A Probe into the Formation Process of “Bozhe” of the Han Official Script

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Abstract
At the beginning of the 20th century, a large number of bamboo and silk manuscripts in the Han Dynasty were excavated, together with newly unearthed bronze and stone inscriptionsin which further deepened people's understanding of characters in previous eras, To a certain extent, it further verified the defined characteristics specific to strokes of Han official script based on epigraphy, such as, “start like a silkworm head and end like a swallow tail”, “wavelike leftfalling stroke and rightfalling stroke as Zhe” However, the beauty of the typical official script strokes came into being in steps, not all at once, Specifically, the formation process of “Bozhe”, as a symbol of mature strokes, was closely related to many influencing factors throughout its development process, such as the innovation of writing materials, the evolution of the characters themselves, etc. An in-depth analysis of this issue could not only help enrich the development path of wave formatio, but also deepen the understanding of formal beauty of Chinese characters.

Keywords
Official Script, Bozhe, Material Tools, The Evolution of Characters

1.Morphological changes caused by the evolution of characters

The splendid culture of the Han Dynasty is remarkable in the 2000 years’ development of Chinese feudal civilization. The fruitful excavation of bamboo and silk manuscripts since the 20th century have provided important literature for in-depth study on all aspects of Han society and culture. As the principal types of calligraphic writing at that time, the official script was not only taken to record and narrate the the blossoming culture of the Han Dynasty, but also symbolized the special pursuit of beauty in written characters here, which was especially reflected in the featured strokes like “Bozhe”.

The first step to probe into the emergence of “Bo Zhe” stroke is to clarify its mature shape and the formation time. As mentioned in Wang Xizhi's The Formula of Brushwork, the expression and shape of “Zhe” is the same as the typical form of "twists and turns" in Han official script. Based on such description by Wangxizhi, combined with the division of time span by Kang Youwei in Guangyizhou Shuangji, “Bozhe” mentioned in this study referred specifically to a unique stroke form during the maturation period of Han official script, such as the rightfalling stroke and leftfalling stroke on Stele Inscriptions of Ritual Vessels (Figure 1).

In addition to its timeline, it is particularly necessary to sort out its origin. According to the existing data, the font form of inscriptions in the Western Zhou Dynasty and the Shang Dynasty were still patterned, with the characters still in the stage of hieroglyphs, while the strokes showed more sense of description and little written expression. As Wang Fengyang stated in his respresentative work Chinese Characters, that in the typical hieroglyphics period, people wrote the characters mainly focused on the “delineation” of the characters, rather than focusing on the writing nature.(2） However, the pursuit of font regularity also made the decorative sense of specific strokes appear in the lines, which was shown in the "Jue" and "Min" Characters in the inscription of Great Yu Tripod (Figure 2). After the doom of the Western Zhou Dynasty, Qin also followed the written track of this vein. At the time of massive changes, the characters of Qin instead became the orthodox source of Chinese characters due to the inheritance of the conservative style of the Western Zhou culture





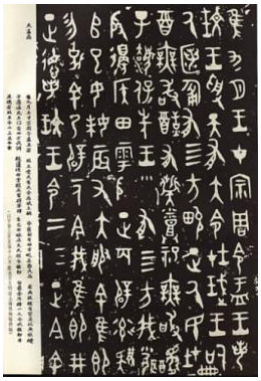




Figure 1:"Ritual Stele"Rubbing.

Figure 2"Great Yu Tripod"Rubbing.

Figure 3:"Stone Drum Text"Rubbing.

Figure 4:"Houma League Book"

Therefore, the characters of the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period can be divided into two styles, including the Qin state characters (such as Stone Drum Inscriptions in the Qin state (Figure 3)) and six states' characters (such as Houma Alliance Inscriptions (Figure 4)). The existing unearthed Stone Drum inscriptions indicated similar structures to bronze inscriptions in Western Zhou Dynasty, but the former proved to be more neat and artistic, which not only implied in-

depth inheritance of Western Zhou culture, but also laid foundation for the later reform of Qin state characters. As the earliest Chinese script of archaeological excavations, Houma Alliance Inscriptions showed significant differences from Qin state characters in styles of characters and strokes, particularly the variant thickness of the beginning and closing strokes. However, the common point between them was also identified in the evolution from objective estimation, that is, describing the appearance of objectives, to the expression approach based on human physiological habits. In 221 BC, Qin state unified the six states, when the large seal script was ameliorated to a smaller version, more symbolic and refined. However, alongside the regularization of the large seal script, a demotic type of ancient official script took on the shape, evolving with the underlying practical folk writing habits. To meet the need of fast and simple writing, the evolution process from the large seal script to the ancient clerical script was hereby accelerated, triggering more symbolically significant fonts following physiological conventions and practical use. Hereafter the graceful and coherent strokes of the seal script were converted to structuring and broken strokes, forming the mode of combing single strokes into radicals, and then constituting the font structure. Even if accompanied with increasing strokes, the broken strokes proved to be more handy in actual use than those of the seal script emphasizing uniformity, steadiness and coherence. As a result, the writing of each stroke should follow a proper step of start, act and end. However, the official script evolved from the large seal script, which was not far from the ancient times. The brushwork style in similar times could not be completely changed. During this period, the main brushwork style of cursive official script overlapped and the small seal script to a certain extent, and inheritance of the gyroidal brushwork style from the large seal script was its intuitive embodiment (Figure 5).

The gyroidal brushwork style of the large seal script gradually came into existence as a kind of aesthetic consciousness in the long march of Chinese history. In pace with the transformation of the big seal script towards cursive and official scripts, its overall writing timing began to weaken, but the artistic style of gyroidal ending was inherited by the official script to a certain extent. After Qin state unified the six states, the brushwork of Qin state characters, as the official characters and aesthetic paradigm, basically returned to its original inheritance of the large seal script. Whereas a large number of fixed and stylized gyroidal start strokes (image such as "silkworm head") were discovered in the archaeological excavation during the period of Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty (Figure 6), which witnessed the remains of this featured brushwork style in Han official script. However, the speed and fluidity inherited from the large seal script led to the destruction of the stable and regular stroke lines, and hereby created fluctuating stroke lines, which paved the way for the twists and turns style of brushwork in the official script.






Figure 05:"Liye Qin Slips".

Figure 06:"Liu Che posthumous edict of caring for the only child.

Figure 07:"Shen Fujun Que"Rubbing,.

Figure 08:"Ritual Stele"Rubbing .

2.The impact of writing materials and tools

The official script was presented by various writing tools and materials. The materials mainly consisted of bamboo slips and stone inscriptions, with the latter as the most typical materials considering their declaration functions. The writing brush was taken as the major tool.

2.1 Stone and Stele Inscriptions

The stones, as the carrier of information record, also has a long tradition in China. Heguang Stone Inscriptions, Stele Inscriptions of Ritual Vessels and Western Gorge Inscriptions were some typical representatives. The stone inscriptions functioning as declaration fund could date back to the Warring States period show its strong function, like Stone-drum Inscriptions, Stone Inscriptions of The Curse to Chu. Thereafter, stele inscriptions including Fei Zhi Stele, Stele of Ritual Vessels and Western Gorge also maintained the declaration function. For the sake of displaying this function, the calligraphy structures and strokes of stone carvings were inevitably improved to be well-organized. In addition, it was easy to obtain stone materials and its width and length could allow sufficient space for the text, and its appreciation value were hereby immediately improved. Take the character “Ling”in Inscriptions of Grave Steles for the Shens (Figure 7) for example. Here the leftfall and rightfall strokes broke through the boundary grid of the bamboo, a great performance of the wanton form. In Stele Inscriptions of Ritual Vessels (Figure 8), those strokes appear thin with light contrast. The strong and oblique rightful stroke and leftfall stroke with a sharp upturn tail attained a strong visual sense. The visual aesthetic formalization produced by the revelation nature also exerted immeasurable effects on daily writing of the official script, which played an important role in the generalization of “Bozhe” strokes.

2.2 The Writing Brush

The use of writing brush as a writing tool appeared in a very early period. The Houma Alliance Inscriptions was an example. In the development process from the seal script to the official script, the writing brush was also involved, specifically when the circular strokes were transformed into the broken strokes. As a writing tool, the writing brush was subjected to the friction from the bamboo surface, which led to the change of its tip form to a certain extent. In addition, the broken types of strokes required to constantly restore the writing brush soon after concluding each stroke to make the normal expression of the next stroke. Based on the above points, the tip needed to lift quickly again and again by external pressure, thus triggered the emergence of ending brushwork like the swallow tail, a typical style of “Bozhe”. To meet individual requirement of the writing speed and conclusions of individual characters. The demand for power release finally integrated with aesthetic appreciation in the contemporary era, and then developed into “Zhe”, the rightfall stroke.

Conclusion

All kinds of fonts and strokes came into being under the influence of multiple factors, especially the featured “Bozhe” of the official script. Those relevant factors certainly differed in the extent of influence. The present study only focused on part of influencing factors in a set time frame, but that didn't mean other related factors could be completely ignored, such as ink, ancient seal, etc. Their influence on “Bozhe” was also indispensable. All the factors listed collaboratively gave rise to such a unique kind of font as Han official script, and its stroke shaped like silkworm head and swallow tail.

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