

An Analysis of the Worship of “Xiang” in the Han Dynasty

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Abstract:

The Han Dynasty was a crucial period for the development of Chinese calligraphy. In this period, the evolution of typefaces came to an end, and five typefaces, “Zhuanshu, Lishu, Cao, Xing, Kai”, appeared one after another. The development of Chinese ancient calligraphy typefaces was basically complete until the Han Dynasty. The relative completeness of the characters makes calligraphy begin to pursue the development of artistry. In the Han Dynasty, there were many famous calligraphers and calligraphy theorists, who played a key role in recording and summarizing the characteristics of calligraphy and guiding the development direction of calligraphy art in the Han Dynasty. This paper discusses the phenomenon of the worship of “Xiang” in Han Dynasty calligraphy through the calligraphy theory of Han Dynasty calligraphers. From the evolution of characters, the aesthetic sense of calligraphy, the appreciation of calligraphy three aspects of in-depth discussion of the Han Dynasty calligraphy for cognition of “Xiang”, in order to sum up the phenomenon of art of calligraphy in the Han Dynasty, reveal the influence of the Han Dynasty for the subsequent Chinese calligraphy art concept.

Keywords:

Calligraphy in the Han Dynasty, Art of Calligraphy, Pictograph

1. Introduction

The unprecedented prosperity of calligraphy in the Han Dynasty was the peak period of the evolution and development of Chinese characters. With the completion of the transformation, the official script replaced the small seal script as the official script in the Han Dynasty. Early cursive script, Zhang Cao, then flourished. In the late Eastern Han Dynasty, running script and regular script were gradually formed. [1] This transformation has made the characters further abstract and condensed from pictographs. The figurative beauty of calligraphy has gradually turned to abstract beauty. With the rapid development of modern Chinese characters, calligraphy has completely freed itself from the constraints of pictographs and images. There has been greater space for aesthetic development of calligraphy, and the artistry of calligraphy has been improved unprecedentedly. Although the development of characters has

shifted from the initial pictographic to the higher level of abstract symbols, the formal beauty of calligraphy in the Han Dynasty is still close to advocating “Xiang”.

The concept of “Xiang” in ancient times can be seen in the Book of Changes. It says that Xiang is the general name of all observable objects in the universe reflected in human consciousness. We can simply understand that “Xiang” is the being of everything. It is also said in the Book of Changes that “Xiang can be formed in the sky, or on the ground, and change is visible”. It means that observing the sky, we can see the phenomenon generated by the movement of celestial bodies. Observing the ground, we can see the different forms of objects. What people observe is not only the object itself, but also the phenomenon of material movement. It can be seen that the ancients believed that “Xiang” is not only the static state of the outward view and shape of all things in nature, but also the movement and change of all things. For example, the material state of the sun itself can be called “Xiang”, and the rising and falling of the sun in the east and the changing of the four seasons can also be called “Xiang”. “Xiang” is an almost insurmountable concept in the calligraphy theory of the Han Dynasty. Whether it is the development of writing, calligraphy aesthetics, or calligraphy criticism, it is expounded around “Xiang”.

2. “Xiang”, the Origin of Words

The first Chinese dictionary, Analytical Dictionary of Characters, laid the theoretical foundation for the pictographic characteristics of Chinese characters. The creation of Chinese characters not only imitated from human beings themselves, but also imitated everything outside. He not only explained the specific imitation process of Chinese characters, but also made it clear that the source of the aesthetic feeling of Chinese characters is the natural universe, and the original form of Chinese characters has the basis of beauty. Cui Yuan also made a similar statement in his “Cursive Script”: The creation of Chinese characters arose from Cang Jie, who imitated the signs of birds and beasts to formulate the pictograms of Chinese characters. It is the result of refining and summarizing the objective things, not reappearance, but the performance of human subjective consciousness after simplifying the objective things. This is determined by the fact that Chinese characters need to be used as language tools. This characteristic of the pictograph of Chinese characters has played a decisive role in the production of the art of calligraphy, which is the fundamental condition for the formation of the art of calligraphy. After the establishment of the basic theory that Chinese characters originated from the natural universe, the development of the artistic beauty of calligraphy is naturally inseparable from the natural universe.

It is worth mentioning that in Non-Cursive Script, which Zhao Yi criticized cursive script and tried to curb its popularity, there is this theory: The cursive script is neither derived from the astrological phenomena, nor is it bred by the Yellow River and Luoyang River, nor is it made by saints. It expresses Zhao Yi's dissatisfaction with the further development of the characters from pictographs to abstract symbols. The cursive script breaks away from the figurative expression and pays more attention to expression. This is an important expression of the artistic consciousness of calligraphy in the Han Dynasty, and also an extremely important step in the development of the whole calligraphy art.

3. “Xiang”, the Beauty of Calligraphy

The generation of Chinese characters originates from “Xiang”, and the aesthetic feeling of Chinese characters is also based on “Xiang”. The aesthetic feeling of calligraphy art cannot be separated from “Xiang”. Mr. Zong Baihua, the master of aesthetics, said in his *Aesthetic Walk*: “Chinese calligraphy is a rhythmic nature”. [2] Calligraphy, as an art form based on Chinese characters, is to write rhythm on the basis of Chinese characters and express natural rhythm with lines. Cai Yong said in his *On the Brush*: Calligraphy comes from nature, where there is yin and yang, and where there is yin and yang, there is a dynamic trend. According to the *Book of Changes*, “one yin and one yang are the Tao”. Tao can be translated into the absolute truth in Western philosophy. The two opposite concepts of yin and yang are the core point of Chinese philosophy in expressing the law of contradiction. Everything has two aspects of yin and yang, which complement each other, move on and transform each other, and are in constant motion, forming the nature of everything and its laws of motion. Cai Yong attributed the beauty of calligraphy to yin and yang, emphasizing that the essence of the beauty of calligraphy is the result of learning from nature.

Cai Yong said in his “*On the Brush*”: “the criterion for writing calligraphy, you must have the image of words in your heart. The shape of words is like sitting while like walking, like flying while like moving, like coming while like going, like laying back while like standing up, like sorrow while like joy, like worms eating leaves, like a sharp sword while like a long dagger, like a strong bow while like a hard arrow, like water while like fire, like clouds while like fog, like the sun while like the moon. Only by imitating the natural beauty of every painting can we call it calligraphy”. The core of the above expression is that the shape of calligraphy must be integrated into all aspects of nature. The following series of comparisons are all about the interpretation of all aspects of nature. It is worth mentioning that in this series of comparisons, it also includes people’s emotions sorrow and joy. It further expands the natural universe. People’s emotions and feelings are also part of the natural universe. It further expands the concept of calligraphy derived from the beauty of nature to the level of consciousness, and reveals the characteristics of calligraphy expressing the beauty of natural shape and expression. This is undoubtedly the expression of “Xiang” at a higher level. The end of the above citation is the summary of the whole narrative. It reveals that calligraphy should express its artistic value by creating the beauty of image.

4. From “Xiang” to “Xiang”, the Aesthetic Evaluation Process from Concrete to Abstract And Then Concrete

Zhuang Zi Zhi Bei You said: “There is great beauty in heaven and earth”. The ancients have long understood that beauty cannot be expressed with rational words. However, in the criticism and appreciation of calligraphy art, it is inevitable to convey the aesthetic feelings of the connoisseurs. The expression needs brought by appreciating artistic works are inevitable. Rational and abstract explanations are very limited. Aesthetic feelings can not be expressed clearly through rational analysis. In addition, rational analysis has a very important drawback, that is, it greatly limits the imagination space of readers, and makes art works become rigid text descriptions. The art of calligraphy originates from nature. It is a process from concrete to abstract that integrates all aspects of nature into calligraphy. If the abstract aesthetic feeling wants to be transmitted, it needs to be embodied again by the connoisseur, and express the

aesthetic feeling experienced by the readers with the general knowledge and sense of “Xiang” in human consciousness. Let the reader associate with the “Xiang”, described again. This “Xiang to Xiang” communication method not only perfectly solves the disadvantages brought by rational description, but also fully brings the artistic nature of literature to the extreme. You can not only feel the beauty of calligraphy art, but also appreciate the beauty of words.

In the Han Dynasty, Cui Yuan pioneered the practice of using Xiang to describe the beauty of calligraphy. His “Cursive Script” is also the earliest calligraphy monograph. He used the concept, that the rabbit is frightened and the moment its going to run away with full strength, to describe the cursive script's movement in silence. The particular moment seems to be static, but it contains the beauty of dynamic power. This sentence vividly describes the sense of the rhythm of the power in the cursive script that is condensed to burst out. He also used the concept, that endless scattered pearls though seem unconnected, but they have the same momentum, to describe the cursive script's movement. Although there are few strokes in the cursive script of the Han Dynasty, there is no doubt that the momentum between the characters is continuous. This way of evaluating calligraphy art also has a profound impact on the development of calligraphy evaluation in later generations. For example, in the Qing Dynasty, Ruan Yuan said in his evaluation of Yan Zhenqing's “Seat Contest Posts” that molten gold flows everywhere, which not only reflects the artistic conception of epigraphy in Yan Zhenqing's running script, but also reveals the character of his running script, that are not arrange, and not pretend.

5. Conclusions

This paper discusses the worship of “Xiang” in the Han Dynasty from three aspects: “the formation theory of Chinese characters”, “the aesthetic sense of calligraphy art”, and “the evaluation and appreciation of calligraphy”. The overall characteristics of the worship of “Xiang” in the Han Dynasty are the inevitable result of the law of the development of calligraphy art, and are the inevitable path of calligraphy art and calligraphy theory. The calligraphy theory of the Han Dynasty has played an indelible role in the development of calligraphy in the future. The “pictograph theory” has laid the foundation of Chinese calligraphy, and the “beauty of situation” has defined the direction for the aesthetic sense of calligraphy art. At the same time, the Han Dynasty was also the origin of Chinese calligraphy using “Xiang” to describe “Xiang”.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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