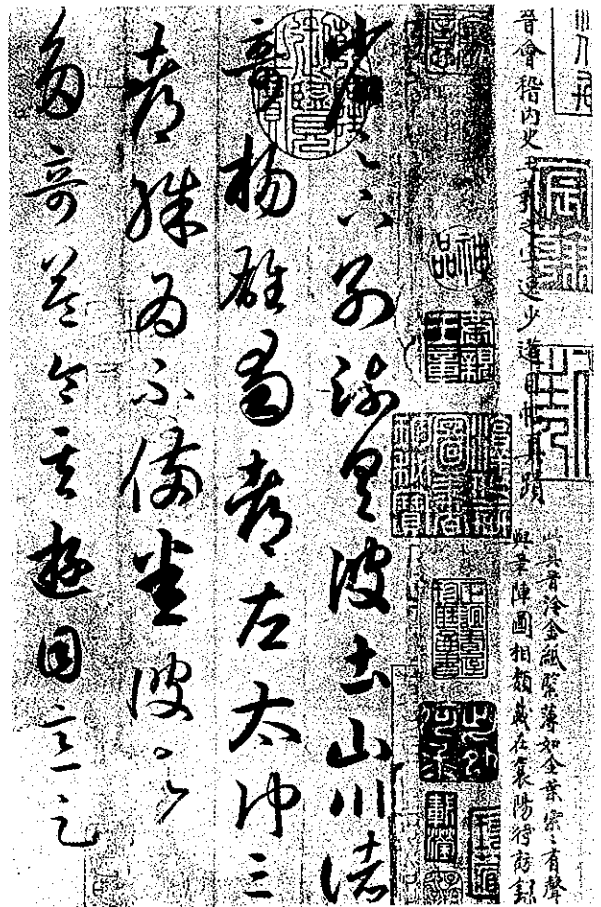


Figure 3. Copy after Wang Hsi-chih, *Sightseeing* (detail), letter mounted as a handscroll, ink on paper (destroyed during World War II). From Liu T'ao, ed., *Wang Hsi-chih, Wang Hsien-chih*, 18: pl. 17.

his correspondents. A characteristic record of ailments appears in a letter known as *Extreme Cold* (*Chi-han t'ieh*; fig. 2), addressed to an unidentified friend:

This morning it was extremely cold. I received your letter and learned from it that your wife again has a cough, cannot sleep well, and tosses and turns. I trust her illness is a little better now. What medicine has she taken? I am thinking of you also, worrying about your asthma. Are you any better? Yesterday evening I vomited heavily, ate a little food, and vomited again. Since this morning I have felt better. I know you are thinking of me. Wang Hsi-chih knocks his head [in respect].<sup>9</sup>

In spite of the unpleasant content of this letter, it was treasured by collectors and included in many anthologies of Wang's calligraphy.

In a letter known as *Sightseeing* (*Yu-mu t'ieh*; fig. 3), sent to a friend who was serving as an official in Szechwan, Wang expresses his longing to visit the famed scenery of that area:

Reading what you have described in your letter about the marvels of scenery where you are, I find that these have been recorded thoroughly in neither "Rhapsody on the Capital of Shu" by Yang Hsiung [53BC-AD18] nor "Rhapsody on the Three Capitals" by Tso Ssu [fl. early 4th century]. The many marvels of your area make me long to sightsee there to satisfy my curiosity. Were I one day able to do so, I would ask you to meet me. Were I to miss this opportunity, I truly would come to feel that the days are as long as years. I believe that since you are stationed there, the court has no reason to move you elsewhere. So I hope that while you are there we can together climb Wen Ridge and Mount

O-mei. These would be great events. Just expressing this wish makes my heart want to gallop to you.<sup>10</sup>

Among Wang Hsi-chih's letters, the two translated above are fairly lengthy. Some of those most treasured by collectors consist of scarcely more than one or two sentences. The shortest of all is *Presenting Oranges* (*Feng-chü t'ieh*), a letter Wang wrote to accompany a gift of oranges sent to a friend (fig. 4):

I present three hundred oranges. Frost has not yet fallen. I cannot get any more.<sup>11</sup>

Consisting of only twelve characters, this letter was among those collected by Emperor T'ang T'ai-tsung (r. 626-49), reproduced as a tracing copy at his court, transmitted through later imperial collections, and preserved today in the National Palace Museum in Taipei.<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, many of Wang's letters preserved in extant copies and recorded in literary sources are frustratingly difficult to read, owing to the now obscure references to historical events or personal matters they contain. The text of *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* is especially difficult to interpret owing to the fact that it is only half of an original letter, the complete text of which was first recorded in a ninth-century survey of calligraphy, *Essentials of Calligraphy* (*Fa-shu yao-lu*) by Chang Yen-yüan (ca. 815-ca. 880).<sup>13</sup> While the letter known today consists of fifteen characters, the text transcribed by Chang had thirty-two, including two characters he could not decipher.<sup>14</sup> The second half of the letter has survived as a separate piece of calligraphy, known by its first two characters as the *Hsüan-liang Letter* (*Hsüan-liang t'ieh*), and appears in several anthologies of rubbings (fig. 5).<sup>15</sup> The thin, angular brushwork in this rubbing seems quite different from the style of calligraphy seen in *Ritual*, and the relationship between the two fragments is so complex as to warrant a separate study. These pieces of cursive-script calligraphy also contain several illegible characters that continue to defy interpretation.<sup>16</sup> Given these problems, it is possible to offer only a tentative summary of the contents of the letter. In it Wang appears to address a friend or political associate who had carried out a ritual accompanied by nine other men. Wang asks if these men have yet made a decision regarding whether to accept government office and suggests that they should respond favorably. He closes by politely stating that he "stands waiting" for a response from the unnamed recipient of the letter.

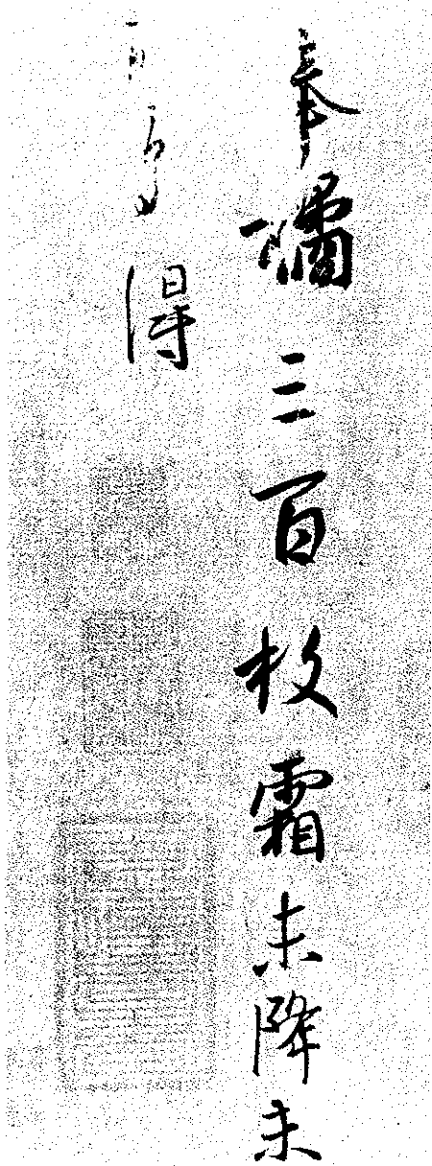


Figure 4. Copy after Wang Hsi-chih. *Presenting Oranges* (detail), letter mounted as a handscroll, ink on paper, height 24.7 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

Figure 5. Copy after Wang Hsi-chih, rubbing from *Model Calligraphies from the Hall of Playing Geese*, 1603. Far Eastern Archives, Princeton University.

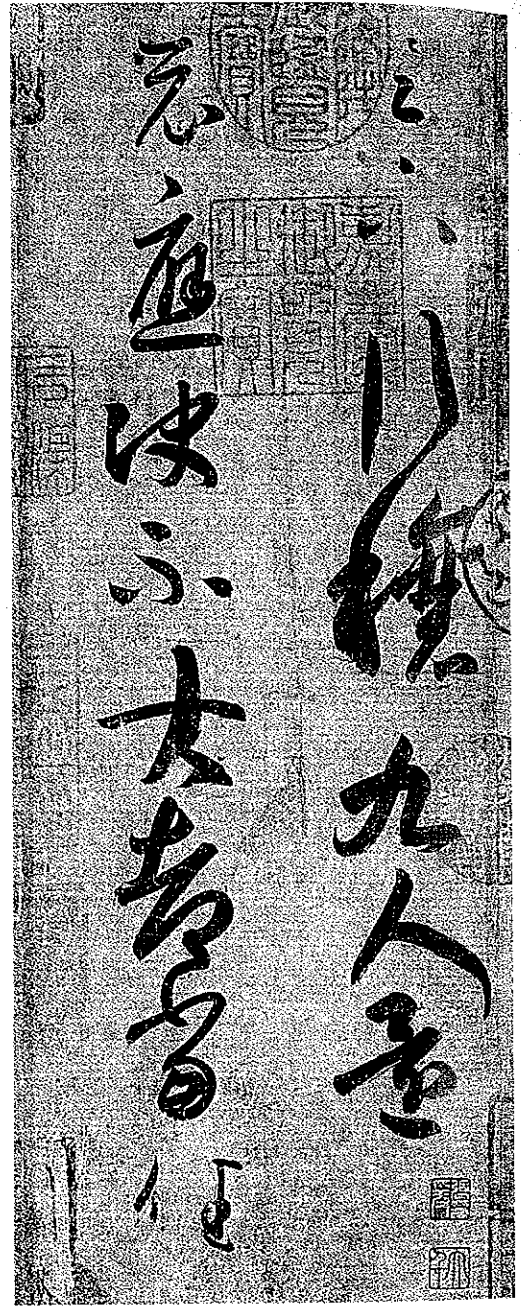
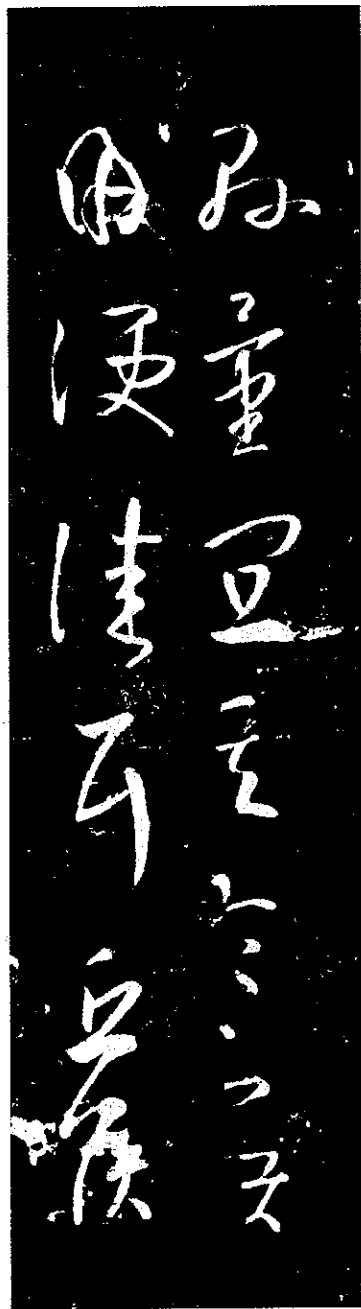


Figure 6. Detail of figure 1.

As a work of calligraphy, *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* displays many of the qualities for which Wang Hsi-chih's art has been most admired. Although the letter seems to have been written rapidly, in irregularly spaced columns of characters that vary considerably in size, brushstrokes are carefully formed and create a sense of disciplined energy flowing down the page (fig. 6). Another hallmark of Wang's style apparent in the letter is his inventiveness in writing recurring configurations of strokes. For example, the dots that appear in the first two characters of the first column

and in the first, third, and fourth characters of the second column demonstrate the wide range of visual effects that can be achieved in even the simplest of strokes. Although this writing displays a fascination with effects of speed, changes of brush direction, and modulation of strokes new in cursive script of the fourth century, Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636) detected in the calligraphy of the letter, produced by keeping the brush tip "hidden" in the center of the strokes, traces of archaic seal-script writing, which was produced through this same brush technique (fig. 7).<sup>17</sup>





Figure 7. Chao Meng-fu (1254–1322), frontispiece to *Record of the Miao-yen Monastery*, ca. 1309–10 (cat. no. II, detail).

#### EARLY COLLECTING AND CRITICAL APPRAISAL

During Wang Hsi-chih's lifetime, samples of his writing were hoarded by the recipients of his letters, and it was thanks to their care in preserving his calligraphy that works became available to early collectors in the decades following Wang's death. Lothar Ledderose has identified the warlord Huan Hsüan (369–404) as the first known collector of calligraphy by Wang Hsi-chih.<sup>18</sup> Huan's interest in Wang's art was encouraged by his friendship with the early historian of calligraphy

Yang Hsin (370–442), whose text *Capable Calligraphers from Antiquity Onward* (*Ku-lai neng-shu jen-ming*) asserts for the first time that Wang Hsi-chih was the greatest calligrapher in history. In the words of Yang Hsin, "From antiquity to the present, he has no equal."<sup>19</sup> At the same time that this view of Wang's status in the history of art was taking shape, demand for his calligraphy fueled the growth of a rudimentary art market and launched the careers of early forgers who sold imitations of his works. Some of these tricksters were said to have imitated Wang's hand so successfully that the

master himself was fooled.<sup>20</sup> Duke Hui (d. 444), another early collector of Wang Hsi-chih's calligraphy, fell victim to forgers who sold to him imitations of Wang's letters that had been soaked in dirty water to make them appear older.<sup>21</sup>

Although powerful aristocrats of the Eastern Chin and Liu Sung dynasties appear to have been the first to collect Wang Hsi-chih's calligraphy, it was the intervention of imperial collectors, deploying the full resources of their authority and wealth, that codified Wang's status in the history of Chinese art. Emperor Ming (r. 465–72) of the Liu Sung reassembled works by Wang Hsi-chih and his son Wang Hsien-chih (344–388) that had been in the collections of his ill-fated imperial predecessors, most of whose brief reigns ended violently, and confiscated other pieces of calligraphy by the two Wangs that were in private hands. He also appointed an expert calligrapher to study and catalogue the works in his collection; this man, Yü Ho (fl. ca. 465–471), thus stands at the beginning of a long line of imperially appointed connoisseurs whose chief duties were to evaluate and catalogue the calligraphy of Wang Hsi-chih. In his *Memorial on Calligraphy* (*Lun-shu piao*) presented to Emperor Ming in 470, Yü Ho reported on the works by the two Wangs in the imperial collection, which he had remounted in a total of sixty scrolls, and also recorded a number of anecdotes that became part of the scholarly lore on Wang Hsi-chih.<sup>22</sup> As we will see, one of these anecdotes, concerning Wang's love of geese, inspired the production of illustrated scenes from the calligrapher's life nearly a thousand years after his death.

Emperor Wu (r. 502–49) of the Liang dynasty not only collected works by Wang Hsi-chih but also actively participated in shaping the critical discourse that ranked Wang as the greatest calligrapher of all time. In his correspondence with the Taoist master and authority on calligraphy T'ao Hung-ching (456–536), Emperor Wu engaged in learned critiques of calligraphic style and discussions on connoisseurship.<sup>23</sup> He also addressed an issue that continues to trouble students of early calligraphy—how to evaluate the profusion of copies, imitations, and forgeries that collectively preserve, or distort, the legacy of Wang Hsi-chih's art. As part of his own efforts to address this problem, Emperor Wu assigned a staff of connoisseurs to authenticate works in his collection, which included many letters by Wang.

In another act of imperial intervention in the history of calligraphy, Emperor Wu contributed to the store of metaphoric language through which the visual effects of calligraphy have been expressed in words. A colorful vocabulary of metaphoric expressions likening the forms of calligraphy to phenomena in nature and to mythological creatures, especially the dragon, had already begun to take shape in the third century. In texts such as *The Forces of Cursive Script* (*Ts'ao-shu shih*) by So Ching (239–303), calligraphy is said to resemble a startled bird, a galloping horse, frolicking dragons, leaping squirrels, and breaking waves.<sup>24</sup> Imagery derived from physiology and medicine also provided a vivid range of metaphors such as "bone" (*ku*), "flesh" (*jou*), and "vital energy" (*ch'i*), which described structural qualities of brushwork and composition in calligraphy.<sup>25</sup> The most powerful metaphoric expressions applied to calligraphy are those connoting movement, speed, and force that evoke the energy released by the calligrapher in the physical act of writing itself.<sup>26</sup> Examples of these appear in *A Diagram of the Battle Formation of the Brush* (*Pi-chen t'u*), a text attributed to the teacher of Wang Hsi-chih, Madam Wei (272–349), but more likely a work of the T'ang dynasty. Here, strokes in standard-script (*k'ai-shu*) calligraphy are likened to "a stone falling from a high peak" and "[an arrow] shot from a hundred-pound crossbow."<sup>27</sup>

It was Emperor Wu who coined a phrase adopted by many later commentators to describe the calligraphy of Wang Hsi-chih: "Dragons leaping at the Gate of Heaven, tigers crouching at the Phoenix Tower."<sup>28</sup> Structured like a parallel couplet in poetry, this eight-character phrase contrasts the realized kinetic force of the dragon in action with the still-latent energy of the crouching tiger. Twelve hundred years after Emperor Wu's time, it was his words that the Manchu emperor Ch'ien-lung (r. 1736–95) inscribed just to the right of the two lines of Wang's calligraphy in *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* (fig. 1). Ch'ien-lung began his transcription of these words in large characters, then, as if having misjudged the amount of space available, reduced the size of the characters below. Although Ch'ien-lung's calligraphy looks flaccid and uninspired next to Wang Hsi-chih's, his boldly placed quotation of Emperor Wu's phrase links his response to Wang's calligraphy with that of an early imperial sponsor of the Wang tradition.

IMPERIAL INTERVENTIONS  
FROM T'ANG TO SUNG AND THE TRANSMISSION  
OF RITUAL TO PRAY FOR GOOD HARVEST

The efforts of earlier rulers to collect and promote the calligraphy of Wang Hsi-chih pale in comparison with those of Emperor T'ai-tsung of the T'ang. Aside from Ch'in Shih-huang-ti (r. 221-210 B.C.), who promoted the unification of script throughout his empire, no other Chinese emperor had a greater impact on the history of calligraphy. T'ai-tsung assembled in his palace collection over two thousand pieces of Wang's calligraphy and required that members of the T'ang aristocracy and calligraphers at his court study Wang's style. He also personally composed Wang's biography for the official history of the Chin dynasty. The emperor's enthusiasm for Wang Hsi-chih, like that of earlier imperial collectors, was no doubt fueled by genuine appreciation of Wang's elegant calligraphy. But many scholars detect ideological as well as aesthetic motivations for T'ai-tsung's ardent commitment to the Wang Hsi-chih tradition. The second emperor of the dynasty, whose role in the consolidation of T'ang power actually surpassed that of his father, the founding emperor Kao-tsu (r. 618-26), T'ai-tsung was eager to exert his influence in cultural as well as political affairs. His policy of vigorously promoting the art of Wang Hsi-chih, closely associated with the aristocratic culture of south China, also allowed the emperor, whose power base was in the north, to use calligraphy as a symbol of national unification.<sup>29</sup>

T'ai-tsung realized that his huge collection of Wang's calligraphy included forgeries and imitations, and he assigned leading calligraphers and connoisseurs to evaluate his holdings. One of these experts, Ch'u Sui-liang (596-658), compiled the earliest extant catalogue of Wang Hsi-chih's calligraphy, a list of 266 items, most of which were letters.<sup>30</sup> The trophy of T'ai-tsung's collection was the original manuscript of Wang's *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection*, which he acquired through trickery and eventually had buried with him in his tomb.<sup>31</sup>

The most enduring legacy of T'ai-tsung's sponsorship of the Wang Hsi-chih tradition was his role in ordering the reproduction of original works, both as ink-written tracing copies and as rubbings. Although debate still rages over how faithfully these T'ang dynasty recensions, including *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest*, and later works based on them preserve the

style of fourth-century calligraphy, scholars and collectors long ago accepted the reality that the earliest extant works attributed to Wang Hsi-chih are actually reproductions dating from no earlier than the time of T'ai-tsung.<sup>32</sup> Had T'ai-tsung chosen to collect and reproduce the works of some other artist, the later history of Chinese calligraphy would have been very different.

As noted earlier, *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* was first mentioned by Chang Yen-yüan in the late T'ang dynasty, but the actual production of the copy in the Elliott Collection may well date from the time of Emperor T'ai-tsung. The material on which the letter was copied has been identified as *ying-huang*, or "hard-yellow" paper. This refers to a type of hemp-fiber paper treated with yellow wax to make it semitranslucent.<sup>33</sup> Placing this paper over an original piece of calligraphy, a copyist carefully traced the outlines of the characters in continuous strokes of the brush or used a method known as "outline tracing and filling in," through which the outlines of the characters were traced in fine, thin lines and then filled in with ink. According to Fu Shen's detailed study of the Elliott letter, both methods were used to copy it.<sup>34</sup> Several other well-known copies of Wang Hsi-chih's letters also were reproduced in this way on *ying-huang* paper, including *Presenting Oranges*.<sup>35</sup>

T'ai-tsung's reign witnessed an early flowering of both the political and military strength of the T'ang empire and a zenith of imperial sponsorship of calligraphy. During the Five Dynasties, a period of political disunion that followed the collapse of the T'ang, works that had been accumulated in the T'ang imperial collection were dispersed among private collectors; others entered the collections of the rulers of the short-lived Later Shu Kingdom, the Southern T'ang, and the Wu-Yüeh Kingdom. When China was reunified under the Sung dynasty, calligraphy by Wang Hsi-chih and other early masters flowed back into a centralized imperial collection. Under Emperor Sung T'ai-tsung (r. 976-97), whose interest in Wang Hsi-chih was almost as intense as that of his T'ang predecessor known by the same posthumous title, court calligraphers were instructed to study Wang's style and imperial agents scoured the empire for samples of Wang's writing.<sup>36</sup> T'ai-tsung ordered Wang Chu (d. 990), a noted calligrapher said to be a descendant of the same Wang clan to which Wang Hsi-chih himself belonged,

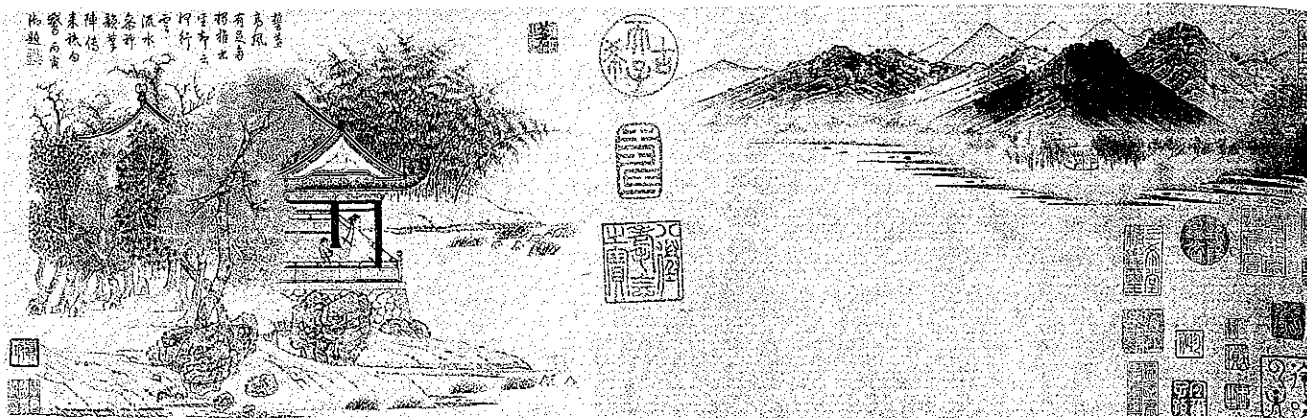


Figure 8. Ch'ien Hsüan (ca. 1235–before 1307), *Wang Hsi-chih Watching Geese*, handscroll, ink and color on paper, 23.2 x 92.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

to evaluate the works that had accumulated in the newly revived imperial collection and to select the best pieces to be engraved on wooden blocks and reproduced as rubbings. The emperor also authorized Wang Chu to borrow works from private collectors, thus bringing under imperial control, at least temporarily, pieces not actually owned by the emperor. This project, completed in 992, yielded the first anthology of *fa-t'ieh*, or “model calligraphies,” in Chinese history.<sup>37</sup> Reproduced through rubbings taken from engraved woodblocks, this anthology of calligraphy was titled *Model Calligraphies from the Imperial Archives of the Ch'un-hua Era* (*Ch'un-hua pi-ko fa-t'ieh*) and functioned as an officially sanctioned survey of the history of calligraphy.<sup>38</sup> Of the ten volumes in the anthology, copies of which T'ai-tsung conferred on officials at his

court, three were devoted entirely to letters by Wang Hsi-chih, including the letter known as *Sightseeing* translated above. Although later scholars of the Sung period sharply criticized Wang Chu's connoisseurship, *Model Calligraphies* was a landmark in the imperial codification of the Wang Hsi-chih tradition and in the history of state-sponsored standardization of culture in China.<sup>39</sup>

In spite of Wang Chu's wide-ranging efforts to assemble specimens of Wang Hsi-chih's writing for the imperial anthology, *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* escaped his notice. Nothing is known of its whereabouts between the time it was recorded by Chang Yen-yüan in the ninth century and its reemergence in the early twelfth century in the collection of another voracious imperial connoisseur, Emperor Hui-tsung



Figure 9. Sheng Mao-yeh (fl. 1594–1640), *The Orchid Pavilion Gathering*, 1621, handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 31.1 x 214.7 cm. The University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, Margaret Watson Parker Art Collection.

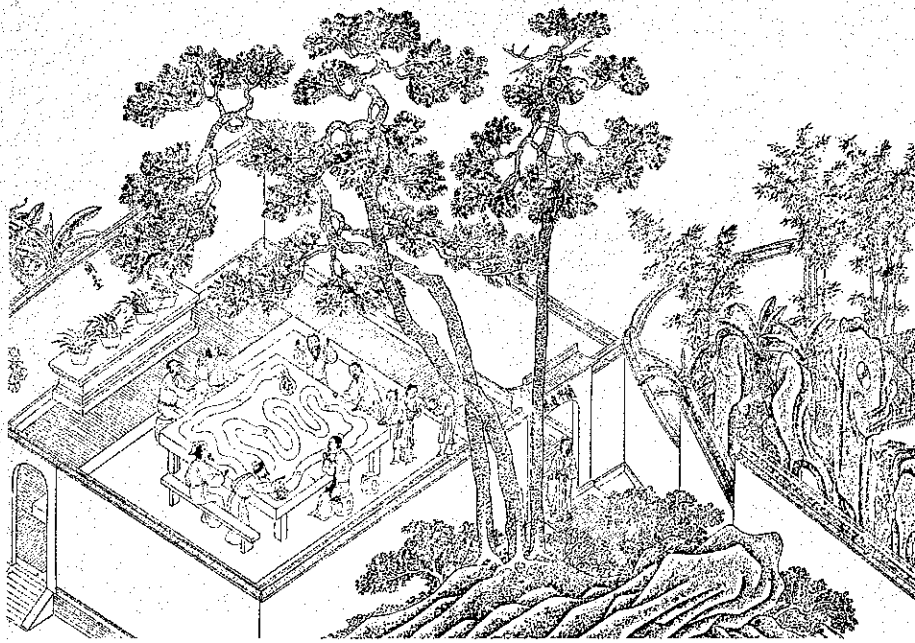


Figure 10. After Ch'ien Kung (fl. ca. 1579–1610), *Garden Views of the Huan-ts'ui Studio* (*Huan-ts'ui-t'ang yüan-ching t'u*; detail), woodblock-printed handscroll, 24.0 x 14.7 cm. From *Huan-ts'ui-t'ang yüan-ching t'u* (Peking: Jen-min mei-shu ch'u-pan-she, 1981).

of the Sung dynasty. *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* is listed in the catalogue of his collection, *The Hsüan-ho Calligraphy Catalogue* (*Hsüan-ho shu-p'u*), and his seals appear stamped on the scroll overlapping the paper of the fifteen-character fragment and the yellow silk mounted at its borders (fig. 1).<sup>40</sup> Also faintly visible on the scroll is the title of the letter written in gold, apparently by Hui-tsung himself.

Although Hui-tsung's highly individual style of calligraphy did not derive from the tradition of Wang Hsi-chih, Hui-tsung did play a role in disseminating Wang's art by issuing a new version of the *Model Callig-*

*raphies* imperial anthology, retitled *Model Calligraphies of the Ta-kuan Era* (*Ta-kuan t'ieh*), and by sponsoring the completion of a new anthology of rubbings, *Sequel to the Imperial Archives Model Calligraphies* (*Pi-ko hsü t'ieh*), begun during the reign of Emperor Che-tsung (1086–1101). This collection, which unfortunately is no longer extant, comprised works from the Imperial Archives that had not been included in the earlier anthology. Two volumes reproduced calligraphy by Wang Hsi-chih and another included works by Wang and other members of his family.



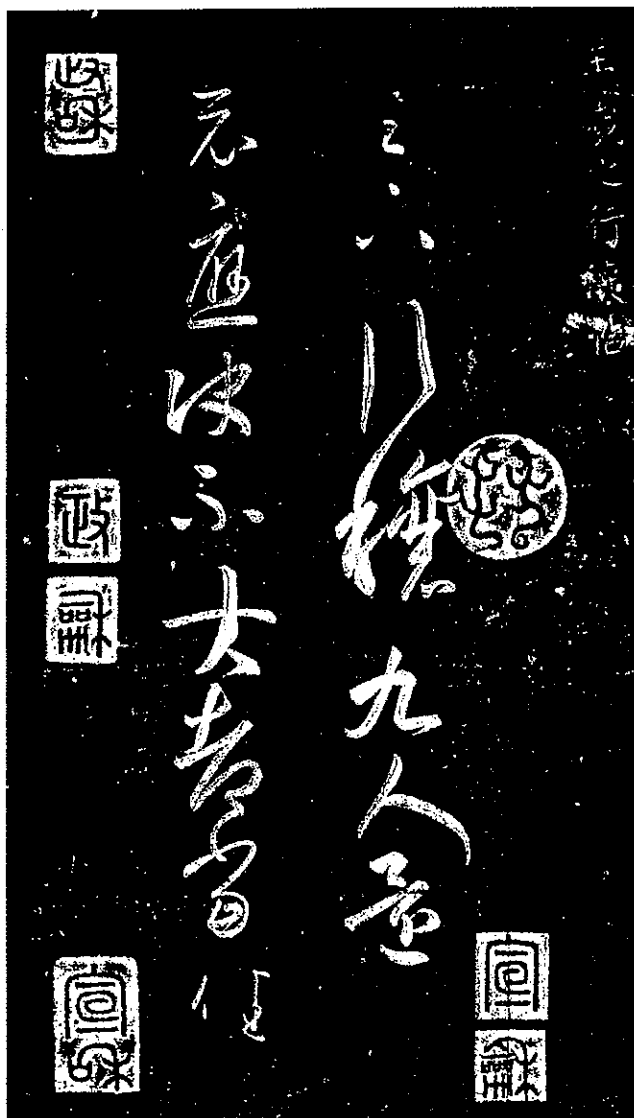


Figure 11. Copy after Wang Hsi-chih, *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest*, rubbing from *Model Calligraphies from the Yü-ch'ing Studio*, 1614. From *Yü-ch'ing-chai fa-t'ieh* (Hofei: An-hui mei-shu ch'u-pan she, 1992), 158.

#### WANG HSI-CHIH TRIUMPHANT AND THE FATE OF *RITUAL TO PRAY FOR GOOD HARVEST*

When the Northern Sung dynasty fell in 1127, hundreds of works of painting and calligraphy from Hui-tsung's collection were carried off by invading Jurchen troops; thousands more simply disappeared. The fate of *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* between this time and its reappearance in the late Ming dynasty remains a mystery. While the letter was absent from the body of materials through which Wang's style was transmitted, the tradition went through several periods of revival and transformation. During the early Yüan dynasty Chao Meng-fu (1254–1322) undertook an extensive

study of Wang's style as part of a larger enterprise of reexamining early traditions of both painting and calligraphy. Combining elements from Wang's fluid brushwork with structural principles derived from standard and clerical script models of the Han and T'ang, Chao produced a striking new synthesis in his own calligraphy (cat. no. 11), which became the most widely imitated model of writing in the Yüan period.

During the Yüan dynasty, when China was ruled by the Mongols, a distinctive iconography of Wang Hsi-chih took shape in painting, reflecting a fascination with the remote past detectable also in Chao Meng-fu's studies of early art. Although the Northern Sung scholar-artist Li Kung-lin (ca. 1041–1106) may have been the first to illustrate scenes of Wang's life,<sup>41</sup> the earliest extant painting of the calligrapher is a short handscroll (fig. 8) by Ch'ien Hsüan (ca. 1235–before 1307), a friend of Chao Meng-fu. Placed in a landscape rendered in the archaic blue-green manner, Wang Hsi-chih stands in a pavilion looking out at geese swimming in the water below. This scene alludes to stories of Wang's fondness for geese first recorded in the fifth century by Yü Ho.<sup>42</sup> Painted by an artist who lived through the fall of the Sung dynasty, this image of Wang Hsi-chih may have been intended as a quiet reaffirmation of Chinese cultural traditions, which many intellectuals of Ch'ien Hsüan's generation believed were threatened by the Mongol conquest.<sup>43</sup>

The iconography of Wang Hsi-chih continued to expand in the Ming dynasty, when depictions of the *Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion* became a popular subject in painting.<sup>44</sup> In scenes from a handscroll by Sheng Mao-yeh (fl. 1594–1640), Wang Hsi-chih sits at a table in the Orchid Pavilion composing his masterpieces while several guests look on. Other guests stroll about or sit on the banks of a stream, in which wine cups float by on lotus leaves (fig. 9).

Although these images of Wang Hsi-chih and his friends were fanciful visualizations of an event that took place in 353, they also reflected the characteristic pleasures of Ming literati and others who followed their lead in building gardens and holding literary gatherings. In the garden of the writer and publisher Wang T'ing-na (fl. 1590s) illustrated in a woodblock print (fig. 10), the words *Orchid Pavilion* appear over the entrance to a courtyard.<sup>45</sup> Within the courtyard, potted orchid plants rest on a table identified as the *Orchid Platform*, and, gathered around a large stone



Figure 12. Anonymous, *The Ch'ien-lung Emperor in a Garden* (detail), 1753, handscroll, ink on paper. Collection unknown. From *Ch'ing-tai ti-hou hsiang*, no. 4 (Peking: Ku-kung po-wu-yüan, 1931), part 2, no. 6.

table inlaid with a winding stream on which wine cups are afloat, a group of gentlemen, some of them apparently drunk, reenact Wang Hsi-chih's famous party.

For calligraphers of the Ming dynasty, Wang Hsi-chih remained a powerful presence, but unlike rulers of earlier dynasties, the Ming emperors played almost no role in maintaining Wang's stature. Although various calligraphers did receive imperial favor, and works of calligraphy continued to be accumulated in imperial and princely collections, no state-sponsored projects comparable to those of the T'ang and Sung dynasties promoted Wang Hsi-chih.<sup>46</sup> But thanks to the increasing dissemination of anthologies of rubbings published by private collectors, knowledge of Wang's style became more widespread than ever.<sup>47</sup> In nearly all of these anthologies, works by Wang Hsi-chih outnumber those of any other calligrapher. The classical tradition of his art, which had been closely tied to imperial sponsorship in earlier periods, had achieved a life of its own.

Of all Ming dynasty students of the art of Wang Hsi-chih, Tung Ch'i-ch'ang was the most influential, devoting a lifetime to collecting and copying his works. Tung also contributed to the ongoing publication of examples of Wang's calligraphy through his own compendium of rubbings, *Model Calligraphies from the Hall of Playing Geese* (*Hsi-hung-t'ang fa-t'ieh*), com-

pleted in 1603, which contains fifty-eight pieces attributed to the Eastern Chin master.<sup>48</sup> It was in Tung's collection that *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* emerged once again. In an undated colophon recorded in a compendium of Tung's notes on art, he states that he had recently purchased the letter.<sup>49</sup> He does not mention the price he paid, but in the overheated art market of the late Ming, it cannot have been low. In a ranking of antiques compiled by the connoisseur Li Jih-hua (1565–1635), calligraphic pieces of the Chin and T'ang dynasties come first.<sup>50</sup> The most expensive work of art to have changed hands during the Ming was *Close Looking* (*Chan-chin t'ieh*), a letter by Wang Hsi-chih for which Hsiang Yüan-pien (1525–1590) paid two thousand ounces of silver at a time when mansions changed hands for less than half this sum.<sup>51</sup>

During the time he owned the scroll, Tung Ch'i-ch'ang wrote three colophons that are now mounted with it and also added a transcription of the text of the letter in small standard-script characters. His transcription apparently was intended to assist readers who had difficulty interpreting some of the cursive-script characters that continue to resist decipherment today. These inscriptions, from the hand of the most esteemed connoisseur of his day, also had the effect of raising the value of the scroll as a collectible object. From Tung Ch'i-ch'ang the letter passed into the hands



Figure 13. Hall of the Three Rarities, Palace Museum, Peking. From Yu Zhouyun, chief comp., *Tzu-chin-ch'eng kung-tien (Palaces of the Forbidden City)* (1982, New York: Viking Press; London: Allen Lane, 1984), p. 95, pl. 82.

of his friend Wu T'ing (fl. ca. 1575–1625), a collector and art dealer noted for his perspicacity—one source claims that he simply could not be taken in by forgeries.<sup>52</sup> The transfer of the letter into Wu's collection resulted in its publication, apparently for the first time in its history, in an anthology of rubbings, the second installment of *Model Calligraphies from the Yü-ch'ing Studio (Yü-ch'ing-chai fa-t'ieh)* issued by Wu T'ing in 1614 (fig. 11).<sup>53</sup> A close comparison with the ink-tracing of the letter reveals both the value of rubbings and their capacity to subtly alter the calligraphy they reproduce. Although it preserves the general configuration of the characters in the letter and captures much of the sense of energy with which they were written, the rubbing transforms the plump, rounded brushstrokes into thinner and more angular forms. Apparently at Wu T'ing's request, the engraver who produced the rubbing moved one of the seals of Emperor Hui-tsung from the far left of the silk mounting to directly between two other Hui-tsung seals stamped on the letter itself (fig. 11).<sup>54</sup> Through this repositioning of an imperial seal, Wu T'ing made certain that all available evidence for the impressive pedigree of the letter was fully visible in his anthology of rubbings.

The letter was seen and recorded by several connoisseurs of the seventeenth century before it entered

the collection of the famous Korean merchant An Ch'i (1683–1744), who stamped eleven of his seals on the scroll and recorded it in the catalogue of his collection.<sup>55</sup> Within three years of An Ch'i's death the letter had passed into the largest art collection ever seen in China, that of the Manchu emperor Ch'ien-lung, the fourth ruler of the Ch'ing dynasty. No emperor in Chinese history was more alert to the ways through which artistic traditions could be harnessed to promote ideological goals, and Ch'ien-lung's lengthy reign witnessed many vast projects through which he demonstrated his authority as an arbiter of taste and scholarship.<sup>56</sup> Playing the role of protector and patron of Chinese culture, Ch'ien-lung frequently had himself depicted as a literati gentleman studying or producing calligraphy (fig. 12), asserting through these impersonations his place in a lineage of artists headed by Wang Hsi-chih himself.

Upon its arrival in the Ch'ing palace, *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* rejoined several other handwritten works attributed to Wang Hsi-chih that had been known in the T'ang dynasty, recorded in later catalogues and collectors' notes, and, in this final great gathering of masterpieces, returned to an imperial collection.<sup>57</sup> As a result of this reassembling of Wang's calligraphy, almost all the extant ink-written pieces



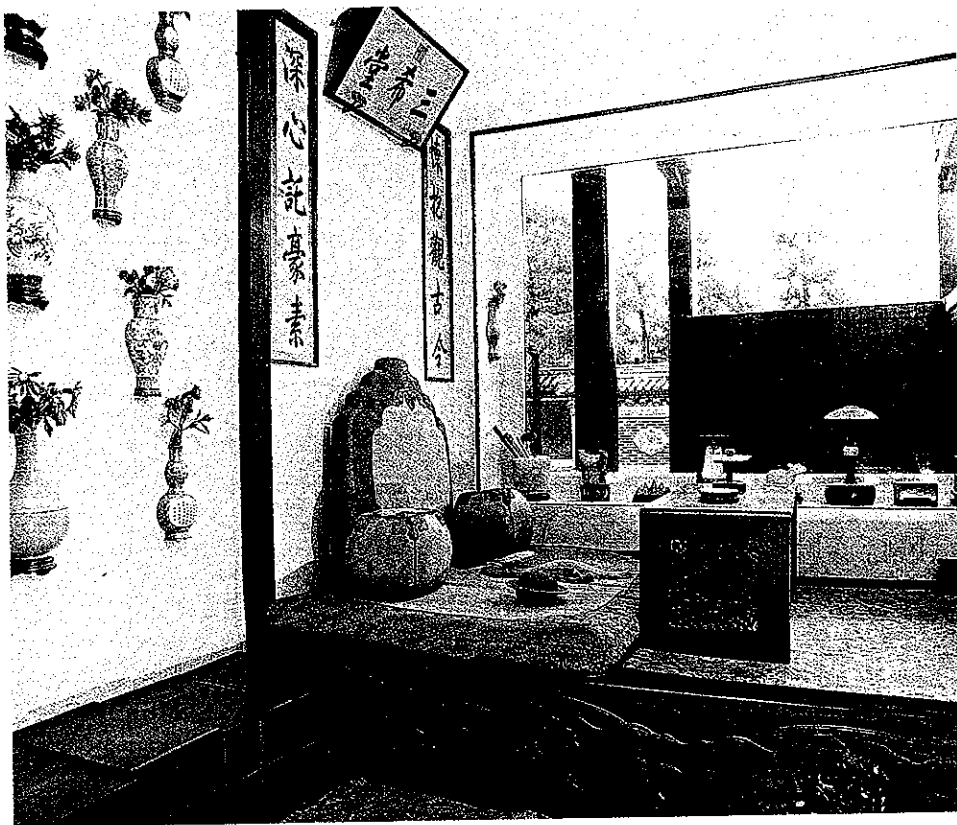


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Figure 14. Huang Chen-hsiao (fl. early 18th century), small screen in the form of a wrist rest with a scene of the Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion, 1739, carved ivory, 9.2 x 4 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

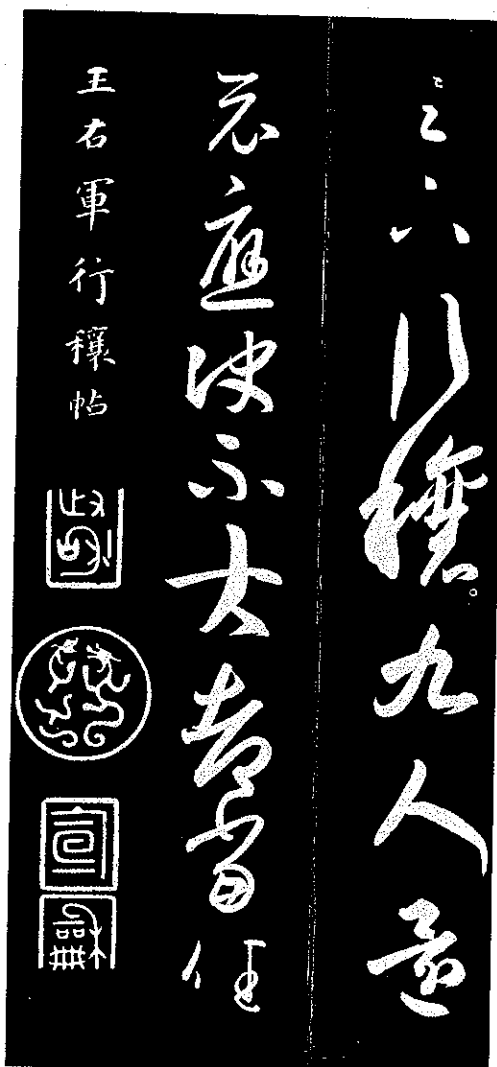


Figure 16. Copy after Wang Hsi-chih, *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest*, rubbing from *San-hsi-t'ang fa-t'ieh*, 1747, ink on paper, 28.6 x 17.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Marie-Hélène and Guy Weill, 1984 (1984.496.1).

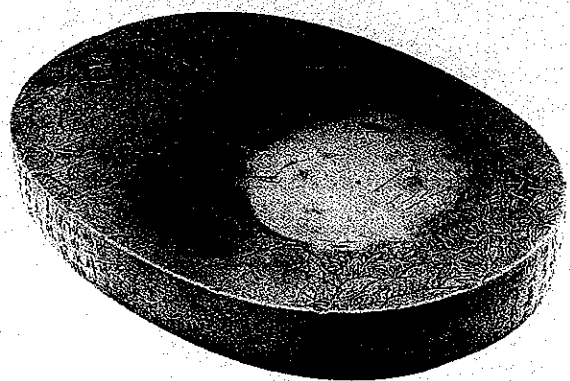


Figure 15. Inkstone depicting the Orchid Pavilion, Sung dynasty or later, T'ao River stone, 3.2 x 23.3 x 17.8 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

attributed to him, aside from those preserved in Japan, bear the seals of Ch'ien-lung. In fact, the most visually conspicuous features of *Ritual* today are the traces of Ch'ien-lung's ownership: his nineteen seals stamped on the scroll and the inscriptions from his hand.

Ch'ien-lung's projects commemorating Wang Hsi-chih were not limited to collecting, stamping seals, and colophon writing. Architectural modifications to the imperial palace also demonstrated his participation in the ongoing enshrinement of Wang Hsi-chih at the center of the canon of Chinese art. One of the most intimate rooms in his palace was a small private studio that Ch'ien-lung reserved for the study of his calligraphy collection. Located in part of the Hall for Cultivating the Mind (*Yang-hsin-tien*), this room was known

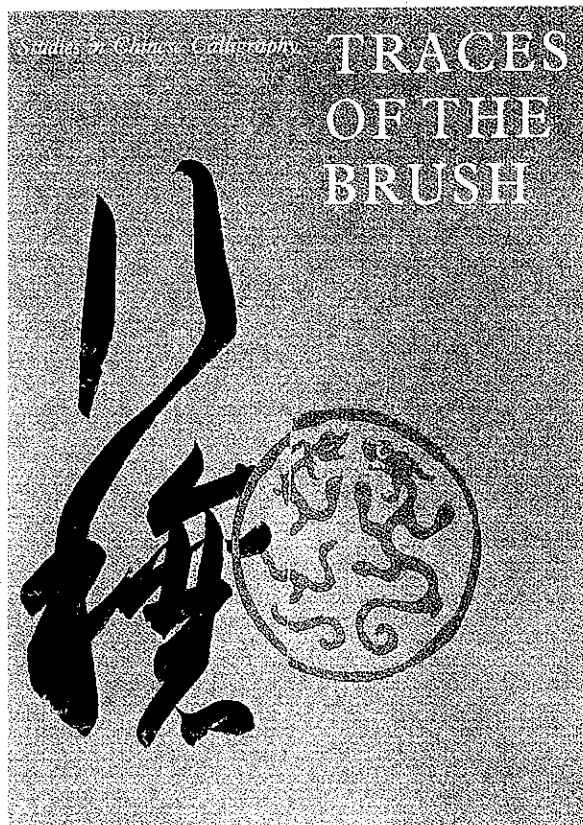


Figure 17. Cover of *Traces of the Brush: Studies in Chinese Calligraphy* by Shen C. Y. Fu et al. (New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, 1977).

as the Hall of the Three Rarities (*San-hsi-t'ang*; fig. 13), named for three works of calligraphy that the emperor considered the prizes of his collection, all of them letters by members of the Wang family: *Timely Clearing after Snow* (*K'uai hsüeh shih ch'i t'ieh*) by Wang Hsi-chih, *Mid-Autumn Letter* (*Chung-ch'iu t'ieh*) by his son Wang Hsien-chih, and *Letter to Po-yüan* (*Po-yüan t'ieh*) by his nephew Wang Hsün (350–401). Beautifully restored, the Hall of the Three Rarities can still be seen today, adorned with a plaque bearing its name written in Ch'ien-lung's own hand. In this room, Ch'ien-lung could also enjoy works of decorative art that commemorated events in Wang's life, such as a miniature screen in the form of an ivory wrist rest carved to represent the Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion (fig. 14) and an antique inkstone engraved with a depiction of the same event (fig. 15).<sup>58</sup>

The name of the Hall of the Three Rarities provided the title for an anthology of rubbings from Ch'ien-lung's collection titled *Model Calligraphies of the Hall of the Three Rarities* (*San-hsi t'ang fa-t'ieh*), cut in 1747. The anthology included 340 pieces by 135 calligraphers reproduced through a painstaking process of copying

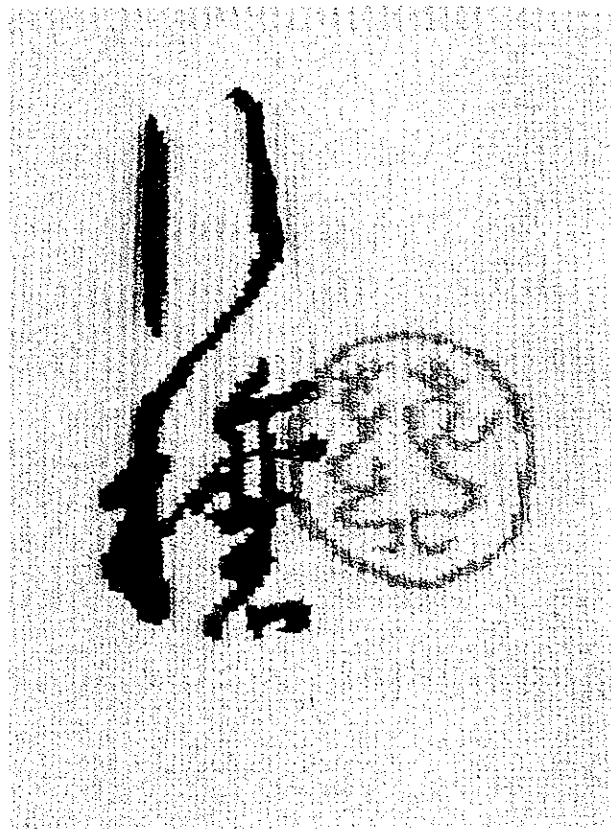


Figure 18. Anonymous, *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest*, after Wang Hsi-chih, weaving, ca. 1980, 42.6 x 35.6 cm. Private collection.

the originals, transferring the outlines of the characters onto stone, engraving the characters, as well as the seals stamped on the original works, and printing glossy black rubbings that were bound into albums. Although Ch'ien-lung included *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* in this anthology, providing yet another format through which Wang's calligraphy could be disseminated, the original appearance of the letter was strangely altered in the process of reproducing it (fig. 16). Although the brushwork of the rubbing is more faithfully preserved than in the rubbing from *Model Calligraphies from the Yü-ch'ing Studio*, the spaces between several of the characters were widened, the placement of Hui-tsung's seals rearranged, and a six-character title written by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang repositioned to the left of the two lines of Wang's calligraphy.<sup>59</sup>

The letter appears to have remained in the Ch'ing imperial collection until the end of the dynasty, though the date of its removal from the palace is unknown. Seals stamped on the scroll indicate that it passed through the hands of three twentieth-century collectors before the famous artist and collector

Chang Ta-ch'ien (1899–1983) bought the scroll in Hong Kong in 1957. In 1970 it entered the Elliott Collection. As at many earlier points in its history, the transmission of the letter in the twentieth century has been paralleled by new formats for reproducing it. These include a facsimile scroll published in Japan in 1959, the cover of the landmark exhibition catalogue *Traces of the Brush* (fig. 17), and a weaving produced by an artist living in New Jersey (fig. 18). It is surely only a matter of time before images of *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* will be digitized on a CD-ROM or transmitted over the Internet.

At the end of the twentieth century the letter survives as a cultural icon, an artifact of a centuries-old

enterprise of evaluating, collecting, and reproducing the calligraphy of Wang Hsi-chih. Although the facts of Wang's life are well documented, his lofty status as the Sage of Calligraphy obscures his existence as an individual, much as the collectors' seals and inscriptions on *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* come close to hiding the fifteen characters traced from Wang's original letter. Perhaps the secret of the fascination the letter has exercised for so long lies not just in its beauty and its status as a prestigious work of art, but in the bond, however tenuous, between this small piece of paper and the venerated but elusive man whose words and brushstrokes it transmits.

#### NOTES

1. On the concept of a classical tradition in Chinese calligraphy, see Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 3–5.
2. For a thorough biographical study of Wang Hsi-chih, see Wang Yü-ch'ih, *Wang Hsi-chih* (Peking: Tzu-chin-ch'eng ch'u-pan-she, 1991); see also Ledderose, *Mi Fu*, 12–14.
3. For a good introduction to intellectual life of the fourth century, see Charles Holcombe, chap. 5, "Literati Culture," in his *In the Shadow of the Han: Literati Thought and Society at the Beginning of the Southern Dynasties* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
4. See Ch'en Yin-k'o, "T'ien-shih-tao yü pin-hai ti-yü chih kuan-hsi," in *Ch'en Yin-k'o hstien-sheng lun-chi* (Taipei: Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan li-shih yü-yen yen-chiu-so, 1971); and Lothar Ledderose, "Some Taoist Elements in Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties," *T'oung Pao* 70 (1984): 246–78.
5. Holcombe, *In the Shadow of the Han*, 4.
6. On the readership of these letters, see Hua Jen-te, "Lun Tung-Chin mu-chih chien-chi Lan-t'ing lun-pien," *Ku-kung hsiieh-shu chi-k'an* 13, no. 3 (Oct. 1995): 40–42; trans. Ian H. Boyden, "Eastern Jin Epitaphic Stones—With Some Notes on the 'Lanting Xu' Debate," *Early Medieval China* 3 (1997): 30–88.
7. For an introduction to the history of *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection* and the many problems raised by its transmission, see Ledderose, *Mi Fu*, 19–24.
8. See cat. no. 16 for a transcription of one of these works, *Essay on Yüeh I*.
9. My translation follows the modern Chinese version in Liu T'ao, ed. *Wang Hsi-chih, Wang Hsien-chih*, in the series *Chung-kuo shu-fa ch'üan-chi* (Peking: Jung-pao-chai, 1991), 19: 385.
10. Based on the modern Chinese version in *ibid.*, 360–61.
11. *Ibid.*, 15.
12. The transmission of this letter is discussed in Lothar Ledderose, "Chinese Calligraphy: Its Aesthetic Dimension and Social Function," *Orientalism* 17, no. 10 (Oct. 1986): 46–49.
13. Chang Yen-yüan, *Fa-shu yao-lu* (*I-shu ts'ung-pien* ed.), *chüan* 10: 169. It is impossible to know whether Chang's transcription of the letter was based on what he believed was an original manuscript by Wang Hsi-chih, a copy, or a transcription from some other source.
14. There are also discrepancies between his transcription and the text of the extant letter, owing either to his own error or to mistakes that crept into printed editions of his work. These are discussed by Qianshen Bai in his essay in this volume.
15. The *Hsüan-liang Letter* is listed in the catalogue of the collection of Emperor Sung Hui-tsung (r. 1100–1126) (*Hsüan-ho shu-p'u*, in the series *Chung-kuo shu-hsiieh ts'ung-shu* [Shanghai: Shang-hai shu-hua ch'u-pan-she, 1984], *chüan* 15: 120). A rubbing of the fragmentary letter appears in the thirteenth-century anthologies *Pao-Chin-chai fa-t'ieh* and *Ch'eng-ch'ing-t'ang t'ieh*, and in *Hsi-hung-t'ang fa-t'ieh*, compiled by Tung Ch'ich'ang, from which the illustration is taken. See Nakata Yüjirō, *Ô Gishi no chüshin to suru hōjō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Nigensha, 1970), 39–40.
16. Some of these difficulties are discussed by Qianshen Bai in his essay in this volume. See also the entry in *Shodō zenshū*, n.s. (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1960), 4: 168–69.
17. This statement appears in Tung Ch'ich'ang's colophon of 1604. See fig. 18.
18. Ledderose, *Mi Fu*, 40.
19. Yang Hsin, *Ku-lai neng-shu jen-ming*, in Huang Chien, ed., *Li-tai shu-fa lun-wen hsüan* (hereafter, *LTSF*) (Shanghai: Shang-hai shu-hua ch'u-pan-she, 1979), 1: 47.
20. Yü Ho, *Lun-shu piao*, in *LTSF*, 1: 53–54; and Chang Yen-yüan, *Li-tai ming-hua chi* (*I-shu ts'ung-pien* ed.), 53–54, cited in Ledderose, *Mi Fu*, 37.
21. Yü Ho, *Lun-shu piao*, in *LTSF*, 1: 50, cited in Ledderose, *Mi Fu*, 40–41.
22. Yü Ho, *Lun-shu piao*, in *LTSF*, 1: 53–54. Four of the anecdotes recorded by Yü Ho were transcribed by Chao Meng-fu. See Wen C. Fong, *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th–14th Century* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; and New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 424–27, pl. 98.
23. T'ao Hung-ching, "Yü Liang Wu-ti lun-shu ch'i"; and Hsiao Yen (Liang Wu-ti), "Ta T'ao Yin-chü lun-shu," in *LTSF*, 69–71, 80.

24. See the excerpts from this text translated in the essay by Wen C. Fong in this volume.
25. These concepts are discussed in an important article by John Hay, "The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy," in Susan Bush and Christian Murck eds., *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 74–102.
26. Michael Baxandall attributes the critical power of this type of language, which he calls "inferential criticism," to the experience of writing calligraphy shared by educated readers in China. See his essay, "The Language of Art Criticism," in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, eds., *The Language of Art History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 73.
27. See the discussion of this text in the essay by Wen C. Fong in this volume. See also Richard M. Barnhart, "Wei Fu-chen's *Pi-chen T'u* and the Early Texts on Calligraphy," *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 18 (1964): 13–25.
28. Liang Wu-ti, *Ku-chin shu-jen yü-lieh p'ing*, in *LTSF*, 1: 81. Note that some editions of this text substitute the character *ko* (pavilion) for *ch'üeh* (tower). In his inscription on *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest*, the Ch'ien-lung emperor uses the former term.
29. Richard Curt Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 32, citing Wang Ching-feng and Shu Ts'ai, eds., *Shu-fa chi-ch'u chih shih* (Peking: Chieh-fang-chun ch'u-pan-she, 1988), 96–97. See also Stephen J. Goldberg, "Court Calligraphy of the Early T'ang Dynasty," *Artibus Asiae* 49, no. 3/4 (1988–89): 189–237.
30. Ch'u Sui-liang, "Chin Yu-chün Wang Hsi-chih shu-mu," in Chang Yen-yüan, *Fa-shu yao-lu*, *chüan* 3: 38–43.
31. The story of T'ai-tung's acquisition of *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection* is told in Han Chuang (John Hay), "Hsiao I Gets the Lan-t'ing Manuscript by a Confidence Trick," *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 5, no. 3 (July–Aug. 1970): 1–7; and 5, no. 6 (Jan.–Feb. 1971): 1–17.
32. For a survey of these debates on the reliability of copies, see Ledderose, *Mi Fu*, 33–39.
33. For a detailed description of the tracing process, see Shen C. Y. Fu et al., *Traces of the Brush: Studies in Chinese Calligraphy* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1977), 3–7. See also Robert H. van Gulik, *Chinese Pictorial Art as Viewed by the Connoisseur* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1958), 137 n. 2.
34. Fu et al., *Traces*, 5.
35. *Shodō zenshū*, n.s., 4: pls. 34, 35.
36. For a study of Sung T'ai-tung's interest in calligraphy, see Ho Chuan-hsing, "The Revival of Calligraphy in the Early Northern Sung," in Maxwell K. Hearn and Judith K. Smith, eds., *Arts of the Sung and Yüan* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), 59–85.
37. *Fa-t'ieh* may also be translated as "model letter" (Amy McNair, "Engraved Model-Letters Compendia of the Song Dynasty," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114, no. 2 [April–June 1994]: 209–25).
38. The anthology is also known as the *Kuan fa-t'ieh* (*ibid.*, 210).
39. The production of anthologies of rubbings was not limited to the imperial court. During the Sung dynasty, private scholars also began to commission their own anthologies, which included letters by Wang Hsi-chih as well as epigraphical material from bronze inscriptions and stelae (*ibid.*, 214–25).
40. *Hsüan-ho shu-p'u*, 120. As noted earlier, Hui-tung also owned the second half of the letter, listed under the title *Hsüan-liang t'ieh*. See note 15 above.
41. A painting titled *Sketch of Wang Hsi-chih Inscribing a Fan* by Li Kung-lin is listed in *Hsüan-ho hua-p'u* (*I-shu ts'ung-pien* ed.), *chüan* 7: 205. A depiction of the Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion preserved in a Ming dynasty rubbing is said to be based on a composition by Li Kung-lin (Percival David, trans., *Chinese Connoisseurship: The Ko Ku Yao Lu* [New York and Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1971], 52–55; and Sydney L. Moss, *Emperor, Scholar, Artisan, Monk: The Creative Personality in Chinese Works of Art* [London: Sydney L. Moss, Ltd., 1984], 31–35). A painting of Wang Hsi-chih watching geese attributed to Ma Yüan (fl. ca. 1160–after 1225) appears to be a much later work (Kuo-li ku-kung po-wu-yüan pien-tsuan wei-yüan-hui, ed., *Ku-kung shu-hua t'u lu* [Taipei: Ku-kung po-wu-yüan, 1989], 2: 183).
42. See note 22 above.
43. See Shih Shou-chien, "The Hermitic Landscapes of Ch'ien Hsüan (ca. 1235–before 1307)" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1984).
44. For examples of Ming paintings of the Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion, see the following: Attributed to Wen Cheng-ming (1470–1559), *The Lanting Gathering*, in James Cahill et al., *The Restless Landscape: Chinese Painting of the Late Ming Period* (Berkeley: The University Art Museum, 1971), no. 7: 51; Ch'ien Ku (1505–ca. 1578), *Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion*, dated 1560, in Roderick Whitfield, *In Pursuit of Antiquity* (Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1969), no. 4: 76–82; Sheng Mao-yeh (fl. 1594–1640), *Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion*, dated 1621, in Alice R. M. Hyland, *Deities, Emperors, Ladies and Literati* (Birmingham, Ala.: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1987), 42–43; Chang Hung (1580–after 1650), *Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion*, dated 1616, in James Cahill, *The Lyric Journey: Poetic Painting and China and Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), fig. 2.15, pp. 98–99.
45. See Nancy Berliner, "Wang Tingna and Illustrated Book Publishing in Huizhou," *Orientalia* (Jan. 1995): 67–75.
46. On members of the Ming imperial family who collected calligraphy by Wang Hsi-chih, see Moss, *Emperor, Scholar, Artisan, Monk*, 31–35.
47. See *Shodō zenshū*, n.s., 17: 19–27.
48. These include the other half of the letter preserved in the Elliott scroll, but not *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* itself, which Tung did not acquire until later. See note 15 above.
49. Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, *Jung-t'ai chi*, in *Ming-tai i-shu chia chi hui-k'an* (Taipei: Kuo-li chung-yang t'u-shu-kuan, 1968), *chüan* 4: 1945. This colophon no longer appears with the letter, though a portion of it, quoting a poem by Su Shih (1037–1101) is part of an undated inscription by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang mounted before his colophon from the winter of 1604. Since the letter was not included in Tung's anthology of rubbings, *Model Calligraphies from the Hall of Playing Geese*, completed in 1603, it seems likely that Tung acquired the letter between that time and the following winter.
50. James C. Y. Watt and Chu-ting Li, eds., *The Chinese Scholar's Studio: Artistic Life in the Late Ming Period* (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1987); see also Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 104–5.
51. Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 125ff; see also pp. 177–81 for a list of prices paid for antiques ca. 1560–1620.

52. See Wang Shiqing, "Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's Circle" (in Chinese), in Wai-kam Ho, ed., *The Century of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, 1555-1636* (Kansas City, Mo.: The Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, 1992), 2: 473.
53. Wu T'ing apparently acquired the letter from Tung Ch'i-ch'ang sometime between 1609 and 1614. In an undated note Tung simply states that he "formerly owned" the letter (*Jung-t'ai chi, chüan* 4: 1949). I am grateful to Amy McNair for lending me her reproduction of the copy of *Model Calligraphies from the Yü-ch'ing Studio* preserved in the She-hsien Museum in Anhwei. In 1880 the collector and scholar Yang Shou-ching (1839-1915) took with him to Japan a copy of *Model Calligraphies from the Yü-ch'ing Studio*, from which a facsimile was made (Fu et al., *Traces*, 242-43). According to Fu Shen, a forged version of *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest*, now in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, also was produced in the late Ming dynasty (*ibid.*, 8).
54. This transformation is described in Fu et al., *Traces*, 292 n. 24.
55. An Ch'i, *Mo-yüan hui-kuan lu* (Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1970), *chüan* 1: 5-6. For other records of *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest*, see Wang K'o-yü, *Shan-hu wang shu-hua-pa (Wen-yüan-ko Ssu-k'u ch'üan shu* ed., Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1983-86), *chüan* 1: 9b; Pien Yung-yü, comp., *Shih-ku-t'ang shu-hua hui-k'ao* (reprint of the 1921 facsimile, Taipei: Cheng-chung shu-chü, 1958), 1: 304; Chang Ch'ou, *Ch'ing-ho shu-hua fang* (undated ed., Far Eastern Seminar, Princeton University), *ch'ou*: 26a.
- During the seventeenth century the scroll also acquired a colophon written by the connoisseur Sun Ch'eng-tse (1592-1676), who states that it was one of the best works by Wang Hsi-chih he had seen in recent years.
56. For an introduction to Ch'ien-lung's role as arbiter of taste, see Harold Kahn, "A Matter of Taste: The Monumental and Exotic in the Qianlong Reign," in Chou Ju-hsi and Claudia Brown, eds., *The Elegant Brush: Chinese Painting under the Qianlong Emperor, 1735-1795* (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1985), 288-302. See also R. Kent Guy, *The Emperor's Four Treasuries: Scholars and the State in the Late Ch'ien-lung Era*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 129 (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, dist. by Harvard University Press, 1987).
57. *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* is recorded in Wang Chieh et al., eds., *Shih-ch'ü pao-chi hsü-pien* (facsimile reprint of an original manuscript, Taipei: Ku-kung po-wu yüan, 1971), 5: 2599-60.
58. See Wen C. Fong and James C.Y. Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Taipei: The National Palace Museum, 1996), 528-31, 537-39.
59. These alterations are discussed in Fu, *Traces*, 8. Fu also discusses a facsimile rubbing, based on *Model Calligraphies from the Yü-ch'ing Studio*, made in Japan in the late nineteenth century (8, 242-43).