

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)
announces an Informal Talk

by

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**Reproducing and Remaking the Paradigm:
Wang Xizhi's (303-361) Calligraphic Masterpiece Essay on Yue Yi
(Yue Yi lun) in the Age of Printing**

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Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures

Warburgstraße 26

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Room 0001

Abstract

This project examines how the paradigm of Wang Xizhi (303-361), arguably the most influential figure in the history of Chinese calligraphy, has been made, un-made, and re-made through incessant reproductions in the age of printing. Very few of Wang Xizhi's original works still existed after the eighth century. As connoisseurs and scholars of the Song dynasty (960-1279) embarked on the task to restore Wang's elusive "true" style in the model-books (small-sized ink rubbings taken from engraved stone or wood), by selecting suitable pieces and making "reproductions" of his works, they applied their own ideas of perfection, sometimes quite different from how Wang was perceived during the Tang (618-907). One of the most significant changes occurred in Wang's small-sized regular script (xiaokai 小楷). In this presentation, I try to chart out this course of change by looking into both textual and visual evidences surrounding Essay on Yue Yi (Yue Yi lun), one of the preeminent calligraphy pieces in small-sized regular script attributed to Wang Xizhi. I will begin with a careful reading of calligraphic treatises on Wang from the pre-Tang, Tang, and Song periods, followed by close examinations and comparisons of the calligraphic style in extant copies of Essay on Yue Yi. These include an eighth-century complete copy by the Japanese Empress Kōmyō (701-760), manuscript fragments by anonymous writers from Astana, Xinjiang and Dunhuang, Gansu, datable to the eighth and ninth centuries, and multiple versions of the same text found in various model-books from the twelfth century and onwards. In addition to addressing the historical issue of the Tang-Song transition, it is hoped that this example will also bring into discussion the intricate relations between originals and copies, ideals and realities, and prototypes and appropriations.

About: Prof Hui-Wen LU

Prof Hui-Wen LU is Associate Professor at the Graduate Institute of Art History at National Taiwan University. She received her PhD in Chinese art and archaeology from Princeton University. Her field of specialty is history of calligraphy and painting in pre-modern China. Some of the topics she has worked on include Northern Wei stone-engraved calligraphy, the secularization of the wild-cursive script from Tang to Song, non-Han artists in the Mongol-Yuan period, and the impact of antiquarianism on calligraphy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She is particularly interested in exploring how calligraphers worked and responded during times of political and cultural uncertainties, and the various ways in which the art of calligraphy correlates to other fields of study, such as literature, religion, material culture and print culture. Her current book project looks into the first publication frenzy of calligraphy model-books in China, from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, and its results in a reformed calligraphic canon.

