

The Development and Influence of Seal Script of Han Dynasty Inscriptions

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Abstract

The Han Dynasty was the great unification dynasty in history after the Qin Dynasty. Since the Han Dynasty inherited the Qin system, the seal script of the Han Dynasty developed continuously based on inheriting the Qin Small Seal Script. With the progress of social productivity, the Official Script gradually replaced the Seal Script in the Han Dynasty, but the Seal Script did not disappear completely; instead, a special line of development arose under the influence of the Official Script. Through the study of seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions, this paper understands that the practical function of seal script of inscriptions has been weakening under the influence of clerical script, but the aesthetic value has been increasing day by day. Moreover, there were new artistic innovations in the context of the development of the diversification of inscriptional forms, and its emphasis on social role, cultural status, and the presentation of an aesthetic style that had a profound impact on later generations are worth studying.

Keywords: Han dynasty, Inscriptions and seal script, Aesthetic value, Status influence

1. INTRODUCTION

The Han Dynasty was a key period in transforming Chinese characters from ancient to modern scripts. With the development of social productivity, the official script gradually took over the position of the seal script. The seal script is no longer used as a daily writing script in society, but it did not leave the stage of history during the Han Dynasty and had its unique development line. The author has taken the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions as an object of study because it is an important part of the Han Dynasty seal script. It accompanied the development of seal script in the Han dynasty, and not only is there a considerable amount of it, but it also presents different aesthetic characteristics. Through the compilation of documents related to the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones, we attempt to analyze the status and functions, aesthetic characteristics and artistic value of the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones, and elaborate on its historical status and influence. Current relevant literature materials include "the seven-volume History of Chinese Calligraphy" (《中国书法史七卷本》), which focuses on the three-thousand-year history of Chinese calligraphy and summarizes the artistic stylistic characteristics as well as the aesthetic features of each dynasty's calligraphy; "the Complete Collection of Chinese Calligraphy"(《中国书法全集》), edited by Liu Zhengcheng(刘正成), contains calligraphic works dating back to the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, and has four editions: seal cutting(篆刻), expound(论着), appendices(附录), and addenda(补遗);" The Qin and Han Seal

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Script"(《秦汉篆书》) explores the process of formation, development and transformation of the seal script and its influence in the context of Qin and Han culture; The "Interpretation of Names"(《释名》) contains a total of 1,502 articles on names and ceremonies, which gives a glimpse of the general situation of names and ceremonies at that time; the "Treatise on Ancient Chinese Stone Carvings"(《中国古代石刻论》) edited by Zhao Chao (赵超) is a more comprehensive work on ancient Chinese stone carvings; The "Han Stele Collection" (《汉碑集释》) edited by Gao Wen(高文) concentrates on organizing the stele literature of the Han Dynasty, providing a historical basis for future researchers; the "General Theory of Stele Literature" (《碑刻文献学通论》) edited by Mao Yuanming(毛远明) introduces the form and style of stele inscriptions, the existing situation of stele inscriptions, the main contents of stele inscriptions, and comprehensively elaborates the importance of stele literature to today's society; the "Complete Collection of Han Stele"(《汉碑全集》) edited by Xu Yuli (徐玉立) covers 285 kinds of topiaries of frontal inscriptions that have been passed down during the two Han dynasties. From the above review of the literature related to the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones, we can see that there is a wealth of research material on the seal script of the Han Dynasty. Although there are some studies on the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones, most of them are partially sorted out in a larger scope, or some of the relevant literature does not directly elaborate on the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones in a systematic way. However, it seems that there is relatively little literature on the direct and systematic study of the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones. Therefore, the author attempts to analyze the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones in a more systematically, and discusses the calligraphic theory and artistic value of the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones in detail through literature analysis and fieldwork. Literature analysis method: The collected relevant literature was analyzed and studied, and was organized and analyzed by reviewing writings and literature. Field research method: The author conducted field research on the existing seal script carved stones, inscriptions and tablets, in order to facilitate the supplementation of images and documentary materials that could not be collected. Comprehensive analysis method: The analysis was conducted by synthesizing various related knowledge systems such as history and archaeology to summarize objective and credible conclusions. The Han Dynasty was not only a crucial period in China's long history, when the feudal system was gradually completed, but also an important stage in the evolution of writing and the development of calligraphy. During this period, the development of calligraphy was characterized by the coexistence of a variety of calligraphic styles and their mutual influence. As the social and economic prosperity developed, the modern script gradually took over the status of the ancient script, and the art of calligraphy gradually moved towards a path of conscious development. As an important member of the Han seal system, the Inscriptions Seal Script inherited the writing techniques of the Qin Seal Script, and under the influence of the "Official Script", its practical function was gradually marginalized, but under the reaction of the "Official Script", the aesthetic expression became more important. With the progress of social productivity, the form of stele was established and perfected, and the expression of seal script of inscriptions became broader, which not only contributed to a new artistic achievement of seal script in the Han Dynasty, but also had a profound impact on later generations.

2. THE PROMINENCE OF AESTHETIC VALUE IN THE PROCESS OF GRADUAL MARGINALIZATION OF THE PRACTICAL FIELD

The development of calligraphy cannot be separated from the support of aesthetics. During the reign of Emperor Wudi (汉武帝), the Confucian school paid particular attention to the aesthetics of enrichment, which can be seen in the large number of inscriptions and tablets that emerged, which presented an aesthetic that was constantly reinforced. Against this backdrop, the art of calligraphy in the Han Dynasty developed like never

before, prompting the aesthetic development of calligraphy. Cai Yong(蔡邕), a famous calligrapher in the Eastern Han Dynasty, said in his book "The Theory of the Pen"(《笔论》): "A book is a book that spreads out. If you want to write a book, you must first disperse your mind and let your emotions run wild. The book first sits in silence and meditation, at will, the words are not spoken, the breath is not full of breathing, sunken and dense, as to the supreme, then there is no good"¹(书者，散也。欲书先散怀抱，任情恣性，然后书之。夫书先默坐静思，随意所适，言不出口，气不盈息，沉密神采，如对至尊，则无不善矣), Cai Yong(蔡邕) believed that calligraphy was an emanation and expression of temperament, and that good works could only be written if the intention and sentiment were first released, so the aesthetic sentiment of the people at that time also contributed to the development of calligraphy. With the progress of productivity, the seal script has played more of a role of graphic beautification, breaking the previous hierarchy and evolving into a highly decorative script. The literary value and aesthetic role it covers are expressed in various carriers, thus allowing the seal script to shine in terms of decorative beauty. Seal script has a special significance and status in the development of Han calligraphy, and its development has been a tortuous and innovative one. In reaction to the "official script", the seal script developed in a special way, transforming its practical function into an aesthetic one, and was often used on special and important occasions. For example, many inscriptions on Eastern Han inscriptions are written in official script, with few seal script inscriptions. On the one hand, the reaction of the position of the main body of the official script makes the seal script play a decorative role for the whole inscription to a certain extent, and then the inscriptions of the stele fuse the practicality and aesthetics of the seal script, presenting a diverse expression of the seal script on the stele; the other hand, with the evolution of Han Dynasty scripts, the writing of seal script also changed accordingly, as the versatility of the lines of seal script led to a new line of development of seal script for Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones, favoring space and line changes, which complemented the style of carriers.

3. ARTISTIC INNOVATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DIVERSIFIED DEVELOPMENT OF THE FORM OF INSCRIPTION STONE CALLIGRAPHY

As a part of the seal script of the Han Dynasty, the inscription stone seal script was written in the same way during the development of the inscription form, due to the richness of the style of the carrier and the different roles. Against this background, the inscription stone seal script also presents diverse stylistic features. In terms of how the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones is presented on various carriers, they have their own aesthetic characteristics, followed by the layout of shapes within the range, so that the overall calligraphic features and the characteristics of the form are perfectly blended. The formation of this situation was both a development of social productivity and an innovation in the art of calligraphy. In this section, the author will elaborate on the artistic innovation of seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones. First of all, in the early Western Han Dynasty, when " stele " (碑) was not yet available, carved stones were always used as a vehicle for people to remember things. Zhao Chao(赵超) describes that "stone is a natural material closely related to the history of human development. At every stage of human social development, stone has served mankind directly or indirectly in various forms," This proves that stone writing has been continued since ancient times. During the Western Han Dynasty, the seal script was no longer the main writing style, and productivity development led people to choose the convenient official script, so there was a fusion of seal and official script during this period. In the middle and late Western Han Dynasty, there were still traces of seal script among the carved stones with the meaning of clerical script. Although the carved stone seal script lasted for a short period of time, it represents the writing style of seal script in the early Han Dynasty. In terms of structure, the early engraved seal script was clearly influenced by the Qin style, and the style remained the same as the vertical style of the Qin small seal script, as shown in Table 1. In the middle and late periods, the

structure of carved seal script is square and flat, as shown in <Table 1-2>.

Table 1. Style of vertical style of seal script in early engraved stones



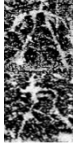
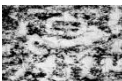


Name of the tablet	Example word	Structure
" Carving of a Stone for the Longevity of the King of Zhao in the Han Dynasty "	“丙”、“寅”	
" The Inscription on the Stone Carved in Front of Huo Qubing's Tomb "	“司”、“空”	
" The Carved Stones of the North Wall "	“天”、“九”	

Table 2. Middle and Late Carved Stone Seal Script in a Flat Square State

Name of the tablet	Example word	结构
" The Stone Inscriptions in the Middle Hall of Guangling "	“百”、“册”	
" The HuangChangshi of Western Han Tomb in Juye Red Soil Mountain "	“寅”	
" The Tomb of Yupingdayin Feng Junru "	“郁”、“平”	

In terms of lines and strokes, the lines of the early engraved seal script are rougher in texture compared with those of the Qin small seal script, and square-fold strokes appear, as shown in <Table 3>. In the middle and late periods, the meaning of the official script is horizontal, and the number of square-fold strokes increases, as shown in <Table 4>.

Table 3. Early engraved stone seal script sprouting square-fold strokes

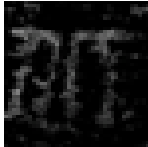
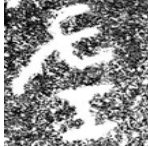

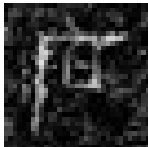


Name of the tablet	Example word	Structure
" Carving of a Stone for the Longevity of the King of Zhao in the Han Dynasty "	“北”	
" The Inscription on the Stone Carved in Front of Huo Qubing's Tomb "	“左”	
" The Carved Stones of the North Wall "	“所”	

Table 4. Middle and Late Carved Stone Seal Script with Obvious Square Fold Strokes

Name of the tablet	Example word	Structure
" The Stone Inscriptions on the Tomb of the King of Chu, Turtle Mountain, Xuzhou "	“石”	
" The HuangChangshi of Western Han Tomb in Juye Red Soil Mountain "	“中”	
" The Carved Stones of the Mausoleum of King LuXiao "	“四”	

Under the influence of the "official script", the carved seal script presents a mixture of seal and official script, a new development for the Qin Dynasty carved stones. Although the number of carved seal script excavations is relatively small, the time span is relatively short, and the style of writing is not very different, it represents the writing style of early seal script and carries the cultural connotation and aesthetic interest expressed by people at that time. Secondly, in the Eastern Han Dynasty, under the influence of Confucianism and the development of iron smelting industry, there was a large number of inscriptions, and the form of monument was established and perfected, not only the style of "BeiChuan"(碑穿), but also the style of

"ShiQue"(石阙), which was both the beginning and the end of the art of ShiQue calligraphy in the Han Dynasty. The status of seal script on inscriptions is special, and it has developed innovatively in terms of aesthetic and artistic presentation in the context of the diversification of inscriptional forms, although it is in the same vein as the inscribed stones of the Qin Dynasty.

The seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones is not only an inheritance and development of the culture of the ancients, but also the rapid development of the productive forces of Han Dynasty society, which led to the diversification of carrier forms and the enrichment of the stylistic features and aesthetic interests they present, and the innovative development driven by various factors in Han Dynasty society, and the artistic values they contain are worth treasuring for future generations.

4. THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF THE PREVIOUS AND FUTURE GENERATIONS IN THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SEAL SCRIPT

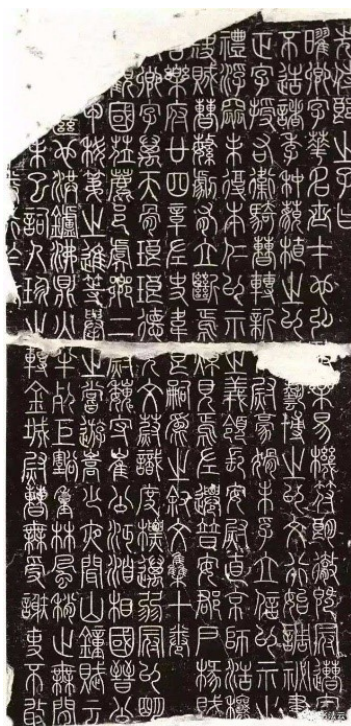


Figure 1. San Fenji

The development of culture has been nurtured and developed based on his previous generations. Initially, there was a certain habitual use of seal script, which in a certain sense showed people's inheritance of ancient scripts until the Han Dynasty. From the analysis of the carriers of seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions, we can understand that whether it is the early engraved stone seal script, or the seal script of stele engraving and stele amount in the Eastern Han Dynasty, they are all inherited from the Qin seal script at first. Later, as the production capacity progressed, the "official script" and the form of inscriptions were developed, and the aesthetics of the Han dynasty were incorporated and appeared to the public. From its initial practical function to its later aesthetic expression, the seal script of the Han Dynasty underwent an important transformation from rigorous to striking, from a serious official script to a conscious pursuit of artistry, which not only had great significance at that time, but also provided a rich source for later generations to take the seal script from. Li Yangbing (李阳冰), as a master of seal script, has the reputation of being "one of the most ancient after Li

Si"(李斯之后的千古一人). He and Li Si(李斯) are known as the "Er Li"(二李), because Li Yangbing pushed the seal script to the peak of calligraphy after the Han Dynasty. Li Yangbing's seal script is not only an inheritance of the Qin and Han seal script, but also under the influence of the Tang dynasty's "Shangfa"(尚法), it was developed in tandem with the social atmosphere and prosperous economy of the time, reflecting the characteristics of the "Tang Shangfa" (唐尚法)era. The reason for the diversity of Li Yangbing's seal script style is that he initially studied Li Si's seal script and followed Li Si's rigor in writing the seal script, perfectly inheriting Li Si's technique of making seal script, expressing the lines with perfect force and starting a generation of precedents in brushwork. His rounded brushwork was largely influenced by the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones. For example, Li Yangbing's representative work of seal script, "San Fenji" <Figure 1>, was heavily influenced by "Yuan An Stele"(《袁安碑》) and "Yuan Chang Stele"(《袁敞碑》), which together inherited the symmetrical structure of the Qin seal script, and employed a rounded starting and rounding brushwork, making the overall seal script ebullient and rounded. As Sun Guoting(孙过庭) said, "The seal script is gentle and fluid."²(篆尚婉而通) It is evident that Li Yangbing's seal script has reached new heights of attainment precisely because he has acquired the essence of the seal script and has continued to inherit and innovate it, forming the temperament of the seal script of the Tang Dynasty.



Figure 2. The Records of the BaiShiCaoTang

After Li Yangbing, Deng Shiru(邓石如) and others were deeply influenced by the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones. As a world-renowned calligrapher, Deng Shiru initially copied the best works of the major calligraphers of the Qin and Han dynasties, with particular emphasis on the seal script of Han dynasty monuments(汉代碑额篆书), and then, because of his unique insight into the official script, the combination of seal and official script strokes also appeared in his writings on seal script. Deng Shiru inherited the strengths of Han Dynasty inscriptions and steles, and added the brushwork of the official script, so that his seal script characters are both round and square, breaking the dull and neat shape. Deng Shiru described his experience of learning seal script in his "A Record of the Seal Script of Wu Yu Wan Bai Shanren"(《吴育完白山人篆书双勾记》): "I took "Guoshan Shike" and "Tianfa Shenchen bei" to make its air, "Kaimu Shique" to make it simple, "Zhifou ershibazi" to end its god, "Shiguwen" to apparate its essence, "Yiqi markings" to exhaust its changes, and Learning the style of Han Dynasty monuments."³(于是以《国山石刻》、《天发神讖碑》作其气，《开母石阙》致其朴，《之罘二十八字》端其神，《石鼓文》以鬯其致，彝器款识以尽其变，汉人碑额以博其体。) Deng Shiru initially studied the seal script under "Er Li", but later he came into contact with and seriously studied the monument " San Gong Shan"(《三公山碑》), " Tianfa Shenchenbei"(《天发神讖碑》), and the Han seal script tablet(汉篆碑额), etc. He enriched the brushwork of the seal script and incorporated the brushwork of

the official script, breaking the uniform single brushwork. Liu Xizai(刘熙载) said in his "ShuGai", "People in the Han Dynasty wrote more official script and used less seal script, while the overall square flatness of the seal script is limited to the two shique inscriptions of "Shaoshi" and "Kaimu", which are elegant and systematic"⁴ (汉人书隶多篆少, 而篆体方扁.....唯《少室》、《开母》两石阙铭, 雅洁有制.....)Deng Shiru drew on the seal script of the Han Dynasty inscription stones and strengthened the writing style of the seal script to create his own distinctive style of seal script, especially the "The stone inscription of Kaimu Temple"(《开母庙石阙铭》), which had a great influence on Deng Shiru's seal script in terms of its posture and brushwork characteristics. Ma Zong Huo(马宗霍) once said, "WanBai Shanren(完白山人) used a clerical brush to make seal script, so the seal script is square, and he started with the seal script, so it is round, which later people have perceived"⁵ (完白山人以隶笔作篆, 故篆势方, 以篆书入手, 故势圆, 再者皆得自觉悟.....)It can be seen that the lines of Deng Shi Ru's seal script were inspired by the "Chui Lu" (垂露)of the seal script on the front of the Han tablet, making the presentation of the lines richer and incorporating the brushwork in the process of carrying the strokes, showing the changes of using long-edge strokes. This echoes Cai Yong's view that "only the brush is soft and strange is born." (惟笔软而奇怪生焉) Deng Shiru's later work, "The Records of the BaiShiCaoTang" (《白氏草堂记》)(Figure 2), has an overall rounded and flowing brushwork, and its overall posture is dignified, simple and heavy, which is closely related to his years of study of the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions.



Figure 3. Part of "ZaiXi article"

The overall style of Yang Yisun's(杨沂孙) seal script was formed under "Deng Seal Script" and the fusion of Han Dynasty inscriptions and other scripts. Yang Yisun's masterpiece of seal script, "ZaiXi article" (《在昔篇》) <Figure 3>, not only uses the ancient and dignified seal script to compose the text, but also summarizes the important achievements of the JinShi(金石) scholars since the Qing Dynasty. Yang Yisun's seal script takes the essence of various schools in its use of strokes, blending the brushwork of the Da Zhuan(大篆) and the Xiao Zhuan(小篆), and presents the characteristics of the Han Dynasty stele carving seal script. Like Deng Shiru, he also changed the Qin seal script from vertical to square, just like Deng Shiru, who was influenced by the "Er Li"(二李) Yu Zan seal script(玉箸篆). The Qin small seal script was changed from a vertical seal to a square one, and the strokes are generally flat and straight, with square folds in the twists and turns, and the whole structure is low on the left and high on the right, thus presenting a unique calligraphic style. He also influenced later generations of seal script, and all subsequent practitioners of seal script after him tend to have a square style in their structural expressions.

The Qing dynasty calligraphers were generally influenced by Deng's seal script, and Wu Rangzhi(吴让之) was one of them. While learning Deng's seal script, Wu's seal script style was also inspired by the seal script

on the front of the stele, In creating his seal script, he drew on some of the characteristics of the knotted characters and the brushwork of the seal script of Han Dynasty monuments, such as his seal script work "The five body book of Yanshan" (《赠砚山五体册》) <Figure 4>, from which it is obvious that the center of gravity of the seal script is on the upper side. However, the downward dragging of the downward stroke makes the whole very solid, and the style of the strokes can be clearly seen to have been borrowed from the front of the "KongZhou Tablet" (《孔宙碑》). The closing strokes are the same as those on the front of the "Yin Zhou Tablet" (《尹宙碑》), and the lines flow like scallion leaves.



Figure 4. The five body book of Yanshan

Recalling that all the dynasties have shown examples of the importance attached to the Han dynasty tablet. As Wu Qiuyan (吾丘衍) said in "Learning the Ancient Compilation" (学古编), "When writing a plaque, the characters and paintings should be fat and the whole should be square and round. The same applies to the monument, but take the seal script as the model and do not use miscellaneous styles." ⁶(凡写牌匾，字画宜肥，体宜方圆。碑额同此，但以小篆为正，不可用杂体。) Xu Guan (徐官) edited the "ancient and modern history of the seal" (《古今印史》) said: "Wu Wen Ding Gong (吴文定公) said: or think the monument forehead useless, many are not to rubbing Without knowing the monument without the forehead, just like things without the head, how can be complete?" ⁶(吴文定公云：或以碑额为无用，多不拓.....不知碑无额，如物无首，可为完物乎?) Thus, it can be seen that Xu Guan here will put forward the monument, enough to show that he attaches importance to the monument, which also reflects the ancient writers of a creative thought - to the ancient style, the inheritance of tradition. It can be seen that the influence and inspiration of the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones still existed in the Qing Dynasty, and it was an important source for Qing Dynasty calligraphers to make seal script. It led to the revival and prosperity of seal script in the middle and late Qing Dynasty, and the emergence of Deng Shiru and other great seal script masters, which provided important resources for the artistic practice of calligraphers of that time and later generations. The creations of predecessors always provide more experience and knowledge accumulation for future generations, and their techniques will be imitated and learned by future generations, constantly being inherited and innovated. The

cultural meaning of Chinese characters is the result of the wisdom of the literati, and the longevity of the use of seal script is a legacy of ancient culture and the status of seal script culture. Today, calligraphy is present on major campuses as traditional culture, and schools are opening faculties to train students in the knowledge system related to calligraphy, which is a direct inheritance and development of the traditional calligraphy culture. Calligraphy student, I am also deeply aware of the importance of cultural heritage, and will continue to study and explore the charm of the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones in my future study and life.

5. CONCLUSION

The Han Dynasty was a glorious period of calligraphy in China, and the seal script of the Han Dynasty was in the most important evolutionary period of ancient and modern scripts. With the development of socio-economic development, the practical function of seal script was reduced due to the convenience of writing in clerical script under the influence of the "li bian"(隶变), But it did not disappear because of the reduction of the practical role, but under the influence of official script, it paid more attention to the aesthetic expression. There are many different types of seal script in the Han dynasty, and the reason why this article is devoted to the study of seal script on inscriptions and stones of the Han dynasty is that it lasted for a relatively long time and accompanied the development of seal script throughout the Han dynasty, The style of the carrier and the aesthetic style presented better reflect the development of the Han Dynasty seal script under the influence of the official script. Studying the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones is significant in examining the evolution of ancient scripts into modern scripts. Under the influence of the popular calligraphic style "official script", the seal script of Han Dynasty inscriptions and stones was marginalized in the practical field, while its aesthetic value was emphasized. In the process, inscriptions and seal script became embellishments in people's lives, causing people's aesthetic consciousness to awaken to a new pursuit of aesthetics in seal script. With the development of social productivity and the diversification of inscription forms in the context of stele carving, there was a new artistic development of inscriptions and seal script. The characteristics of the calligraphic style and aesthetic features presented are both the result of the development of social civilization and innovation in the art of calligraphy compared to the Qin Dynasty. Moreover, it has provided a rich source for later generations of seal script, and its value and influence cannot be underestimated.

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