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SALA EVENTI
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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
**Chinese Calligraphy and Music:
Meeting of Voices**

Book of Abstracts



NEW FORMS OF CALLIGRAPHY IN CHINA:
A CONTEMPORARY CULTURE MIRROR



Museo Internazionale
e Biblioteca della musica
di Bologna



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Sounds of Ink - The Musicality of Writing and the Ode to Spirituality

Symbolic music

The first form of calligraphy (writing) to record music appeared in China (approximately 1038-1227). Writing not only served as music score symbols, but also added musical indications. This method of musical notation is called “Gongche notation” and has become a standardized and mature art of calligraphy.

The musicality of writing

In the highest level of the performative realm, calligraphy is based on the rhythm of music. The smoothness and rhythm of music are used to compare the changes and natural feeling of calligraphy. The magical strokes of calligraphy are like mountains and flowing water. Calligraphy is likened to visible music, an invisible and voiceless musical art.

Spiritual hymn

Calligraphy is the media with the highest spiritual realm in Chinese culture. A deep understanding and mastery of this art was required to everyone: from emperors to poets, from literati to Buddhist descendants. Representing a spiritual tool of Chinese culture, they have used calligraphy to sing praises of nature, gods, spirits, and poetry.

Luo Qi - Professor of Calligraphy at the China Academy of Art (CAA) in Hangzhou and Director of the “Calligraphyism Research Center” at the College of Fine Arts in Yangzhou University. He is the founder and the leading figure of the post-modern calligraphy movement called “Calligraphyism”, formed in Mainland China in 1992, that attempts to transform Chinese calligraphy into a contemporary idiom. He was the curator and organizer of 13 exhibitions on Calligraphyism around the world. He is one of the most important calligrapher and artist who experiments with new forms of calligraphy in the fields of painting, installation, photography, body painting, fashion design, etc. He has had numerous major exhibitions across the globe, for example at Louvre, National Art Museum of China (NAMOC), Brera Academy, Tokyo Art Museum, National Gallery of Art, etc. He is the author and editor of more than 30 books about Chinese calligraphy and art. In 2017 and 2018 two of his books was proclaimed “the most beautiful art books published in China”. He also won a painting award at the Third Florence International Contemporary Art Biennial and “the International Art Contribution Award” at Prince of Songkla University (Thailand). He is editor-in-chief of three specialized journals. He is the founder and director of the “Asia & African and Mediterranean International Modern Art Association” (AAMA). For AAMA he organized 18 international art exhibitions that gathered hundreds of artists from more than 50 countries around the world.

Brushes in Motion – Calligraphy and Performance

Immortalized through a poem by Du Fu (712-770), the sword dancer Gongsun Daniang is said to have inspired the cursive calligraphy of her contemporary Zhang Xu and the painting style of Wu Daozi. Through famous works of cursive calligraphy from the Tang dynasty to the seventeenth century, aspects of kinesthetics, spontaneity, motion, and performance, so central to the art of calligraphy, will be brought to life in the eyes of the beholder.

Uta Lauer - Ph.D. Heidelberg University, currently at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Hamburg University and Senior Fellow at the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou. Research interests focus on Chinese calligraphy, the arts of the Yuan dynasty and iconography.

Words, Sounds and Visual Display as a Symbiotic Domain in Chinese Culture

Many sinologists in the West still tend to perceive Chinese art and culture primarily as ‘word culture’ and as a visual domain, much less so as a ‘sound culture’. This presentation, based on the speaker’s musical research in China since the mid-1980s, will argue that these different realms - words, sounds and vision - are by no means separate islands or opposites. They fundamentally occupy a shared territory of human experience, whether in Chinese ritual ceremonies, in music, dance or theatre, or in more contemporary literary or artistic events. The domains of words, sounds and physical movement in China are frequently inseparable. They often blend in such deep and intricate ways that they can only be studied meaningfully in combination. Scholars of qin (seven-stringed zither) music and of Chinese opera have often pointed at the visual resemblances between motion involved in Chinese calligraphy and in the musical gestures employed in qin or opera performances. But the interdependency between words, sounds and vision is about more than such expressive resemblances. For centuries, Chinese words (in the shape of plays, poems, couplets, sayings, tales and, indeed, calligraphy) have helped mould the shape and expressive flow of China’s regional musical genres - not only vocal but also instrumental music, and not just the form of the melodies, or certain peculiarities of the rhythms or timbres, but the very emotional drive and energy of these genres. This goes well beyond the mere notion of ‘musicalized speech’, or about a projection of tonal speech patterns onto folk or opera melodies (often a misguided idea). Word culture, for much of China’s history and in many ways, frequently coincides with music and gestural culture to the point of a complete symbiosis, leading to the creation of unique, independent new realms of sonic and visual display. This paper will plead for a more thorough study of these complicated interactions. It will briefly discuss some samples from folk and ritual songs and local opera, primarily to illustrate the many intricate links, but also to point at the major difficulties which scholars face when exploring this field.

Frank Kouwenhoven - music scholar from Leiden, The Netherlands. He has published widely on Chinese music, carrying out musical fieldwork on folk songs and other genres in China (including avant-garde music) with his partner Antoinet Schimmelpenninck (d.2012) ever since 1986. Frank is co-founder of the international platform for Chinese music CHIME. He has produced films and CDs and organized exhibitions on Chinese music, as well as many international festivals and concert tours for Chinese musicians. He has taught Chinese music at Leiden University for many years. www.fkouwenhoven.com - www.chimemusic.net

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The Chinese Musical Instruments of the Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica, Bologna

In 1888, on the occasion of the Universal Music Exhibition in Bologna, the city received several collections of instruments representing African and Asian cultures. The Exhibition marked a significant moment in the early development of organological studies: private collectors contributed to the enrichment of the collection of the Liceo musicale di Bologna (1804-1942), generously donating non-European instruments. The collections donated by the Bolognese composer Riccardo Lucchesi (1852-1915), collected in the Chinatown of San Francisco, California, and by the Bolognese journalist Giovanni Vigna dal Ferro (1840-1919), collected in Shanghai, include drums and idiophones for the traditional Chinese opera percussion ensembles (e.g., *gu* 鼓, *ban gu* 板鼓/班鼓, *gong* 锣, *cha* 镲), highly decorated chamber music zithers (*yang qin* 洋琴/扬琴), as well as treatises on Chinese music including *pipa* (琵琶) and *guqin*

(古琴) scores written in textual notation (文字谱/减字谱). Today, the collection is preserved at the Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica in Bologna but remains largely unknown to the wider public. In this paper, we will present the events and circumstances that led to the establishment of the collection at the museum. We will discuss organological details, painted decorations, and manufacturers' labels of a few Chinese musical instruments from the museum's collection that have been kindly made available. At the same time, we will present the ongoing work of inventory and cataloguing being carried out as part of an ethnomusicology research group from the Department of the Arts, University of Bologna.

Lorenzo Chiarofonte - researcher and lecturer in Ethnomusicology at the University of Bologna, where he teaches the course "Musical Traditions in Asia". He earned his PhD from SOAS University of London. He has conducted research in central Burma and Indonesia, focusing on the music and dance in spirit possession cults. His first Italian monograph *Nat Hsaing* has recently been published by NeoClassica (2023). He coordinates the project "The World Music Listening Guides" in collaboration with the Intercultural Institute of Comparative Music Studies (IISMC, Giorgio Cini Foundation, Venice).

Yifei Zhang – She obtained her bachelor's degree from the Department of Ethnic Composition at Inner Mongolia Normal University (China). In 2020, she completed her master's degree studies in DAMS (Disciplines of Art, Music, and Performing Arts) at the University of Bologna. She is now part of the research group that is working on the inventory and cataloguing of the Chinese instruments and documents that belong to the Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica in Bologna.

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New Forms of Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy and Music: A Focus on "Musicaligraphy Performances"

This speech will illustrate how the strict correlation between music and calligraphic principles has influenced the artistic activities of both contemporary Chinese calligraphers and musicians, in three different ways: i) when calligraphers conform their artistic conception to music principles (i.e. Luo Qi, Fung Ming-chip, Tong Yang-tze); ii) when musicians inspire the shaping of their music gestures to calligraphic brushes (i.e. Chou Wen-chung, Chen Yeung-ping, Lie Lang, Wen Deqing); and iii) when calligraphers and musicians work together in "musicaligraphy performances". After giving an overview and representative examples of these three different modalities, this speech will focus in particular on "musicaligraphy performances", starting from the first musicaligraphy performance held in 1997 by Zhu Qingsheng (calligrapher) and Zhang Weiliang (flautist) near Beijing, passing through the experimentation of the Chinese calligrapher Pu Lieping (b. 1959) and the Italian calligrapher Silvio Ferragina (b.1962), giving insights on performances in which calligraphy, music and dance work together, and ending with recent interaction with technology. This kind of performances can represent not only a means to show the versatility and modernity of calligraphic art in contemporary times but also its openness towards other art forms, its capability to transcend national boundaries and also to give new possibilities for its future development.

This speech results from preliminary research within the European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant Project "[WRITE – New Forms of Calligraphy in China: A Contemporary Culture Mirror](#)" (GA. 949645).

Adriana Iezzi - Full Professor of Chinese Language and Culture at the Department of Interpreting and Translation of the University of Bologna. She is the Principal Investigator of a European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant Project entitled "[WRITE – New Forms of Calligraphy in China: A Contemporary Culture Mirror](#)" (GA. n. 949645). Her research activity focuses on Chinese contemporary calligraphy, with particular attention to the analysis of the main artistic expressions that deviate from traditional forms and practices.

Writing in Rhythm: Luo Qi and Gu Wenda, and Their Connection with Music

For centuries, the art of Chinese calligraphy used to be connected with other arts, such as music, performance art and sword dance. The atmosphere of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing during the early 1990s, when I studied there was closely tied to other art schools and live performance of young musicians, mostly rock and were given during the evenings. I am going to discuss the work of two distinguished artists that create ink art; one is Professor Luo Qi, a founder of the movement “calligraphyism”, whose art is connected with music. The second artist is Gu Wenda, of the 85 New Wave, residing in New York and Shanghai. His work is deeply influenced by music. I am presenting Gu’s ideas given in 1981 in his Master thesis at the Zhejiang Academy of fine Arts (Chinese Academy of Fine Arts), where he talks about musicality in paintings. Both artists are playing with calligraphy on the boundaries of this very ancient art form evidenced by bold experimentation. In addition to details of their creative processes their opinions on art philosophy sense and the theory of art are discussed. The work of both exceptional artists is also closely analysed.

Daniela C. Zhang - Researcher in the field of contemporary Chinese art and contemporary Chinese literature. She presently works at Slovak Academy of Sciences, Institute of Oriental Studies, and Comenius University, Department of East Asian Studies (Chinese literature). She is the author of the book Breaking the Ink – Abstract Ink Art in Mainland China, published in 2020, and over 20 papers in highly regarded, peer-reviewed journals and almanacs. She frequently speaks at international conferences. She was awarded the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation Doctoral Fellowship in 2000/2001. In 2023 she attended a study stay at National Central University in Taoyuan, Taiwan. She has translated several books of poetry and prose from and to Slovak and Chinese (Paolo Zhang: The Shadow of Jinyang, MESA, Bratislava, 2011, Zhao Si, Tang Xiaodu, Chen Dongdong Lin Song, ARS POETICA 2015, Bratislava, Zhao Si: Disappearing and returns, Ars Poetica, 2018, Milan Richter: Death on a long visit – a linguistic part, Taipei, 2019, Mian Mian: Candy, Mladé topole, Bratislava, 2020).

“Cursive” in Compositions of Four Chinese Composers

Calligraphy holds a distinguished place among the highly esteemed skills and hobbies cherished by ancient Chinese literati. Alongside playing stringed musical instruments, engaging in the strategic board game “Go”, and practising the art of painting. Within this rich tradition, “Cursive” emerges as one of the calligraphy styles known as “caoshu”, which evolved into a distinctive form of calligraphic art during the prosperous Tang Dynasty—a pinnacle of China’s cultural and economic achievements. Departing from the functional purpose of transmitting information, “Cursive” transcended into an artistic creation. This style defied the principles of symmetry and balance found in other font styles, instead drawing deeply upon the writer's fluctuating inner emotions to better showcase individuality and uniqueness. In a similar vein, poets of the Tang Dynasty expressed their emotions through chanting poetry and composing prose. Chinese composers likewise harness the power of music to convey their inner thoughts and feelings, endeavouring to construct their own musical “caoshu” that effectively gives voice to their emotions. This exploration delves into the distinctive musical “caoshu” woven by four notable Chinese composers—Chou Wen-chung, Liqing Yang, Xiaoyong Chen, and Wenchen Qin—who possess diverse international backgrounds. Chou compares the ink flow to the density of the music and experimented with the ideograms of cursive style writing in the piece *Cursive* in 1963. Yang, blending Chinese and Western influences, incorporating meticulous painting techniques into his music. Chen’s compositions embody the Asian mentality, emphasizing the creation and development of sound, leading to unexpected and open-ended musical journeys. Qin fuses his folk music influence with the Western avant-garde, creating a distinct musical language of subtle, intense sounds. These four composers infuse their compositions

with elements from Chinese and Western, reflecting their diverse backgrounds and creating distinct expressive voices, mirroring the essence of “cursive” script in Chinese calligraphy.

Zhang Zhenzhen - *A dynamic composer and pianist in contemporary music and research. During her earlier music career, she achieved numerous worldwide prizes, Including first place in the 8th International Composition Competition in Luxembourg, second Place in 18th International Composition competition “2 Agosto” in Bologna, fourth place in The Molinari Quartet’s 4th International Composition Competition in Montréal and the 4th Palatino International Composition Competition in Beijing. Later, she conducted research on Chinese diaspora composers (i.e., Dun Tan, Chou Wen-Chung, Xiaoyong Chen...). China National Art Fund and SCAA Fund have rewarded her First prizes in outstanding artists 2012 & 2010.*

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Sound MAP (Musicaligraphy Augmented Performances)

Can the harmonious and rhythmic gestures of Chinese Calligraphy be represented as a contemporary music performance? Sound MAP is an innovative and captivating multidisciplinary performance that wants to show the creative potential of the ancient Chinese Calligraphy art form through the use of motion sensors. The generative process, from silence to sound and visuals, will be created by a calligrapher together with a pianist and a dancer. They will perform and embody the correlation between Chinese strokes, gesture, music and visuals. Motion sensors embedded by Milan-based firm LWT3, will be used to capture performers’ gestures and brush movements and to transform them into electronic sound and visuals. The mesmerizing fusion of Eastern and Western culture will drive the audience to a unique performance which overcomes the boundaries of past and present, traditional and digital art forms and re-define the Chinese cultural identity in relation to the Western contemporary performing art.

Giusy Caruso - *Concert pianist and postdoctoral researcher focused on studying human-machine interaction (HMI) for the creation of futuristic multimedia formats and music performance analysis. Chairwoman of the CREATIE research group at Royal Conservatoire Antwerp and affiliated researcher at IPEM-Ghent University, she is Official Music Advisor of the LWT3 Performing Arts Lab Milan. Renowned interpreter of contemporary music repertory, she is pursuing her concert activity in Europe, Asia, Russia and America, taking part into Radio and TV shows. She released CDs acclaimed in worldwide music reviews. Among other international awards, Dr. Caruso received together with LWT3 team the first S+T+Arts Prize Honorary Mention 2023 for the project 'MetaPhase: a contrapuntal dialogue between a pianist and her avatar in the metaverse.*

Silvio Ferragina - *Artist calligrapher of Eastern formation active in the panorama of contemporary experimental Asian calligraphy, Silvio Ferragina has emerged on the scene of important exhibitions of calligraphy. In addition to an artistic production of classical inspiration, which uses techniques and styles of traditional Chinese calligraphy, he engages in works of taste and contemporary flavor, which allowed him to return fully within the fold of calligraphic experimentation of today. In his works, the Chinese character comes to life in three-dimensional structures and the calligraphic sign is transposed into sound, thus achieving a transformation from calligraphic works into “multidisciplinary musical works”.*

LWT3 - Innovative company founded by Eng. Paolo Belluco, PhD (20+ years in sensors, biosignals and data analysis fields) and designer Samuele Polistina (20+ years UX/UI, product design and data visualization). With expertise in data analysis, visualization, IoT infrastructure development, and human-machine interaction solutions, LWT3 works in their Data Driven Performance Lab in Milano across three pillars: Industries workers, Sport Science, and Music and Performing Arts. In particular, their mission is to design, to develop and to integrate new technologies and methods of interaction in the world of music and performing arts.

This event is part of the project “WRITE – New Forms of Calligraphy in China: A Contemporary Culture Mirror”, that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (GA n. 949645). The event is linked to the exhibition “Sounds of Ink: Luo Qi and 30 years of Calligraphyism” (Museo Internazionale della Musica – Bologna, 12.10 – 05.11.2023).



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