

Reproduced Pasts: Tourism Imaginaries of Chinese Heritage at the Orchid Pavilion

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This paper explores the study tours at the Orchid Pavilion in rural Shaoxing, China, a site dedicated to commemorating the ancient literati culture, particularly focusing on calligraphy and their gatherings. Guided by tourism workers in traditional Han attire, students participate in a game by a gently flowing creek where a cup gracefully floats, and the student in front of whom it stops recites a poem. This practice is inspired by an ancient literati gathering in 353, as detailed in one of China's most significant calligraphic works, 'The Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection'. The literati dined beside meandering streams, letting wine cups float freely. Over the past 1700 years, the calligraphy and the associated ancient world have fascinated the Chinese, prompting visits to constructed creeks and commemorative sites to honour literati gatherings. Individuals, like the students, imitate the rituals of the ancient gathering, the drinking game, and the calligraphy practices. Despite uncertainties about the original creek's location and the site's relocations and renovations, the game persists, paying homage to the intellectual heritage of ancient scholars and connecting to China's imagined past. This study contributes to discussions on the relationship between tourism imaginaries and authenticity in the Chinese context, highlighting how tourism practices shape the perception of heritage among visitors.