

Brief Talk About the Historical and Humanistic Background of Bagui Calligraphy Style

Hongkun Zhang^{1*}, Zhihan Qin¹

¹ Nanning Normal University of Art and Design, Nanning, Guangxi, China

Email Address

2275658267@qq.com (Hongkun Zhang)

*Correspondence: 2275658267@qq.com

Received: 16 August 2022; Accepted: 13 September 2022; Published: 30 December 2022

Abstract:

“Bagui calligraphy style” was first proposed by Comrade Pan Qi when he talked with Mr. Shen Peng about the history and development of calligraphy in Guangxi. [1] Bagui calligraphers mainly refer to calligraphers who are influenced by the humanistic environment of Guangxi. This paper mainly explains the history of Guangxi calligraphy and calligraphy resources to explain the formation of “Bagui calligraphy style”, such as the seals, bamboo slips, tablet inscriptions unearthed in Guangxi, briefly describing their uniqueness, then we will talk about the current situation of calligraphy in Guangxi.

Keywords:

Bagui Calligraphy Style, Guangxi Tablet Carving, Cong Qizhi, Guangxi Calligraphy

1. The Origin of Bagui Calligraphy: Guangxi Calligraphy and Seal Carving In Qin and Han Dynasties

The history of calligraphy in Guangxi can be traced back to the Qin and Han Dynasties. In the general history of Guangxi we can see that Zhong Wendian once said that in the pre-Qin period, the Xiou and Luoyue peoples in Guangxi had no written language. [2] However, the Qin Dynasty unified the six countries, to rule the whole country easily, it should also unify and popularize written language in Guangxi. Even though there is no record in ancient books about how to popularize written language in Guangxi during the Qin and Han Dynasties, we also can know something about the popularization of written language in Guangxi from the archaeological information. In 1976, the Archaeological Team in Guangxi Autonomous Region excavated Luobowan Tomb No. 1 in Gui County. The Archaeological Team unearthed a piece of “Cong Qi Zhi”, which is 38 cm in length and 5.7 cm in width. The contents of “Cong Qi Zhi” are the list of burial objects, and there are 372 inked texts. The excavation of “Cong Qi Zhi” reflects the side that Guangxi people have begun to use Chinese characters in the Qin and Han Dynasties. The “Bronze Crossbow Machine” unearthed in Gui country Starch Factory in 1955 belonged to the Eastern Han Dynasty, with a length of 11.9 cm and a width of 3.2 cm. There are seven

characters on the weapon, they are “河内工官第廿四”， and the lettering is between Regular script and Official script. And the engraving can reflect the wonderful writing ability. So we can know that Guangxi people have applied Chinese characters to daily utensils according to the text of this ancient weapon.

The history of seal carving in Guangxi can be traced back to the Eastern Han Dynasty. In 1956, a copper seal that looked like a turtle was unearthed in the granary of Gui County. The copper seal is overprinted and there are four characters “丁莫當印”， in it. These four characters are 1.7 cm high and they were written in red color. The most interesting thing is that one of the characters “丁” was very decorative, which can reflect the wisdom of ancient craftsmen in dealing with words.

2. The Infiltration of Chinese Culture in Guangxi During the Southern Dynasty

In Southern Dynasty, especially those areas controlled by the central had little inscription can be survived. Why? Because compared to the Eastern Han period, the Eastern Jin and Southern Dynasty, which inherited the Wei-Jin system, severely banned monuments due to the ban on monuments by Emperor Wu. [3] Although Guangxi is located in southwestern China and has many mountainous areas that lead to transportation difficulties, the unearthed calligraphy materials from the Southern Dynasty are as beautiful as the northern inscriptions. In Guangxi, people found a large number of Title deeds from Southern and Northern dynasties. Such as *Ouyang Jingxi Title deed*, *Qin Sengmeng Title deed*, *Huang Daoqiu Title deed*, *Xiong Yue Titled deed*, *Xiong Wei Title deed*, and so on. These Titled deeds have a very high historical and humanistic value, and the contents can be used to explore the influence of the Chinese Taoist culture on Guangxi during the Southern Dynasty. In addition, these Titled deeds have great value for historical research in calligraphy, and we can learn something about the formal aesthetics, content, and emotions of the calligraphy of the Guangxi people during the Southern Dynasty from the structure of the Chinese characters.

We can get some messages from the “Five Years of Yongming” Title deed (also known as *Qin Sengmeng Title deed*) from the Southern Dynasty. [4] The Title deed is made of talc, rectangular in shape, 17.5 cm long, 11 cm wide and 0.5 cm thick. The Title deed was surrounded by a dividing grid and straight lines, which was inscribed with Chinese characters in regular script and there are seven lines, ranging from 13 to 19 characters per line. This Title deed was unearthed in Yao Mountain, Guilin. There are similarities between the Southern Liang Dynasty’s “Yihe inscription” and the former Qin Dynasty’s “General Guangwu Stele”. Their similarities are the strokes are simple, the font is broad, the font space is spacious, the size is jagged, the lengths are in harmony, the squares and circles correspond, and there is a meaning in clerical script.

These Title deeds side-by-side reflect the penetration of the Chinese Taoist culture in Guangxi. During the Southern Dynasty, the calligraphy of Guangxi already had a sense of writing norms and artistic aspects.

3. The Humanistic Sentiments of Bagui Stone Carvings

The ancient literati and scholars are excited to travel to Guangxi because of its unusual karst scenery, which resembles a fairyland. Additionally, Guangxi’s unique limestone geology is perfect for carving, therefore the ancient people frequently

composed poetry after arriving. Almost every city and county in Guangxi has stone inscriptions, those inscriptions cover a wide range of historical periods and regions. These stone carvings have also inculcated generations of Guangxi calligraphers.

The monument of the official of Qinjiang County, Ningyue County from Sui dynasty, and we can also call it *Ning monument*. It contains the Guangxi people's patriotic sentiments. *Ning monument* is the epitaph of Ning Xuan who was an official in Sui dynasty. The monument commemorates the Ning Xuan and his son's outstanding leadership and military prowess in securing the frontier. The narrative details his valiant actions against foreign barbarians, including fending them off with a small number of men while achieving professional achievement. This monument was found in the 6th year of Daoguang when farmers were plowing the land. The regular script of the monument is strict and similar to that of the Tang Ouyang Xun Huadu Temple Monument. The Guangdong Provincial Government transferred this monument to Guangzhou and now it is treasured in the Provincial Museum. Chairman Mao gave this monument a very high evaluation when he saw it in the museum, and it was identified as a national-level protected cultural relic.

The pottery monument of Ning Daowu in Qinzhou, Guangxi is also can reflect the characteristics of Guangxi's ethnic minorities. It is known as the first pottery inscription for thousands of years because it is the earliest inscription made of nixing pottery found so far, and it highlights the Guangxi ancient people's sense of innovation. We can see something about pottery inscriptions from *Qin county annals* in 34th year of the Republic of China. *Qin county annals* said: "A farmer who lived in the northern of Pingxin village found a huge tomb in the mountain. The pottery monument of Ning Daowu was hidden in the tomb. The pottery monument was four feet high and there is a pottery pot by the side. This monument is engraved with the inscription of the 20th year of the Tang Dynasty." "It was written by Regular script, especially looked as Northern Wei monument script." "There were one thousand and five hundred words in this monument, because of the passage of time, more than 70 words are no longer legible." [5] This inscription has also survived the war against Japan. This monument was collected by Feng Zicai, but during the war, Feng's family fled and this monument was found and destroyed by the Japanese. Now only one-sixth of it exists in the Guangxi Autonomous Region Museum.

Numerous writers of poetry and songs have been inspired by the stunning and enigmatic natural beauty of Guangxi. In the *Record of the Newly Opened Stone Chamber on Duxiu Mountain* of the Tang Dynasty, there is a story about Yan Yannian of the Southern Dynasty singing praises of Duxiu Mountain. He wrote: "No mountains can be compared to the Duxiu mountain, which towers between the city and the country." The great Confucian of the Song Dynasty, Zhang Tree, inscribed "Zhaoyin" in memory of his visit to Yin Mountain in Guilin. At the southern foot of Yu mountain in Guilin, Zhu Xi wrote *There is a Song Jingjiangfu Xinzuo Yu Di Temple Monument*, which records his friendship with Zhang Shu and the pursuit of faith. After that, the literati followed the example of inscriptions, and it became a fashion. In the Song Dynasty, Fang Xinru had a monument inscribed with *Ancient Acacia*, saying: "Yu Mountain is so high and Xiang Water is so deep", with the feeling of finding a soulmate in the world. In the Song Dynasty, Chen Zhengzhong visited Guilin Cave and sang, "The landscape and mountains are very strange, the gods like to live in the cave. Larks pluck out the cave cleverly, five stones make up the rest of the sky" (for details, see Chen Dang's "poem of touring Guilin caves" tablet). The mountains in Guangxi are also called immortal mountains, and there are

literati and elegant scholars making statues to support them, such as the inscription of *Newly repaired five hundred Lohan Buddha statues* and the inscription of *Support for the five hundred great Lohan holy names of the eighteen past generations of Sakyamuni*. In the water cave of Xiangbi Mountain in Guilin, there is another stone inscription of *Lu You's Handwritten Notes*, in which Lu You's perception of life can be read from the poem. There are many similar inscriptions about life perceptions, and the literati in Guangxi were of course much influenced by them. In addition, there is also a calligraphic inscription of the great thinker Wang Yangming, "Pingsi Tian Ji Gong Monument", which records the deeds of Wang Yangming who did not move a single soldier and a single arm to calm the chaos. Wang Yangming's teleology and his thoughts on establishing virtue and speech, and the unity of knowledge and action have also influenced generations of calligraphers in Guangxi.

4. The Unique Bagui Calligraphy Style

It took a while for the Bagui calligraphy style to develop. During the Republican period, several educators such as Xu Beihong, Ma Wanli, Wei Jichang, Lin Banjue and Lei Peihong promoted the development of calligraphy education in Guangxi and laid the foundation for the formation of the Bagui style of calligraphy. After the New Culture Movement, secondary teacher education in Guangxi was prosperous, and teacher education had strict requirements for teachers' ability to write on boards. For this reason, most professional teachers were outstanding artists, they were proficient in calligraphy and seal carving.

In 1937, Xu Beihong organized the Guilin Academy of Arts in Guilin. While emphasizing basic training in painting, Xu Beihong also emphasized the study and training of calligraphy. For calligraphy education, Xu Beihong advocated calligraphers being friends with the ancient people and hard training to improve their skills. In his opinion, the combination of endowment and hard training is necessary; if a person is highly endowed but fails to make friends with ancient people, his calligraphy skill will only be shallow, flashy, or even vulgar. [6] According to Xu Beihong, calligraphy is just as lovely as music. Fools always complicate simple things, and it is bad for development. So now Chinese calligraphy looks more simple than before. Chinese calligraphy is as origin as painting, so it is beautiful. It evolved and became simple, but it's as beautiful as before. Later, it became abstract, just like music. The dots and paintings are as beautiful as the clanging of gold and stone. Xu Beihong was partial to the calligraphy of the Northern Dynasty, and he believed that "the beauty of calligraphy lies in virtue, in emotion, but the shape is used to reach virtue. The shape is sparse, dense, thick and thin, long and short, but it is used to make the turn to declare its feelings." [7] Xu Beihong's view of calligraphy emphasizes the importance of mindfulness, expressing emotions through calligraphy, as Cai Yong's "Pen Theory" says: Different virtues and emotions can also affect one's spirit. Emperor Li Shimin of Tang Dynasty said, "The word has the spirit as its essence, if the spirit is not in harmony, the word has no attitude; the heart is the sinew and bone, if the heart is not firm, the word is not strong and healthy. Xu Beihong's calligraphic character statement also profoundly influenced contemporary Baji calligraphers.

In 1941, Ma Wanli, Yang Taiyang and others established the Guilin Academy of Arts, and in 1960 Ma Wanli was employed by the Guangxi Literature and History Museum. In 1966, Ma was persecuted by the Cultural Revolution and had a difficult life. However, in the face of adversity, he also put his life perceptions into calligraphy and painting, expressing his feelings with ink and brush and expressing his

temperament. Ma Wanli made significant contributions to Guangxi's calligraphy instruction, and he was a close friend of Qi Baishi, Xu Beihong, Zhang Daqian, Huang Binhong, Chen Hunding and others. Just like a window, Mr. Ma Wanli lets more people in Guangxi appreciate the works of the top Chinese calligraphers at that time, and thus raises the aesthetic level.

The modern Bagui calligraphy style reveals a more mature side. Since the reform and opening up, Guangxi has shown its openness and tolerance to the world, and the calligraphers' thoughts are liberated and free as never before. Western learning, fetishism, inheritance of traditions, and innovation have made more people in Guangxi learn advanced cultural ideas and knowledge, so many outstanding and thoughtful calligraphers emerged, and they even took calligraphy as their lifelong research to explore the mysteries of it. There is an example like “Xi Liu Ying”, which was created by Chen Guobin and Zhang Yuxiang. They are also the creators of the “Guangxi phenomenon”, absorbing the advanced teaching methods of the Chinese Academy of Fine Arts and their contemporaries, and making calligraphy education concrete and humanized based on their predecessors. Concretization means that in the teaching of calligraphy, the method of brushwork, the middle method, the method of closing the brush, transformation, mentioning and pressing, the middle and side fronts, square and round, flesh and bone, the structure of the odd and positive, sparse and dense, backward and forward, jagged and wrapped, the psychological, divine and natural meaning of the brush, etc. are deconstructed and digested one by one, forming a complete teaching system from post to creation. Humanization in calligraphy means that they put temperament in a crucial position in the teaching of calligraphy, so they trace their roots to ancient Chinese traditional calligraphy, drawing from cultural treasures such as stone carvings, brick carvings, brief documents, and pottery texts from various dynasties and then learning and creating them, expressing their reverence and understanding of tradition through calligraphy, as well as expressing their emotions through the language of their brush.

National interest in the new Guangxi calligraphy era is growing. In recent years, Guangxi hosts the 10th National Calligraphy Exhibition, the 6th National New Talent Exhibition, the 1st Huang Tingjian Award National Calligraphy Exhibition, the 8th Gui Calligraphy Style Excellent Works to Beijing Exhibition, the Shenmen Seven Sons Calligraphy Exhibition, the National Calligraphy Masters Invitation Exhibition, the annual Guangxi Art Exhibition, etc. Recently, more than 250 authors have become members of the Chinese Calligraphers Association, and the “Bagui Style of Calligraphy” has become a resounding brand of calligraphy nationwide.

The formation of the Bagui calligraphy style is not accidental, which is inseparable from the genetic heritage of Guangxi culture for a thousand years. In the age of the Internet, the sharing of calligraphic resources of various dynasties has become a simple matter, and it is believed that the “Bagui Calligraphy Styles” will become more distinct and mature with the times, and become a distinctive banner in the Chinese calligraphy world, following the mastery of the past sages.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Author Contributions

By studying the Museum of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Zhang Hongkun sorted out the history of calligraphy in Guangxi, and sorted out the historical background of the eight-Guangxi calligraphy style based on the current situation of Guangxi calligraphy. Qin Zhihan sorted out the cultural relics involved in the article, including calligraphy and seal cutting.

Funding

This work was supported by the educational reform project funded by Guangxi Department of Education. The project funding number is: 2022JGB260.

References

- [1] Pan, Q. A Preliminary Exploration of the" Bagui Book Style. The Southern Literary World. 2008, 4.
- [2] Zhong, W.D. Guangxi General History Volume 1, Nanning: Guangxi People's Publishing House, 1999; pp. 99.
- [3] Wang, Y. A Brief History of Chinese Calligraphy, Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2004; pp. 114.
- [4] Cultural Relics Administration Committee of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region: Unearthed Cultural Relics in Guangxi, Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1978; pp. 155.
- [5] Qin County County Annals, 34 years of the Republic of China.
- [6] Xie, L.Y. Research on Calligraphy Education in Guangxi during the Republic of China. Guangxi Normal University, 2015.
- [7] Qin, G.X. A Brief Analysis of Xu Beihong's Book Theory [D]. Central Academy of Fine Arts, 2018.



© 2022 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)