



Who was Wang Xizhi

(王羲之)

Sophia Elsom

Basic Facts:

- Born c. 303 in Linyi (临沂市), Shandong Province (山东省) China, during the Jin dynasty (266-420AD)
- Due to numerous rebellions, Wang Xizhi and his clan moved to present-day Shaoxing (绍兴) and Wenzhou (温州市) of Zhejiang (浙江省) province



- Started learning calligraphy from his father and his aunt Wei Shuo, when he was 7
- Lady Wei Shuo, famous calligrapher of her time, attributed with established the rules of Kaishū (楷书)
- Most renowned for Xingshū (行书), semi-cursive script
- Inspired by geese necks





- **Title:** Wang Xizhi watching geese
- **Artist:** Qian Xuan (Chinese, 1239–1301)
- Took inspiration from observing how geese turned his neck; informed his wrist movements
- Daoist monk myth





- Laid back and informal personality
- Legend: government official Chi Jian looked for a perfect match for his daughter Chi Xuan, sent a subordinate to Wang family to find a husband
- Wang Xizhi sat in his bed with pajamas on and was the only sibling to not receive the subordinate.



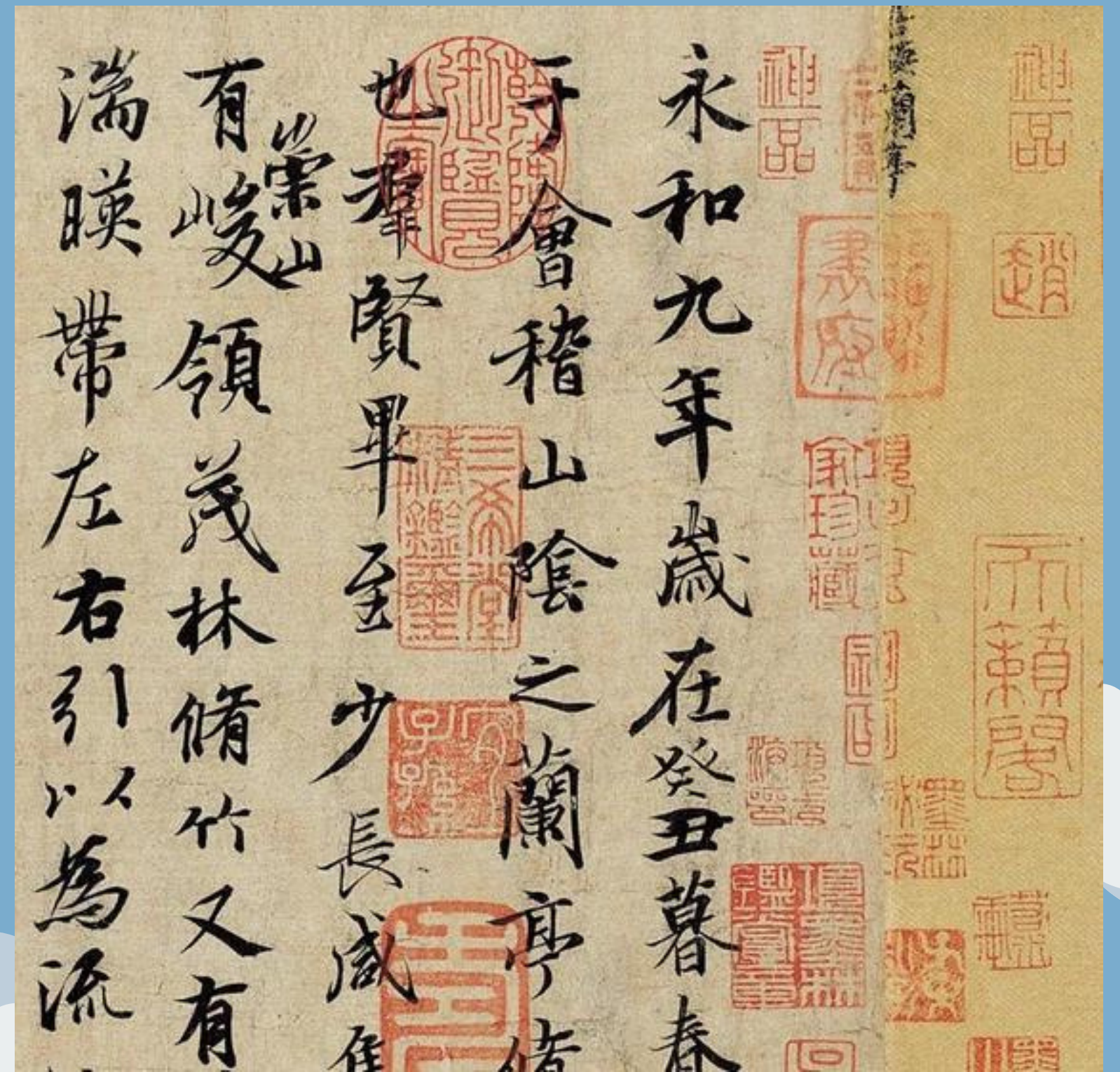
- Regarded as the Sage of Calligraphy
- Legend: writing on the freshly polished table-top of his student
- “three millimetres into the wood” 入木三分 rù mù sān fēn,



- Another legend: he used to practice at a pond in Shaoxing
- He practiced for so many hours that the pond turned black due to him frequently dipping his brush in the pond to extend the life of his ink



- Most famous work: Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion
- Composed of 324 characters in 28 lines
- Spring Purification Ceremony held in Lanting, today Shaoxing
- Winding stream drinking contest
- character zhi (之) appears 17 times, but no two look alike
- Original is lost, but copies remain



永和九年歲在癸丑暮春之初會

于會稽山陰之蘭亭脩禊事

也羣賢畢至少長咸集此地

有峻領茂林脩竹又有清流激

湍映帶左右引以為流觴曲水

列坐其次雖無絲竹管弦之

盛一觴一詠一足以暢叙幽情

是日也天朗氣清惠風和暢仰

觀宇宙之大俯察品類之盛

所以遊目騁懷足以極視聽之

娛信可樂也夫人之相與俯仰

一世或取諸懷抱悟言一室之內

或因寄所託放浪形骸之外雖

趣舍萬殊靜躁不同當其欣

於所遇暫得於己快然自足不

知老之將至及其所之既倦情

隨事遷感慨係之矣向之所

欣俛仰之間以為陳迹猶不

能不以之興懷況脩短隨化終

期於盡古人之死生之大矣豈

不痛哉每攬昔人興感之由

若合一契未嘗不臨文嗟悼不

能喻之於懷固知一死生為虛

誕齊彭殤為妄作後之視今

亦猶今之視昔悲夫故列敘時人錄其所述雖世殊事

異所以興懷其致一也後之攬

者亦將有感於斯





Why is he the standard?

- Hard-working and benevolent governor figure
- Emperor Tang Taizong (599 - 649) admired Wang's work and had court calligraphers copy hundreds of works by Wang
- Famous Song dynasty (960 - 1279) calligraphers were also inspired by Wang
- Ming dynasty (明朝, 1368 - 1644) calligraphers praised Xīzhī's calligraphy for for its grace.
- "style of calligraphy breathed life and motion into the written words"



WORKS CITED:

- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Wang-Xizhi>
- <https://medium.com/@531257668/wang-xizhi-the-sage-of-calligraphy-ab66bd8ec51f>
- <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/40081>
- <https://www.culturalkeys.cn/2019/07/05/master-wang-xizhi/>
- https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Wang_Xizhi
- <https://ink-and-brush.com/wei-shuo/>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/14/arts/design/14asia.html>
- https://beyond-calligraphy.com/2011/12/01/woi-wang_xizhi-p1/
- <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/39899>
-