

Analysis on Development and Evolution of Calligraphy in the Pre-Qin Period

He Liu

Technology School of Shanwei, Guangdong 516600, China

ABSTRACT. *Broad and grand, sophisticated and profound, Chinese culture is well-established and can be traced back to ancient times. Regarding the Chinese characters, it has experienced a development course of 5000 years, which includes the diligence and wisdom of the working people. In the pre-Qin period, all kinds of things emerged, and the characters in this period were also in a state of research and continuous improvement, which laid a solid foundation for the perfect presentation of subsequent characters. This paper focuses on the development process of calligraphy in the pre-Qin period, describes the types of calligraphy in the pre-Qin period, and attempts to analyze the evolution of the human outlook on life, social development and economic promotion in these developments.*

KEYWORDS: *Pre qin period, Characters, Calligraphy, Evolution*

1. Introduction

The Chinese characters can be regarded as Chinese treasures, and it is a great achievement in the history of human development. Calligraphy is a symbol of the wisdom of a country and even the mankind. Its development contains the progress of human society. Today, the emergence and development of various fonts can be traced back to the pre Qin period. The emergence and development of modern characters can be traced back to the pre Qin period.

2. Overview of Calligraphy in the Pre-Qin Period

The pre Qin period refers to the period before the unification of the Qin state, including the Shang Dynasty, the Western Zhou Dynasty, the Spring and Autumn period. Calligraphy in the pre-Qin period refers to the situation, meaning and shape of the characters, as well as the process and thinking of the creation of the characters. As we all know, the economy was relatively backward at that time, and people relied primarily on self-sufficiency. Therefore, in the field of cultural life, characters are a simple tool that can only express their wishes, not to mention beauty and artistry.

The calligraphy in the pre-Qin period represented the level of the early stage of Chinese calligraphy. Although the characters were simple, it laid a solid foundation for the follow-up development of calligraphy.

3. The development and evolution of calligraphy in the pre Qin Period

Types of Chinese calligraphy in pre Qin Period.

The types of calligraphy in the pre-Qin period mainly include oracle bone script, Chinese bronze inscriptions and the lesser seal character. These were transformed with the changes of several dynasties in the pre-Qin period.

(1) Oracle Bone Script

Oracle bone script, the source of the name of this character are written and engraved on the animal bones and tortoise shells.

The Oracle bone script is known as the earliest script in China and the most systematic script in the early history of mankind, which is still relatively mature in the early script of humankind. The oracle bone script was found in the archaeological process of our country are mainly in the Xiaotun area of Anyang City, Henan Province, it was found that this area used to be the capital city from Pangeng to Dixin after research. These kings of the Shang dynasty belong to the late Shang Dynasty, namely called "Yin Dynasty ruins". The oracle bone

script unearthed in “Yin Dynasty ruins” were later called “Yin Dynasty ruins characters” by archaeologists.

The content of the Oracle bone script is mainly from Pan Geng's relocation of capital to “Yin”, to the reign of King Zhou of Shang, about 270 years, the material related to royal divination is mainly in the form of ancient words, so it is called “oracle bone characters” and “oracle inscriptions” by the archaeological community. As the character is mainly engraved on the bones and tortoise shells, it is also known as “characters carved on oracle bones” and “oracle-bone writing”. According to archaeological findings, the Shang Dynasty actually existed in pen and ink with relatively sophisticated. The Oracle bone script were processed with engraving, with a thin and sharp style, which was very special. The inscriptions on Oracle bone script seems to striking, but in the period of emperor Yi and Emperor Xin in the late Shang Dynasty, the characters became smaller, while in the Western Zhou Dynasty, they became more and more smaller.

Oracle bone script calligraphy mainly includes two meanings. The first one is relatively primitive and the most fundamental meaning, which refers to the calligraphy works that are copied by referring to the font structure and calligraphy characteristics of Oracle in Shang and Zhou dynasties. The second one is expanded, which refers to the modern calligraphy works that are formed by drawing on the characteristics of Oracle bone script characters and self creation.

(2) Chinese Bronze Inscriptions

The source of the Chinese bronze inscriptions is that the characters was cast on the bronze wares of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties with the alias of inscriptions on ancient bronze objects.

An important dynasty of the bronze age is the Shang and Zhou Dynasties. The ritual vessels commonly used during the Shang and Zhou Dynasties are the “tripod” and the musical instruments are the “bell”, these are high-level bronze works. As the main representative of bronzes in that period, they became the synonym of later bronze age. Therefore, Chinese bronze inscriptions has become a kind of noun of Chinese ancient characters and a cultural representation of a period. As the Chinese bronze inscriptions runs through the Shang dynasty, Western Zhou dynasty, Spring and Autumn period, Chinese bronze inscriptions were divided into four categories according to the dynasty, namely, the Chinese bronze inscriptions of the Shang, Chinese bronze inscriptions of

Western Zhou dynasty, Chinese bronze inscriptions of Eastern Zhou dynasty and Chinese bronze inscriptions of Qin & Han Dynasties.

1) Chinese bronze inscriptions of Shang dynasty

The historical period of Chinese bronze inscriptions in Shang Dynasty was basically from about 1300 BC to about 1046 BC, while it is not very developed. Although the Shang Dynasty had already had bronzes before, but the carving tools were not developed, and they didn't invent the Chinese bronze inscriptions until Pan Geng moved to “Yin”, and they were just some simple figures. By the time of the demise of the Shang dynasty, there were only more than 1,200 words of Chinese bronze inscriptions, mainly the names of the authors of cast bronzes or some ancestors names. The written Chinese bronze inscriptions are also very simple, with a maximum of more than 40 words.

The calligraphy of Chinese bronze inscriptions in this era was deeply influenced by Oracle bone script, and was produced on the basis of it. Its calligraphy style is thin and long. While the strokes is a seal cutting, so the writing style is magnificent, dense, rigorous, and unique when coupled with bell and tripod. The calligraphy community once summarized it into two styles, one is full-bodied, with strong and sharp strokes, but the writing is rich and powerful; the other is thin, powerful, and straight, little or no sharp in strokes.

2) Chinese bronze inscriptions of Western Zhou dynasty

The historical period of Chinese bronze inscriptions in Western Zhou Dynasty was basically from about 1046 BC to about 771 BC, this era is a period of great prosperity of Chinese bronze inscriptions. Some national events, such as the historical records of king Mu hunting, King Zhao southern tour and so on, are recorded by Chinese bronze inscriptions.

After the Zhou Dynasty destroyed the Shang Dynasty, the craftsmen who made bronze wares in the Shang Dynasty returned to the Zhou Dynasty one after another, and people in Zhou Dynasty inherited the Chinese bronze inscriptions calligraphy and developed it into a unique calligraphy art.

3) Inscription on bronze in East Zhou

From around 770 BC to 220 BC, inscriptions on bronze of Eastern Zhou Dynasty were widely used. The Eastern Zhou Dynasty originated from eastward migration of King Ping, after which bronze ware became more common, and the musical instruments cast by bronze ware such as “Bell” gradually gained more popular. At this

time, in order to decorate these bronzes and record important events, the Eastern Zhou people invented a simple method -- to cast the characters on the outer side of the bronzes. At that time, Bronze Ware became common and no longer precious, so this is no longer the “the exclusive property of nobles” , but was widely used in civil society, so that it can be called the “the Golden Age” of inscription on bronze.

As for font and style, the inscription on bronze in Zhou dynasty was featuring smooth, with the strokes basically in the first and last touch. Elegant and rigorous in structure, it has obvious right-falling strokes.

In the early age of Zhou Dynasty, calligraphy works feature plain style, mostly using hanging needle strokes, which is straight, plain and simple, with condensed straight momentum. Besides, It also has the style of Oracle under its affection. For example, “King Wu of the Western Zhou Dynasty defeated Shang Dynasty”, with thirty-two characters, each with a square stroke and a round stroke, was the first cast bronze ware of the Western Zhou Dynasty found so far, setting a precedent for the calligraphy of the Zhou Dynasty. The inscription on bronze of the late Zhou Dynasty shows a dignified and heroic style, at which time the calligraphy of the Jin Dynasty did take calligraphy into account. The characters in the works such as the emperor's protection are terse, elegant and upright. In the “Wang” shaped characters, “人” shaped characters and “Ren” side characters, most of the creations have thick strokes , where light and heavy touches are obvious. These inscription on bronze were known as “Right-falling Strokes Style” among calligraphers. For example, the inscription on the Great Yu Tripod, the full text of 291 characters, elegant, lively with appropriate size, can be called the best inscription on bronze work in Cheng and Kang's administering, whose rubbings and copies are still valued by today's calligraphy masters.

4) Bronze inscriptions of the Qin and Han Dynasties (221 BC- 219 BC)

After the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty unified the six kingdoms, there was a need for the unification of writing. The inscription on the Bell tripod was no longer advocated, so the bronze inscription was gradually replaced and gradually declined. In the Western Han Dynasty, the bronze ware was often replaced by the iron ware, which was used to cast characters on the bronze ware.

So far, about 3005 characters have been found, 1804 of which are recognizable, slightly more than oracle bone inscriptions, according to archaeologists. This shows that the inscriptions on bronze are more similar to the modern characters than the inscriptions on oracle bones, walking further in the history of human calligraphy. The inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells inherited from the inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells, and the small seal characters of the Qin Dynasty inherited from the inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells. The bronze inscription is usually engraved on the top of the bell or Tripod, so it can be better preserved than oracle-bone inscriptions. Moreover, it has a flavor of primitive simplicity when equipped with ancient bronze.

(3) The Small Seal

The seal character, including the big seal and the small seal, is also known as the “seal script”. In calligraphy community, Zhouwen is accustomed to be called big seals, so future generations often equate seal script with small seals. During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, the Chinese characters in various countries were various in shape and complicated.

The calligraphy Qin adopted is small seals. After the first emperor ruled the country, he also needed to standardize and unify the characters, so he ordered the national characters to adopt Qin seal, that is, small seal. In fact, the small seal appeared as early as the Warring States Period, so it was also a part of pre-Qin calligraphy, which was created on the basis of inscriptions on bronze and inscriptions on drumshaped stone blocks, simplifying and beautify both of them. Regarding the inscription on bronze, it has already been described above. The exemplary work of big seal is the famous *Ancient Proses on Stones*, which is characterized by thick brushwork and rigorous structure. Its stroke is round and powerful, dense and rugged, which has the edges and corners in smooth touch. The spacing in lines and words make the entire text have an open and loose style, and thick as a whole. The characteristic of this calligraphy is that it abandons the decorative meaning of the inscriptions in the bronze, showing the feeling of writing with brushes, which indeed provides a foundation for future generations of calligraphy. Therefore, it is also well-known and has been called “the first rule of calligraphers” in the calligraphy community of China.

As for small seal, calligraphy Li Si's masterpiece is among the most famous ones. He carved the stone of Mount Tai from Qin Dynasty, which has been highly praised by all generations. The Qin Dynasty was a period of transformation of inheritance and innovation. During this period, there were six carved stone carvings that pushed the art of stone carving to a new height. There are now four kinds preserved, namely Yishan, Langya, Taishan, and Kuaiji, which have always been Awesome.

(2) Analysis of the development and evolution of calligraphy in the pre-Qin period

As mentioned before, the economy in the pre-Qin period was at a preliminary stage, evolving from a slave society to a feudal era, which was sometimes merged and separated. In the process of interlacing wars and times, pre-Qin calligraphy has also evolved in meaning due to the development of human economy and society. The reasons for these evolutions are as follows.

1) Economic Progress in the Pre-Qin Period Increased the Demand for Culture and Art

The economic foundation determines the superstructure, among which the most representative ones are culture and literature. As a representative cultural product, calligraphy has also evolved a lot in the pre-Qin era, with the development of economy and the improvement of tools. For example, the aforementioned inscriptions before the Zhou dynasty only appeared slightly due to the rarity of the bronze wares and insufficient workmanship, but after the Western Zhou Dynasty, the bronze wares gradually increased and the inscriptions were also used by ordinary people. However, after the unification of the Qin Dynasty, the bronze inscriptions were discarded again because they were slow to make and could not keep up with the times and economic development.

2) The Calligraphic Culture of the Pre-Qin Period Embodies the Needs of the Rulers

During the pre-Qin period, each style of calligraphy emerged and developed with the changes of dynasties. Or a certain calligraphy would own its specific stage of development with the dynasties passing. It simply because ordinary people didn't have much demand for writing during the pre-Qin period, and the real need for writing is from Ruling class, who needed to record history and write announcements. Besides that, only rulers could afford using high-value calligraphic instruments. Therefore, the whole evolution of calligraphy in the pre-Qin period presents the scale of the dynasty.

3. Conclusion

In short, the calligraphy in pre-Qin period went through a transformation, from the application of art to the tool and came from the Ruling class to the field of folk design. In this period, Calligraphy was closely related to the change of characters, and gradually became perfect from the immature stage, which established a special position in the history of Chinese calligraphy and became the forerunner of later calligraphy development. It has shown the economic and social progress of the pre-Qin period, fully illustrating the long-standing and well-established of Chinese culture. Besides, it also reveals the people's love of labor and life, as well as their rich in creativity.

References

- [1] Peng Jixiang (2012). Introduction to Art Peking University Press. 18th printing in March.
- [2] Zhu Renfu (2010). History of Ancient Chinese Calligraphy. Guizhou Education Press First printed.