

Chinese Character Design Presented in Pictograph and Symbolism at the Beginning of Signifying Search

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Abstract: Chinese characters are the carrier and symbol of Chinese culture. In the process of visual conveyance, more and more people are paying attention to the application and study of Chinese characters design. This paper mainly aims to analyze and explore the Chinese characters in terms of pictograph and symbolism. It illustrates Chinese characters' features of graphical visualization and conceptualizes in the sense of symbolism; it elaborates Chinese characters graph implication from the perspective of their ideogram; it sheds light upon the innovation and adornment of Chinese characters from the perspective of their symbolic analysis; it explores the symbolism of Chinese character in terms of the signifier and signified. It is applied in the design of visual conveyance. Therefore, Chinese characters have an impact and revelation on the development and innovation of the visual conveyance design. Moreover, it shows the importance and significance of Chinese characters in the era of pictures of interpreting.

Keywords: Chinese characters, pictograph, symbolism, gene, visual conveyance.

1. The Generation, Evolution and Development of Chinese Characters

With a long period of development and evolution, Chinese characters have become mature and standard. A lot of words formation methods appeared in Oracle period, among them pictograph and ideogram accounted for the vast majority. The main elements of Chinese characters were graphics and symbols. However, with the weakening of direct graphic character, the symbolism of Chinese character was strengthening. The main features presented by the Oracle Bone Inscriptions were as follows: 1. the form, strokes and writing were not fixed; 2. the direction to write was different, from left to right or from right to left, making it rather difficult to read; 3. the strokes were fine and hard, and most of them were party pen instead of round pen.

To the late Shang and Zhou dynasties, words began to be engraved on bronze vessels. In the ancient times, copper was named "Ji Jin", so words written on bronze vessels were called "Characters of Jin". As "Zhong"(a cup without handle) and "Ding"(an usually three-legged ancient Chinese cooking vessel) were the most famous bronze vessels, "Characters of Jin" was also known as "Bronze Inscriptions". Compared with Oracle Bone Inscriptions, bronze inscriptions is a great progress. Bronze inscriptions written on bronze vessels were rich in images and explicit in meaning and here are its main characteristics: 1. Most of the strokes were curve, thick and natural. The characters tended to be neater and neater. 2. The structures of characters were powerful and plain, and they became more consistent, beautiful and delicate. 3. The styles of calligraphy were flexible and various.

The Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States witnessed a great development of characters, during which seal characters came into being. At first, they were called Large Seal Script, and its real artwork generally considered to be "Ancient Proses on Stones." According to historical records, in early Tang Dynasty ten drum-like stones with inscriptions were found in Chen cang(now Baoji, Shanxi Province), which were called "Ancient Proses on Stones." These characters were different from Oracle Bone Inscriptions from the perspective of structures, but quite similar to Large Seal Script. The structural characteristics of Large Seal Script are as follows: 1. The lines approached perfection, even and soft. 2. The

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structure was neat, laying a foundation to square Chinese characters.³ There were almost no variant forms on the same implement.⁴ The strokes were numerous and inconvenient to write. Large Seal Script revealed that the forms of Chinese characters were on the basis of square pattern, coordinating to the world view of "hemispherical dome cosmology" advocated by Chinese ancestors.

The Qin Dynasty saw the birth of Small Seal Script. In the early stage, it was merely used among the officials, and the characters used in folk were named "Cursive Script". The characters of the Cursive Script were straight in writing style, simple in strokes and convenient in writing. Emperor Qin Shi Huang encouraged people to use "Cursive Script", thus a certain scale formed. As time went by, Clerical Script came into being. Clerical Script dated back to Qin Dynasty and became popular in Han Dynasty. Therefore, Clerical Script was also called "Han Clerics". In Clerical Script, the pictographic character vanished, which make Chinese character lose picture colors and become pure signal tool to communicate. From the comparison between Seal Script and Clerical Script, we can know that: the structures were from round to square; the lines from curve to straight; the strokes from complex to simply.

Evolved from clerical script, the Regular Script was straight in line, square in structure, convenient in writing and symbolic in meaning. The calligraphy was based on the so-called "the Eight Strokes of Yong" proposed by Zhang Huaiguan in Tang Dynasty. The Chinese character "Yong"(simplified Chinese "永") contained the eight basic strokes of Chinese character, namely: dot, horizontal, vertical, hook, pick, left falling, right falling, horizontal turning and vertical turning. All of the strokes embodied the decent, orderly and harmonious cultural philosophy of Chinese people as well as their spirit of tolerance and designing philosophy. To write "Yong" well is to grasp the intrinsic essence of Chinese characters. The structure of Regular Script is associated with such basic formation of words as quadrangle and rectangular lattice, and it is related to the ancient Chinese land system "well-field system".

2. The pictograph of Chinese character

2.1. The features of pictograph of Chinese characters from the perspective of pictographs

It can be found that Chinese characters have the nature of pictograph in terms of style and structure by analyzing historical changes and development. How can we understand the pictograph of Chinese characters? First of all, hieroglyphic purely utilizes pictograph as Chinese characters that resemble the representatives in appearance. Generally, pictographic characters are firstly found as Chinese characters. We concretely sketch the external characteristics of the objects we try to explain by using lines and strokes of Chinese characters. Therefore, pictograph of Chinese characters designates the characters form as well as the characters meaning and voice. If we combine one character with others, we will have different meanings, different voices and different feelings. Consequently, pictograph of Chinese characters have relationships with graphs and signs.

Chinese characters based on pictograph differs in phonetic alphabets from other countries. For these countries, they group different letters to convey meaning, while Chinese characters are figuratively showed that through strokes. In ancient times, we abstractly outline the object to get the pictograph And It resembles and then evolves to Chinese characters. In terms of the origin of the characters, most of national characters in the world originate in pictograph of the nature. One legend said that God dispersed people on purpose who create Babel Tower to depart their mundane life by using one language, God messed up their language, made people far away from each other and people couldn't create the tower. Many nations in the world began to take the path of alphabetization after undergoing pictographic characters. This is the reason why characters changes for a long time.

Pictograph designates and also describes the shape of the object. Xu Shen mentioned in WORD AND EXPRESSION: "Pictograph firstly draws out the object to convey its meaning according to its shape.". The so-called "convey the meaning according its shape" describes its natural shape of the object with circumbendibus method. The pictographic characters are painterly and the characters have direct and transparent revelation in the course of reading. For an instance, characters of inscription on oracle bones like "Ri" (simplified Chinese "日") and "Yue" (simplified Chinese "月") resemble the red sun moving and the crescent moon rising. The character of inscription on oracle bones like "Ri" is expressed vividly with its outer shape like the outline of the sun and the one stroke inside like one point in the sun. The conversation between

Kohei Sugiura and Zheng Bingkui pointed out pictograph of the characters. Like the character "Qi"(simplified Chinese “气”) in ancient times, on one hand it evolved from the shape of cloud in the sky and on the other hand, it showed unseen vitality concealed in the nature. Its ancient shape is three fierce strokes arranged vertically, symbolizing the sky, the medium altitude and the earth(the three layers of the atmosphere). Therefore, the left side of the upper stroke goes up, while the right side of the bottom one goes down. The three strokes have a changeable situation with wandering charm by only changing their models, thus forming the shape of "Qi" formed dropping from the sky.

2.2. The pictograph of Chinese characters from the perspective of understanding meaning

Ideogram is the combination of different characters to form another new character. Ideogram characters, made up of two or more independent pictographic characters, combine the shape and the meaning of the character to convey a new meaning. Ideogram characters is more pictographic because they are made up of two or more pictographic characters, which people can clearly understand by directly reproducing some objects and states of motion in the nature. Zuo Anmin mentioned in The Explanation "The construction of ideogram characters can be included in three types to clearly convey the pictograph of ideogram characters."

1) Ideogram of the same shape.

It means ideogram characters with two or more pictographic characters of the same shape, showing the figurative nature of the pictographic characters. For instance, the character of "Miao"(simplified Chinese “淼”), means a lot of water and "Zhong" (simplified Chinese “众”) means many people. The upper part of the character "Zhong" of inscription on oracle bones is "Ri"(simplified Chinese “日”) and the bottom part depicts a lot of people, which means many people standing under the sun. In slave society, the original meaning of "Zhong" was "agricultural slaves" and then designated the ordinary people because for those people working in the farmland against the heated sun, they must be slaves. Therefore, this construction approach expands the scope of its original meaning to attain pictograph.

2) Ideogram of the different shapes

It means ideogram characters with two or more pictographic characters of the different shapes, which kind of characters account up most of the ideogram characters. This approach of construction lies in capturing a dynamic or state situation in life and then combines the pronunciations the pioneers had analysed to convey the meaning people want to express, tactfully a combination of pictographic characters. For example, the character "Mo"(simplified Chinese “莫”), the original character for the character "Mu"(simplified Chinese “墓”), shows the sun falls down in the grass, which means it is dark.

3) Ideogram with group explanation

It means the method of construction with two or more non pictographic characters to convey its meaning through the combination of pictograph. For an instance, the character "Ka"(simplified Chinese “卡”) is made up of the character "Shang"(simplified Chinese “上”) and the character "Xia"(simplified Chinese “下”); the character "Jian" is made up of the character "Xiao"(simplified Chinese “小”) and the character "Da"(simplified Chinese “大”); the character "Leng"(simplified Chinese “楞”) is made up of the character "Si"(simplified Chinese “四”) and the character "Fang"(simplified Chinese “方”); the character "Song"(simplified Chinese “嵩”) is made up of the character "Shan" and the character "Gao"(simplified Chinese “高”).

2.3. The pictograph of Chinese characters from the perspective of symbolization

The evolution of Chinese characters from pictograph to abstraction made the scripts visualized, and the meaning symbolized. The symbolization of Chinese characters designed in the pictograph characters are manifested by turning the characters into the picture elements. Through the art dealt of the whole pattern of the character, and the ingenious combination of concrete graphics and the abstract strokes, the character style has been shaped into "the visualized scripts", which is in half- word and half- figure, representing the great creation. There have been two forms in the process of the visualizing the characters: the visualization of the entirety and part. The former has regarded the character as a whole by mixing the outside framework of the characters and the inside structure of the graphs. By this way, the character style could not only present the visualized word meaning, but also constitute an enjoyable picture. The visualization of part refers to

embedding the graphs related to the character meanings into the individual strokes of the characters. Through the marvelous conflict between the original strokes of the characters and the embedded graphs, the character meaning could be presented vividly and directly.

There are various design formations of symbolization of character meaning in Chinese folk, which make Chinese people feel the charm of the combination of Chinese characters and pictures. The Chinese people have created different types of Chinese characters based on pictures in the course of folk customs. The ordinary people have invented new pictographic characters by combining basic elements of Chinese characters with flowers in the nature, story plot of people and objects and auspicious meaning. These characters are beautiful in style and vivid in image. For an instance, the character "Shou" in "Zhushou", the character "Xi" when Chinese people marry and the twelve Chinese zodiac designs in Chinese folk art of paper cutting. These pictographic characters are usually utilized by the ordinary people as a symbol of folk activity and communication method widespread.

3. Symbolism of Chinese characters

3.1. Meaning of the symbol

As the general vocabulary, a symbol represents some kind of thing or expresses some kind of significance. On one hand, a symbol is an object, action, or idea that represents something other than itself; on the other hand, a symbol is concluded to the "signifier" and "the signified" by Saussure. "The signifier" means the form of the linguistic symbol which indicates one thing; "the signified" means the content of the linguistic symbol, and it is the value and the function resulted from the process of symbol representing things. Correspondingly showing the form and the meaning of symbols, this two are correlative and contrastive. In this way, man names everything in the world. Man can "feel" things from the form, while know things from the meaning.

3.2. The signifier and the signified of the symbol

The signifier shows the form or the direct representation of some kind of thing while the signified explains the meaning of the thing. Take the rose for example, Man can see and smell the flower, which is the signifier while the signified is love. Thus the symbol of rose showing love is created. From the view of the Chinese characters design, the signifier shows the external structure, and the signified makes the new explanation on the base of eliminating the scientific linguistic meaning. The word "green" itself is the signifier, the signified means the peace and the life in social life, passing in the traffic signal, and the quietness of the spring. "Green" can be felt as the color, while it is meaningless itself. However, once it is defined as one meaning and is generally acknowledged, it becomes a symbol. So the signified of the Chinese character is the new meaning formed in people's life. Then we can combine the signifier and the signified smartly to form new symbols and to pass on to other people.

3.3. The abstract significance of symbolism in Chinese character design

Each language has its own style and characteristics in the font. Thus we can judge the language from the elements of the font which we can regard as the symbol of the language. Once we see a number of strokes, we could estimate which kind of character style or language it is, including Chinese character. For example, when we see the elements of a Chinese word without completeness, we still know it is Chinese symbol. So in the process of designing, we can start with the analysis of the signifier and the signified of the word, then reunited it to new meanings and forms without violating the nature of Chinese character structure. For example, It is more lively and acceptable to replace the element (simplified Chinese “艹”) of the Chinese word "Sun"(simplified Chinese “笋”) with the real thing - bamboo without changing the stroke. Besides, we can combine the signifier with the other signified of "Sun" to show other meanings. It is the arbitrariness of symbols. This style of design which breaks the square form of the Chinese character has been used in many hotels in HongKong and Taiwan. It gives people a new knowledge of Chinese character, makes it more interested, captures the sense of speed which people can accept, and makes it more lively. And it perfectly shows the symbolic of Chinese character.

4. Conclusion

In the above, we talked about pictograph and symbolism of the Chinese characters. We can see the pictograph and symbolism of the Chinese characters are moving towards a new spiral point. From the point of the development of modern visual conveyance design, visual conveyance and design of Chinese characters will become more intuitive and simple, and it makes it easy to convey information or communicate with others with the simplicity of the semantic nature of the graphics and symbols. Therefore, we should stand at a new height and level to re-interpret the artistic design of Chinese characters. In visual communication design, we can give the Chinese characters new connotations from different angles, and make it new image and intention. Also, it is a good way to show the pictographic nature and meaning of the Chinese characters. As an ancient and elegant visual language, the Chinese characters have exhaustive design innovations in the modern visual conveyance direction. We should make Chinese characters more simple and intuitive in a way of new thinking, and it enables people to grasp quickly the information and culture to be conveyed.

5. References

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