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Aesthetic Ideas in Chinese Calligraphy and Characters

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Abstract: Chinese aesthetic thought is rooted in the deep cultural heritage of China, which has been inherited and developed for thousands of years. Aesthetic thought has influenced the development of traditional Chinese art and culture, and also shaped and developed Chinese characters. As a system of symbols for recording Chinese language and passing on culture, Chinese characters have taken on forms that reflect the imprint of Chinese aesthetic thought on Chinese characters. Based on the development of Chinese characters and the evolution of the art of calligraphy, and through the elaboration of the characters "hao", "zhong" and "ren", This paper sheds light on the connection between the development of Chinese characters and the art of calligraphy, and how Chinese aesthetic thought contributes to the growth of both. This study reveals how traditional Chinese aesthetics shape the aesthetic form of square characters by analyzing the evolution of Chinese character fonts and traditional Chinese aesthetics. Moreover, calligraphy, as an artistic expression of Chinese character writing, is deeply influenced by aesthetic ideas in its unique writing style and chapter layout.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Chinese character, calligraphy art, Chinese character forms.

1. Introduction

The evolution of Chinese characters has been influenced by Chinese aesthetic thought, and the development of Chinese characters has been promoted, which have evolved along with the times in all periods of history, and the different forms of Chinese characters in each period also reflect the influence of Chinese aesthetic thought on the historical period at that time. As a script with a long and continuous history, Chinese characters are not only a carrier of language but also a combination of culture, art and aesthetics. The development of Chinese characters has lasted for thousands of years, carrying a rich history and culture and incorporating the essence of Chinese aesthetics, and the evolution of their fonts has been an exploration and sublimation of Chinese aesthetics.

The evolution of fonts and the development of calligraphy are complementary and inseparable. According to "Calligraphy is an art of writing developed on the basis of the writing symbols of Chinese characters, which not only expands the potential charm of Chinese characters' forms, but also artistic and aesthetic principle of Chinese characters' 'coming out of things' and changes the principle of language creation into an aesthetic principle" [1]. Calligraphy is the art of writing Chinese characters. Calligraphy is the expression of the art of writing Chinese characters, from the oracle bone script to the regular script, running script, cursive script font changes, the art of calligraphy in the unique stroke, line, chapter, chapter cloth white and other elements of the composition of the art

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contains a deep traditional cultural heritage, not only reflecting the pursuit of beauty at that time, but also reflects the unique spiritual temperament of the Chinese people and the concept of aesthetics.

In addition, the high degree of confidence in writing is directly influenced by Chinese aesthetics. "Chinese characters carry the cultural identity and aesthetic concepts of the Chinese nation and are the crystallisation of the wisdom of the Chinese nation's historical practice [2]." Chinese characters are the product of the cohesion of excellent traditional Chinese culture, and confidence in writing also stems from confidence in traditional culture "Chinese characters are not only the carriers and transmitters of traditional Chinese culture, but also the embodiment of its inner spirit and aesthetic pursuits, and the two are closely linked together to create a brilliant and unique cultural landscape [2]." The structure, form and usage of Chinese characters demonstrate the unique charm and elegance of ancient Chinese calligraphy art, and record and pass on the aesthetic concepts of Chinese culture, making Chinese characters an important link in the transmission and development of Chinese culture.

2. Overview of Chinese Aesthetics

The most special point of traditional Chinese aesthetics is the mutual integration and penetration of Confucianism and Taoism, not like what previous scholars have said that Confucianism is the beginning of Chinese aesthetics and Taoist aesthetics is a kind of supplement, or Taoism is the beginning and Confucian aesthetics has become a redundant thing in history. Due to the common absorption of Confucianism and Taoism, it was possible to form a uniquely Chinese concept of aesthetics. "Chinese aesthetics is based on the Chinese tradition of Confucianism and Taoism, reflecting the essence of 'goodness', and 'Tao' as the direction of the expression of the abstract realm of 'writing'" [3]. This shows that the ancient Chinese aesthetics into the Confucian and Taoist thought, become the most advanced thought of the Chinese nation, "ancient Chinese aesthetics is the essence of the thought of the aesthetic experience of the Chinese nation" [4].

Traditional Chinese aesthetics focus on nature, the pursuit of "art without art", emphasising that artistic creation should be in accordance with nature, to achieve the ideal pursuit of "unity of man and nature". "The realm of the unity of heaven and man is a realm of harmony between heaven and man, in which the individual is committed to nature and realises the fusion of individual life and the life of the universe [5]." Since ancient times, the Chinese have considered nature to be sublime, which is inseparable from the farming habits since ancient times, the worship of the land and the expectation of a good harvest have formed the closeness to nature. This has led to the formation of the psychological belief that man and nature are one and the same. Chinese aesthetics is through the harmonious coexistence of man and nature in the search for thinking about beauty, the formation of a unique aesthetic sense, laying the foundation for the development of later generations of aesthetics.

3. Historical Trajectory of the Development of Chinese Characters

3.1. Origins and Early Development

The origin of Chinese characters can be traced back more than 6,000 years to the late primitive period, when the ancestors of the Han people began to carve symbols on various artefacts to keep track of events. These symbols may have started out as simple drawings to represent things or behaviours in daily life and were known as "word pictures" or "picture writing". Gradually, these drawings became symbolised, and, because of the departure from their original pictorial form, hieroglyphic Chinese characters were formed. Oracle bone inscriptions, the original form of Chinese characters, were mainly popular during the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, and were named after the turtle shells and animal bones on which they were carved. "As an early form of written record, oracle bone inscriptions played a cornerstone role in the evolution of modern Chinese characters [6]."

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The earliest and mature writing system found in China to date is Oracle bone inscriptions, which are the origin of Chinese characters and the foundation of China's exceptional traditional culture. As the source of Chinese characters, the initial structure of the oracle bone inscriptions shows the image of natural objects, for example, “sun” and “moon” are drawings of the sun and the moon. According to the research of scholars, we can find that the oracle bone inscriptions already possessed the various types of Chinese character structures and had the “four styles” of the traditional “six books”, i.e., pictogram, huiyi, huanyi, and xingyin. Most of its contents are records of the divination of the Yin Shang royal family, reflecting the religion, politics, economy and other aspects of the society of the Yin Shang dynasty.

3.2. The Evolution of Fonts

Jinwen is the script engraved on bronzes from the late Shang Dynasty to the Western Zhou Dynasty, also known as Zhongdingwen or Shikuwen. These scripts recorded social activities such as rituals, commands, and wars, and the characters were complex, rounded, and varied in style. Seal script can be divided into two types: the Big Seal Script and the Small Seal Script, of which the Big Seal Script was very popular from the late Western Zhou Dynasty to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, but due to the division of the lords in different parts of the world, the shape of the characters varied; after the unification of Emperor Qin Shi Huang, who implemented the policy of “writing the same script”, Li Si simplified the big seal style and created the small Seal style, “the perfect line and standardization of the small seal style, so that the text gradually got rid of the pictographic constraints, more symbolic, and really developed into a neat and beautiful rectangular block font” [7]. This balance and symmetry of strokes marked the entry of Chinese characters into a new stage of standardisation.

The origins of the Official Script can be traced back to the Qin Dynasty and reached its peak during the Eastern Han Dynasty, when its structure was both flat and delicate, laying a solid foundation for the art of writing in both ancient and modern times. The Regular Script, which was not prevalent from the Han Dynasty onwards, simplified the style of the Official Script, “The Regular Script is explained in the Dictionary as “square in form, with flat and straight strokes, which can be used as a model”, hence the name Regular Script [8].” Whether horizontally or vertically, it was considered a model character and has been used ever since. Cursive script is stylistically more concise than the official script, and includes three types of characters: zhangcao, jincao, and baocao; the style of running script is between regular script and cursive script and has both the characteristic of being easy to write, as well as the advantage of being recognisable.

The development of Chinese characters has been a process of continuous simplification and standardisation. From oracle bone script to golden script, big seal script, small seal script, official script, regular script, cursive script, and running script, each stage of evolution reflected the social and cultural needs of the time and the laws of script development. As a treasure of Chinese culture, Chinese characters carry the glorious history of Chinese civilisation and will continue to contribute to the development of human civilisation.

4. The Intrinsic Connection Between Chinese Aesthetics and the Development of Chinese Characters

4.1. The Influence of Aesthetic Concepts on the Development of Chinese Characters

The influence of aesthetic concepts on the development of Chinese characters is far-reaching and wide-ranging, which not only shapes the beauty of the form of Chinese characters, but also profoundly influences the direction and connotation of the development of Chinese characters. Since ancient times, Chinese people have looked at the world from a unique aesthetic perspective, and this aesthetic

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sense has permeated every aspect of culture, and Chinese characters, as a carrier of culture, are naturally no exception. The principles of harmony, symmetry and balance emphasised in aesthetics have been fully reflected in the development of Chinese characters. For example, the Chinese character for "goodness" is written in such a way that the top, bottom, left and right sides are of similar size and the shape is the same, so as to achieve a level and coherent appearance in the visual sense. From the earliest hieroglyphics, the shape of Chinese characters has pursued the beauty of intuitive images, outlining the outlines of things through simple lines, such as "lai", meaning wheat in ancient times, and in the oracle bone inscriptions, the upper part of the character "lai" represents the vertical part of the ear of wheat, which is consistent with the characteristics of the ear of wheat. The vertical part of a wheat ear in the Oracle Bone script is represented by the upper part of the character "lai", which aligns with the upright character of the wheat ear.

As history progressed, the Chinese character gradually moved from the hieroglyphic to the abstract, but its aesthetic pursuit did not diminish as a result. On the contrary, the rise of the art of calligraphy has further enhanced the aesthetic value of Chinese characters. Calligraphers have brought the aesthetics of Chinese characters to the forefront using brushwork, structural arrangements, and other techniques. The creation of different styles of calligraphy, such as the ancient simplicity of the seal script, the steadiness of the official script, the neatness of the regular script, and the fluency of the running cursive script, demonstrated the unique understanding and pursuit of the aesthetics of the Chinese characters in different eras and different cultural backgrounds. In addition, the concept of aesthetics has also promoted the expansion of the functions of Chinese characters. In ancient times, Chinese characters were not only a tool for recording language, but also an art form for expressing emotions and conveying thoughts. Literati and writers expressed their emotions and aspirations through writing Chinese characters and incorporated their aesthetic feelings into them.

4.2. The Uniqueness of Chinese Characters as an Aesthetic Carrier

Chinese characters are made up of basic strokes such as dot, horizontal, vertical, apostrophe, and press, which are combined according to certain rules and sequences to form the unique structure of Chinese characters. For example, the character "zhong" in the regular script is symmetrical, balanced and harmonious. The structural balance and symmetry make the Chinese character visually beautiful.

The simplification of Chinese characters has led them to move away from concrete objects and become more abstract and general. In the oracle bone script, "hao" is depicted as a woman half-kneeling and holding a baby. The oracle bone script was the basis for both the gold and small seal scripts, which was then transformed into the modern-day character "hao". In the Shuowen Jiezi (Explaining and Analysing Characters), the Chinese character for "hao" reads, "hao, mei ye, cong nü, cong zi" ("hao" means wonderful, Composed of the characters "nü" and "zi"). The shape of the character does not resemble the image of the oracle bone but is transformed into a "female" instead of a half-kneeling woman, with fewer strokes, it is easier to express the meaning of the character and makes the Chinese character more abstract and symbolic, freeing it from hieroglyphs.



Figure 1: Character of "hao".

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Chinese characters are square characters, each of which occupies a certain amount of space, is square in shape, and is of the same size. This square character structure gives Chinese characters a visual aesthetic of neatness and uniformity. At the same time, when Chinese characters are written, there is a certain proportion and spacing between strokes, between radicals, and between the whole and its parts. For example, the character "hao" (Figure 1), with its narrow left and wide right, and the short right side of the apostrophe next to the character "nü", and the long horizontal part of the character "zi" in the middle of the side of the character "nü", constitutes a harmonious and unified visual effect.

5. Integration of Calligraphy Art and Chinese Aesthetics

5.1. Cultural Connotation of the Calligraphy Art

An important difference between Chinese culture and Western culture is the artistry of Chinese calligraphy and its significance in history. The integration of Chinese aesthetics in calligraphy creates the unique Chinese art of calligraphy, which is distinguished from that of other countries and has a unique national character.

"Calligraphic characters began as "drawings" of the outlines and shapes of natural things [3]." Chinese characters represent images formed by the ancient people based on their observation and understanding of the heavens and the earth through refinement, and the images were given to be associated with words in the language to express certain meanings to become Chinese characters. The Chinese characters are a combination of sound, meaning and action. Calligraphy has evolved from "drawing" to an art with fixed brushwork. For example, the two character forms of Ren in the Shuowen Jiezi (Explaining and Analysing Characters) show a big difference between Ren and today's character forms, the first one being "huo cong shi" ("ren" is sometimes written from the word "shi" in Figure 2). The second character is "cong qian xin zuo" (It's made up of the characters for "xin" and "qian" in Figure 3).



Figure 2: Character of "ren".



Figure 3: Character of "ren".

The script was unified by Emperor Qin Shi Huang, the character ren became similar to the current form, "Ren, kin, from human, from two." "According to the glyph aspect of ren, the left part is a simple symbol of humanity, and the right part is two, which is the relationship between people [9]." In ancient societies, Ren was regarded as a core value in interpersonal relationships, advocating the

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concept of treating people with benevolence and pursuing core coexistence, which can also indicate that the changes in the font were in response to the changes of the times.

The dynamic spirit of Chinese character aesthetics is embodied in the "writing" of Chinese characters, the paradox of freedom and norms of "cursive script before regular script", which gives Chinese characters the "writing" state of growth, and in the "writing" state of the Chinese characters. "This paradox gives Chinese characters a state of growth in which the flow of "brush meaning" and "brush power" is condensed [10]." The art of calligraphy is developed on the basis of the writing of Chinese characters, which is not only the simple writing of Chinese characters, but also contains artistic expression and demonstrates the essence of the calligrapher. For example, the brush stroke in calligraphy is the technique of using the brush to contact the paper, which can be divided into positive, side, smooth and reverse strokes, and these different methods are summarised in the "Eight Sides of the Peak". This way of writing emphasises the flexible use of the brush and is also a high degree of embodiment of the principles of aesthetics. Calligraphy as a unique form of expression, it through the calligrapher to adjust the angle of the brush, showing rich layers and dynamic beauty.

5.2. Aesthetic Performance of the Calligraphy Art

The layout of calligraphy is an important aesthetic expression. Chapter refers to the arrangement of the overall layout of the calligraphic works, including the relationship between words and words, lines and lines, the whole and the local. A good chapter should be well laid out, sparse and dense, coherent and harmonious. In calligraphy, the size, shape, position and number of characters need to be arranged according to the theme and emotion of the work in order to achieve the best visual effect.

Bubai refers to the blank space in a calligraphy work, including the blank space between words, the blank space between lines, and the blank space in the overall layout, etc. Bubai can highlight the theme and create the overall harmony. The white cloth can highlight the theme, create a mood, and enhance the sense of hierarchy and rhythm of the work. Calligraphy chapter of the cloth white includes the spacing between words, the distance between lines and the distribution of chapters and so on. In calligraphy, there are vertical lines and horizontal columns: vertical lines and horizontal columns, which is the most neat and orderly style, in which the front, back, left and right sides are in a straight line, and the centre of each character is symmetrical, showing a neat, even and clear character, mostly used in the writing of Regular Script, Clerical Script and Seal Script.

In the chapter layout is more important to plan in advance on the paper, according to the content written to determine the layout, and the whole article should be one and the same tone, "The Lanting Preface is rich in penmanship, the pen is free to turn, stable in the risk, regular script and grass both, there are thousands of changes, the lines are flowing, the dots and paintings are full of interest, the God and the heart will meet, the heart and the gas, the heart and the hand corresponds to each other, one and the same breath [11]." Just as Wang Xizhi wrote the "Lanting Preface" when the momentum consistently made, the overall style of unity, font size, length, sparseness and so on with each other, to form an integrated aesthetic meaning.

The aesthetics of Chinese characters can be expressed through the art of calligraphy. In the creation of calligraphy, calligraphers fully express the aesthetic characteristics of Chinese characters using techniques such as the intensity of ink and the dryness and wetness of brush strokes, and changes in the thickness of strokes. The art of calligraphy not only pursues the beauty and harmony of character shapes, but also pays more attention to conveying the calligrapher's emotions and mood through ink and brush.

Calligraphy is not only the writing of words, but also the embodiment of the author's emotion, cultivation and temperament "Every word, must be used in a number of ideas, or horizontal drawing like eight points, and hair like seal script; or vertical draw like deep forest trees, and zigzagging like steel hooks; or on the tip of the pole as dry, or under the thin as a needle; or turn the side of the

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momentum of the bird like flying down, or the side of the prismatic shape of the flow of water to [12].” Each word in calligraphy creation contains multiple meanings and ideas, incorporating personal feelings and understanding in calligraphy, expressing their own spiritual and aesthetic pursuits, and giving the works a deep cultural connotation and artistic charm.

6. Conclusion

By analysing the evolution of Chinese character fonts and traditional Chinese aesthetics, the influence of traditional Chinese aesthetics on the writing of Chinese characters is revealed in this study, resulting in the aesthetic form of square characters. Moreover, calligraphy, as an artistic expression of Chinese character writing, is deeply influenced by aesthetic ideas in its unique writing style and chapter layout.

The traditional aesthetic thought in China has profound influence on Chinese characters. In ancient society, Chinese characters were written to record language, and the evolution of Chinese characters can reflect the influence of aesthetic thought. The evolution of calligraphy forms such as regular script and clerical script is not only a change in Chinese character writing, but also influenced by traditional Chinese aesthetic thought.

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