

POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF EARLY ISLAMIC AND ANCIENT CHINESE COIN CALLIGRAPHY

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The study of Islamic coin calligraphy is relatively late, that of Chinese coin calligraphy is even later. Both calligraphies reflect the political orientation of the respective region and of the central government. Whether it is Islamic coin calligraphy or Chinese coin calligraphy, they reflect the sacred spiritual belonging. Ancient Islamic coin calligraphy followed the secular regime's obedience to the *Qur'ān*, and ancient Chinese coin calligraphy embodied the secular regime's obedience to heaven.

Keywords: *Coin, Calligraphy, Politics, Qur'ān, Heaven.*

Introduction

Earlier coin calligraphy was not given due regard, people cared more about the practical value of the currency than its artistic beauty. Since the Renaissance, Greek and Roman coins have been looked upon as works of art comparable to sculpture or painting. In this period, the coin was finally regarded as a piece of art.

In the world of Islamic coin calligraphy, Kufic is the earliest and most famous coin calligraphy. Jakob Georg Christian Adler (1756 A.D.-1834 AD), Professor of Syrian language at the University of Copenhagen, was the first to study Kufic inscriptions on early coins.

There are many studies on Kufic calligraphy, but not as many studies on coin calligraphy. Most studies on Islamic ancient coin calligraphy generally can be found in books on Islamic art. Independent research works include Ali Akhar Sarfaraz Fereidoun Avarzamani, *Iranian Coins From the Early Beginning to the Zand Dynasty*, 1389 A.D. Prasant Srivaastava, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Numismatics* 1996 A.D. and so on. Some such studies appear as separate book-chapters, for example,

Jurgen Wasim Frembgen, *The Aura of Alif: The Art of Writing in Islam*, 2010 AD has a chapter devoted to Calligraphy on Islamic Coins. The situation is different in China, one of the first countries in the world to mint coins. In ancient Chinese literature, description of coins started relatively early. For example *Guan Zi* (The author is Guan Zi and some later scholars. It was compiled from the Warring States Period, 475 B.C.-221 B.C, to the Qin and Han Dynasty, B.C 221-220 B.C.), *Historical Records* (Author Sima Qian, completed in 91 B.C), *Salt and Iron* Author Huan Kuan, completed around 51 B.C., *Han Shu* The main authors are Ban Gu, It was basically completed in the period of Emperor Zhang of the Han Dynasty, 80 A.D.), *Tong Dian* (Author Du You, completed in 801 A.D.), *Tongzhi* (Zheng Qiao, completed in 1161 A.D.), *Road History* Author Luo Mi, completed in the Southern Song Dynasty Qiandao period, between about 1165 A.D. -1173 A.D., *Tong Kao* Author Ma Duanlin , completed in 1322 A.D.all have narratives about the origin of money. In the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420A.D. - 589A.D.), Gu Yuan compiled the *System of Money* The exact time is unknown, but which is the earliest monograph on ancient numismatics.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there research on coin culture has been ongoing. However, they are mostly concerned with the history of inheritance, archaeology, economic history, textual proof, and cultural relics, only few recent short review articles on calligraphy have appeared. There have been two Master's Thesis on coin calligraphy, the *Ancient Coin Calligraphy Study* by Cao Yi of Shanxi Normal University in 2011 and the *Chinese Ancient Coin Calligraphy Study* by Liu Ze of Shanxi Normal University in 2014. These two thesis studied two aspects, coin history and calligraphy style, and did not include other calligraphy connotation research.

It should be said that both for Islamic calligraphy research or Chinese calligraphy research that the study of ancient coin calligraphy as an independent discipline is relatively recent. It should be pointed out that to date there has been no comparative study made on ancient Islamic coin calligraphy and ancient Chinese coin calligraphy.

Political Regional Issues in Islamic Coin Calligraphy and Chinese Coin Calligraphy

“In the late seventh century, Islamic authorities initially created coins as text documents. Early coins are anonymous, containing parts of the *Qur'ān*, the divine revelation, and the necessary

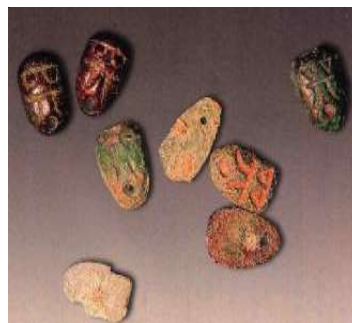
administrative information. Later, names of caliphs, sultans, kings, governors and even the names of the die-engravers were added.”¹

It is pointed out here that the later Islamic coins were engraved with the names of kings and governors, and they had obvious regional characteristics.

In the later Islamic currency casting, the coins were very particular. The text on them showed more information. For example, it would indicate where the coins were minted. Usually, the name of the city where the coin was cast appeared, and the coins were usually engraved with information on the casting year, sometimes the month, and occasionally even the date. In the ancient era, different regions and cities had their own coins.

There was a similar situation in ancient China, where different coins were cast in different regions. For example, the early Bu coin is mainly distributed in the Three Jin Two Zhou (Guanzhong area, Luoyang area) area of the middle reaches of the Yellow River, and its shape is similar to a tool that is used in farming. For example, the Yuyang Bu coin, in the shape of a flat shoulder, square foot, flat head, is the coin of the Yan State during the Warring States Period 770 B.C-221 B.C. Yuyang is located in the southwest of Miyun County, Beijing.

Chu (circa-223 B.C) is located in the middle and lower reaches of the Chang Jiang (Yangtze) River and the Huaihe River Basin. Its economy was relatively backward, therefore, it was called the backward country by the northern countries. Because there was very little communication with the northern countries, the currency of Chu is self-contained, and the coin looks like an ant or a human-like nose (Ant nose coin). This is a kind of copper coin. The back of the coin is like a flattened shell with an intaglio text. It is the earliest metal coin in China.



Ant nose coins are small and light. Generally, a coin is 1.2-2.1cm long, 0.8-1.4 cm wide, and weighs about 3.2 grams. Source Dai Zhiqiang, *Appreciate Ancient Coins*, Beijing: Printing Industry Press. 2011, 43.

As stated in the preface to *Interpretation of The Origin of The Text* by Xu Shen (58 -147 A.D) :“Managers in different countries are committed to their own rule, do not make uniform arrangements for things like craftsmen, hate etiquette for their own disadvantages, and abandon such books. Between regions the soil measurement standards are different, the roads are different, the laws are different, the dresses are different, the dialects are different, and the characters are different in shape. In terms of different shapes of characters, different regions have different calligraphy styles.”² just like Lu Youren of the Yuan Dynasty. In his book *Yan Bei Magazine* said “the calligraphy on the coins of the pre-Qin period 2^{1st} century B.C-221 B.C is different, and the names of the places in the coins are also cast on the coins.”³

Political Central Issues in Islamic Coin Calligraphy and Chinese Coin Calligraphy

Although Chinese coinage dates from the ancient period and Islamic coinage from the medieval period, the regional political issues in Islamic coin calligraphy of late antiquity are the same as in ancient Chinese coin calligraphy, reflecting the legal rule of different political institutions in different regions. During the Spring, Autumn and Warring States Period (770 B.C-221 B.C) in China, there were frequent wars between principalities and it was very difficult to control the political situation. Each principality issued its own coins. This trend remained same in China during the Five Dynasties and Ten States (907 A.D.-979 A.D.).

The scope of coin promotion also represents the scope of political power. Therefore, the coin calligraphy should be considered not only in view of artistry, but also in terms of political power and political stability. Since the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770 BC-256 B.C) in China, each country had its own coinage, though the promotion of coins had been hampered by other vassal states. Until Qin Shihuang unified the six countries and introduced the policy of unified coins on 221 B.C, the political aspect of coin calligraphy was very prominent. So we can also say that coin calligraphy is an art with a clear political orientation. Since the beginning of the reign of Emperor Qin Shihuang 259 B.C-210 B.C, there had been uniform coins in the unified dynasties (except for the later Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, from 907 A.D to 979 A.D.). These coins were either written by the emperor himself or by famous calligraphers.



Qin Shihuang's coin after unifying the six kingdoms. It is 2 to 3 cm in diameter and weighs about 6 to 8 grams. Source Dai Zhiqiang, *Appreciate Ancient Coins*, Beijing: Printing Industry Press. 2011, 64.

Both in China and the Islamic world, currency has a royal symbolic meaning. In Turkey there is an artistic style called *Tughra* “that was formerly used for regal rulers just like an authentication stamp, and it is the stylized and elaborate writing version of the Ottoman ruler’s name. This imperial style was later adopted by the Turkish and the Arab countries’ rulers as a royal insignia on the coins and stamps.”⁴

Another research paper describes the relationship between imperial rulers and coin calligraphy, as “Originally the *Tughra* was the calligraphic emblem which oriental rulers, mainly the Ottoman sultans, placed on such items as official documents and coins as their imperial insignia.”⁵

After about 1500 A.D., calligraphy on Iranian coins became more elaborate than before. The provincial mint factory was supervised by a Central Studio. The prayers inscribed on minted coins and the name of the king, are considered important symbols of central sovereignty. For example, during the Safavid 1501-1736 dynasty in Iran, not only religious inscriptions and administrative information on the rulers were displayed on the coins, but the names of the rulers as well.



Iran, Safavid Coin. Safavid dynasty’s coins have high requirements for metal quality, with easy-to-identify and beautiful inscriptions. Source About Iran, Iran’s Heritage *Iran Review* Sunday, January 24, 2010.

There are also events event from the troubled history of medieval Bengal. Sultan Sulaiman Khan Karrani (r.1565 A.D -1572 A.D) wrote

Akbar's name on his coins, and ordered Akbar's name to be mentioned in the Friday Sermon. When Sulaiman died in 1572, his son and successor Daud Khan Karrani (r.1572 -1576 A.D) defied the Mughuls, and was striking coins and having the Jama'ah Salah in his own name.⁶

During the Mughul Empire in India (1526 A.D-1857 A.D), the name of the emperor on the coin was usually expressed in Persian couplets. Nearly 50 verses were found on coins of Jahangir's reign (1605 A.D-1627 A.D). During this period, Jahangir (1569 A.D-1627 A.D) also printed his portrait on the coin, together with the portrait of his late father, These coins with heads were not currency in circulation, but commemorative coins.



Coin of Jahangir. As Jahangir's successor, Shah Jahan, withdrew these coins and melted most of them, their numbers are now small.
Source: Online Museum Collectorspedia *Mintage World* Mumbai, May 25, 2018.

While religious preaching (*khutbah*) is only verbal, the words and images on the coins clearly indicate who the ruler of the regime is, like an announcement that the people will understand it at a glance. Coins are used for daily contact. They were copied in large quantities, and people recognized them. They have become an object of national awareness. Thus we have shown that in the early Islamic coin calligraphy system, the content of calligraphy writing has a clear sense of imperial power and a strong political tendency. Ancient Chinese coin calligraphy also has this connotation.

Calligraphers participating in coin making as a political force

As seen, coins have obvious political significance, and are an important way to unite their own forces. During the reign of Abdul Malik (r. 705-15 A.D) the Shahadah was inscribed as a political statement against the Byzantines "During the Abbasid Period (750-1258 A.D), especially during Al-Ma'moun's rule, calligraphers were involved in coinage and inscribed Arabic script on silver coins (*dirhams*) and gold coins (*dinars*). These coins contained inscriptions from the Shahada."⁷

During the Ottoman Empire (1299 A.D-1923 A.D), the production of coins was also supervised by the royal family. In the production process, there are different divisions of labor among calligraphers. The calligraphers were divided in two parts. Some calligraphers prepared stones and cut precious stones, while others were busy with constructing more precise royal tughra forms.

The participation of calligraphers has deepened the artistic content of coins, adding to the coins a strong artistic quality.. In later coin art design, calligraphers played an important role as coin designers. Even later, when bank currencies began to be used, the most outstanding calligraphers of the Ottoman Empire participated in the design of bank currencies.

Ancient Chinese coin manufacturing also needed the participation of calligraphers. Famous calligraphers of the time participated in writing the words on the coins. The text of the Kai Yuan Coin was written by Ouyang Xun, and the Old Tang (Tang Dynasty, 618 A.D-907 A.D) History records that the text of the Kaiyuan coin was designed and written by a civil servant Ouyang Xun. At that time, people spoke highly of his art. Ouyang Xun is one of the four famous calligraphers in the early Tang Dynasty (618 A.D - 907 A.D), a first-class calligrapher, the Koreans at that time admired his calligraphy, and the diplomatic department often gave his calligraphy to other countries.



Tang Dynasty (618 A.D - 907 A.D), Kaiyuan coin, weight 11.1g, diameter 2.45cm. Source: Feng Feng, *An Selection of Ancient Coins Collected by Feng Feng*, Hefei, Anhui People's Publishing House, 2008, 50.

Emperor Yuanzong of the Southern Tang Dynasty (937 A.D - 975 A.D) cast coins for circulation. The calligraphy on the coins had three styles: Zhuan, Li and Kai, among which the Zhuan was written by Xu Xuan.

Like in the Tang Dynasty, the famous ministers of the Northern Song Dynasty (960 A.D - 1127 A.D) also participated in the writing of currency. The "Yuanfeng Coin" and the "Yuanyou Coin" are the result of the cooperation between the great calligraphers of the Song Dynasty,

Su Shi and Sima Guang. After the Seventh Year of the Southern Song Dynasty (1180 A.D.), the coin calligraphy of the Song Dynasty has become gradually unified into the form of the Song Dynasty characters. Since then, coin calligraphy has paid more attention to practicality, and generally adopts current style of the script. The calligraphy structure of the “Shaoxing Coin” written by Emperor Gaozong of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127 A.D. - 1279 A.D.) is well-proportioned, clear and generous, and stayed widely used in later generations. Tao Zongyi of the Ming Dynasty said: “The Southern Song Dynasty Emperor Gaozong Zhao, the ninth son of Emperor Song Huizong of the Northern Song Dynasty, is good at scripts, cursives, and the calligraphy he wrote is not uncomfortable. It is very good.”⁸

Other emperors with good calligraphy also participated in coin writing. In the Song Dynasty, Zhu Changwen said in *Continue to Judgement of Calligraphy*: “The Emperor Song Taizong pays attention to calligraphy and learns calligraphy after he is busy. He often learns late at night.”⁹ Since Emperor Taizong of Song Dynasty wrote the three-clock style calligraphy of the Chunhua Coin and Zhi Dao Coin, later emperors have began to follow and Emperor Song Zhenzong wrote the words on Medical Coins and Auspicious Coins; Emperor Song Renzong wrote Emperor Song and Peace on his coins. The emperor Song Huizong, very talented in calligraphy and Chinese painting, also personally wrote the words Sacred Song Dynasty, Chongning, Grand View, Government and Xuanhe on coins. Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty coined and circulated the Chongning coin during the Chongning Year (A.D. 1102 - A.D. 1106). The Chongning Coin was written by Song Huizong when he was a boy. At that time, he was flourishing and his style was vigorous, and he was praised by the world as the first in the Song Dynasty.



Chongning Tongbao coin, written by Huizong Song Dynasty, 3.5cm in diameter and 6.4 grams in weight. Source: Gong Wei, *Diaomu Ancestor Money Paper*, Shenzhen, Haitian Publishing House, 2009, 31.

As mentioned above, the excellent calligraphers' tradition of writing on coins has gradually framed unwritten rules, which became more apparent after the Tang Dynasty. The participation of famous calligraphers including Emperors increased the artistic value of coin calligraphy.

In the Qing Dynasty (1636 A.D - 1912 A.D), Weng Shupeì said in the *Guquan Hui Kao*: "The Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127 A.D) coin calligraphy fonts are different, but the production model is particularly delicate. The calligraphy strokes are vivid, chic and radiant, because the coin calligraphy is written well, so this is a kind of good calligraphy. It has an exemplary role and can be passed down."¹⁰

Spiritual aspects of coin calligraphy politics

There is no doubt that coin calligraphy also has the role of uniting a nation. When the core value of a country is recognized by the entire population, this is conducive to the stability of the country's political power, and people live and work in peace. For a historical example, recall that when "the Zubayrid and Kharijite challenges of the early Umayyad Caliphate between 681 and 697 C.E - the years of the Second Fitna - created the political context for the definitive creation of epigraphic coin design."¹¹ and "what followed the Second Fitna can be seen as embracing the defeated moderate Zubayrid and the more extremist Kharijite propaganda as far as possible in order to reunite the Islamic elite. It was at this point in history at the latest that the idea of an Islamic uni-versal empire in its own ideological right emerged."¹²

In the Islamic world, early coin calligraphy reflects Islamic values and is accepted by the general public. The inscriptions of the Islamic Empire and its successors, and the calligraphy on coins always point to the art of the *Qur'ān*. The vocabulary, the style of the monumental architecture, or the art of the court poetry, ultimately embody the sacred content of Islam in calligraphy. "The art of writing on coins established itself at the moment when the *Qur'ānic* message became an iconic symbol for Islam and its empire."¹³

Early Islamic coin calligraphy reflects the spirituality of Muslims. In the monetary system of the Islamic Empire, secular political rights come from the sovereignty expressed by the *Qur'ān*. Imperial leaders often refer to themselves as "the deputy of God", Khalifah. In the art of Islamic coin calligraphy, art serves God and is an expression of God's thought.



Minted between 696 and 697 A.D., an early Islamic coin, with Arabic inscriptions taken from the *Qur'ān*. Source: The newspaper of *Arab News* from Saudi Arabia, 6 February 02, 2020.

In this way, in Islamic lands, coin calligraphy carries its unique spiritual and cultural connotation. But “calligraphy on the other hand can take any shape and it is a more difficult and more complicated form of writing. Calligraphy was developed rapidly after the rise of Islam and used to beautify the words of God. It has been emerged as the most important medium in the Arabic and Islamic art.”¹⁴ The later models of coin calligraphy are always interspersed between the *Qur'ānic* style and the inscriptions of monumental architecture.

Similarly, it is necessary to be realize that traditional Chinese society was the co-governance of the emperor and civil servants.. In the edicts promulgated by the emperor in the Ming (A.D 1368 - A.D 1644) and Qing (A.D 1644- A.D 1912) dynasties, the first sentence is “to honor the will of heaven, the emperor said...:”The rulers of Muslims represent the sacred will of Allah, and the rulers of China represent the divine purpose of heaven. In the context of Chinese culture, the emperor is called the son of heaven. Chinese scholars and ordinary people agree that the emperor has inherited the idea of heaven. This is also reflected in ancient coin calligraphy. Ancient coin calligraphy often clearly wrote that an emperor is a throne that conforms to the will of heaven.

For example, *The Collection of Points in the Tang Dynasty* (*Tang Hui Yao*) records: “The Emperor Gaozong (July 21, 628 A.D. - December 27, 683 A.D.) of Tang Dynasty worshipped the heavens in Taishan, and changed the year number to Qian Feng. The Chinese meaning of Qian is Heaven. The year of the seal is written in the casting. On a good coin, the coin is one inch in diameter... the previous coins are invalidated. In the second year, because the food quickly becomes expensive, merchants rarely use the money engraved with Qian Feng coins to do business. In the third year, the coin was also abolished, and the new coin with the words “Opening A New Era” was used.”¹⁵

During the Chong Ning period (1102 - 1106 A.D.) of the Song

Dynasty, coins of similar names were also issued. Their name was Qian Heng coin, which means that heaven brought good luck to the currency. Similarly, during the Da Guan period (1107 A.D - 1110 A.D) of the northern Song Dynasty, a coin was also cast, named Qian De coin, accurate translation is the coin of heaven's character.

Another example is the Qian You coin written in the Qianyou period (1171 A.D - 1193 A.D). Qian You means God bless. In addition, Tian Xing first year (1232 A.D) Jin Guo cast the Tian Xing coin, which means that it is as prosperous as heaven. The name of the currency of Emperor Ming Emperor (September 8, 685 A.D - May 3, 762 A.D) of the Tang Dynasty also referred to heaven, it was called Tian Cheng coin, meaning the same achievement as heaven. Coin calligraphy also embodies the idea of imperial power. We can also extract a lot from coin calligraphy texts related to the Emperor's Year. For example, The Collection of Points in the Tang Dynasty records that the old history of the Jin Dynasty (266 A.D-420 A.D) believed that the coins of the emperor's words encrusted with the blessings of heaven were cast by Zhao Shihu.

In Chinese cultural context, Yuan or Xin represents a new beginning for heaven. We generally say that we are opening a new era. In the era of the monarchy, Liu Zhiyuan of the post-Han Dynasty (947 A.D - 950 A.D) engraved his own number Han Yuan on the coin. The complete meaning of the words written on the whole coin is the common coin of the later period of the new Han Dynasty. The same is true of Emperor Zhou Shizong (895 A.D - 948 A.D). He used his own year number or his title for coin calligraphy. The Ming Dao coin written during the Ming Dao period (1032 A.D - 1033 A.D) in the Northern Song Dynasty; the Jin Kang coin written in the Jin Kang period (1126 A.D - 1127 A.D) during the Northern Song Dynasty; the Min Dao coin during the Southern Song Dynasty (A.D 1165 - A.D 1173) was cast and written Qian Dao coin.

During the Ming Dynasty, the Tian Qi coin, which was written during the Tian Qi period (1621 A.D - 1627 A.D), was also the meaning given to the regime by heaven. During the Qing Dynasty, Kang Xi coins were written and cast during the Kang Xi period (1662 AD-1722 A.D). During the Tong Zhi years (1862 A.D - 1875 A.D), Tong Zhi coins were written and cast. During the Yong Zheng period (1723 A.D - 1735 A.D), Yong Zheng coins were written and minted; Qian Long (1736 A.D - 1796 A.D) was cast and engraved with Qian Long coins; and Xuan Tong coins written and cast during the Xuan Tong years (1909 A.D - 1911 A.D).



Xuan Tong coin. Northeast three provinces manufacture, the model is exquisite, the pattern is fine. Source: Wangye, *Appreciating Treasures, Volume Four*, Zhengzhou, DaXiang Publishing House, 2004, 46.

Before the Tang Dynasty, Chinese coin calligraphy was mainly based on local signs and special signs. After the Tang Dynasty, it almost always reflected the imperial power granted by heaven, and the imperial conferment of representatives in accordance with the meaning of heaven inscribed on the circulation of coins, the formation of a monetary system with Chinese characteristics. The smooth circulation of coins, reflects the stability of political situation and the spiritual connotation that the political power is granted by heaven.

Conclusions

The comparative study found that many political factors in ancient Islamic coin calligraphy are similar to those of ancient Chinese coin calligraphy, especially the writing content which reflects and conveys the legitimate source of political power. There are only a few differences, such as the emperor of the Islamic empire is called the deputy of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ), and the emperor of China is called the son of heaven. Early Islamic coin calligraphy and ancient Chinese coin calligraphy all have the characteristics of regional political power. With the expansion and unification of the national territory, the meaning of elites and people in currency calligraphy has gradually become strong. At the same time, the symbolism of political power in currency calligraphy is also more clear. Whether it is ancient Islamic coin calligraphy or ancient Chinese coin calligraphy, it shows that the power of the king or emperor comes from the sacred Allah or the sacred heaven, with obvious and profound spiritual connotations.

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