

# Discussion on Features of Form and Arrangement of Lines and Evolution of Calligraphic Style in Inscriptions on Bronze Ware of Western Zhou Dynasty

Shuai Wang

School of History and Culture, Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, 710062, China

**Keywords:** Western Zhou Dynasty; inscription on bronze ware; features of form and arrangement of lines; evolution of calligraphic style

**Abstract.** The form and arrangement of lines, calligraphic style and ornamentation, and shape and structure of inscription on bronze ware are all external expression forms, and their development law is one of basic elements used in appraisal of collection. On the basis of existing research, this paper attempts to explore some new perspectives for the purpose of reflecting the evolution of calligraphic style in inscription on western Zhou bronze ware in a more objective and clear way, and the form and arrangement of inscription chirography are also fundamental work made in studying on evolution rule.

## Introduction

As the core role of Western Zhou ritual system, the bronze ware can be regarded as externalization of ideology to some degree; due to the policy change in politics, economy, thoughts, culture, and religion, it is certain that there exists difference in form and arrangement of lines and features of calligraphic style for different dynasties. Most of inscriptions on bronze are made by ancient people to keep a record of events or express the emotion; later, with popularity of simple volumes, the inscriptions become ware manufacturers' name for convenience of inspecting ware quality. The chirography of inscriptions on bronze ware in Shang and Zhou Dynasty is generally big-seal style, which is kind of mature calligraphic art. The inscriptions in different period have different chirography and also bring people different artistic sense. The inscriptions on bronze ware start from late of Xia Dynasty, and the inscriptions which appear on vessel at the earliest time are solid alignment pattern. The production and development of inscriptions are closely related with the production and development of Chinese characters, and forging technology of bronze ware.

There is a development process for the attention which the academic circle pays to research on evolution of chirography of Western Zhou inscriptions on bronze ware. Guo Moruo, Tang Lan, Ma Chengyuan, Qiu Xigui, Zhu Fenghan, Zhang Zhenlin, and other scholars all have involved the evolution rules of chirography of Western Zhou inscriptions on bronze ware in related works; however, the research related to this aspect is still not systematic.

By the end of the beginning of 2014, we have totally collected 1,310 clear and recognizable Western Zhou inscriptions on bronze ware; according to vertical and horizontal space of character arrangement, size, shape, side structure, and writing force and trend of single character, we can carry out typology analysis on above inscriptions, and the inscriptions can be specifically divided into 2 classes (Figure I and II).

Class A: This class of inscriptions generally have fat and sharp characters. According to shape, trend, and posture of single character, this class can be divided into 3 sub-classes.

Type Aa: The single character has high pictographic degree, with rectangular character shape and mainly inclined and arbitrary posture. Although the sharp at beginning and end is obvious, the form is unsophisticated with many curves, and most of flexures show circular bead. According to vertical and horizontal space of character arrangement, side structure, writing force and sharp form, this type can be further divided into 3 forms.

Form I: There are totally 166 inscriptions of form I. The whole form continuos the mainstream style of inscriptions in late Shang Dynasty; few character patterns are similar to the pattern of oracle

inscriptions of 𠂔 group in the period of King Wuding in Shang Dynasty, and most characters are fat, and the strokes at 2/3 of left-falling stroke and right-falling stroke become thick. The calligraphic style is not regular, the space between characters is arbitrary, and the side structure is sometimes loose or sometimes tight. The specimen can be seen in Tian Wang Gui (Collections, 04261).

Form II: There are totally 69 inscriptions of form II. The sharp of starting and end stroke is slightly round, the chirography becomes thin, the space between vertical characters becomes regular, and the side structure of characters tends to be tight. The specimen can be seen in Xian Ding (Collections, 02749), Xiao Chen 音速 Gui (Collections, 04238), etc.

Form III: There are totally 47 inscriptions of form III. The space between vertical characters becomes regular, the strokes are uniform and thin, the size of single character is similar, the side structure is tight, and most of characters are inclined. The specimen can be seen in Qi Zun (Collections, 05983), etc.

Type Ab: The shape of character is slightly rectangular, the form of characters is similar to that of type Aa, but the form of this type of characters is slightly thin with many straight strokes and upright posture. According to vertical and horizontal space of character arrangement, side structure, writing force and sharp form, this type can be further divided into 4 forms.

Form I: There are totally 81 inscriptions of form I. The space between characters is arbitrary, and the distribution is sometimes loose and sometimes tight; the vertical space between characters of partial inscriptions is regular with many straight and smooth strokes; few characters have slightly inclined posture, with different character pattern; the side structure is still not reasonable, but it is more regular than that in type Aa form I. The fat strokes at left-falling stroke and right-falling stroke are obvious, but the sharp at the character end is round. The specimen can be seen in Li Gui (Collections, 04131).

Form II: There are totally 71 inscriptions of form II. The horizontal and vertical space between characters have been pull open, and the horizontal characters have regular arrangement. The single character has positive posture and similar size; the fat stroke still exist, but they become thin; there are more straight and uniform strokes, which shows a new style. The specimen can be seen in Da Yu Ding (Collections, 02837), Zuo Ce Qiong You (Collections, 05407).

Form III: There are totally 132 inscriptions of form III. The calligraphic style is regular, and the horizontal and vertical characters have regular arrangement; few inscriptions have boundary. The side structure is tight and stable, the size of single character is regular, and partial characters are rectangular. Compared with form II, the strokes become more uniform, thin and straight, and the fat strokes great decrease and generally appear at the link. The specimen can be seen in Jing Ding (Collections, 02720).

Form IV: There are totally 30 inscriptions of form IV. The character arrangement is slightly messy than that in form III, and the overall calligraphic style is hasty. The character form becomes rectangular; although the strokes are still uniform, some verticle strokes are winding; few strokes include fat strokes, which mainly exist at the juncture of horizontal and vertical strokes. The specimen can be seen in Hu Ding (Collections, 02838).

Type Ac: Compared to type Aa and Ab, although this type of inscriptions have thick strokes, there are many straight or arc strokes, and many fat strokes; the character form is rectangular, and the posture of character is unscrupulous. According to vertical and horizontal space of character arrangement, side structure, writing force and sharp form, this type can be further divided into 3 forms.

Form I: There are totally 30 inscriptions of form I. The space between characters is arbitrary, most of characters have fat strokes, and the sharp at character end is more obvious than that in type Aa form I (we call it as “large sharp); for example, the corner of lower stroes of Chinese character “令” is sharp corner; the side structure is loose, the single character has different side, and partial sides have inclined posture. This form continuos calligraphic style of Xiao Zi 王子 You (Collections, 05417) in late Shang Dynasty. The specimen can be seen in Tai Bao Gui (Collections, 04140).

Form II: There are totally 29 inscriptions of form II. The space between vertical characters is regular, the single character is more upright than that in form I, the side structure becomes tight, the

fat strokes are obvious, but the sharp of left-falling stroke and right-falling stroke is weak. The specimen can be seen in Zhao Zun (Collections, 06004), Rong Gui (Collections, 04241).

Form III: There are totally 17 inscriptions of form III. The space between characters becomes more regular, the strokes become thin, the fat strokes decrease, and the sharp is round. The specimen can be seen in Xiao Chen Bu Ding (Collections, 02581).

Compared class A chirography with “Bo Zhe style” and “Yin Shang style”, there are more differences than similarities. Superficially, the class A inscriptions have many fat strokes and sharp, which is similar to “Bo Zhe style” and “Yin Shang style”; however, actually, only Aa I, Aa II, Ac I, and Ac II are similar to those styles, and the change has happened in Aa III and Ac III. The characters such as “唯”, “隹”, “𦨇”, and “彝” of type Aa have high pictographic degree, and most of their postures are inclined and arbitrary; the starting and end sharp is obvious. The most important features of type Aa of inscriptions include many curve strokes, circular bead at flexure, and long character form. The features of type Ac include thick strokes, many straight or arc strokes, obvious sharp of partial strokes, upright and foursquare character form; their form is shorter than that of type Aa; their posture can be called “magnificent”, but there is still a changing process in the space between characters, side structure, thickness of strokes, and sharp of fat strokes. The type Ab of inscriptions are specific with both fat strokes and sharp, the character form is rectangle and the posture is positive; although their character form is similar to that of type Aa, the strokes are slightly thin with many round strokes at flexure, and most of horizontal and vertical strokes are straight strokes, which makes the vertical and horizontal arrangement of characters of type Ab more regular than that of type Aa and Ac.

From the period of King Kang and King Zhao in Western Zhou Dynasty, the new change has happened in calligraphic style, and the change is mainly reflected at regular arrangement of characters, thin strokes, and similar size of single character. The popular styles at this stage include Aa II, Aa III, Ab II, Ac II, and Ac III, etc.

The period of King Mu and King Gong in Western Zhou Dynasty is a stage in which the Western Zhou inscriptions show a diversified development, and the popular calligraphic styles in this period include Aa III, Ab III, and Ba I, and the previous Aa II, Ab II, and Ac II rarely continue.

Class B: Compared with class A, this class of inscriptions basically have no fat strokes and sharp. According to character form and posture, it can be divided into 2 sub-classes.

Type Ba: Most of character forms are upright and foursquare, and the side structure is tight. According to vertical and horizontal space of character arrangement, character size, and stroke form, this type can be further divided into 3 forms.

Form I: There are totally 37 inscriptions of form I. The space between characters is regular, the character form is rectangular, the size of single character is not completely consistent, the characters with many strokes have large shape, and partial strokes are not uniform with many arc strokes; there are many round strokes at corner, the external surrounding side of characters such as “匱” and “畐” is oval. This form is similar to Ab III form, but the fat strokes and sharp of left-falling and right-falling strokes are rare. The specimen can be seen in Shi Qiang Pan (Collections, 10175).

Form II: There are totally 270 inscriptions of form II. The space between characters is regular, but the arrangement of characters of some inscriptions is slightly irregular and it is even out of boundary. The character form is square; the size of single character is regular, and partial characters are hasty. The posture is positive, and the strokes are uniform and full with many straight strokes; the arc strokes decrease, with many bending strokes at corner; the side structure is tight. The specimen can be seen in Bo 簋 Fu Xu (Collections, 04438), Ni Zhong(Collections, 00060-00063), etc.

Form III: There are totally 237 inscriptions of form III. The horizontal and vertical arrangement of characters is regular; as for partial inscriptions with boundary, the single character is uniformly arranged in the boundary; the character form is regular and elegant, and the side structure is tight with many round strokes at corner; the strokes stretch and show a water flowing form (similar to wave pattern); the end of vertical strokes or left-falling and right-falling strokes slightly falls towards both sides. The specimen can be seen in Ji Fu Hu (Collections, 09721), and Guo Ji Zi Bai

Pan (Collections, 10173).

Type Bb: Most of character forms are rectangular, and the posture is inclined, which shows that the calligraphy is hasty. The side structure is loose, with great difference with type Ba type. According to vertical and horizontal space of character arrangement, character size, and stroke form, this type can be further divided into 2 forms.

Form I: There are totally 64 inscriptions of form I. The vertical and horizontal arrangement is not regular, with many straight strokes; there are many blending strokes at corner, the side structure is loose, and the single character has different size. This form has inherent relationship with Aa III and Ab IV in terms of chirography. The specimen can be seen in 高Cong Xu (Collections, 04466), etc.

Form II: There are totally 30 inscriptions of form II. The space between characters is more regular than that in form I, and the side structure is tighter than that in form I; the single character has similar size, with many blending strokes; there are many round strokes at corner; the strokes are uniform, and end of vertical strokes or left-falling and right-falling strokes slightly falls towards both sides. The specimen can be seen in Liu Nian Diao Sheng Gui (Collections, 04293).

Compared type Ba with type Bb, the character form of type Ba is more upright and its characters have tighter side structure, but the inscriptions of type Bb look more hasty and loose.

From the period of King Xiao and King Yi in Western Zhou Dynasty, new change has happened in chirography, and the change is mainly reflected at uniform horizontal and vertical arrangement of characters and uniform and full strokes. The popular styles at this stage include Ab IV, Ba II, Ba III, Bb I, and Bb II, etc. The arrangement of characters of Ba II and Bb I form is slightly irregular, and some of characters are even arranged out of boundary; the posture is still positive, the strokes are uniform and full, with many straight strokes and few arc strokes; there are many blending strokes at corner. We think that Ba II and Bb I form have inherent relationship with Aa III and Ab IV in terms of chirography, and the time approximately continues in the period of King Xiao, King Yi, and King Li. As for Ba III form, the vertical and horizontal arrangement of characters is regular; as for inscriptions with boundary, the single character is uniformly arranged within boundary; the character shape is elegant, and the side structure is tight; there is also a kind of chirography similar to Qin characters in early Spring and Autumn Period, such as Guo Ji Zi Bai Pan (Collections, 10173), and the time approximately continues in the period of King Xuan and King You. As for Bb II type, the space between characters is more regular than that in Bb I type, with many blending strokes; there are many round strokes at corner; same as Ba III, the end of vertical strokes or left-falling and right-falling strokes often falls towards both sides, and the time approximately continues in the period of King Xuan.

Through our preliminary classification, the chirography development of Western Zhou inscriptions on bronze ware approximately undergoes 4 stages: the 1<sup>st</sup> stage can be called “Yin-style continuation period”, the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage can be called “Zhou-style germination period”, the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage can be called “Zhou-style consolidation period”, and the 4<sup>th</sup> stage can be called “Zhou-style establishment period”. Actually, these 4 stages can be further combined as 2 stages: the earlier stage refers to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stage, and it continues from King Wu and King Cheng to King Zhao and King Mu; the late stage refers to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> stage, and it continues from King Mu and King Gong to late of Western Zhou Dynasty; in late stage, Western Zhou inscriptions have completely established its style, and finally result in evolution and formation of seal and official script style.

Reference books: 1. Tian Wang Gui (Collections, 04261); 2. Xiao Chen 訣 Gui Inscriptions (Collections, 04238); 3. 走蟲 Gui (Collections, 04266); 4. Li Gui (Collections, 04131); 5. Da Yu Ding (Collections, 02837); 6. Jing Ding (Collections, 02720); 7. Hu Ding (Collections, 02838); 8. Tai Bao Gui (Collections, 04140); 9. Zhao Zun (Collections, 06004); 10. Xiao Chen Bu Ding (Collections, 02581); 11. Shi Qiang Pan (Collections, 10175); 12. Bo 簋 Fu Xu (Collections, 04438); 13. Jin Hou Su Zhong (New Collections, 870); 14. Ji Fu Hu (Collections, 09721); 15. Guo Ji Zi Bai Pan (Collections, 10173); 16. 高Cong Xu (Collections, 04466); 17. Liu Nian Diao Sheng Gui (Collections, 04293).

## Acknowledgments

This paper is: 1. major project of national social science fund of Year 2012 (the 3<sup>rd</sup> batch): classification and study on unearthed Western Zhou inscriptions on bronze ware (Ref. No.: 12 & ZD138); 2. central special fund for basic scientific research operating expense of colleges and universities of Year 2010 (Ref. No.: 2010ZYGX008).

## References

- [1] Guo Moruo, Research on Inscriptions of Bronzes in Yin & Zhou, People's Publishing House, 1954.
- [2] Tang Lan, On Inscriptions of Bronzes in Years of King Zhao of Zhou, Research on Palaeography (Volume 2), Zhonghua Book Company, 1981.
- [3] Ma Chengyuan, Chinese Bronzes (Revised), Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 2003.
- [4] Qiu Xigui, Summary of Philology, Commercial Press, 1988.
- [5] Zhu Fenghan, Ancient Chinese Bronzes, Nankai University Press, 1995.
- [6] Zhang Zhenlin, On Signs of Times on Bronze Inscriptions, Research on Palaeography (Volume 5), Zhonghua Book Company, 1981.
- [7] Qichuan Long, Classified Research on Oracle Bone Inscriptions, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2011.
- [8] Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Collection of Inscriptions on Bronzes in Yin & Zhou (Revised), Zhonghua Book Company, 2007.