



EXPLORING THE TRADITION OF ORACLE BONE AND BRONZE INSCRIPTIONS IN LINGNAN SEAL CARVING THROUGH ZHANG DAJING'S WORKS

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ABSTRACT

[Objective] To study Mr. Zhang Dajing's ancient seal works incorporating oracle bone and bronze inscriptions, explore their relevance to contemporary seal carving creation, and examine the tradition of using oracle bone and bronze inscriptions in Lingnan seal school. *[Methods]* Based on Fu Ding Tang Seal Collection, analyze Zhang Dajing's social connections and explore the ideological origins of his seal carving art; analyze the artistic characteristics of Zhang's oracle bone and bronze inscription seals to seek inspiration for seal creation. *[Conclusions]* (1) Zhang Dajing was skilled at absorbing artistic characteristics from Qin-Han seals and school seals, while extensively drawing from oracle bones, bronze inscriptions, and even tiles and clay seals. His oracle bone and bronze inscription seals present multiple styles. In his later years, he developed a personal knife technique characterized by abandoning sophistication for simplicity and wielding the knife like a brush, which can inspire contemporary seal carving. (2) Zhang Dajing frequently associated with paleographers, scholars, poets, and calligraphy-painting artists. His preference for ancient-style seals and artistic philosophy of learning from pre-Qin era was likely influenced by his teachers and social circle. (3) Zhang's preference for ancient-style seals reflects both his personal artistic philosophy and the Lingnan seal tradition's emphasis on scholarship and using learning to enhance seal carving. This tradition was formed under the influence of Chen Li, Huang Shiling and others, combined with Lingnan's geographical, economic, and historical-cultural factors, and was reinforced through later interactions among Guangdong school seal artists.

KEYWORDS: Zhang Dajing, Social Connections, Guangdong School Seal Carving, Oracle Bone and Bronze Inscription Incorporation

1. INTRODUCTION

Zhang Dajing (1909-1984) was an influential seal carving master in modern Lingnan seal art. His collection *Zhang Dajing's Selected Seal Works* showcases diverse styles, including works influenced by the Zhe School, Wan School, and Qianshan School, as well as numerous seals incorporating oracle bones, bronze inscriptions, and even tile and clay seal elements. This reflects an artistic spirit that both draws broadly from various sources while avoiding adherence to a single school, emphasizing the use of scholarship in seal carving and creating innovation through studying the ancient. This represents both his personal artistic philosophy and a common characteristic among the Lingnan seal carving community at the time, forming a shared aesthetic taste under Lingnan seal carving's historical tradition. Studying Zhang Dajing's oracle bone and bronze inscription seal works can both benefit contemporary seal carving creation and help us better understand the artistic spirit of the Guangdong school of seal carving.

2. FORMATION OF LINGNAN SEAL TRADITION'S EMPHASIS ON PRE-QIN LEARNING

In modern times, Lingnan, as a trading port, developed advanced economy and culture with open mindset, providing an excellent background for artistic development. Its location south of the Five Ridges formed a relatively independent geographical space, bringing relatively independent artistic development characteristics conducive to forming regional traditions.

During the Qianlong and Jiaqing periods of the Qing Dynasty, the Zhe School seal style prevailed. The Lingnan region's seal carvers were naturally influenced by this style. At that time, Lingnan seal artists who followed the Zhe School included: Ke Youzhen, Ke Zhaoliang, Ye Qi, Yang Qiguang, Hu Man, Zhang Jingxiu, Zhang Jiamo, and others. However, as the Zhe School developed into its later period, it gradually formed defects of "bloated, jagged" and formulaic styles. Chen Li (1810-1882), founder of the "Eastern School", proposed the concept of "ancient elegance and simplicity" in response to the Zhe School's defect of purely pursuing a mottled effect through knife techniques. He believed that "the broken strokes in ancient seals were due to weathering, and need not be imitated... those



without visible knife techniques often appear thick and refined; those with visible knife techniques often appear sparse, simple, and wild" (Chen, 1985, p. 452). His seal works often incorporated bronze vessel inscriptions, tile patterns, and brick inscriptions. His aesthetic view of "elegance, correctness, purity and harmony" had a profound influence on later Lingnan seal carving. Republican period artists like Yi Dachang, Deng Erya, Jian Jinglun, Rong Geng, Huang Wenkuan, and others were all influenced by him.

Huang Shiling (1849-1909) had a profound influence on the Lingnan seal community. Through interactions with Chen Li's disciples and students, Huang absorbed and integrated the seal-making principle of "elegant and ancient", while also deriving the aesthetic interest of knife and brush techniques and the beauty of smooth lines from Zhao Zhiqian's seal carving. He proposed aesthetic criteria of "smooth and elegant", forming artistic characteristics of "seeing flow in steadiness, and gracefulness in strength". He also proposed the insight of fusing bell-cauldron inscriptions, small seal script, and Miao seal script "into one to achieve high spirit and ancient meaning" (Liang, 2017, pp. 238-245). He incorporated inscriptions from ritual vessels, weights and measures, coins, pottery, tiles, Han steles, and other text forms into seals for his own use, developing the spirit of "seeking seals outside seals" to the fullest extent. This creative method became a common approach emulated by Lingnan seal artists.

The "Four Masters of Guangdong School" - Yi Dachang (1874-1941), Li Yinsang (1882-1945), Deng Erya (1883-1954), and Jian Jinglun (1888-1950) - were all deeply influenced by Huang Shiling. Yi Dachang excelled at incorporating ancient seals, Li Yinsang mastered ancient seals comprehensively, Deng Erya was known for incorporating clerical and regular scripts, and Jian Jinglun was famous for incorporating oracle bone inscriptions. Yi Dachang was Chen Li's grand-disciple and also received direct guidance from Huang Shiling. His seal works often imitated Three Dynasties bronze vessels, pre-Qin ancient seals, pottery inscriptions, and clay seals, achieving profound artistry. Ma Guoquan commented that "its thickness and simplicity, along with its unrestrained uniqueness, share the same interest as Warring States pottery inscriptions from Qi and Lu regions" (Ma, 1998, p. 73). Liang Xiaozhuang believed that incorporating oracle bone inscriptions into seals was first initiated by Yi Dachang, which influenced Jian Jinglun and others (Liang, 2017, pp. 252-253).

Li Yinsang was passionate about ancient seals, broadly adopting Shang and Zhou bronze inscriptions, with ancient and simple knife techniques and staggered chapter layouts. Huang Binhong evaluated: "The pure whiteness of Xiling is not worth showing off... Your works will likely surpass them" (Huang, 1998, pp. 289-290).

Deng Erya's seal carving drew materials not only from ancient seals, tile patterns, and Han seals, but even incorporated foreign scripts at will. His self-composed poem states "Upward pursuing oracle and bronze inscriptions, also including pottery and tile texts" and "Dare to claim inheritance of the system, I can handle unusual characters" (Liang, 2017, p. 262). Jian Jinglun's oracle bone inscription layouts featured flexible extension and contraction, mutual accommodation and interlocking, creating dynamic visual interest; his knife technique was anciently rough and forceful, thin and strong, natural and transcendent. Han Tianheng evaluated his oracle bone inscription seals: "Creating new horizons for seal carving, becoming a model of self-innovation" (Han, 2013, p. 272).

Under the influence of Chen Li, Huang Shiling and the Four Masters of Guangdong School, learning from pre-Qin and drawing nourishment from bronze inscriptions and unusual characters became a creative approach commonly accepted and emulated in the Lingnan seal community. This formed a creative trend of incorporating oracle bones, bronze inscriptions, and Warring States scripts into seals, as seen in works by He Shaojia, Mo Zhongyu, Ding Yanyong, Mo Tie, Ma Guoquan, Lin Qianshi, Huang Siqian, Ye Yi, Deng Fu and others, who all produced excellent bronze inscription seal works. Besides being influenced by Huang Shiling's seal style, many Lingnan seal artists achieved success by directly learning from ancient seals, Qin-Han seals, and Yuan Dynasty red character seals. These Guangdong seal artists' unprecedented emphasis on scholarship and cultivation outside seal carving continues to this day (Kuang, 2017, pp. 198-199). Additionally, Nanyue State pottery inscriptions, seals, and tile patterns excavated in Guangdong during the early Republican period were compiled into seal albums by Lingnan scholars, becoming study materials for local seal artists. This was also an important reason for the formation of the antiquarian trend in the Lingnan seal community (Liang, 2017, p. 246).

3. ZHANG DAJING'S LIFE AND ARTISTIC LINEAGE

Zhang Dajing (1909-1984), also known as Fu Lao, maintained studios named Xinxiang Hall, Fu Ding Hall, and One Hundred and Fifty Stone Studio. Originally from Jiangsu, he was registered in Nanhai, Guangdong, and lived in the Western District of Guangzhou. Zhang graduated from Changcheng Middle School in Guangzhou. Later he served as a member of the Guangzhou Cultural and Historical Research Institute, advisor to Guangzhou Cultural Park, and consultant to the Guangzhou Young Calligraphers Association.



At age twenty-two, Zhang Dajing studied painting, calligraphy, and seal carving under Cheng Zhuyun at the Shangmei Art Studio in Guangzhou. Cheng Zhuyun (1874-1934), originally named Jingxuan, styled Zhuyun, also known as Longhu Elder and Master of Zhuanxiang Studio, was from Nanhai, Guangdong. Cheng excelled in both seal carving and painting, and founded the Shangmei Chinese Painting Research Institute and Shangmei Art Studio in Guangzhou. His seal carving followed Han seals as the primary model while incorporating Zhe School knife techniques, with quiet and simple line work, pure and proper elegance.

Following Cheng Zhuyun, Zhang Dajing took Han seals as his foundation while also studying the styles of Zhe School, Wan School, Qianshan School, Zhao Zhiqian, Huang Shiling. In his later period, he drew from oracle bones and bronze inscriptions, integrating ancient seals, clay seals, and pottery inscriptions, achieving high mastery across multiple styles. In his early years, he commonly used thin sharp knives, while in his later years he switched to pure knives, creating rough and simple line work with resistance in the strokes, along with hammering on the seal surface, achieving an unintentionally grand and complete artistic style characterized by depth and uniqueness.

In his later years, the master suffered from eye disease and called himself "One-Eye Man". Due to vision problems, he mainly created large seals in his late period. At this time, his seal style did not pursue refinement but became more spontaneous, achieving even greater freedom and completeness. Zhang Dajing had many disciples, with notable ones including Liang Xiaozhuang, Gu Shuan, Fang Boren, and Zhong Zhiming, who are all now renowned in the seal carving community.

The extant seal album of Zhang Dajing is *Fu Ding Tang Seal Collection*. This album contains over a hundred seal works collected by his student Wang Xiang, most without border inscriptions, which were later added by his student Liang Xiaozhuang. The border inscriptions recall the master's life and evaluate his seal carving art. This "collaboration" between teacher and student generations became a notable story. The book begins with title inscriptions by Liang Xiaozhuang and Chen Yongzheng (Chen's inscription reads "Selected Seal Works of Zhang Dajing"). It also includes Liang Xiaozhuang's article "The Ancient and Transcendent Zhang Dajing" as a preface.

4 EXAMINING MUTUAL INFLUENCES OF ORACLE BONE AND BRONZE INSCRIPTION INTEGRATION THROUGH SOCIAL CONNECTIONS IN *FU DING TANG SEAL COLLECTION*

During his lifetime, Zhang Dajing's seal reputation was highly regarded, as "renowned calligraphers and painters both domestically and abroad considered it fortunate to obtain his seal carvings" (Liang, 2017, p. 1). Artists like Pan Tianshou, Xie Zhiliu, Tang Yun, Huang Yongyu, and Wu Hao used his seals extensively. The Wu Hao brothers alone possessed over two hundred of his seal works.

Fu Ding Tang Seal Collection also includes many seals carved for famous painters, calligraphers, seal artists, and scholars. Among these, eleven seals were carved for the paleographer and seal artist Rong Geng, including: "Rong Geng's Seal", two versions of "Rong Geng", two versions of "Rong Geng's Longevity", "Xi Bai's Longevity", "Xi Bai", "Rong Geng's Seal", "Rong Geng's Works After Seventy", "Xi Bai's Works After Eighty", and "Both Person and Writing Have Aged". Rong Geng was slightly older than Zhang Dajing, who respectfully referred to Rong as "Elder Brother Xi Bai", "Elder Xi Bai", and "Old Man Xi Bai" in the border inscriptions. These border inscriptions span twenty years, from 1954 to 1974. Two seals each were made in 1963 (Rong Geng's seventieth birthday), 1964, and 1973 (Rong Geng's eightieth birthday), reflecting their long-lasting close relationship.

Rong Geng (1894-1983) learned ancient characters and seal carving from his uncle Deng Erya. Under Deng Erya's inspiration and guidance, he compiled *Bronze Inscription Compilation*. Rong Geng devoted his life to studying ancient characters, authoring works including *Qin-Han Bronze Inscription Records*, *Song Zhai Bronze Vessel Illustrated Records*, *Overseas Bronze Vessel Illustrated Records*, *Bronze Inscription Continued Compilation*, and *Shan Zhai Bronze Vessel Round Records*. In seal carving, he studied under Deng Erya and privately followed Deng Shiru and Huang Shiling. When studying in Beijing, he encountered more pre-Qin bronze vessel inscriptions, which broadened his horizons and transformed his seal style from school preferences to directly pursuing antiquity, becoming strict and elegant.

He stated, "Ancient scripts should primarily follow the inscriptions on Three Dynasties ritual vessels, supplemented by Stone Drums. Small seal script should primarily follow Qin steles, weights, proclamation tablets, and Xin Dynasty coin inscriptions, supplemented by Li Yangbing's seal script". He also said: "For name seals, red character seals should imitate Zhou-Qin small seals and Han clay seals, while white character seals should imitate Han seals; this is the correct path. Occasionally incorporating elements from bronze vessels, mirrors, coins, and tile inscriptions makes them especially ancient and appealing". Rong Geng's seal work "Jiegang Notice" incorporates bronze inscriptions with clear and strong lines and natural compositional interweaving; "Fu Kan's Longevity" combines bronze inscription characters with Han seal white character line work, fusing them into one, achieving both dignity and thickness. Characters



adapt their size with mutual accommodation and interlocking based on their dimensions, masterfully capturing the layout artistry of ancient seals. Though both were seal carving masters, they commissioned seals from each other. Zhang's seals for Rong Geng include styles of Qin seals and bronze inscriptions that Rong excelled at, with border inscriptions often reading "Elder Xi Bai's Correct Seal Script" and similar phrases, reflecting their mutual exchange and refinement. This also demonstrates how Lingnan seal masters with different lineages influenced and learned from each other. Evidently, Lingnan seal masters' preference for incorporating oracle bones and bronze inscriptions reflected both their individual artistic personalities and the collective stylistic direction of the school.

In 1980, the Guangzhou Young Calligraphers Association was established, with Zhang Dajing, Rong Geng, Shang Chengzuo, Huang Wenkuan, Qin Gasheng, Li Quzhai, Zhu Yongzhai and others serving as consultants. They frequently gathered for activities and exchanges afterward. Many in this social circle were seal masters skilled at incorporating oracle bones and bronze inscriptions. Qin Gasheng (1900-1990), styled Guxun, also known as Luting, was accomplished in oracle bone script, bronze inscriptions, seal script, clerical script, regular script, running script, and cursive script, known as the "Three Qin Excellences" in poetry, calligraphy, and seals. His seal carving completely derived from ancient and Han seals, occasionally incorporating oracle bone script with fascinating results. Shang Chengzuo (1902-1991), styled Xiyong, also known as Qi Zhai. A paleographer and seal artist, he authored works including *Oracle Bone Inscription Categorization*, *Fu's Collection of Oracle Bone Characters*, *Twelve Masters' Bronze Vessel Round Records*, and *Hun Yuan Bronze Vessel Illustrations*. His seal carving excelled at ancient seals, deriving from ritual vessel inscriptions and pottery seals through integration and transformation, achieving pure and elegant character. Huang Wenkuan (1910-1989), styled Yan, also known as Yunshi Road Man, Ping Lu, and Gang Zhai. He named his studios Wa Cun Lou, Fan Zhuo Lou, and others. His collections include *Wa Cun Room Seal Collection*, *Ping Lu Remaining Seals*, and *Ju Wu Xun Meng Room Seal Collection*. Huang had extensive interactions with Li Yinsang, Deng Erya, and others, greatly advancing his seal carving. He excelled at incorporating Han bronze inscriptions, and integrated the roundness of Wan School and angular features of Qianshan School, fusing them into one style.

Zhang Dajing greatly admired Feng Kanghou (1901-1983). Zhang once told his disciples: "Elder Kang's seal carving learned from many masters, achieving synthesis of predecessors' accomplishments, which can be studied and deeply comprehended" (Liang, 2017, p. 3). Feng's seal carving "took Qin-Han as models, Ding and Deng as teachers, fusing Zhe and Wan schools", but when occasionally creating bronze inscription seals, they were also thick and full-bodied, with layouts creating dynamic visual interest and flowing vitality.

Fu Ding Tang Seal Collection includes a seal "Li Tianma's Book Seal". Li Tianma (1908-1990), with studio name Xi Yi Zhai, was from Panyu, Guangdong. A calligrapher and seal artist, Li Tianma also excelled at seal carving, extensively studying Qin-Han ancient seals and Ming-Qing schools, particularly accomplished at incorporating Zhou Dynasty bronze inscriptions, creating ancient, elegant, simple, and innovative works.

The collection also includes eight seals carved by Zhang Dajing for Chen Yongzheng: three versions of "Chen Yongzheng", "Chen Yongzheng Seal", "Yongzheng", "Yongzheng's Longevity", "Yongzheng's Voice Support", and "Yongzheng's Book Collection". Chen Yongzheng was a student of Rong Geng and Li Tianma, a paleographer, poet, and calligrapher. Six seals were carved for poet Liu Yisheng: two versions of "Yisheng's Longevity", "Yisheng", "Yi Elder's Poetry Drafts", and two versions of "Yi Hall". The collection also includes works carved for painter Huang Yongyu, calligraphers Chen Jingshu, Liao Yunyu, Huang Zihou, and others.

From the celebrity seals recorded in *Fu Ding Tang Seal Collection*, we can see that Zhang Dajing's social circle included many seal masters skilled at incorporating oracle bones and bronze inscriptions, as well as paleographers, scholars, poets, and artists. An artist's social circle and teacher-student relationships can indirectly reflect their artistic cultivation and ideological sources. Zhang Dajing's teacher Cheng Zhuyun was a member of the "Guihai Cooperative Painting Society" (later expanded into "Guangdong Chinese Painting Research Association") established in Guangzhou in 1923. This association proposed the slogan of "three excellences" in poetry and literature, calligraphy and bronze studies, and painting and sculpture, advocating their mutual enhancement to achieve higher realms. Cheng Zhuyun's artistic philosophy must have influenced Zhang Dajing. Zhang Dajing achieved extremely high accomplishments in all three aspects of seal carving, calligraphy, and painting. His frequent association with paleographers, scholars, poets, and artists demonstrates both his emphasis on ancient characters, poetry, calligraphy, and painting studies, and indicates that his scholarship was respected by these cultural luminaries.

Liang Xiaozhuang pointed out in *History of Lingnan Seal Carving* that under the influence of Chen Li, Huang Shiling, and others, South Guangdong seal artists particularly emphasized self-cultivation and improving skills beyond seal carving, focusing on textual studies as foundation while broadly connecting with bronze studies and paleography. Xin Chen said "Among inheritors of the Guangdong school seal style, those who achieved outstanding accomplishments were all well-learned scholars" (Xin, 1995, p. 297). They used learning to enhance seal carving, learning from the ancient without being bound by it, not limited by regional schools or adherence to a single



method, learning from many masters to develop their own characteristics (Liang, 2017, pp. 297-299). When analyzing Zhang Dajing's seal carving art, we should note these mutual influences and school characteristics.

5 ANALYSIS OF ZHANG DAJING'S ORACLE BONE AND BRONZE INSCRIPTION SEALS

In his early years, Zhang Dajing began with Qin-Han seals while studying the Zhe School, Wan School, Zhao Zhiqian, Huang Shiling, Wu Changshuo and others. The collection contains many works that capture the essence of these masters. For example: "Chen Jingshu" uses Zhe School cutting techniques, with layout also imitating the Zhe School's angular steadiness. "Yi Hall" shows Wan School impact technique style, with circular flowing beauty, its broken edges reminiscent of Deng Shiru's seal "Flowing Water Sounds Break Thousand-Foot Banks". "Zi Zheng's Poetry Collection" clearly shows Wu Rangzhi's style, with gracefully elongated character forms and flowing dynamic lines. "Xinxiang Hall" follows Zhao Zhiqian's Han white character style, with full and expansive lines, showing dignity and elegant simplicity. "Red Sleeve Adds Fragrance to Night Reading", "Yisheng", and "Spare Time After Medicine Practice" demonstrate Huang Shiling's style, with crisp and vigorous knife work, smooth lines, and layouts showing steadiness with novelty. "Iron Inkstone Worn Through" follows Wu Changshuo's style, with ancient and powerful spirit, well-balanced density, and balanced tilted and upright elements. "White Snow Studio" shows Zhe School knife technique while its layout and spirit closely resembles Qi Baishi, demonstrating Zhang Dajing's ability to integrate and absorb artistic approaches.

From these school-style works, we can see Zhang Dajing's high-level understanding of each school's knife techniques, layouts, and stylistic characteristics. His early years of comprehensive study and integration of various schools laid a solid foundation in technique and aesthetics for later developing new styles. When we expand our view to the entire Guangdong school seal carving community, we can easily find common characteristics: in Guangdong school seal artists' collections, we often see imitations of various school styles achieving such close resemblance that real and imitation become indistinguishable. Yet they often also have self-innovative works not relying on predecessors, developing their own characteristics. This represents the artistic orientation of "limited regional methodology, not adhering to one school, learning from many masters, seeking innovation".

As Zhao Changzhi stated in *History of Chinese Seal Carving*: "Although Shanghai school seal artists took Wu Changshuo as their master, Guangdong school seal artists were influenced by Huang Mufu, and Zhejiang seal artists considered themselves a new school, none strictly adhered to ancestral methods or merely imitated forms. Schools influenced each other, seal artists from various regions learned from multiple masters, styles changed, becoming intricate and complex, more brilliant than any other historical period" (Zhao, 2006, p. 299).

Besides the above school-style works, *Fu Ding Tang Seal Collection* contains numerous ancient-style seals incorporating oracle bones, bronze inscriptions, tile patterns, pottery inscriptions, and clay seals. These works also show diverse styles, robust and simple, rich in bronze and stone spirit. Chen Yongzheng evaluated his seal works as "achieving ancient and transcendent spirit". These were his works that broke free from boundaries and developed his own characteristics. His ancient-style seals can be roughly categorized as follows:

5.1 Refined and Elegant Type

"Rong Geng", "Rong Geng's Seal", and "Chen Rong" follow Qin seal style, with clean and graceful lines and pure, ethereal layouts. In the "Rong Geng" seal, the half-arcs of the two characters echo each other, bringing flowing movement within stillness, with small decorative strokes serving as eye-catching focal points. "Rong Geng's Seal" uses upright positioning unlike the curved forms of the "Rong Geng" seal. The character "zhi" is slightly smaller and "xi" slightly larger, avoiding sparse arrangement. The top stroke of "geng" forms a triangle, with round-dot decorative strokes, creating two small geometric patterns. Many early Guangdong school seal artists had overseas study experience or Western aesthetic foundations, advocating integration of fine art and seal carving. For example, Deng Erya proposed seal carving aesthetic views of "incorporating geometric white space into profundity" and "viewing horizontal and diagonal all as geometry". The artistic spirit embodied in some of Zhang Dajing's refined and exquisite pre-Qin small seals also aligns with Deng Erya's viewpoints.

Additionally, three "Zhang Dajing Seal" works were created in Warring States private seal style. These three seals are very small in size with refined spirit, yet employ bold and powerful knife techniques. Ancient calligraphy theory states that small characters must possess the spirit of large characters. These three small seals, when enlarged, maintain power no less than large seals. Though the three seals contain identical content, their layouts and forms differ entirely, demonstrating Zhang Dajing's superior artistic handling ability.

5.2 Pure and Classical Type

Another style of Zhang Dajing's ancient seals incorporates Shang-Zhou bronze inscriptions, capturing the essence of Shang-Zhou ancient seals, appearing pure and classical, quiet yet dynamic. "Dajing's Casual Works" uses bronze inscriptions with predominantly curved momentum. The characters "Da" and "Jing" are relatively formal, while "Xian" boldly tilts, with the following three characters arranged



in sequence, either intersecting, supporting, or echoing, creating significant movement at the seal's center while maintaining coherence within the flow. The space between "Da" and "Xian" particularly draws attention. The right portion's stillness and left portion's movement create a dynamic-static harmony. "I Value Human Literary Destiny" primarily uses vertical straight lines, emphasizing the characters' vertical strokes, creating vertical momentum and sense of textual columns. "Finding novelty within steadiness" characterizes this seal, employing numerous diagonal lines to break the steady form, such as the diagonal lines in "Wo", "Ren", "Wen", and even the horizontal lines in "Jian" and "Zhong" take slight diagonal positions. Moreover, "Wen" and "Yuan" cleverly intersect with characters above and beside them, making the entire seal show novelty within steadiness, seeking liveliness within stability.

"Lishi Xuan" adopts the common "U-shaped" layout found in ancient seals, with the "Shi" character lowered to create large space above, while the "Li" character and right component of the "Che" character are raised to create two slightly smaller white spaces below, forming a triangular arrangement of three spaces that interweave with the U-shaped text arrangement. "Mo Yun Lou" places the center of gravity in the upper right, boldly leaving the lower left empty, while cleverly breaking the void with two vertical lines, again demonstrating superior spatial handling ability. In "Geng Shen", all vertical strokes in the "Shen" character lean right, while the three vertical strokes in "Geng" gradually straighten, achieving an artistic effect of slant returning to upright. When teaching students, he said: "The principles of 'dangerous precipices' and 'level correctness' in *Book of Calligraphy* also apply to seal carving" (Liang, 2017, p. 3). This style of Zhang Dajing's work, with its intersecting vertical and horizontal layout, perfectly embodies the principle of finding novelty within steadiness. Chen Yongzheng evaluated his seals: "His layouts are extremely strict, with careful attention to spacing density and weight distribution, seeking proper arrangement, achieving ancient and transcendent meaning" (Liang, 2017, p. 323).

"Ba Fen Shu Er" leaves red space in the upper right corner, with four diagonal lines showing subtle variations in angle and height. Though the characters "Shu" and "Er" have numerous strokes, they are intentionally compressed, appearing especially tight. The central axes of the two characters are offset yet echo each other, merging into one. The final horizontal stroke of "Er" pulls back to the right, both stabilizing the offset axis and forming an organic connection with the right side. This seal boldly leaves red space in sparse areas while compressing dense areas into one mass, achieving the artistic effect of "sparse enough for horses to gallop through, dense enough to block the wind".

5.3 Bold and Primitive Type

In his later years, Zhang Dajing had to adapt his seal material and carving table due to health conditions, but these forced changes led to another style of bold and genuine ancient seal work. In the border inscription of "Fu Ding Tang", Liang Xiaozhuang mentioned:

"In his later years, Master Zhang Dajing suffered from eye disease and mostly created large seals. Moreover, due to age and physical weakness, fearing insufficient hand strength, he preferred using soft soapstone as seal material".

Under conditions of impaired vision and hand strength, Zhang Dajing used blunt knives with sliding force, wielding the knife like a brush, not pursuing details but making bold moves, comprehensively applying techniques of impact, cutting, and hammering. His lines became substantial and strong, like axe-chopping and chisel-carving, powerful and sharp. Zhang once said, "Handle the knife as holding a brush, knife spirit like brush spirit... without knife spirit, it cannot be called seal carving". His three bronze method seals for "Fu Ding Tang", using blunt knives for either heavy or light impact, either cutting or hammering, created lines as hard as chiseling, forming a highly personal characteristic knife technique style that distinguished him from other masters skilled in bronze inscription ancient seals. Yi Dachang also favored blunt knives, proposing concepts of "blunt knife hard entry", "contrary knife like casting", and "using blade like laying brush for writing". Zhang Dajing learned the spirit while changing the substance, exemplifying learning from the ancient without being bound by it. His knife technique style even carries some flavor of "modern seal style". Though Lingnan seal artists were known for emphasizing learning from the ancient, in this pioneering region of reform, their avant-garde thinking was not necessarily inferior to central plains masters.

His "One Hundred and Fifty Stone Studio" oracle bone script seal shows thin and hard lines with sharp knife edges, decisive and determined. Although soapstone is naturally soft and difficult to achieve crisp and thin effects, Zhang Dajing's ability to achieve such results demonstrates his profound knife technique mastery. His "Age Seventy-Two in Xin You Year" oracle bone script seal shows bold and substantial lines, different from other Lingnan seal artists like Jian Jinglun and Qin Gasheng, forming his unique personality.

An excellent artist should be able to skillfully transform personal limitations into advantages. Just as Su Shi's single-wrapped brush grip created his characteristic left-graceful-right-sparse and towering right-corner structural features, and Huang Tingjian's trembling habit transformed into his "leaking roof trace" brush technique. Zhang Dajing's declining eyesight and hand strength did not constrain him; instead, by abandoning refinement for simplicity, he achieved his most distinctive knife technique style. Studying Zhang Dajing's seal carving artistic philosophy may offer considerable inspiration for our seal carving creation.



6 CONCLUSION: FURTHER DISCUSSION ON THE "GUANGDONG SEAL" TRADITION

Zhang Dajing's seal carving took Qin-Han seals as foundation while broadly incorporating styles from Zhe, Wan, Qian, Wu, and Zhao schools, achieving high mastery in both Qin-Han seals and school styles. He also extensively drew from oracle bones, bronze inscriptions, and even tiles and clay seals, with his oracle bone and bronze inscription ancient seals displaying multiple styles. In his later years, due to health conditions, he abandoned refinement for simplicity, wielding the knife like a brush without pursuing details, making bold moves, forming a highly personal knife technique style. Studying Zhang Dajing's seal carving artistic philosophy can inspire contemporary seal carving creation.

Using the seals recorded in *Fu Ding Tang Seal Collection* as an entry point, this paper examined Zhang Dajing's social connections. His frequent association with paleographers, scholars, poets, and artists demonstrates both his emphasis on ancient characters, poetry, calligraphy, and painting studies, and indicates that his scholarship was respected by these cultural luminaries. Zhang Dajing's preference for ancient-style seals and artistic philosophy of learning from pre-Qin era was likely influenced by his teachers and social circle.

From examining South Guangdong seal artists who were Zhang Dajing's contemporaries and associates skilled at incorporating pre-Qin bronze inscriptions, we can see that Zhang's preference for ancient-style seals reflects both his personal artistic philosophy and the Lingnan seal tradition's emphasis on scholarship, using learning to enhance seal carving, taking textual studies and paleography as foundation, and advocating integration of poetry, calligraphy, painting, and bronze studies. This tradition was formed under the influence of Chen Li, Huang Shiling and others, combined with Lingnan's geographical, economic, and historical-cultural factors, and was reinforced through later interactions among Guangdong school seal artists.

In *History of Lingnan Seal Carving*, Mr. Liang Xiaozhuang provided a clear definition of "Lingnan School" seal carving as a regional artistic community residing in Guangdong that emphasized scholarly cultivation, stressed innovation while maintaining both refined and popular appeal in their mutual research activities. He believed that Guangdong's open atmosphere as a revolutionary birthplace brought about the local artistic community's innovative spirit; Chen Li's scholarly approach and Huang Shiling's seal style fostered South Guangdong seal artists' tradition of learning from the ancient while developing new styles; and the establishment of the Haoshang Seal Study Society provided a strong foundation for South Guangdong seal artists' mutual activities and exchanges. Mr. Liang Xiaozhuang's viewpoint is quite insightful. However, we can continue to ask: Why did Guangdong, with its relatively open and innovative style and comparatively less traditional cultural or excavated cultural relic materials than central regions, develop such an antiquarian tradition? Besides the influence of scholars like Chen Li, what other cultural and ideological factors existed? What are the most essential differences between "Lingnan School" seal style and other schools? Has this core changed to this day? Perhaps these questions are all valuable directions worth further in-depth research when continuing to study the Lingnan seal school in the future.

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Research Focus: History of Calligraphy and Documentary Research

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