

Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips

The Visual Evolution from Seal Script to Clerical Script and Its Artistic Value

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Abstract

Since the 1950s, the field of Chinese archaeology has seen significant advancements with the unearthing of Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips, hidden underground for over 2,000 years. These discoveries have provided a wealth of data for studying the development of pre-Qin ink writing and its calligraphic impact. The bamboo slips, as a multi-dimensional cultural artifact, hold substantial academic value in calligraphy and have deeply influenced the calligraphic styles of the Warring States period.

Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips is among the earliest ink-written scripts in Chinese archaeology, showcasing the evolution from Seal Script to Clerical Script, which marked early Chinese calligraphy. The use of specific writing tools and techniques not only set the foundational aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy but also played a critical role in the development of calligraphic styles and the establishment of calligraphy as an independent art form.

This paper analyzes the visual and artistic value of Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips, highlighting its role in linking historical and contemporary Chinese calligraphy and its potential influence on artistic and design fields.

Keywords

Calligraphy; Bamboo Slips; Chinese Characters; Evolution

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1. Introduction

As one of the three oldest writing systems in the world, the Chinese character system is the only one that has been in continuous use to this day. Its evolution over the past few thousand years can be traced from the hieroglyphic script of ancient times to the “seal script” of the Warring States period. The evolution of the Chinese character for “fish” (鱼) is depicted in Table 1, where the oracle bone script resembles the actual form of a fish. This pictorial aspect is the most significant distinction between Chinese and Western scripts—each Chinese character resembles a unique figure, rather than a collection of letters. Similar to artistic movements, Chinese characters can be categorized by era and style. Throughout history, each phase of Chinese characters has had a distinct stylistic identity, and even within the same period, regional variations are significant.






				
<i>Oracle bone script</i>	<i>Bronze inscriptions</i>	<i>Seal script</i>	<i>Clerical script</i>	<i>Regular script</i>

Table 1. Evolution of the Chinese character for “fish” (鱼).

Chinese calligraphy is not only a medium for the evolution of Chinese characters but has also transcended the limitations of these characters to become a highly visual and aesthetically compelling art form. The visuality of writing in Chinese calligraphy is akin to the soul in a human being. To detach from this visuality is to disconnect from the essence of Chinese calligraphy (Wang 2018). Chu calligraphy embodies this notion. The term “Jian” (简) refers to characters inscribed on bamboo or wood, while “Chu” (楚) denotes the powerful Chu state during the Warring States period, which was a significant cultural force at that time. Chinese scholars have coined the term “Chu Style” to represent the unique artistic style associated with this state. To paraphrase the French writer Buffon, “Style is the man himself”. The “Chu Style” reflects the artistic ethos of the Chu people.

For millennia, a popular saying has persisted in Chinese folklore: ‘惟楚有材——Only the Chu are talented.’ The surviving documents, materials, and exquisite artifacts of the Chu people to this day all exemplify this assertion; the Chu people did not overstate. Renowned for their intelligence and wisdom, the Chu people embraced an unconventional approach to art, resulting in a rich and diverse artistic style. Chu calligraphy, as a representative art form of the era, embodies the individuality, boldness, and romanticism synonymous with the “Chu Style”.

The article commences with a comprehensive examination of the visual evolution of Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips, tracing its development from

Seal Script to Clerical Script. It meticulously explores the intricate writing characteristics and stylistic nuances inherent in Chu calligraphy. Subsequently, it illustrates the unique qualities of Chu calligraphy through a series of examples, underscoring its pivotal role in the evolution of calligraphic traditions and its enduring inspirational value for contemporary disciplines such as design.

2. Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips - Simplified Seal Script

“笔形——Bixing” is a fundamental concept in Chinese philology, representing the basic unit of seal script writing. Before the Clerical Change, the smallest writing unit in ancient script was commonly referred to as the Bixing, while the post-Clerical Change form, symbolized as Strokes, emerged. It serves as the material basis of ancient characters, denoting the trajectory of the brush from the start to the finish of a character, without lifting the pen from the writing surface. Bixing can be categorized into horizontal, vertical, oblique, and curved forms.

During the Warring States period, there was a shift from limited use of inscriptions to widespread writing on bamboo and silk. This period witnessed changes not only in tools and materials but also in writing practices, notably characterized by “simplification”. Cong Wenjun summarizes this phenomenon as changes in stroke momentum, stroke order, and stroke linkage in ancient texts during this era.

The Bixing in Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips, a cursive style derived from ancient seal script, exemplifies this “simplification”. Examining the changes in the Bixing allows for the identification of patterns in the early stages of the transformation from seal script to clerical script, providing valuable insights into the evolution of Chinese writing.

Comparative analysis between Chinese bronze inscriptions and Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips reveals three main aspects of writing simplification in the latter:

1. Straightening curved Bixing to dissolve hieroglyphic elements;
2. Adjusting Bixing direction to follow stroke momentum;
3. Aligning writing direction with the right hand for smoother handwriting.

The following text will delve into the changes of these three Bixing in the visual evolution process of Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips from Seal Script to Clerical Script.

2.1. Curve to straight, simplify the turn to dissolve hieroglyphic elements

The bronze inscriptions are cast inscriptions, the products of the casting process, still retaining more pictorial elements. According to Duan, “The specific object is represented in the form of a drawing, thus forming the text, and the style of drawing differs according to the object” (Duan 1981: 755). Therefore, bronze inscriptions exhibit more imitative lines, characterized by rounded and coiled strokes, and an abundance of reverse strokes during writing. Subsequently, to facilitate writing on flat surfaces, calligraphers often consciously omitted stroke shapes. A notable example is the distinctive writing of

the Bixing “宀” in Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips, which, following stylistic modifications, was simplified to various forms of the word “人”.

In the Jin script, each curved stroke of the Bixing “宀” contains a turn in the middle, resulting in the entire Bixing “宀” composed of either two straight strokes (a Bixing with a straight square corner in the turn) or zigzag strokes (a Bixing with a rounded turn). However, these two curved Bixing are not very convenient for writing with the right hand. To facilitate writing, calligraphers gradually omitted these curved stroke forms in bronze inscriptions, effectively straightening them and transforming them into the two simple and easy-to-write diagonal stroke forms seen in Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips. This transformation is illustrated in Tables 2 and 3:

Bronze inscriptions										
Regular Script	宀	宣	宝	家	宝	宗	室	宗	宫	家
Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips										
Regular Script	空	宅	室	客	塞	宗	室	定	深	宫

Table 2. The bronze inscriptions for “宀”.

Regular script	Bronze inscription	Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips
		

Table 3. The “室” Bixing transforms from “宀” to “人”.

This indicates that converting curves into straight lines and shortening strokes is a relatively common method of simplifying Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips. The characters of the Shang and Zhou dynasties originated from oracle-bone script. Although breaking away from pictographic characters, the number of phonetic characters increased, with seal script remaining at the core of the writing style. Rounded, coiled, and curved Bixing still retain pictorial elements, as their characteristic is “the style of drawing differs according to the object’s shape”.

During the Bronze Age, when inscriptions and engravings were prevalent, the form of writing largely relied on bronze craftsmanship. Therefore, bronze inscriptions were a stable continuation of seal script, imitating the lines of



Figure 1. Chu calligraphy on Bamboo slips, Zeng Houyi, Suizhou, Hubei 443 B.C.

objects. The emergence of writing on bamboo and silk made holding the ink brush in the right hand the natural choice for convenient writing. Growing awareness of simplification, writing order, and efficiency led to the curved strokes being straightened out first, as they did not align with handwriting habits. Consequently, simplifying strokes by eliminating pictorial elements and straightening and hyphenating them became an inevitable choice in the early days to accommodate handwriting habits. The straightened Bixing, whether horizontal or slanted, marked a significant breakthrough from the vertical style of seal script, allowing later Chinese characters to expand freely from left to right and ultimately transition to horizontal writing.

2.2. Following the momentum of strokes, adjusting the direction of the Bixing (Oblique Bixing)

The concept of stroke momentum is pivotal in calligraphy, encompassing the aerial posture of the ink brush before it touches the surface and the directional trajectory after it makes contact. This dynamic is crucial for imbuing the strokes with power and beauty. Cai Yong emphasized the importance of powerful and uninterrupted brush momentum, stating that weak momentum results in strange and bizarre characters. (Cai 1979: 6)

When holding bamboo slips with the left hand and the ink brush with the right hand, individuals often adjust the strokes to enhance convenience, especially for writing adjacent strokes. This adjustment ensures that the front and back of the strokes dovetail, maintaining the overall balance of the text. In Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips, handwriting often exhibits a low-left, high-right pattern, as illustrated in Figure 1, depicting bamboo slips excavated in 1978 from the tomb of Zeng Houyi in Suizhou, Hubei. This pattern is influenced by the positioning of the slips in the left hand and the ink brush in the right.

Experience has shown that drawing horizontal lines with curves is particularly suitable on a single bamboo slip with narrow space. When the right hand holds the ink brush and draws horizontal lines directly on the surface of the slip, the left side of the horizontal Bixing is often lower than the right side. Consequently, a pattern emerges where the left side of the script is lower and the right side is higher when writing horizontal Bixing. Over time, this pattern becomes a definite trend. The overall shape of Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips tends to be oblique, not only with the originally oblique Bixing but also with horizontally and vertically aligned Bixing, as illustrated in Tables 4 and 5.






Bronze inscriptions											
Regular Script	二	其	王	玉	正	五	言	金	皇	金	义

Table 4. The oblique placement of the horizontal Bixing of Baoshan Bamboo Slips.












Bronze inscriptions											
Regular Script	臣	多	乃	首	言	也	也	月	自	以	也

Table 5. The oblique placement of the U-shaped Bixing of Shangbo Bamboo Slips.

Drawing lines on a single piece of bamboo slip with limited width, diagonal lines exhibit a divergent, outward-looking, and dynamic nature, aiding the calligrapher in expanding brushwork and enhancing the sense of movement. Upon examining various batches of unearthed Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips, the prevalence of oblique Bixing is evident, reflecting the Chu people's preference for this style.

A comparative experiment can be conducted by copying the same character, which is relatively challenging to structure, on a long and narrow bamboo slip using both bronze inscriptions and Chu writing styles. The latter proves to be less fluent in bronze inscriptions but significantly more comfortable in Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips.

However, some bamboo slips, such as one found in the Qinghua Bamboo Slips, exhibit a different style, indicating the work of an unskilled individual. The brushwork appears awkward, resembling a copy of an ancient seal script character. The Bixing is flat and uneven, lacking the spirit and lyricism characteristic of Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips.

The narrow space of a single bamboo slip is unsuitable for writing the slower, heavier lines and more stable characters of bronze inscriptions. Therefore, simplifying the writing of ancient seal script in Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips to accommodate the slips' constraints is an inevitable response to prevailing writing trends.

The phenomenon of oblique Bixing in Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips can be summarized as follows:

One aspect is that the oblique pen forms in Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips originate not only from the text itself but also from the simplification of curved Bixing in ancient seal script. This transformation involves replacing curves with oblique straight lines, rendering them easier to write. In an era of bureaucratic paperwork, simplifying writing would have been the natural choice for every calligrapher.

Another factor is that the oblique placement of Bixing counteracts the adverse effects of overlapping with the vertical fibers of bamboo. The vertical force of the ink brush is mitigated by the direction of the bamboo fibers, resulting in increased utilization of horizontal lines. This enhances friction between the ink brush and the surface of the slip, making writing more robust.

Additionally, writing oblique Bixing on a single, simple form facilitates spreading Bixing from side to side on the limited width of the surface. This expands the character's structure, creating a livelier and more spacious appearance. Over time, this accumulation leads to a gradual shift from the vertical orientation of traditional seal script characters towards a broader and flatter structure. This trend aligns with the later preference for horizontally oriented character forms. Thus, the inclination towards oblique Bixing serves as the precursor to lateralizing the clerical script.

2.3. From Reverse Writing to Forward Writing

Writing is a sequential process that involves following a specific order whenever using a brush. This order, known as writing order, dictates the natural direction of brush movement, aligned with the motion of the right hand and the sequence of strokes. Otherwise, reverse strokes may occur. In his work 'Principles of Right-Hand Writing and Brushwork,' Ping Qifan summarized the physiological mechanism of holding the pen in the right hand and the 'optimal coordination of movement of various parts of the right arm.' This encompasses movements such as left-to-right, top-to-bottom, and both clock-

wise and counterclockwise lines. Additionally, it includes curved lines from top-left to bottom-right and from top-right to bottom-left (Ping 2000). These directions are fundamental to brush writing.

When writing with the right hand, the five directions of line movement—left to right, top to bottom, bottom-left to top-right, top-left to bottom-right, and top-right to bottom-left—are the most natural, habitual, and comfortable directions for moving the brush. Writing in these five directions feels relaxed and enjoyable, constituting forward strokes. Conversely, writing from bottom to top, bottom-right to top-left, top-right to top-left, and top-left to left is strenuous, unnatural, and less smooth, constituting reverse strokes. That’s why modern Chinese writing methods have boldly abandoned the reverse strokes from right to left, top-left strokes, and left-side strokes, while retaining the five most basic forward strokes—left to right, top to bottom, bottom-left to top-right, top-left to bottom-right, and top-right to bottom-left. These five strokes form the foundation of basic strokes in seal script, clerical script, and modern regular script.

In bronze inscriptions, the frequency of reverse strokes is notably high, making them the primary target of simplification in Chu calligraphy on Bamboo Slips. This simplification is evident not only in the transition of writing order from reverse to forward but also at times in their shape and positioning, thus altering the direction or structure of the entire character. In bronze inscriptions, the first stroke of the character “女” (woman) involves a typical reverse stroke, written from right to left. However, in Chu calligraphy, the direction of both the initial and subsequent strokes is changed to a slanted or slant-curved stroke from right to left, which corresponds to one of the five basic directions mentioned earlier. This transition from reverse to forward strokes in bronze inscriptions results in straight lines being replaced by slanted lines for the first stroke, followed by a similar change for the second stroke, tilting the entire character structure, as depicted in Table 6.

<i>“女” in the bronze inscriptions.</i>					<i>“女” in Chu Calligraphy on bamboo slips.</i>				
									
女(大 克鼎)	女(大 克鼎)	女(大 克鼎)	女(大 孟鼎)	女(大 孟鼎)	女(上 博简)	女(上 博简)	女(上 博简)	女(上 博简)	女(上 博简)

Table 6. Comparison of the characters for “女” in the bronze inscriptions and the character for “女” in Chu Calligraphy on bamboo slips.

The characters with a “女” frame, such as “母” (Mother), “毋” (No), and “民” (People), are similarly written in an oblique pattern. While this deviation from writing norms doesn’t align with the later standardized Clerical script’s requirement for horizontal and vertical forms with a smooth center of gravity, the oblique strokes following the character’s momentum become the character’s primary strokes, playing a crucial role in stabilizing its structure. Should these strokes be further adjusted to a horizontal orientation, transitioning into

horizontal strokes, the entire character’s structure would lay the groundwork for its later evolution into the Clerical script writing style, as illustrated in Table 7.

“母” in the Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips.			“毋” in the Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips.			“民” in the Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips.			
									
母 (上博简)	母 (包山简)	母 (上博简)	毋 (新蔡简)	毋 (包山简)	毋 (郭店简)	女 (郭店简)	民 (郭店简)	民 (上博简)	女 (清华简)

Table 7. The strokes of momentum of the characters “母” and “民” in the Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips.

The transition of Bixing direction in Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips from reverse to forward has rendered writing more physiological and convenient. Effectively managing broken or connected Bixing strokes has also been significantly beneficial in breaking away from the rounded shapes characteristic of ancient seal script. This liberation from reliance on objective shapes allows for greater regularity in Bixing and promotes a more disciplined approach to Bixing combinations.

In summary, “After the Warring States period, Chinese characters transitioned from pictorial line structures to strokes that accommodate right-hand brush handling, moving from left to right, top to bottom. Subsequently, they passed through the Qin and Western Han dynasties, ultimately transitioning from seal script to clerical script based on the Qin script” (Zhao 2020: 4). Therefore, the above three points are not only characteristic of Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips but also an indispensable segment of Chinese calligraphy history. With its unique style and writing pattern, Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips serves as a testament to the “evolutionary process” from seal script to clerical script, representing one of the most prominent chapters in the history of calligraphy.

3. The Artistic Value of Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips

As mentioned earlier, the uniqueness of Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips lies in the infusion of romantic subjectivity by the Chu people in contrast to the rigid strokes of traditional seal script. Through their writing, the Chu people vividly expressed their aesthetic views, characterized by the soft and vigorous lines evident in the characters on bamboo slips. Valuing beauty and advocating for a carefree and liberated lifestyle, the Chu people conveyed these ideals through their writing on bamboo slips, influencing the aesthetic perceptions of subsequent generations regarding writing. This persistent pursuit of the beauty of writing laid the groundwork for calligraphy to emerge as an independent discipline in the arts. The pursuit of textual beauty has influenced the aesthetic sensibilities of generations of Chinese people for thousands of years, continuing to the present day, where Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips



Figure 2. The exterior façade of the Changsha Bamboo Slips Museum.

continues to be present in various contexts. The following sections will briefly outline the artistic value of Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips through several case studies.

3.1. Bamboo Slips and Calligraphy as Disciplines (Calligraphy Education)

Calligraphy today transcends mere artistic expression; it encompasses various disciplines, including calligraphy history, appreciation, and education, all of which enjoy widespread popularity. As a quintessential element of traditional Chinese culture, calligraphy has become deeply ingrained in the daily lives of Chinese people. Many primary and secondary schools offer calligraphy education as a mandatory subject, and throughout China, numerous calligraphy-themed museums have been established to promote calligraphy education. One such institution is the Changsha Bamboo Slips Museum, located in Changsha City.

Established in 2002, the Changsha Bamboo Slips Museum stands as China's premier modern institution dedicated to the collection, preservation, research, and exhibition of bamboo slips. Its collection comprises over 140,000 bamboo slips dating back to the Three Kingdoms period of the Southern Wu Dynasty, unearthed at Changsha Zoumalou in 1996, as well as more than 2,000 bamboo slips from the early Western Han Dynasty discovered in 2003. Beyond their significance in calligraphy research, the contents inscribed on these bamboo slips hold profound importance in illuminating the history of Changsha City during the third century, the Wu Kingdom, and Chinese history as a whole (Fig. 2).



Figure 3. The exterior facade of the Shenzhen Library.

Of particular note is the museum's architectural design, which integrates bamboo, the primary material of bamboo slips, as a defining element. Bamboo is seamlessly incorporated into the exterior façade of the building, resembling a canvas, with bamboo plantings thoughtfully integrated throughout the structure. The design of the museum's logo also pays homage to bamboo slips, featuring vertically arranged characters reminiscent of the writing style found on bamboo slips. Positioned on the columns to the right of the building, this design element reflects the ancient practice of writing from right to left and top to bottom.

In addition to the Bamboo Slips Museum, there are many cities in China that have calligraphy museums. One notable example is the Xi'an Chinese Calligraphy Art Museum, established in 1989 as the first specialized museum dedicated to calligraphy art in China. Serving as a crucial component of calligraphy education, calligraphy museums bear the responsibility of showcasing and disseminating calligraphy culture. This has given rise to a new discipline known as Chinese calligraphy exhibition studies.

3.2. Bamboo Slips and Calligraphy as Design Elements

Similar to the architectural façade and logo of the Changsha Bamboo Slips Museum, the shape of bamboo slips and the characters written on them have inspired many designers. Their influence is evident in architectural, decorative, and brand logo designs. As depicted in Figure 3, the exterior design of the Shenzhen Library incorporates the appearance of bamboo slips. Neatly arranged vertical lines form a cohesive pattern reminiscent of an unfolded bamboo slip scroll, perfectly complementing the theme and function of the library.

The emblem of the 2008 Beijing Olympics stands out as a quintessential example of logo design, depicted in Table 8. Its most striking feature is the human-shaped “京” character, representing Beijing, the host city of the 2008 Olympics. The font of this emblem unmistakably draws inspiration from the seal script style of the “京” character. As illustrated in Table 8, the designer condensed the structure of the “京” character into three parts: the head, torso, and legs of a human body. Moreover, the designer skillfully infused dynamism into the typography, imbuing the character “京” with the semblance of a running figure. This dynamic representation symbolizes Beijing’s warm embrace of the Olympics and its athletes. The seamless fusion of the pictographic essence of Chinese characters with modern design principles is executed with exceptional finesse in this emblem.

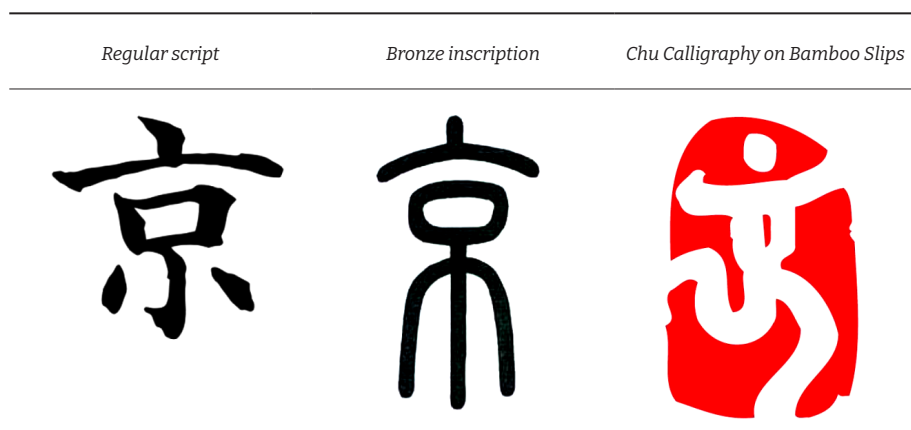


Table 8. From the character “京” to the emblem of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Another example is the iconic logo design of Coca-Cola. The four Chinese characters of “可口可乐” not only resemble the original logo in appearance but also closely match the pronunciation of the English version. Furthermore, the meanings of the Chinese words “可口” (tasty) and “可乐” (happy) not only remain intact but also reinforce the brand’s identity. The Chinese logo design of Coca-Cola can be regarded as one of the most successful and representative examples of foreign brands localizing in China (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. The American and Chinese logos of Coca-Cola.

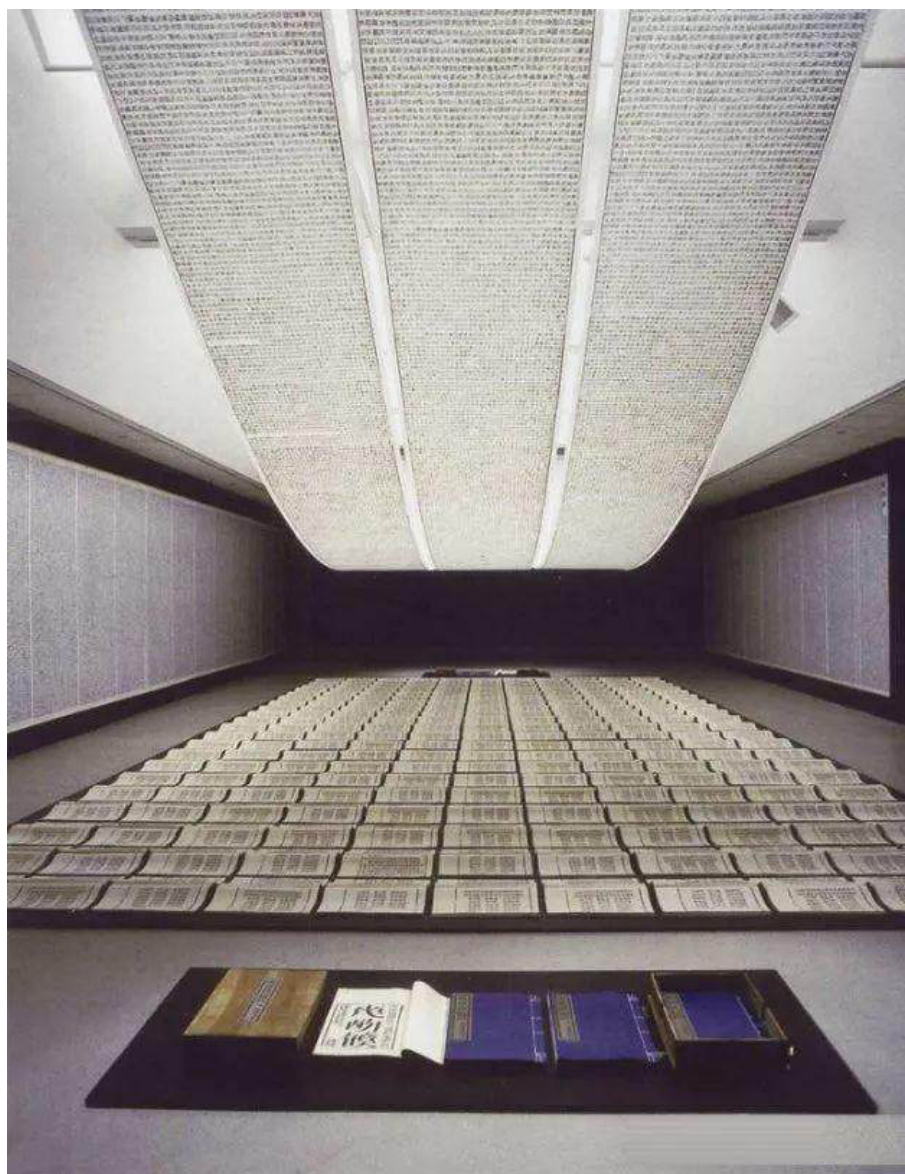


Figure 5. Xu Bing's artwork "A Book from the Sky" created between 1987 and 1991.

3.3. Interweaving of Bamboo Slips and Calligraphy with Art

Toshio Takeuchi pointed out in the "Encyclopedia of Aesthetics" that "calligraphy is a unique art form, particularly in East Asia, notably China and Japan." In the West, "calligraphy" is primarily concerned with the execution of ordinary handwriting, emphasizing clarity and legibility, thus focusing on efficiency and aesthetics. However, Eastern calligraphy differs significantly, extending beyond the choice of tools, such as pens and brushes.

The *Dictionary of Chinese Reverse Words* defines "calligraphy" as "the art of writing characters, specifically referring to the art of writing Chinese char-

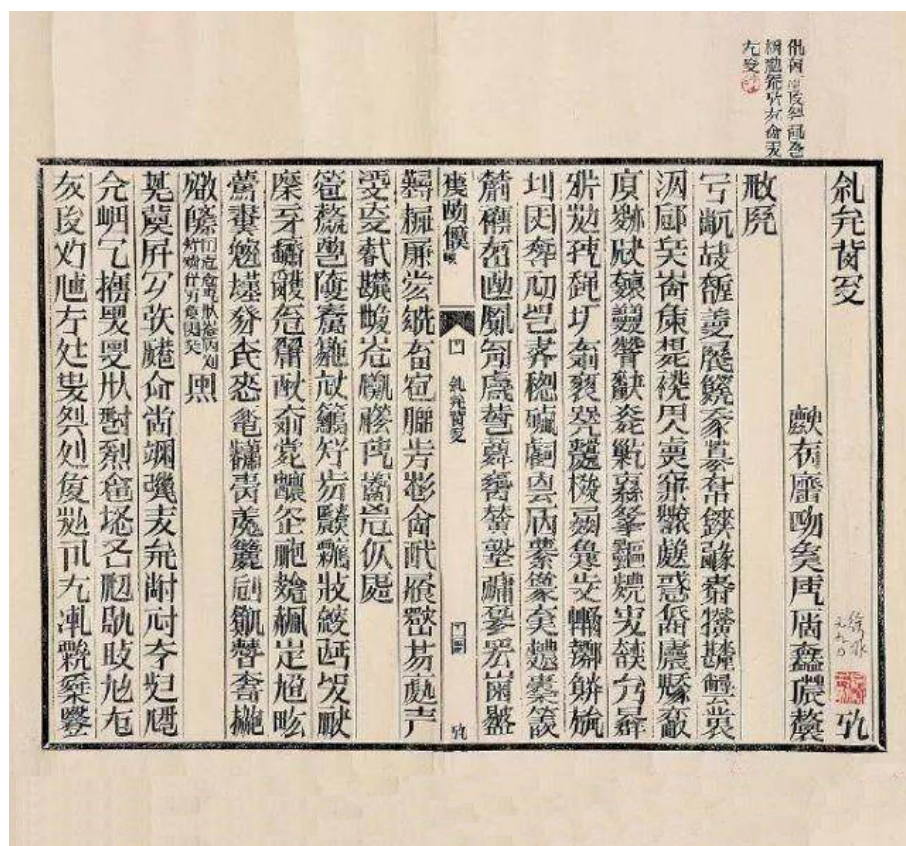


Figure 6. Partial view of Xu Bing’s artwork “A Book from the Sky,” created between 1987 and 1991.

acters with a brush”. Calligraphy established itself as an independent art form millennia ago, maintaining its significance in Chinese art to this day. Nevertheless, in the contemporary art world, where traditional calligraphy is highly valued, many remarkable artworks have emerged that incorporate calligraphy as a central element.

One such example is Xu Bing’s artwork *A Book from the Sky*, created between 1987 and 1991. Xu Bing devised over four thousand new Chinese characters based on existing ones and utilized letterpress printing to produce volumes and scrolls spanning several tens of meters (Fig. 5 and 6).

Xu Bing described his work “A Book from the Sky” as follows: “It’s a book that attracts you to read but rejects you from entering. It has the most complete appearance of a book, but its completeness lies in the fact that it says nothing, much like a person spending years solemnly and earnestly doing something meaningless. ‘A Book from the Sky’ is full of contradictions”.

These words appear readable but are actually unreadable to anyone, serving no communicative purpose. This piece adopts the traditional display format of calligraphy art, yet it delivers a powerful impact to viewers with its utterly meaningless content and exceptionally striking presentation. It stands not only as a work of calligraphy art but also as a thought-provoking contemporary artwork.

4. Conclusion

By changing curved strokes into straight ones, reverse strokes into forward ones, and flat strokes into slanted ones, the pictographic elements of ancient seal script have been significantly weakened. Particularly, the abandonment of the wrist-twisting writing method in ancient seal script has enhanced the horizontal support sense of the writing form, and the strengthened horizontal support sense of character form has led to a trend towards square characters, facilitating the gradual transition of Chinese characters from vertical to horizontal forms. This simplification holds significant importance in accelerating the evolution from ancient seal script to clerical script. As Zheng (2013) stated, “It freed character forms from the constraints of depicting objective things, initiating a process of symbolization, while laying the groundwork for horizontal, flat, and vertical square Chinese characters”. Therefore, the change in stroke patterns in Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips represents an important step in the comprehensive transformation of ancient calligraphy and a true harbinger of clerical script reform.

However, the clerical reform in Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips remains merely a simplification of writing style rather than an evolution of ancient textual structures. Strictly speaking, the simplification of writing style does not truly break through or liberate the structure of seal script; it remains fundamentally seal script rather than clerical script. The simplification of writing forms reflects phenomena rather than patterns of evolution in writing forms, and the simplification of writing style does not fundamentally shake the essential attributes and patterns of seal script. In summary, there are many factors contributing to the transition from seal script to clerical script, including calligraphers, materials, tools, techniques, writing environments, contemporary writing standards, and modes of text dissemination and communication. These are all crucial factors promoting the transition from seal script to clerical script. During the era when bamboo slips were prevalent, the significance of the simplification of Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips cannot be overlooked. Without the simplification of ancient seal script writing in Chu Calligraphy on Bamboo Slips, the subsequent transition to clerical script in Qin script would not have been as timely and smooth under any circumstances.

For millennia, throughout the transition from pictographic to square characters, the significant impact of writing simplification on the evolution of Chinese characters has been unmistakable. Moreover, the Chu people’s pursuit of beauty, as evidenced by their freehand writing on bamboo slips, profoundly influences the trajectory of character development and, by extension, the aesthetic sensibility of the Chinese populace. Through diverse mediums such as art, design, and culture, this influence enriches the spiritual landscape of modern society.

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