

## Delving a Little Deeper: A Guide to *Yaji* 雅集

### What does *Yaji* mean?

The Chinese word *Yaji* 雅集 is made up of two characters, with *Ya* 雅 meaning refined, elegant and *ji* 集 meaning to gather, to collect.

### What is a *Yaji*?

Historically a *Yaji* defines a “literati gathering” - a distinguished symposium of creative individuals, congregating to enjoy art and various kinds of performances in private gardens attached to private residences.



Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden

A well-known representation of a traditional Chinese *Yaji* can be found in the painting “Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden”, depicting a famous meeting that took place in China during the Northern Song Dynasty in 1087 between sixteen political leaders, scholars and artists in the capital Kaifeng at the Western Garden of Wang Shen, the Emperor’s son-in-law.

Guests included those who have long been considered models of scholarly virtue, such as the poet and calligrapher Su Shi and the famous painter Li Gonglin, who is believed to have recorded the event in the painting.

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A traditional *guqin* player

### The *Yaji* then...

It was a traditional form of art salon, an elegant private congregation where a small group of *guqin* players – the ancient seven-stringed zither – played and discussed Chinese music.

*Yaji* was also characterised by the idea of mutual inspiration, where attendees inspired each others by means of the arts performed. Indeed, the literati attending these gatherings were indulging in a wide range of pastimes, such as calligraphy, admiration of paintings, relics and artefacts as well as poem composition, often accompanied by food and drinks.

### ...the *Yaji* now

Today, *Yaji* commonly refers to a gathering where *qin* players play for each other. Most frequently, participants include the students of a teacher, although often friends and other guests are invited to join. In order to distinguish this gathering from a student recital, social activities or lectures can be included.

At China Exchange, we have recreated this vibrant atmosphere as part of our China in Context festival and we would like to welcome everyone interested to join us for an animated afternoon with a group of talented artists, as a unique chance to explore the fascinating Chinese tradition of the *Yaji* through a wide range of artistic performances.

