

# Study on the Style of Duan Inkstone Inscriptions in the Tang Dynasty "Wu Yong Pan Guan"

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## Abstract

The establishment of the imperial examination system in the Sui and Tang Dynasties of China led to the development of stationery accessories. Among them, the inkstone, as one of the important stationery accessories, has a rich cultural and historical background. The archaeological excavation of the Duan inkstone inscribed in the Tang Dynasty "Wu Yong Pan Guan" enhances the textual research on the appearance period of the Tang Dynasty Duan inkstone, as well as the tracing of the aesthetic style of the regular scripts of the Tang Dynasty.

## Keywords

Duan Inkstone; Calligraphy of the Tang Dynasty; Regular Script; Inscriptions.

## 1. Introduction

The history of Chinese inkstones can be traced back to the Neolithic stone abrader 5,000 years ago. Its shape is composed of stone grinding discs and grinding rods. The purpose of this grinder is mainly around grain processing. The earliest archaeologically unearthed grinder in China is a set of pottery used for painting by ancient Chinese ancestors in Jiangzhai, Lintong County, Shaanxi Province, a site of the primitive society of Yangshao culture. , There are depressions at the grinding disc, and the pigment is ground with the help of a grinding rod, which has the functional shape of the early inkstone. Inkstone has gone through the development of the Pre-Qin Dynasty, Qin Dynasty, Han Dynasty, Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, and Sui Dynasty. There are different transitions in shape, style, and user mode. become more organized and refined. From the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties to the Sui Dynasty, the inkstones also changed. For the first time, ceramic inkstones appeared. The style of the three-legged ceramic round inkstones inherited the three-legged stone inkstones of the Eastern Han Dynasty style.

## 2. Traceability of Duan Inkstone in the Tang Dynasty

Entering the Tang Dynasty, the national strength was prosperous and strong, the economic strength was strong, and the culture was diversified. Through the imperial examination system, students from poor families were selected to enter official careers, and there were even students from poor families who were in high-ranking positions. This relatively fair imperial examination system promoted the enthusiasm of students and paid more attention to the study of cultural theoretical knowledge. At the same time, the art of calligraphy gradually entered its heyday in the Tang Dynasty, and famous calligraphers such as Ouyang Xun, Yu Shinan, Yan Zhenqing, and Liu Gongquan emerged, and various calligraphy styles have their characteristics, showing the wonderful calligraphy of the prosperous Tang Dynasty. At the same time, calligraphy also lists it as one of the important conditions for selecting officials. Based on the social background of the Tang Dynasty, with the improvement of the imperial examination system, people paid more attention to writing tools, which further accelerated the evolution of the Chinese inkstone form.

In the Tang Dynasty, there were different kinds of inkstones in various regions. Among them, Duan inkstones were abundant in Zhaoqing City, Guangdong Province, which was called Duanzhou in ancient times. The Duan inkstone first appeared in the Tang Dynasty and flourished in the Song Dynasty. The literati and writers of the past dynasties all regarded the Duan inkstone as a Congbi, and it has been handed down to this day, accumulating a profound history and containing the essence of art. The reputation of Duan inkstone is mainly due to its unique ornamental and practical functions. It has both material and spiritual attributes and has both use value and aesthetic value. From the point of view of the stone quality of Duan inkstone, it is delicate and moist. In terms of hair ink, the grinding ink is moist, showing layered richness, and has a good sense of practicality. From the perspective of viewing the Duan inkstone, the stone patterns are rich, combined with the craftsman's exquisite carving skills, to maximize the charm of the Duan inkstone.

### **3. The Shape of the Duan Inkstone in the Tang Dynasty**

Duan inkstone was mined in the Wude period of the Tang Dynasty (618-626) and has a history of more than 1,400 years. The shape of Duan inkstone has evolved and developed with the times, deeply influenced by the social trends of thought in various dynasties, and the refinement of art and craftsmanship has formed styles with different characteristics of the times. The craftsmanship of the Duan inkstone in the Tang Dynasty was still in the early stage, focusing on practicality, and the craftsmanship's aesthetic characteristics were weak. The popular style of Duan inkstone in the Tang Dynasty was mainly in the shape of a bucket, commonly known as "Ji-shaped Inkstone".

At the same time, because the shape resembles the Chinese character "Feng" or "Phoenix", it is also called "Feng character inkstone" or "phoenix character inkstone". There are two main types of Ji-shaped Inkstones. One is that there is no obvious transition between the edge of the inkstone hall and the edge of the inkstone table, and the two sides are directly connected to form an arc-shaped concave state. The other is a corner with a clear transition between the edge of the inkstone hall and the edge of the inkstone table. Both types of inkstones have feet at the bottom. Although the Tang Dynasty Duan inkstone is mainly functional, it also has a unique charm of simplicity.

### **4. Analysis of Inscriptions on Duan Inkstone of "Wu Yong Pan Guan" in the Tang Dynasty**

Judging from the physical objects unearthed by archaeology, from the material aspect of the Duan inkstone in the Tang Dynasty, emphasis was placed on practical functions, focusing on the excellent usability of the Duan inkstone, and there was no more complicated decorative pattern on the appearance surface. However, it is worth noting that there has been an inscription engraved Duan inkstone, just like the Tang Dynasty tomb excavated in 2009, located on the north side of the Second Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical College, Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, China. An inscription "Wu Yong Pan Guan" was unearthed. The Duan inkstone is an important historical material for textual research on the calligraphy style of stone carvings in the Tang Dynasty.

#### **4.1. Reasons for Duan Inkstone of "Wu Yong Pan Guan"**

According to the archaeological excavation records of this Tang Dynasty tomb, the tomb was roughly formed in the late Tang Dynasty. There is a rectangular groove, 2.8 meters long and 0.67 meters wide, and the bottom is covered with flat stone bricks. It is determined that the stone bricks are the floor tiles of the tomb. There are few burial objects unearthed in the tomb. From the point of view of the unearthed objects, the owner of the tomb in the Tang Dynasty was

not a high-ranking official. There were no precious objects such as gold and jade in the funeral objects, but most of them were talc objects. Among them, the most important utensil is the Duan inkstone of "Wu Yong Pan Guan" (Fig. 1). The Duan inkstone presents the popular style of the Tang Dynasty, with a length of 10cm, a width of 7cm, and a height of 1.6cm. Square line. The surface of the inkstone table is flat and open, the back of the inkstone table is polished and smooth, with obvious traces of rust, and the four-character inscription "Wu Yong Pan Guan" is engraved, the handwriting is clear and legible, and the script is in the form of regular script.

The identity of the owner of the Tang Dynasty tomb can be roughly identified from the four characters "Wu Yong Pan Guan". According to historical records, the inscription with the word "Pan Guan" indicates that the judge was the official name of the Chinese feudal society and began to appear in the Sui Dynasty. In the Tang Dynasty, important official positions such as Jiddu, Observation, Defense, etc., were free to petition to serve as judges. The judges in the Tang Dynasty were not formal officials and had no real power. They only cooperated with officials such as Jiedushi, Observer, and Defense Envoy to handle paperwork and chores, and their overall social status was low. After the Tang Dynasty, it was still used until the Qing Dynasty, but the mission of each dynasty was different. It can be roughly identified as the social status and position of the tomb in the Tang Dynasty. As an important tool used by the tomb owner during his lifetime, the Fang Duan inkstone was buried in the underground world with the tomb owner.



**Figure 1.** "Wu Yong Pan Guan" Duan Inkstone

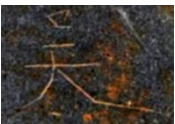



#### **4.2. The Font Features of the Duan Inkstone Inscription in "Wu Yong Pan Guan"**

The unearthed inscriptions on the Duan inkstone of "Wu Yong Pan Guan" played an important role in the study of stone inscription calligraphy in the Tang Dynasty. First of all, from the overall point of view, the four-character inscription "Wu Yong Pan Guan" is engraved in regular script, which has the main characteristics of "the beauty of regular script" in the Tang Dynasty, and the calligraphy is square and vigorous. Under the four-character engraved inscription, there is a delicate turning and square-cut brushwork. The knot body stretches and expands outwards, not sticking to one section, and the brush strokes are chic and more agile.

Looking at the four-character inscriptions as a single unit, there are many similarities between the style of calligraphy and the development of the calligraphy style of the Tang Dynasty. A closer look at the inscription of the word "Wu" on the Duan inkstone, the brush is steady and the lines are well-proportioned. The knot body is narrow at the top and wide at the bottom,

regular and straight, and is highly consistent with the famous inscriptions in the Tang Dynasty, as shown in [Table 1](#). For example, the word "Wu" in Ou Yangxun's "Monument of Duke Gong of Yu" has different lengths of horizontal strokes, which play a balanced font. for structure. It is highly similar to the pen angle of the character "Wu" in Yan Zhenqing's "Duobao Pagoda Stele". At the same time, the word "Wu" in Xu Hao's "Bu-kong monk monument" also has this rich dynamic, the structure is squarer, the thickness of the strokes is well-proportioned, and the righteousness is full. The two "Wu" characters are both used in horizontal strokes. Paying attention to the balance effect, the writing style is more even, and the style is pure and ancient.

**Table 1.** Comparison of the inscriptions of the word "Wu"

"Wu Yong Pan Guan"Duan Inkstone	Ou Yangxun's "Monument of Duke Gong of Yu"	Yan Zhenqing's "Duobao Pagoda Stele"	Xu Hao's "Bu-kong monk monument"
			

The character "Yong" of Duan Inkstone is loose, and the font is long and thin. Consistent with the strokes of the word "Wu", the strokes are straight and neat, with obvious square cuts and turns. The straight line of the pen is similar to several inscriptions of Yan Zhenqing. As shown in the first three types of calligraphy in [Table 2](#), the pen with a sharp edge has strong and vigorous momentum. Duan inkstone "Yong" has a structure similar to that of "Yong" in Yan Zhenqing's early inscription "Wang Lin Epitaph". The font structure is slender and the vertical pen in the middle is tightened to stabilize the structure. smooth. The pen of the word "Yong" is similar to the inscriptions of Ouyang Xun and Yu Shinan. The knot is long, with the vertical pen in the middle as the middle point, and it spreads out to the four sides, showing a posture of tightening on the left and deep on the right. The upper part is narrower and the lower part is wider, and the shape of the font changes with the strokes, which has the characteristics of dynamic.




**Table 2.** Comparison of the inscriptions of the word "Yong"

"Wu Yong Pan Guan"Duan Inkstone	Yan Zhenqing's "Wang Lin Epitaph"	Yan Zhenqing's "The Monument of Oriental Shuo Paintings"	Yan Zhenqing's "Li Xuanjing Monument"	Ouyang Xun's "Jiucheng Palace Liqun Inscription"	Yu Shinan's "Confucius Temple Stele"
					

Compared with the other three characters, As shown in [Table 3](#). The word "Pan" of Duan inkstone has a looser structure and stretches out in all directions, sparse and open. However, in the loose structure, there is also the founder and prudent paradigm of the Tang Dynasty regular script, which is similar to the Tang Dynasty inscriptions. Powerful. Horizontal strokes are lighter, and vertical strokes are heavier. Short and stout, long and slender. Pointillism is varied, with the common existence of long orchid leaves and short and narrow swords, which are neat with the pen. At the same time, it is similar to Yan Zhenqing's early inscription "Wang Lin's Tomb Master" in the calligraphic structure and brushwork, especially the vertical pen has

obvious setbacks, and the pen is stronger than the horizontal brush, which enhances the diversity of font structure and aesthetic interest.

**Table 3.** Comparison of the inscriptions of the word "Pan"

"Wu Yong Pan Guan" Duan Inkstone	Ouyang Xun's "Huadu Temple Stele"	Liu Gongquan's "Mysterious Tower Stele"	Yan Zhenqing's "Wang Lin Epitaph"	Yan Zhenqing's "Duobao Pagoda Stele"	Yan Zhenqing's "Yan Qin Giftstone"
					

Duan inkstone's "official" character is compact in structure, with well-proportioned strokes and lines, showing a rigorous attitude, and there are brushstrokes used in both square and circle, showing the variety of strokes. A closer look at the comparison between the word "guan" on this inkstone and the famous inscriptions in the Tang Dynasty is shown in Table 4. It is found that the structure of the word is the same, the upper part is wide and the lower part is narrow, which achieves overall coordination and balance. The brushwork structure also follows the characteristics of the regular script of the Tang Dynasty. The horizontal paintings are thinner and the vertical paintings are thicker and more powerful. It contains the heavy feeling of the regular script of the Tang Dynasty and the dignified and elegant aesthetic charm.

**Table 4.** Comparison of the inscriptions of the word "Guan"

"Wu Yong Pan Guan" Duan Inkstone	Liu Gongquan's "Mysterious Tower Stele"	Yan Zhenqing's "Duobao Pagoda Stele"	Yan Zhenqing's "Li Xuanjing Monument"	Yan Zhenqing's "Yan Qin Giftstone"	Pei Xiu's "Monument to Master Guifeng"	
						

### 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the inscription on the Duan inkstone of "Wu Yong Pan Guan" unearthed in the Tang Dynasty has many similarities with the famous inscriptions in the regular script of the Tang Dynasty. First of all, in terms of structure, it follows the law of vertical writing and is arranged in a relatively neat manner. The distance between the fonts is appropriate, which achieves the beauty of balance. Secondly, the structure of the inscriptions on the Duan inkstone is consistent with the square and symmetrical shape of the regular script of the Tang Dynasty. Finally, in terms of the brushwork structure, it has the same characteristics of rich changes as the inscriptions in the regular script of the Tang Dynasty, especially the flexibility of the use of the brush. The thickness and depth of the horizontal and vertical strokes are diverse. Fang and Yuan use the pen to take into account, full of vitality and master the rhythm of the font. These rich and varied features are similar to the aesthetic rhythm of the regular script of the Tang Dynasty, and they also represent the aesthetic fashion of all classes.

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