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# On the Seal Carving and Seal Albums by Early Hong Kong Seal Carver Deng Erya

Chen Wenyan Translator: Lau Wai-kuen Caden

## Introduction

Huang Shiling, whose seal carving “looks ordinary at first glance but in fact is peculiarly striking,” has made a profound impact on the history of seal carving in the Lingnan Region between the late Qing and the Republican periods. Among all the Lingnan seal carvers whom Huang Shiling has taught, instructed or inspired, Li Yinsang, Yi Ru and Deng Erya are so prominent that they are acclaimed as “the three main pillars supporting the seal carving world in the Lingnan Region.” Deng Erya did a better job of inheriting the style of Huang Shiling compared to the other two seal carvers: Li Yinsang focused on studying ancient seals while Yi Ru developed his own “bold and unrestrained” style with the characters on ancient seals and sealing clay as his source of inspiration. The style of seal carving Deng adopted from Huang Shiling, which is characterized by the quaintness in his flexible yet elegant composition of characters that stands the test of time, can be described by the fifth and sixth lines of his poem “*Written for Huang Shiling’s Album of Seals*”: “With the true essence of the spacing and composition of the characters; Using the carving knife as free as if it could defeat thousands of soldiers with great ease.” There have been a number of articles published on Deng Erya’s seal carving, with a focus on the artistic style and features of his seal carving. This essay will look at Deng Erya’s life and his relationship with Hong Kong, explore his journey to becoming a seal carving master and organize Deng’s seal impression books available to me, with reference to information from books such as *Wenzi yuanliu* (Notes on the Origin of Characters), *Deng zhai yin ke* 鄧齋印可,<sup>1</sup> *Deng zhai yin ying* 鄧齋印媵 and *Deng Erya shigao* (Poetry Manuscripts of Deng Erya).

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1 Editor’s note: please see “Conclusion” for the meaning of *yin ke*.

## 1. Deng Erya's Life and His Relationship with Hong Kong

Rong Geng (1894-1983) has summarized the life of Deng Erya (1884-1954) in his afterword to Deng's *Lüqi yuan shiji* (Collected Poems of the Lüqi Garden):

*Fourth maternal Uncle Deng Erya, a native of Dongguan, was the fourth son of my maternal grandfather Deng Rongjing (1834-1902) [...] Deng Erya (and his wife)<sup>2</sup> studied art in Japan between the years yisi (1905) and bingwu (1906) and became a teacher at a primary school after returning to China. During his stay at my home in the year guichou (1913), he worked hard on the philological studies and seal carving, and my brother and I learned from him. He later brought his family to Guilin in the year yimao (1915) [...] He visited Shaoguan in the years wuyi (1918) and jiwei (1919) and worked at the secretariat of General Li Genyuan who commanded the Yunnan army [...] In the year renxu (1922), he moved to Hong Kong to avoid the turmoil of war. He set up his studio Lüqi Yuan (the Lüqi Garden) in Tai Po in the year jisi (1929) and the name he gave to the studio came from a Tang qin-zither Lüqi Tai he collected, which once belonged to the famous Ming intellectual Kuang Lu [...] He went to Luofu twice in the years bingzi (1936) and dingchou (1937). Subsequently in July 1937, he had to move out as a typhoon hit his home in Tai Po, where the house became rubble and where his book collection was destroyed.<sup>3</sup>*

Deng was born between the late Qing and the Republican periods, a time of dramatic change, and has been given the chance to receive traditional education in the Confucian classics and gain new knowledge of the west in Japan. He has been to many places in the years of turmoil, but finally he chose to settle in Hong Kong. Though accomplished in poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal carving, he is noted particularly for his seal carving and more widely known as a “seal carver” in history.

Deng Erya was known as one of the “Five Seniors of Hong Kong,” who included famous seal carvers Luo Shuzhong, Chen Yushan, Lu Dinggong and Feng Kanghou.<sup>4</sup> There have been many

2 His wife Chen Lingshu (1884-1928), a native of Xingxianli, Guancheng, assumed the courtesy name of Yaotiao and adopted the literary name of Kangzhai. Her father Chen Ronghui worked as a military advisor in Haikou, so she spent her childhood in Qiongzhou. Under her husband's influence, the gentle and virtuous wife specialized in philological studies and could write prose and poetry. See: Yang Baolin ed. *Dongguan shici suqu yanjiu* (A Study of Poems, Verses and Folksongs of Dongguan) vol. 1 (Dongguan: Leshuiyuan, 2002): 222.

3 Deng Erya. *Lüqi yuan shiji*, eds. Rong Geng, Chen Ji and Shang Yanliu (Hong Kong: [s.n.], 1960): 135-136.

4 Tang Cheung-sing. “Xianggang zhuanke fazhan shi (The Development History of Seal Carving in Hong Kong),” in *Shupu*, no. 86 (1989: 1): 76-77.

written accounts about his life and experience in Hong Kong, but his Hong Kong origin can be traced far back in time. In his *Deng zhai yin ying*, which is a collection of words and phrases for seal carving, he wrote down “Jishui gujia” (old home in Jishui) in the section “Family Traits” and added the note:

*My ancestors left the Baisha Village of Jishui County, Ji'an Prefecture, Jiangxi, and moved to the Kam Tin Village of Dongguan County in the Northern Song Dynasty. The Kam Tin Village was later put under the administration of Xin'an County, which is called Bao'an in the present day. Bao'an, the county's name in the Jin Dynasty, subsequently renamed as Dongguan, where the Duanguan Salt Fields were. The ancient Dongguan is in modern-day Shandong province and is different to the one in Guangdong. My late father used to own this seal (Jishui gujia).*

Deng Hanfu, Deng Erya's 29th-generation ancestor, was from the Baisha Village of Jishui County, Jiangxi (Deng Erya carved a seal “Baisha xiangren” (man from the Baisha Village) (Plate 1) and held the title of chengwulang (gentleman for rendering service). Having visited Guangdong in the early period of the Northern Song Dynasty, he was attracted to the humble and simple life led by the locals. Thus, in the sixth year of the Kaibao reign (973), he moved to Shum Tin, Dongguan, which is in modern-day Kam Tin, Hong Kong, and became the first-generation ancestor of the Dengs' Kam Tin lineage.<sup>5</sup>

Plate 1

Baisha xiangren (man from the Baisha Village 白沙鄉人) (After Hui Lai-ping ed., *Deng Erya Yin Ji* [Deng Erya's Seals] [Hong Kong: Han Mo Xuan Press, 2010], p.77).



Inside the Dengs' ancestral halls in Kam Tin and Ping Shan, Hong Kong, there are official rank title boards of Deng Rongjing, Deng Erya's father, which read “Appointed by the Emperor as a Bachelor at the Hanlin Academy in the tenth year of the Tongzhi reign (1871). Presented respectfully by Deng Rongjing.”<sup>6</sup> (Plates 2, 3) There is also an embroidered silk birthday hanging in the collection of the Ping Shan Tang<sup>7</sup> Clan Gallery. The birthday hanging was presented

5 So Man-hing. *Zuoyan ji zhi Jintian Deng zu* (Hong Kong: Systech Technology and Media Services Limited, 2008): 31-32.

6 So Man-hing. *Zuoyan ji zhi Pingshan Deng zu* (Hong Kong: Systech Technology and Media Services Limited, 2008): 130; So Man-hing. *Zuoyan ji zhi Jintian Deng zu* (Hong Kong: Systech Technology and Media Services Limited, 2008): 189.

7 Editor's note: The family name of Deng Erya, “Deng,” is usually spelt as “Tang” in Hong Kong in accordance with its pronunciation in Cantonese.



Plate 2 (left)

Deng Rongjing's official rank title board in Kam Tin (After So Man-hing, *Zuoyan ji zhi Jintian Deng zu* [Hong Kong: Systech Technology and Media Services Limited, 2008], p.189).

Plate 3 (center)

Deng Rongjing's official rank title board in Ping Shan (After So Man-hing, *Zuoyan ji zhi Pingshan Deng zu* [Hong Kong: Systech Technology and Media Services Limited, 2008], p.130).

Plate 4 (right)

Birthday hanging presented to Lady Zheng (wife of Deng Shuxiang) inscribed by Deng Rongjing Tin (After So Man-hing, *Zuoyan ji zhi Jintian Deng zu* [Hong Kong: Systech Technology and Media Services Limited, 2008], p.132).

Plate 5

*King Law Ka Shuk* (Jingluo Family School 敬羅家塾) (After So Man-hing, *Zuoyan ji zhi Jintian Deng zu* [Hong Kong: Systech Technology and Media Services Limited, 2008], p.189).

to Lady Zheng, wife of Deng Shuxiang, the 21st-generation ancestor of the Dengs' Ping Shan lineage, on her 60th birthday in the eleventh year of the Tongzhi reign (1872), and the birthday greetings on the gift were composed and inscribed by Deng Rongjing (Plate 4).<sup>8</sup> Assuming the courtesy names of Lianchang and Shangxuan, Deng Rongjing earned the title of *juren* in the *jiazi* year of the Tongzhi reign (1864) and rose to the rank of Bachelor at the Hanlin Academy in the year *xinwei* (1871). He held office as Left Admonisher in the Left Secretariat to the Crown Prince, Examination Official of the metropolitan examination in the year *bingzi* (1876), Archivist in the *Wenyuange* Library, General Coordinator at the Bureau of National History and Supervisor of Grain Transport in Jiangxi. After returning to his hometown to mourn his mother's death, he was appointed as the President of the Guangya Academy and the General Director of the Guangdong Militia Bureau.<sup>9</sup> Deng Rongjing was a 28th-generation grandson of Deng Hanfu and a 23rd-generation grandson of Deng Yuanying,<sup>10</sup> whose descendants moved from Kam Tin to Zhuyuan and Guancheng of Dongguan. Deng Erya was a descendant of those who relocated to Dongguan (see Table 1). The four characters "Jing luo jia shu" (Plate 5) on the plaque that is hung at the entrance of the King Law Ka Shuk in Tai Po, Tai were inscribed by Deng Erya.<sup>11</sup> The characters are



8 Deng Rongjing's signature reads: "Humbly written as a homage by Bachelor of the Hanlin Academy of the Class of the year *xinwei* (1871) Rongjing your nephew." See: So Man-hing, *Zuoyan ji zhi Pingshan Deng zu* (Hong Kong: Systech Technology and Media Services Limited, 2008): 131.

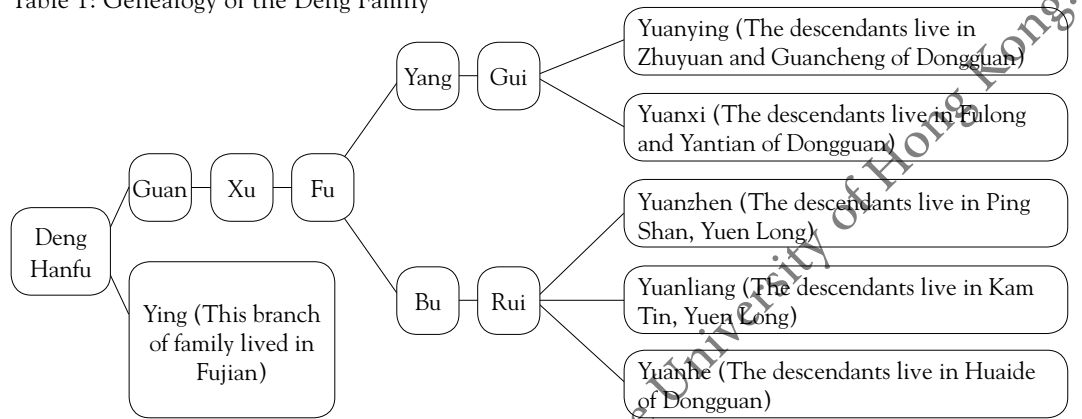
9 Deng Erya. "Deng Rongjing zhuanlüe (A Brief Biography of Deng Rongjing)," in Dongguan shi zhengxie ed. *Rong Geng Rong Zhaozu xue ji* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2004): 400.

10 So Man-hing, *Zuoyan ji zhi Pingshan Deng zu* (Hong Kong: Systech Technology and Media Services Limited, 2008): 134.

11 So Man-hing, *Zuoyan ji zhi Jintian Deng zu* (Hong Kong: Systech Technology and Media Services Limited, 2008): 188.

believed to be written during his stay in Tai Po. Apparently, Deng Erya’s relationship with Hong Kong owes its origin to his ancestors who arrived there centuries ago.

Table 1: Genealogy of the Deng Family<sup>12</sup>



## 2. From Playful Pastime to Extensive Reading: Deng Erya’s Journey to Becoming a Seal Carver

As quoted from the *Three-character Classic*: “Those who are learners must have a beginning.” Deng Erya’s journey to becoming a seal carver can be seen in various publications. The following section will look at how he learned seal carving using his own poems and writings. He mentioned how he picked up seal carving in his preface to *Deng zhai yin ke*:

*I entered school at a young age. The teacher would teach books such as Wenzhi mengqiu (Explanations of Characters for Children) and Shuowen bushou (Explanations of the Radicals in Shuowen) to my late brother, who was six years older than me. I have been fortunate to learn the six principles of character composition earlier than the others because I could join my brother in the lessons. Then I picked up my carving knife for fun. Knowing my family had an extensive collection of books, I always read them at leisure, learned and got the knowledge from books about seal carving. Then I found seal carving very addictive that the stones have replaced my toys. When I turned 20, I bought more books and catalogs about epigraphy since the books produced by the popular lithographic printing did not cost a lot of money. For those very rare books that were beyond my means, I would try to borrow from my friends and relatives so as to broaden my knowledge of seal carving. I learned the techniques of using carving knife from my reading. It is an amusing fact that I did not acquire all the skills from my teachers.*

12 See: So Man-hing. *Zuoyan ji zhi Pingshan Deng zu* (Hong Kong: Systech Technology and Media Services Limited, 2008): 135; So Man-hing. *Zuoyan ji zhi Jintian Deng zu* (Hong Kong: Systech Technology and Media Services Limited, 2008): 25.

The preface reveals that the early school lessons exerted an influence on Deng Erya so he could study paleography as soon as he started reading the books about seal carving in his family library. He took seal carving as a game. He bought more books about epigraphy after he came of age to extend his knowledge of seal carving at the time when lithographic copies of books were popular and cheap in price. If he knew his friends and relatives collected rare books, he would try to borrow the books from them. Subsequently, he learned the skills and technique from the books he read instead of acquiring all of them from his teachers. After all, one could develop his skills by “flipping through thousands of ancient books; building up extraordinary skill of using carving knife.”<sup>13</sup> Then from which books did he learn his skills? In “Wenzi yuanliu xiaoji” (Brief Notes on the Origin of Characters) in the first section of *Deng zhai yin wai*, he noted:

*Mo yin shu (Narration of the Script used for Seals) is easy and clear for lay readers to get a rough idea of seal carving. My family library had a bigger collection of books on literature. There were the ancient lexicon Shuowen jiezi with annotations by different scholars such as Duan Yucai, Gui Fu, Wang Yun, Niu Hushu, Zhu Junsheng, Lei Jun, Wu Dacheng and Sun Xingyan. The library also collected books by scholars in the Shang, Zhou, Qin and Han Dynasties as well as rubbings so it was literally a “Nanmian shucheng (well-stocked library in the South)”.*<sup>14</sup> I am aware that it has been a privilege to read in such a huge library and that I can overrate my ability so I started reading at an early age.

*After reading Yin sou (Collection of Seals), Jigu yincun (Collection of Ancient Seals), Shizhong shanfang guyu xiwin (Ancient Jade Seals Collected in the Mountain Studio of Ten Bells), Yinren zhuan (Biographies of Seal Carvers) and seal albums by seal carvers of the Wan and Zhe schools in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, I practiced the two main cutting techniques, abiding by the guidelines and instructions in Chen Li’s books. I began with relief seals with round characters and paid attention to the character spacing. My works were merely a play with my carving knife. Those whose works stand at my seal carving bed are truly my heroes.*

*My late father taught at the Guangya Academy and was the President [...] when Yishanren Huang Mufu (Huang Shiling) was an editor at the Guangya shuju (Guangdong Provincial Press) [...] Mr. Chen, Mr. Huang and Mr. Jiang have each collected several dozen seals by Huang Mufu and they have shown his seal*

13 Deng Erya. “Moyin (the Script used for Seals),” in Dongguan shi zhengxie ed. *Deng Erya shigao* (Poetry Manuscripts of Deng Erya) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2007): 36.

14 “Nanmian baicheng” is an idiom used to describe a person in a high position ruling over a large area, and later it also carries the meaning of having a huge collection of books, having another expression “Nanmian shucheng”. Liu Jiexiu ed. *Hanyu chengyu yuanliu da cidian* (Beijing: Kaiming chubanshe, 2009): 831.

*impressions to me. I practiced my skills with greater perseverance after seeing these works of seal carving [...] My work of seal carving has been shifting back and forth between the styles of the Wan school and of Yishanren, but I just followed seven tenths of those works instructed by the elders of my father's generation.*

Deng Erya read avidly about the annotations, explanations and analyses of *Shuowen*, and at the same time had a high regard for Chen Li's *Mo yin shu* in his learning of seal carving. He also had the opportunity to read a vast array of seal albums and books including: *Yin sou* by the Ming collector Gu Congde, *Jigu yincun* by the Qing scholar Wang Qishu, *Shizhong shanfang guyu xiying* by the Qing epigrapher Chen Jieqi, albums of seal impressions by the masters of the Wan and Zhe schools in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the album of seal impressions by Huang Shiling and *Yinren zhuan* by Zhou Lianggong and its two sequels by Wang Qishu and Ye Ming. In addition, the rich collection of his family library allowed him to read extensively the works and catalogs about stones, bronzes and rubbings from the Shang, Zhou, Qin and Han Dynasties. He wrote poems like "I study many albums of seal carving, reading more than just *Sanshiwu ju* (*Thirty-five Instances on Seal Carving*); The heart and the hand forget each other's existence, as free as nature without transgressing what is right" and "Heaven is perfect while man is not, and thus one's artistic excellence depends on what he reads"<sup>16</sup> which show the importance of the seal albums' demonstration when he learned seal carving.

Following the instructions in *Mo yin shu*,<sup>17</sup> he started producing seals by using the two main cutting techniques in relief seals with round characters. His seals modeled on those by different masters with special attention given to the composition of characters. He would place emphasis on copying the styles of Deng Shiru (1743-1805) and Huang Shiling and on asking the elders of his father's generation for advice while he was able to be flexible in using what he learned.

Even though Huang Shiling and Deng Erya both stayed at Guangya, Deng advanced his knowledge of seal carving not by consulting Huang in person but by studying the albums of his seal impressions. It is similar to the case with seal carver Liu Qingsong, who improved his skills as if Huang was there to teach him since he spent all day savoring Huang's seal impressions that he

15 In his work *Deng zhai yin wai xu chugao*, Deng wrote, "As a child I remember hearing from my seniors that it was more appropriate to learn the characters first before studying prose and poetry. I always keep a copy of *Shuowen* handy on my desk and in my suitcase, and that is how I support my elementary learning of philology."

16 Deng Erya. "Zhiyin shi erbei (Carving Seals for Posterity)," in Dongguan shi zhengxie ed. *Deng Erya shigao* (Poetry Manuscripts of Deng Erya) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2007): 168-169.

17 In Deng Erya's poem *Carved seals and sent to Xu Shoubai, Zhang Lu'an and Chen Weichen*, there is a line that says: "Though passionate, I knew not much about seal carving when I was a child; and yet at the age of thirteen, I have already read through *Mo yin shu*." Deng Erya. *Lüqi yuan shiji*, eds. Rong Geng, Chen Ji, Shang Yanliu, etc. (Hong Kong: [s.n.], 1960): 56.



borrowed from Ouyang Wuyun.<sup>18</sup> In his notes to the poem “*Written for the Qiuqin Guan Collection of Poems by Huang Qixiang*”, Deng Erya wrote, “When my father was the President of the Guangya Academy, Huang Qixiang was one of the Vice-presidents. I started learning seal carving as a child so I would not be ashamed to show my work to Huang for his comments.”<sup>19</sup> There is a line in Deng’s poem “Eulogy for Huang Lengguan” which reads “How does a bright child acquire the skills of seal carving? Learning from your father whom I regarded as my teacher.”<sup>20</sup> The line reflects that he enthusiastically embraced Huang Qixiang as a model when learning seal carving. The Deng and the Huang families have been friends for years, as shown from the poem “*To Huang Wanfu*”,<sup>21</sup> which says: “A long time ago my family ancestors became friends with yours. The Huangs of Jiangxia are without peer in the entire world. Our hearts and feelings find a perfect response as we share humble backgrounds. I have a recurring dream about our time together at the Guangya Academy.”<sup>22</sup> In the book *Lingnan jindai yinren zhenglue* (Brief Biographies of Modern Seal Carvers in Guangdong), Deng Erya mentioned himself in the entry of “Jiang Fengchen,” “When Erya lived with his father who taught at the Guangya Academy, he received teaching on seal carving from Jiang.” It shows that Jiang Fengchen was also one of his teachers of seal carving. Besides, he also practiced his skills of seal carving with a few friends. In his poem “*Carved seals and sent to Xu Shoubai, Chen Lu’an and Chen Weichen*”, he wrote, “Shoubai and Lu’an had studied under the same school of thought. I have known Weichen since childhood. My brother Shuzi keeps me company. We have been friends of seal carving for more than ten years.”<sup>23</sup> Those mentioned in the poem are Xu Zhiheng,<sup>24</sup> Chen Lu’an, Chen Weichen<sup>25</sup> and Deng Shuyu.

18 Lin Qianliang et al. *Ershi shiji zhuanke dashi* (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2006): 41.

19 Deng Erya. *Lüqi yuan shiji*, eds. Rong Geng, Chen Ji and Shang Yanliu (Hong Kong: [s.n.], 1960): 129.

20 Ibid: 98.

21 Huang Wanfu, also named Huang Zuxiong, was the fourth brother to Huang Miaozi, the son of Huang Lengguan (1887-1938) and a grandson of Huang Qixiang.

22 Deng Erya. “To Huang Wanfu”. See Dongguan shi Zhengxie ed. *Deng Erya shigao* (Poetry Manuscripts of Deng Erya) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2007): 350-351.

23 Deng Erya. *Lüqi yuan shiji*, eds. Rong Geng, Chen Ji and Shang Yanliu (Hong Kong: [s.n.], 1960): 56. The notes to the poem explain, “Xu Shoubai, grandson of Xu Qiguang, was a grandson-in-law of Chen Li. Chen Lu’an was Chen Li’s grandson. Chen Weichen is a great-grandson of Chen Li. Deng Shuzi was Deng Erya’s third brother Deng Shuyu.”

24 Seal carver Xu Zhiheng (1877-1934), a native of Panyu, Guangdong, had the courtesy name Shoubai. He was an accomplished poet who had great interest in seal carving. See Han Tianheng ed.: *Zhongguo zhuanke da cidian* (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2003): 284.

25 Deng Erya’s poem “I was recuperating in the countryside in the ninth month of the year *jiayin* (1914). One night I had a dream that Chen Dawo, also known as Weichen, came back to his hometown from Berlin and stayed for three days before setting off for Tianjin. In the next morning I went to the provincial capital rushedly as I learned that Weichen came to my place yesterday evening and left me a letter on the desk. I met him in an inn and it was true that he would leave in three days.” He made a note that “Weichen, originally named Zhida, has a literary name Dawo and is a great grandson of Chen Dongshu (Chen Li).” Deng Erya. *Lüqi yuan shiji*, eds. Rong Geng, Chen Ji and Shang Yanliu (Hong Kong: [s.n.], 1960): 12.

Deng Erya started out doing seal carving as a curious child who played with stones for fun with “an itch to test his skills,”<sup>26</sup> and became very drawn to the art that he would read voraciously, remembered with his heart and practiced with his hands. He modeled on seven tenths of the characteristics from each master while blending various styles into his own distinctive one. It is easy to explain how he turned a playful pastime into an artistic skill but no one can know the hardship he endured before his success. So accomplished was he that people who see his seals characterized by “elegant charm and originality” would agree “there has been no such level of work in Guangdong in the last three hundred years.”<sup>27</sup>

### 3. Profound Insights: Deng Erya’s Thoughts on Seal Carving

#### a. Proficiency in Philological Studies

Proficiency in philological studies is a priority for seal carvers. Chen Li said, “The Script used for Seals is a branch of philological studies that support the elementary learning of the people in the past ... Without knowledge of philology, one cannot write the seal and clerical scripts.”<sup>28</sup> Deng Erya also said, “Traces of craft so sophisticated and harmonized that they appear unembellished. The elementary study of philology as the first step. Vulgar are those who do not know the characters. Even with a knife in hand cannot be called heroes.”<sup>29</sup> However, one cannot be proficient in philological studies overnight and it takes a lifetime to master. Deng Erya exclaimed, “I picked up my carving knife for fun as a child, but I am still studying philology in my old age. Now that I realize how difficult it is to know the characters, never mind to study each of them thoroughly.”<sup>30</sup>

#### b. Necessity to Learn the Seal Script

Chen Li wrote in *Mo yin shu*, “To make seals one has to learn the seal script as well as the clerical scripts, and archaic-seal scripts are reminiscent of the Han clerical script.”<sup>31</sup> Deng Erya

<sup>26</sup> Deng Erya wrote the poem *Rashness* which says: “Besides reading remarkable books extemporaneously, I can’t help practicing the unimportant techniques.” See: Dongguan shi zhengxie ed. *Deng Erya shigao* (Poetry Manuscripts of Deng Erya) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2007): 324.

<sup>27</sup> Deng Erya. *Lüqi yuan shiji*, eds. Rong Geng, Chen Ji and Shang Yanliu (Hong Kong: [s.n.], 1960): 136.

<sup>28</sup> Chen Li. *Mo yin shu* (Narration of the Script used for Seals, in Han Tianheng ed. *Lidai yinxue lunwen xuan volumn one* (Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 1999): 370.

<sup>29</sup> Deng Erya. “Zhiyin shi erbei (Carving Seals for Posterity),” in Dongguan shi zhengxie ed. *Deng Erya shigao* (Poetry Manuscripts of Deng Erya) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2007): 169-170.

<sup>30</sup> Deng Erya. “Zhiyin kouzhan (Orally Improvised Poetry of Seal Carving),” *ibid*: 435-436.

<sup>31</sup> Chen Li. *Mo yin shu* (Narration of the Script used for Seals), in Huang Binhong and Deng Shi eds. *Meishu congshu 1* (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1986): 35.

once copied the entire book of *Hanyin fenyun* (Collection of Han Seal Scripts Categorized by Rhyme) in the seal script. In volume three of his work *Wenzi yuanliu* (Origin of Characters), he shared his experience of learning the seal script and commented on the calligraphy: *Xu sanshiwu ju* (Supplement to Thirty-five Instances on Seal Carving) by Huang Zigao, a must-read for beginners, explains the seal carving theory in a simple and clear way. Zhao Yiguang's cursive-seal script calligraphy is swift and vigorous, but borders on vulgarity. With the prevalence of epigraphical calligraphy in the Qing Dynasty, the seal-script calligraphy of Deng Shiru, Wu Dacheng, Yi Bingshou and Huang Shiling is among the best. These calligraphers got out of the old habit of cutting or burning the brush-tip and instead wrote with a flaring well-soaked brush, resulting in seal characters that were no longer scorched, lean and stiff. Moreover, Deng also elaborated that (the seal script), "The space treatment of characters and the steeliness of the 'jade-chopstick' seal script draw an analogy between writing calligraphy and drawing the chessboard. Neat execution could result in staleness while demure sophistication lacks robustness. It is hard to attain the competent class, let alone the untrammelled or divine class." He then praised the seal-script calligraphy of the Han plaques for "their concealed brushwork, vibrancy, ferocity, and absence of the common problems of those of the Qin Dynasty." As far as we can see, Deng Erya went after spontaneity and gentleness and try to avoid artificiality and febleness when writing the seal script.

### c. Calligraphy and Seals

Deng Erya once said, "Writing calligraphy is like carving seals, and carving seals is similar to writing calligraphy. The wrist must be held with steadiness, writing and carving have the same origin."<sup>32</sup> In the history of Chinese calligraphy and seal carving, Deng Shiru, Wu Rangzhi, Zhao Zhiqian, Xu Sangeng and Huang Shiling are among the exponents with impressive accomplishments. They were all very innovative with their own features, developing consistent styles for both calligraphy and seal carving. This was very much in line with what Deng Erya was doing.

Rong Geng described the artistic achievements of his uncle: "Owed his seal carving to Deng Shiru and Huang Shiling, his regular-script calligraphy to Deng Chengxiu and poetry to Gong Zizhen, Deng Erya succeeded in deriving his personality in his work from the merits of various masters."<sup>33</sup> It

32 Deng Erya. "Zhiyin shi erbei (Carving Seals for Posterity)," in Dongguan shi zhengxie ed. *Deng Erya shigao* (Poetry Manuscripts of Deng Erya) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2007): 168.

33 Deng Erya. *Lüqi yuan shiji*, eds. Rong Geng, Chen Ji and Shang Yanliu (Hong Kong: [s.n.], 1960): 136.

is worth pondering that why Rong Geng mentioned only Deng Chengxiu<sup>34</sup> as Deng Erya's model of calligraphy. Of all the script-forms of Deng Erya's calligraphy, his regular- and running-script calligraphy is most surprising with its stylistic spontaneity, owing to his modeling on the "sublimely slender" calligraphy of Deng Tiexiang (Deng Chengxiu). Deng Erya wrote a poem praising Deng Chengxiu's calligraphy, "The spacing is carefully done in forceful execution; sublimity of slenderness is evoked with the steely lines,"<sup>35</sup> which rightly describes what he learned from Deng Chengxiu. A comparison with the "steely and uncompromising" calligraphy of the "iron-faced Censor-in-Chief" Deng Chengxiu would show that Deng Erya's works are more lively, agile and genteel. (Plate 6) He also made efforts to retain this merits on the small surface of seals. (Plate 7)

Deng Erya's work *Lingu zagao* (Miscellaneous Works of Copying Ancient Calligraphy)<sup>36</sup> is a collection of the seal inscriptions written in the large-seal, small-seal, bird-fish-seal and cloud-seal scripts, and includes the copies of relief seals with round characters and intaglio seals which named "full-white" style (Plate 8) and the calligraphy he modeled on Deng Shiru, Xu Sangeng, Zhao Zhiqian, Deng Chengxiu and Huang Shiling. Although he internalized his own ideas of purity, truthfulness and harmony in his agile stokes and comfortably spaced composition, he was capable of showing the features of each script form. This explains practically how he "followed only seven tenths of the masters," bearing testimony to his learning from extensive reading and to what he said in a poem: "Relaxed composition of space can conjure sentimental roundness; the borrowing of Qin-Han elements is the basic in writing ancient scripts."<sup>37</sup>

34 Deng Chengxiu (1841-1892), known by the courtesy names Bone and Tiexiang, was a native of Guishan, Guangdong. He earned the title of *juren* in the year *xinyou* (1861), and held the post of Director in the Board of Punishments and subsequently Censor-in-Chief in the Jiangnan provincial region. He rose to the rank of Chief Minister of the Court of State Ceremonials and Chief Minister of Foreign Affairs, managing the affairs at the border between China and Vietnam. After he returned to his hometown upon retirement, he taught at the Fenghu Academy and established the Shangzhi Hall, suggesting setting up the Chongya Academy. He was a close friend to Deng Erya's father Deng Rongjing, who wrote a poem "Remembering the Past" for him, "Describing Deng Chengxiu as a bold man to speak his mind, still unknow his true personality. He is unrelenting in his criticism against political affairs, the first person since the Ming official Gangfeng (Hai Rui)." Jian Youwen gave an account on his calligraphy, "Vigorous, elegant and self-restrained, his calligraphy shows borrowings from Yan Zhenqing and is in the style he invented by modeling on stelae of the North and the South." See: Wu Daorong. *Guangdong wenzheng*, volume six (Hong Kong: Guangdong wenzheng bianyin weiyuanhui, 1973): 38; Ye Wei. "Deng Chengxiu qi ren qi shu (Deng Chengxiu and His Calligraphy)," in Guangdong Museum ed. *Guangdong sheng bowuguan jikan 1999* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1999): 212-215; *Dongguan lidai zhuzuo congshu: Deng Xizhen shiji, Deng Rongjing shiwen ji, Deng Jifang shiji* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011): 153.

35 Deng Erya. "Hui ji wuyin chongjiu riji (Record of the Double Ninth Festival in the Year *Wuyin*)," in Deng Erya. *Lüqi yuan shiji*, eds. Rong Geng, Chen Ji and Shang Yanliu (Hong Kong: [s.n.], 1960): 104.

36 It is in the collection of the Art Museum, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

37 Deng Erya. "Ti wang'er Wei suo shu wadang wenlu (Written for the Collected Essays on Eaves Tiles by My Late Son Wei)," in Deng Erya. *Lüqi yuan shiji*, eds. Rong Geng, Chen Ji and Shang Yanliu (Hong Kong: [s.n.], 1960): 129.

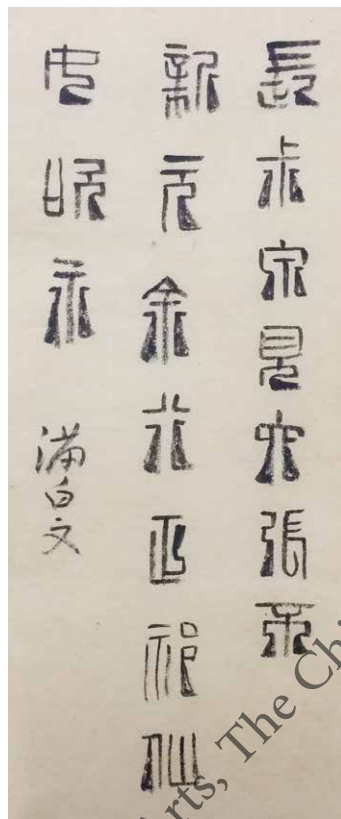
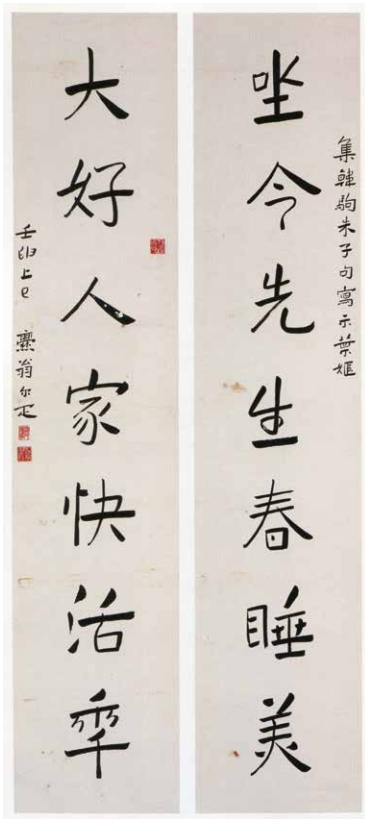


Plate 6 (left)

Couplet written by Deng Erya (After Hui Lai-ping ed., Deng Erya – *Volume of Calligraphy* [Hong Kong: Han Mo Xuan Publishing Co., Ltd [1998], p.9).

Plate 7 (bottom)

Dengqi Suozuo (鄧柒所作) (After Deng zhai yin shang [Guangzhou: Lingnan Meishu Chubanshe, 1988]).

Plate 8 (right)

*Linguzagao* (Miscellaneous Works of Copying Ancient Calligraphy) in full-white letter seals style, Ink on paper, 19.3x12cm, donated by Deng Zufeng. Collection of the Art Museum of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2012.0187)



In writing calligraphy and carving seals, be it “calligraphy modeling on seals” or “seal carving born out of calligraphy”, there is an intimate relationship between the two arts, which somewhat conforms to what Deng Erya said, “Writing calligraphy is like carving seals, and carving seals is similar to writing calligraphy.”

d. Miscellaneous Notes

*Deng zhai yin ke* by Deng Erya is worth a closer read because it provides good insights about Chinese seals and shares the author’s practical experience of seal carving. For example, when

Plate 9 (left)

Ba Fa (Eight principles 八法) (After Deng zhai yin ke 48)

Plate 10 (center)

Zaosui yi xing feng mu tan,  
yusheng yongfei lu'e shi  
(It grieves me that my  
parents have died at my  
young age; and I am too  
grief to read the poem  
"Lu'e" again. 蚤(早)歲  
已興風木歎，餘生永廢  
蓼莪詩) (After Deng zhai  
yin ke 70)

Plate 11 (right)

Yuru (玉汝) (After Deng  
zhai yin ke 68)



discussing how to overcome the difficulty of fitting characters into irregular natural surface of stones, he would try using either the characters inscribed on the weighing and measuring instruments of the Qin Dynasty, (Plate 9) or a kind of characters between small-seal and the tangled seal scripts, (Plate 10) paying careful attention to the arrangement of space. In the second seal, he even put vertical borders between characters for a more compact composition.<sup>38</sup> As for the seals with the characters in the nine-fold seal script, (Plate 11) apart from talking about the history of this particular kind of seals, he made a comment about one of their features, saying “the script is used for a close-knit structuring of characters.” The Manchu Qing nine-fold seal script has Chinese seal characters on the right and Manchu seal characters are on the left. Deng commented the combination as “eye-pleasing and conformative.”<sup>39</sup>

Deng Erya had profound knowledge on the studies of *yi* (the Changes) and would carve hexagram images on the seals. “Jieyi” read in the seal is a representation of two hexagrams (the upper hexagram is called jie and the lower one is called yi), which replace the characters on where they should be. He believed that those hexagram seals are “suitable and original to make a rectangular mark at the beginning of a calligraphic work, which is cleverly subtle without being too cautious.”<sup>40</sup> What is more, hexagrams are “extremely difficult to combine well with Chinese characters. It might work if the hexagram images are put together with names like “Ding 丁,”<sup>41</sup> “Lu 呂,” “Wang 王,” “Yang 羊,” “San 三,” “Wu 五,” “Dan 丹,” and “Yu 玉.” If the names do not go with the hexagrams, it is more difficult to make two hexagram images uniform in structuring because there are too few hexagram names to choose from.”<sup>42</sup> (The original seal is placed upside down.) (Plate 12) These show that he was very particular about the coherence and harmony of the characters on his seals.

38 See: *Deng zhai yin ke* 48&70.

39 See: *Deng zhai yin ke* 68.

40 See: *Deng zhai yin ke* 67.

41 Editor’s note: Deng is referring to the visual form of the Chinese characters instead of their literal meanings or pronunciations. Chinese characters after the pinyin indicates the physical appearance of the characters.

42 Ibid.



Plate 12 (first left)

Jieyi (解頤) (After Deng zhai yin ke 67)

Plate 13 (second left)

Bodhisattva Manjushri (Wenshu) (After Hui Lai-ping ed., *Deng Erya Yin Ji* [Deng Erya's Seals] [Hong Kong: Han Mo Xuan Press, 2010], p.215.)

Plate 14 (third left)

Qilin (giraffe) (After Hui Lai-ping ed., *Deng Erya Yin Ji* [Deng Erya's Seals] [Hong Kong: Han Mo Xuan Press, 2010], p.233).

Plate 15 (right)

Year Dingchou (丁丑) (After Hui Lai-ping ed., *Deng Erya Yin Ji* [Deng Erya's Seals] [Hong Kong: Han Mo Xuan Press, 2010], p.217).

In addition to hexagrams, Deng Erya produced a number of image seals of Buddhas. He described how he made an image seal of the Bodhisattva Manjushri (Wenshu) (Plate 13): “I copied the image from a photograph of the Tang statues in the way people drew maps. I began by marking out the photograph with grid lines and then reduced the size of the image proportionately on another piece of paper, which was brushed with highly diluted glue and transcribed onto the surface of the seal stone.”<sup>43</sup> He was scrupulous not just about subjects and his creation, but also about the mudras and the objects the Buddhist statues carried. He said, “When representing images of Buddhas, one must delve deep into the history of the mudras and the ritual objects, and cannot invent the gestures and identity icons for the Buddhist figures.”<sup>44</sup> Images of ancient relics aside, he was able to keep pace with the times creating a modern image seal (Plate 14) with an illustration of *qilin* (giraffe) from *Dongwu tushuo* (Pictorial Explanations of Animals) translated by the Gezhi shuyuan (Polytechnic Institution) in Shanghai. He explained that the modern image seal was “absolutely different from the austere Han image seals, on which a dragon, a tiger, a stag or a horse was carved,” and that he did textual research into the origins of the creature and the word “*qilin*.”<sup>45</sup> This again shows that regardless of whether he had drawn his inspiration from ancient or modern materials, he would look for information that supported his seal images and inscriptions.

In the usage of different kinds of seals, according to Deng Erya, the inscriptions of signature seals can be birth names, courtesy and literary names, studio names, places of origin, auspicious words, quoted verses or idioms while the balancing-corner seals usually bear inscriptions of auspicious words, quoted verses and idioms. The colophon-head seals are the trickiest kind of seals. They have to be rectangular in shape and the number of characters in the inscription should be limited. Considering the top position this kind of seals occupies on a work, seal carvers would avoid having studio names and places of geographical origin as inscriptions. It

43 See: *Deng zhai yin ke* 36.

44 Ibid.

45 See: *Deng zhai yin ke* 64.

was common practice for the Ming and Qing literati to choose words from the four-character imperial plaques in the colophon-head seals, combine them with double dragons, terms about painting and calligraphy or the names of the years of the ganzhi cycle. Deng Erya made two colophon-head seals with the same inscription “*dingchou*,” one in the style of the Han-Jin wooden slips and another in the style of the bricks of the Jin Dynasty. On the seal with the characters found on the Jin bricks, there are a few dots on both sides of the characters, and the tiny marks are a feature exclusive to bricks and tiles, which contribute to a sense of balance of the space and convey a natural charm.<sup>46</sup> (Plate 15)

#### 4. Adhering to the Original Versions: Notes on Deng Erya’s Albums of Seals Seen Personally

Rong Geng described Deng Erya as “having no thoughts of imparting the knowledge of what he has learned over years as there were a lot of crossing out and erasing in his poetry manuscripts that made them hard to read.”<sup>47</sup> Deng Erya’s seal albums were in a similar situation. His seals have never been organized for any publication before he passed away, except they were seen sporadically in newspapers. Most of his seal albums were compiled by his friends and descendants. I am glad to have seen six of his albums of original seal impressions held in private and public collection, from which I can learn more details about his creation. Apart from the fineness of the seal impressions made with vermilion clay, I can understand under what circumstances the seals were made and Deng Erya’s relationships with those who received or collected his seals by studying the contents of the seal inscriptions, side inscriptions, colophons, prefaces and afterwords.

*Cai Hanqiong cang Deng Erya yingao* (Deng Erya’s Seals Collected by Cai Hanqiong) is now in the collection of the library of the University of Hong Kong and is rarely mentioned. The album is in three volumes and consists of original impressions made with Deng Erya’s seals. The books are four-eye-thread-bound without any type frames or side inscriptions. The title “Cai Hanqiong cang Deng Erya yingao” is handwritten in ink on the cover made from brown tiger-skin pattern xuan paper. Five characters “Shuizhou Tang yingao,” of which “Shuizhou Tang” is one of Deng’s studio names,<sup>48</sup> are printed on the lower edges of the books. Each volume is 16.9 cm in height and 12 cm in width, with copper-coated red paper inserted beneath the cover and the back to keep away silverfish or other insects.

46 See: *Deng zhai yin ke* 34.

47 Deng Erya. *Lüqi yuan shiji*, eds. Rong Geng, Chen Ji and Shang Yanliu (Hong Kong: [s.n.], 1960): 136.

48 Huang Jie wrote the poem “Written for the Painting of Shuizhou Tang as I Dropped By Deng Erya’s Studio in the North of the Town in the Second Month of the Year Jiayin.” See: Lin Donghai et al. *Nan she shi xuan* (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2011): 195.



In volume one there are six seal impressions on the endpaper of the cover, namely *Jingxiang*, *Nanhai Pan Yan*, *Li Genyuan zhang* and three seals with inscription “*Cai Shou zhi yin*.” It is unusual for a seal album to have impressions on the inside cover, and this piece of lining paper tells that it was supposed to be a draft of seal impressions, which shows that this seal album is a draft. Also, there are two left-right reversed marks left by the seal impressions *Xu Chonghao yin* and *Gongwu* on the flyleaf. Nonetheless, the page that follows is the title page and the seals on the first page are not those two seals. This demonstrates that this volume has been rebound and the order of the seals has been rearranged.<sup>49</sup> There is the same seal impression *Hancheng shoucang yintuo* on the title page and the first page. This is a sixty-one-page volume and has a total of 157 seals, with one to six seals on each page.<sup>50</sup>

In volume two the endpaper of the cover also bears seal impressions and there are as many as fifteen seals, including *Daoheng*, *Kong zi ku*, *Lanzhi baimo chong kaiguang*, two seals with inscription “*Hanqiong*,” *Luanhua ai luanshi ye*, *Hankun*, *Hancheng*, *Cai Zhefu*, *Cai Shoutuo*, *Cai Shou*, *Luanhua*, *Danyuan tang*, *Tengchong Liu Chuxiang yin* and *Chi zhai jinshi wenzi*. There are fifty-three pages in total for this volume. It has 167 seals, with one to nine seals on each page.

As for volume three, the inside cover bears no seal impression. There are, however, left-right reversed characters “*Deng zhai yin ya*” written in the regular-clerical script on the endpaper of the back cover, with the inscription “Written at the Tian Kuang Festival” (July 21) in the year gengshen (1920)” next to the characters “*Jiu hua deng*” in the regular-running script. It is very likely that this was a piece of draft paper for writing the book’s title, and this again means it is a sketchy seal album. Volume three is seventy-two pages long and has a total of 271 seals, where there are one to sixteen seals on each page.

49 On the back of some pages the marks left by seal impressions do not match the seals on the next page. For example, in volume one, there are two left-right reversed marks that read “*Kunsou*” and “*Chen Changrong yin*” respectively on the back of the page that has the seals “*Liu Zuwu*” and “*Jizhi*”, but the next page bears the seals “*Miao Jiashou yin*” and “*Yanzhi*.” It is also the case with volumes two and three.

50 Does not include the seal impressions on the inside cover.

51 Does not include the seal impressions on the inside cover.

52 Tian Kuang Festival is on the sixth day of the sixth month, by which “Tian Kuang” means heavenly blessings. According to the legend, Heaven God sent out the letters of Heaven to give blessings to his people on the sixth day of the sixth month some year in the Song dynasty, and the emperor called this day “Tian Kuang Festival.” As the saying goes, “On the sixth day of the sixth month, every household would put their colorful clothes and sheets under the sun.” People would air their clothing, bedding and books under the sun on this day to prevent damage from insects. See: Xiao Ting ed. *Guangdong sheng zhi fengsu zhi* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2002): 17.

From the endpaper of volume three, we might guess that someone had compiled a seal album called *Deng zhai yin ya* that contained seal impressions by Deng Erya. Historian Yang Baolin once mentioned *Deng zhai yin ya* too: “I collected two volumes of *Deng zhai yin ya*, in which the seal impressions were placed on the Yukou paper each printed with a type frame and three characters ‘Lüqi tai.’ In the two volumes, there were 123 seals carved before the year wuwu (1918) and 159 seals ‘produced after the year wuwu’ as indicated in the book, plus twenty-six seals on pages other than the contents. The seal album had 308 seals in total, with inscriptions on the cover that read ‘Yuantai shouta’ and ‘Yuantai cangben’. Yuantai is Rong Zhaozu’s pet name. The seal album belonged to Rong’s family [...]”<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately there is no way of telling whether *Cai Hanqiong cang Deng Erya yingao* and *Deng zhai yin ya* are the same book.

*Cai Hanqiong cang Deng Erya yingao* was once in the collection of Cai Shou (1879-1941).<sup>54</sup> Cai Shou and Deng Erya were members of the same arts and cultural groups, such as the Guangzhou branch of the Zhen Society, the Haoshang Seal Association, the Nan Society, the Nan Society Hunan Gatherings and the Painting and Calligraphy Association of the Nan Society (Hong Kong), and therefore they had frequent interactions with each other.

Urged by Mo Rongxin, the Military Governor of Guangdong Li Genyuan (1879-1965)<sup>55</sup> took up the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Yunnan Garrison in Guangdong in March 1918 and led his army to fight against Governor-General of Guangdong and Guangxi Long Jiguang, who was in the opposite camp of the Constitutional Protection movement. Meanwhile, Beiyang warlord Duan Qirui ordered

53 Yang Baolin. “Deng Erya de Lüqi yuan shiji (Collected Poems of the Lüqi Garden by Deng Erya),” in Dongguan shi zhengxie ed. *Rong Geng Rong Zhaozu xue ji* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2004): 410.

54 Cai Shou, originally named Cai Xun, was a native of Longjiang, Shunde, Guangdong. He changed his name to Cai Youshou and then Cai Shou, and assumed the courtesy names Zhefu and Chengcheng and the literary names Hanqiong, Hanweng, Han Daoren and Chaqiu Canke. As a member of the Nan Society, he relished in poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal carving and was noted for his expertise in epigraphy. He was the author of *Hanqiong yingao* and *Yin lin xian hua*. See: Lin Jiaqiang ed. *Shunde gujin meishu renwu lu*: 150, see: <http://book.duxiu.com/bookDetail.jsp?dxNumber=000007796630&d=DDAA3A1523E77E8121F94201367E07D1>. Accessed May 26, 2017; Sun Keqiang et al. *Qing ren ci hua*, volume three (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 2012): 2135.

55 Li Genyuan, a native of Tengchong, Yunnan, assumed the courtesy names Yangxi, Xuesheng and Yinquan and took the literary names Qushi and Gaoligong Shanren. He studied military science, politics and economy at the Imperial Japanese Army Academy and Waseda University, and became a member of the Chinese United League and the Nan Society. He held many posts, including Headmaster of the Jiangwutang Military Academy in Yunnan, Division Commander of the Second Division and General-in-Chief of the National People’s Army, Provincial Governor of Shaanxi, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Headquarters of the National Protection Army in Guangdong and Guangxi, Commander-in-Chief of the Yunnan Garrison in Guangdong, Commissioner of Guangdong’s Coastal Defense and Grand Defender of Leiqiong, Regional Inspector of Yunnan and Guizhou, and member of the Military and Administrative Committee of Southwest China. His publications include *Qushi wen lu*, *Qushi shi lu* and *Xuesheng nian lu*. See: Li Genyuan. *Xuesheng nian lu* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1966).

Wu Hongchang and Ding Xiaolan to lead an army of more than 30,000 troops advancing through Yuling. Nanxiong fell to the Beiyang army, whose aggression seriously threatened the Constitutional Protection Army. Li Genyuan, hastily appointed as the Commissioner of Border Defense of Guangdong, Jiangxi and Hunan, led his army northward and defeated the Beiyang Army after four days of intensive fighting, regaining control of Nanxiong. As the war began to ease, Li Genyuan focused his efforts on dealing with issues such as education, infrastructure, transportation and river regulation in the fifteen counties of the Beijiang region, Guangdong.<sup>56</sup>

Cai Shou and Deng Erya have worked as senior aides to Li Genyuan at his invitation and joined Li's army to stay in Shaozhou, Guangzhou and Qiongzhou.<sup>57</sup> Deng Erya, who carried out secretarial work in the military, has carved the seal "*Jishi canjun*"<sup>58</sup> for his military experience.

Apart from being a military expert, Li Genyuan was a scholar of the Confucian classics, literature and arts, and he read many ancient documents and rare books with great interest in epigraphy.<sup>59</sup> When he was the Provincial Governor of Shaanxi, he ordered the restoration of the Forest of Stelae in Xi'an, the compilation of *Shaanxi tongzhi* (Encyclopedia of Shaanxi) and the expansion of capacity of the library.<sup>60</sup> During a visit to Beijing, he spent much time playing chess with Gu

56 Li Genyuan. *Xuesheng nian lu* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1966): 86-89.

57 See: Li Genyuan. *Xuesheng nian lu* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1966): 86-97; Deng Erya. "Shaozhou za shi (Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects about Shaozhou)" and "Qiongzhou za shi (Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects about Qiongzhou)," in Dongguan shi zhengxie ed. *Deng Erya shigao* (Poetry Manuscripts of Deng Erya) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2007): 91-100; Deng Erya. "Caoxi Nanhua si Song ke wubai luohan ji (The Five Hundred Luohan Statues Carved in the Song Dynasty at the Nanhua Temple of Caoxi)," in Xu Yandong ed. *Guangdong wenzheng xubian*, volume two book eight (Guangdong wenzheng bianyin weiyuanhui, 1987): 542; Cai Shou. *Hanqiong yigao*, Tan Yuese ed. (China: [s.n.], 1943): 3-34; Huang Dade. "Deng Erya nianbiao (Chronology of Deng Erya)," in *Dongguan wenshi*, no. 29 (Dongguan: Zhengxie Dongguan shi wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui, 1998): 78-85.

58 "Jishi canjun" is an official post at the secretarial department under the Prime Minister's direct control, designated for those who were in charge of official documents and first introduced in the Western Jin Dynasty. During the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the position was set up at the offices of emperor's brothers, princes, regional princes, noblemen, senior officials and commanders with special commissions, and the officials holding this position were ranked from the ninth grade to the seventh grade. In the Sui Dynasty, "Jishi canjun" were given a lower grade-six appointment and reported to the offices of imperial princes. The Tang government followed suit but the official was ranked lower grade six, second class. In the Song Dynasty, this post was taken up by high-ranking officials who held audiences on a daily basis. "Jishi canjun" was an official of the eighth grade who read and drafted official papers and documents at the princes' offices in the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234). See: Zhang Zhenglang ed. *Zhongguo gudai zhiguan da cidian* (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1990): 360-361.

59 "When I was 23 ... I have read *Yunnan tongzhi* compiled by Ruan Yuntai, *Dianxi*, *Dian nan shi lue*, *Dian nan wen lue*, *Dian shi siyin ji*, *Chongguang ji*, *Nanzhao yeshi*, *Xiaotian jinian*, *Dianyun linian zhuan* and books on stories of Yunnan province. I also read *Shan hai jing*, *Erya*, *Shuowen jiezi*, *Jinshi cuibian* and *Peiwen zhai shuhua pu*, and paid attention to the documents about my home province. That was where my interest in epigraphy started." Li Genyuan. *Xuesheng nian lu* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1966): 15.

60 Li Genyuan. *Xuesheng nian lu* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1966): 80.

Jiufeng, discussing epigraphy with Ren Zhiqing and Liu Xitao, reading books and wandering around the antiques and old book market.<sup>61</sup> He joined the Nan Society as introduced by his friends like Qin Jianzhai, Lü Tianmin, Chen Peiren, Gao Tianmei and Cai Shou.<sup>62</sup>

When Deng Erya was working at the secretariat of Li Genyuan, he participated in many activities that involved visiting and preserving monuments and historic sites, for example, the restoration of the Nanhua Temple of Caoxi and the tomb of Zhang Jiuling, the famous Tang minister, and the tour to the Xiashan Temple.<sup>63</sup> He also composed or calligraphed articles for monuments, such as “An Eulogy to Fallen Soldiers of the Yunnan Army,” “The Tombstone at Shachongping” for the military cemetery for the Yunnan army and “Tomb Inscription for Zhang Jiuling” for the restoration of his tomb in Wulingyuan. In addition to essays, Deng was very passionate about seal carving, making a number of seals of names, literary names and names of studios and libraries for Li Genyuan and Cai Shou. He had a long list of people whom he carved seals for, including military governors of the “Military Government to Protect the Constitution” Tang Jiyao, Lu Rongting and Cen Chunxuan, Representative of the military government and Minister of Transportation Zhao Fan, Chief Advisor of the military government Leng Yu, Division Commander of the Third Division of the Yunnan army Li Tianbao, Division Commander of the Fourth Division Zhu Peide, Brigade Commander of the Fifth Brigade Sheng Rongchao, Regiment Commanders Zhang Peize, Li Genyun and Zhao Deyu, Battalion Commander Sun Shaoyu, County Magistrate of Yangshan County Xue Zhengqing, and his colleagues at the Commander’s headquarters like Yang Jin, Lu Zhu, Qin Enshu, Xu Chonghao, Chen Zuji, Zhou Chengchun, Liang Liudu, Li Chaoyang, Wei Dingrong, Qin Shanpei, Yuan Zhuhong, Zhao Congyi and Li Qifang.<sup>64</sup> The seals Deng Erya made for them are the main source of the seals cataloged in the album *Cai Hanqiong cang Deng Erya yingao*.

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61 Ibid.: 85.

62 Ibid.: 88.

63 The painting *Zeng Bingu Holding a Xiuxi Gathering at the Buddhist Monastery of Longevity*, once in the collection of the Xiashan Temple, has a colophon that reads “The eighth month of the year *jiwei* (1919). Viewed by Li Genyuan, Lu Zhu, Cai Shou, Pan He, Deng Erya, Zhao Fan and his son Zhao Zonghan.” In volume one of the seal album *Cai Hanqiong cang Deng Erya yingao*, the seal “*Zhao Fan, Lu Zhu, Pan He, Cai Shou, Deng Erya tongshi shending*” (Judged by Zhao Fan, Lu Zhu, Pan He, Cai Shou and Deng Erya) also makes reference to these activities. See: Li Ruoqing. “Jindai Lingnan fojiao shehui biange yu siyuan shoucang – yi *Zeng Bingu Changshou si xiuxi tu* Minguo nianjian de liuchuan wei zhongxin (Social Changes on Buddhism and Art Collection of Buddhist Monasteries in the Lingnan Region in Modern Times – Centered on the Circulation of *Zeng Bingu Holding a Xiuxi Gathering at the Buddhist Monastery of Longevity* in Republican China),” in Kong Lingwei et al. ed. *Huang Binhong and the Evolution of Modern Ideas in Art: An International Forum* (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2014): 110.

64 Li Genyuan. *Xuesheng nian lu* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1966): 88-90.

In the collection at the library of the University of Hong Kong, there is the *Deng Erya yintui (fu taoyin)* (Seal Impressions by Deng Erya [Supplemented with Pottery Seals]) compiled by Cai Shou. The four-eye-thread-bound edition, 20.2 cm in height and 11.5 cm in width, contains original seal impressions (some of which are pasted to the pages), and has copper-coated red paper put beneath the cover and at the back to keep away silverfish. On the lower edges of the book there are regular-script characters that read “Seal Impressions by Deng Erya Supplemented with Pottery Seals.” The type frame is 11.2 cm in height and 7.3 cm in width. There are signatures “yinya” printed at the top and “*Hanqiong*<sup>65</sup> *shuixie*<sup>66</sup>” printed at the bottom of the foredge. This seal album has two kinds of type frames, one being in the shape of character *tian* (田) and the other being in the shape of character *ri* (日). The right bottom corner of the first page of the seal impressions is inscribed with “Hancheng’s<sup>67</sup> collection of seals” outside the type frame. The album is 50 pages long and it has 258 seals in total, with one to ten seals on each page and side inscriptions on some of the pages. The last page bears Cai Shou’s handwritten inscription “Those forty seal impressions were made by pottery seals. On the winter solstice on the ninth day of the eleventh month of the year *dingsi* (1917). Written under the lamp after looking for plum blossom in the Datong Temple.” Cai Shou also remembered this gathering at the Datong Temple in his *Hanqiong yigao*, and wrote “the Linked Verse Composed with Society Members Deng Erya (Wansui), Hu Boxiao (Xiong’e), Xie Citao (Zuxian) and Zhang Yunxiang (Hui) about Looking for Plum Blossom in the Datong Temple.” Handwritten notes in ink are found next to some of the seals as an explanation of their materials (for example, the character “ya” (tooth) next to the seal *Chuiwan* tells that the seal is made from ivory) and carvers. Most of the seals in the album were carved by Deng Erya while some were made by other seal carvers: The two characters “Tui’an” near the seal *Qingcheng puhua xiezha* tells that Ye Qi is the seal carver; the characters “Shoubai” beside the seal Erya explains that the seal carver is Xu Zhiheng; the characters “Qiyun” at the side of the seal *Yiren si* refer to the seal carver Li Qiyun;<sup>68</sup> there are two characters “Xingzhou” next to the seals *Deng Wansui* and *Fenghuan*

65 It is one of Cai Shou’s literary names.

66 The original character in the seal album is ‘廚’. “The character ‘廚’ is not found in *Shuowen jiezi*, which, according to *Shuowen xifu* (Shuowen, Newly Appended), it is the word ‘樹 *xie*’ under the radical ‘mu (tree/wood)’.” See: Xu Wenjing. *Guzhou huibian* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2013): 316.

67 It is one of Cai Shou’s literary names.

68 Li Qiyun (?-1956), originally named Mohu, was known by his literary name Daye. He was a native of Xiangtan, Hunan. Once a supporter of the revolutionary cause, he has been a Buddhist monk and took the religious name of Qiyun. He was noted for his calligraphy, borrowing elements from the stone-drum inscriptions for his seal script and acquiring the clerical script from the *Eulogy on Shimen* and the *Stele for Zhang Qian*. He was also good at seal carving and was able to combine the features of the Wan and Zhe schools well. He painted landscapes occasionally in his late years and owed the brushwork to the seal script. Han Tianheng ed. *Zhongguo zhuanke da cidian* (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2003): 316.

*wenzi lou* and they are the literary name of Xu Xinzhou.<sup>69</sup> Apart from Deng Erya, the carvers of the last forty seals include Li Jian<sup>70</sup>, Cai Shou, Pan He<sup>71</sup> and Xi Geng.<sup>72</sup>

*Deng Erya yintui (fu taoyin)* bears features found in manuscripts as well. The seals are in a quite random arrangement as they are not only found inside the type frame of the pages, but also outside the type frame and on the reverse side of some pages. Most seals are the courtesy, literary and studio names or simply ornamental seals of Cai Shou, Deng Erya and their poetry friends, painting friends and seal-carving friends, like the seal “*Gao Jianfu Mabei Chuanchun Zhu Ji*” (Red seal mark of Gao Jianfu during his sojourn).

Many of the seals collected in *Cai Hanqiong cang Deng Erya yingao* and *Deng Erya yintui (fu taoyin)* are recorded in *Deng Erya zhuanke ji* (Collection of Seals by Deng Erya) published in 2004.<sup>73</sup>

The other four of Deng Erya’s seal albums that I have seen are now in a private collection. The first book is entitled *Deng zhai yin ke*. The four-eye-thread-bound edition is in one volume and has a porcelain-blue paper cover, with copper-coated red paper beneath the cover and at the back to

69 Xu Xinzhou (1853-1925), a native of Wuxian, Jiangsu, assumed the courtesy name Xingzhou. He was accomplished in seal carving and owed the steeliness and vigorousness to Wu Changshuo. He toured round China in his old age. He was well-respected for his talents so during the late Qing and Republican periods many senior officials and important families would have him carved seals for them. In 1918, he finished compiling the four-volume *Ouhua an yincun* for the seals he made. Wang Chongren ed. *Zhongguo shuhua yishu cidian zhuanke juan* (Xi’an: Shanxi renmin meishu chubanshe, 2002): 258.

70 Li Jian (1747-1799), a native of Shunde, Guangdong, had the courtesy name Jianmin and went by the literary name Erqiao. He became an imperial scholar by special examination in the 54<sup>th</sup> year of the Qianlong reign (1789). Much respected for his poetry, opera scripts, calligraphy and painting, he was the author of *Wubaisi feng caotang shi chao* and *Yaoyan ge ci chao*. Sun Keqiang et al. *Qing ren ci hua*, volume two (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 2012): 958.

71 Pan He (1873-1929), adopted the courtesy name Zhi Zhong, and took the literary names Bao Cang and Yun Jiao. Villager, was born in Nanhai. Pan read widely, and named his private library *Wanjuan Lou*. He was skilled in painting, calligraphy, poetry, and also expert in appreciation of art and epigraphy. His publication included *Baocanshi Shiwen Ji* (Collection of Poetry and Essay of *Baocanshi*). See: Zhang Jielong ed. *Nanhai Shi Zheng*, Volume two (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2009): 314.

72 The name is not found in books, and the inscription of the two seals he carved is “*Zou An*.” Zou An (1866-?) is more widely known as Zou Shouqi. Originally named Zou Weiqi, Zou Shouqi adopted the courtesy name Jiemei and took the literary names Jingshu, Shilu and Shuangyu Zhuren. He was a native of Hangxian, Zhejiang, and a famous and erudite scholar of epigraphy. As an experienced connoisseur of antiques, he was very particular about authenticating artifacts. He excelled in calligraphy. His works in the bronze script are infused with extreme antiquity. He was the author of *Zhou jin wencun*, See: Gu Tinglong. *Qingdai zhujian jicheng* (282) (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1992): 239; *Zhongguo Wenwu Xuehui Zhuanjia Weiyuanhui* ed. *Zhongguo wenwu da cidian* volume two (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2008): 1329.

73 Huang Dade comp. *Deng Erya zhuanke ji* (Beijing: Rongbaozhai chubanshe, 2003).

keep away silverfish. It is 22.9 cm in height and 12.1 cm in width. On the cover there is a paper mark inscribed with four characters “Deng zhai yin ke” in seal script, under which the writer signed “Yuezhuo shouqian, Erya.” The signature tells that Tang Yuezhuo, a brilliant student of Deng Erya’s, made all the seal impressions of this book by himself. The green type frame is 17.4 cm in height and 8.1 cm in width. The book has thirty-four pages, with one to ten seals on each page. There are 157 seals in total. No rubbings of side inscriptions are included in the book. As for the purposes of most of the seals, Deng Erya carved them for his own use or for modeling on the seals by the others while some seals were gifts to his family and friends.

The second book is *Deng Erya yin ke*, which contains the seals Deng Erya carved during his years as the secretariat of Li Genyuan. It is also in a four-eye-thread-bound edition in one volume. The cover is made from porcelain-blue paper. The book is 17.2 cm in height and 12.1 cm in width. The title “Deng Erya yin ke” is written in ink on the title page, where there is also an inscription “Carved in Quhong<sup>74</sup> (present-day Qujiang region of Shaoguan, Guangdong) during the last ten days of the fifth month of the year jiwei (1919).” There is no type frame for the pages. The book is twenty-three pages long, with one to nine seals on each page, consisting of eighty seals altogether. It comprises the seals that Deng Erya carved for the General Li Genyuan, Brigade Commander of the 20th Brigade Yang Yiqian, his colleagues Lu Zhu, Wang Heng and Chen Zuji, graduates of the Baoding Military Academy and Li Genyuan’s subordinates Ye Zhaoyong and Lü Liutao, and officer of the military command headquarters of Guangdong and Guangxi Huang Zhongzao. By that time Deng Erya has gradually matured in his style in seal carving, using diversified cuts in the prim and proper structuring of characters.

The third book is *Lüqi yuan yinying* 綠綺園印影. The four-eye-thread-bound edition is in one volume and has a porcelain-blue paper cover. The book has been bound in the “jinxiangyu” (gold-edged-in-jade) style for the protection of the book leaves with seal impressions. It is 21.7 cm in height and 13.3 cm in width. There is a preface written by Wang Guichen on the first page:

*I borrowed the collection of seals from Mr. Zhao Haogong and compiled this book of seal impressions by selecting the seals by Deng Erya from the collection. In 1973, I asked my senior Rong Xibai (Rong Geng) to inscribe the book title on the cover. Rong passed away recently so I have this book rebound in the “jinxiangyu” style as a commemoration. The seal impressions were made in the 1960s. I did not have time to make the ink rubbings*

74 It refers to Qujiang, Guangdong. See: Peng Zuxi. “Qujiang xian yu Quhong xian ming de kaojiu (Examination of the Names of Qujiang and Quhong Counties),” in Qujiang xian zhengxie wenshi zu ed. *Qujiang wenshi*, volume 3 (Qujiang xian: Zhengxie Qujiang xian wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui, 1983): 67-68. <http://book.duxiu.com/bookDetail.jsp?dxNumber=000005160816&d=D91E542D6F68D1733B418F8025B95F86&fenlei=110308&sw=%E6%9B%B2%E6%B1%9F%E6%96%87%E5%8F%B2+%E7%AC%AC3+%E8%BC%AF>, accessed June 20, 2017.

*of the side inscriptions and therefore wrote down the inscriptions in haste. Inscribed in Yangcheng by Wang Guichen. December 29, 1983.*

The preface is followed by a relief seal of Wang Guichen that reads “Keju shizhu.” The next page has Rong Geng’s inscription, where he signed “Written respectfully by Rong Geng in the second month in spring of the year *guichou* (1973).” The book has no type frame. It is a twenty-four-page volume, with one to two seals on each page, having in total twenty-six seals, each of which has the seal inscription written by Wang Guichen. All the seals were carved by Deng Erya at the behest of Zhao Haogong (1881-1948).

Zhao Haogong, a native of Taishan, Guangdong, was born into a poor family and had a love of learning. He began life as an apprentice in a picture-mounting workshop and then learned the skills of copying and authenticating paintings. Having studied painting with a famous painter Wang Zhuxu, he became an exponent of imitating paintings, promoting Chinese painting in pure traditional style. He has been a professor of Chinese painting at the Guangzhou Municipal College of Art and Sun Yat-sen University.<sup>75</sup> He and Deng Erya were good friends brought together by painting.

The seal inscriptions of this album can show how thoughtful Deng Erya was in his seal carving. He modeled on the bronze script of the Qin Dynasty, jade seals, Huang Shiling’s seals and the Tangut script. Some of his seal inscriptions are very meaningful, for example, the side inscription of the seal *Laofu chen ye* explains where the seal inscription is derived from: “The inscription comes from the story of Zhao Tuo, who acknowledged the suzerainty of the Han emperor. I have carved it as stationery for Haogong. Erya.” Even the seal *Zhao yi lou* has a story to tell as explained by its side inscription: “Duo Yu was impressed by a line the Tang poet Zhao Gu wrote: ‘The sound of a flute leads to someone who stands atop the tower.’ Zhao Gu has since been regarded as ‘Zhao Yilou’ (Zhao, the one who stands atop the tower). My painting friend Zhao Haogong named his studio that so I made the seal as a stationery gift. Erya.”

The fourth book is *Deng Erya yincun* 鄧爾雅印存. The album of original seal impressions is in one volume, 21.4 cm in height and 12 cm in width. The single-line black type frame is 13.1 cm tall and 8 cm wide. The book has forty-six pages and a total number of fifty seals with one to two seals on each page. Deng Erya carved those seals for his family and friends like Huang Bore, Ye Yi (Deng Erya’s secondary wife) and Liang Huiwu (master of the Tianjing lou). They were all his friends in the world of art since Huang was a master of Chinese painting, Ye a seal carver and Liang an avid collector.

<sup>75</sup> See Huang Dade. “Zhao Haogong nianbiao (Chronology of Zhao Haogong),” in Zhu Wanzhang and Guo Yanbing eds. *Guangdong guohua yanjiu hui yanjiu* (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2010): 178-204.



## Conclusion

Born at a time when politics and culture were changing and when revolutionary ideas clashed with the conservative tradition, Deng Erya was a zealous scholar of the Confucian classics, traditional art and culture like his forefathers, and also went to Japan to acquire new ideas and knowledge. He has worked at the military secretariat and been to different places during the tumultuous early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Due to the wars and conflicts, he moved to Hong Kong, where his ancestors stayed many generations ago. Throughout this time the only thing that has not changed is his passion for art. He never ceased to practice calligraphy and seal carving. He once quoted, “Ancient people would say that they feel regret about their early artworks. Both learning and art-making know no bound. There is no artist who would not regret his early works unless he draws a boundary for himself.”<sup>76</sup> He also said, “I called the draft of my work ‘yin ke’ at first and did not change. Nevertheless, I call them ‘ke,’ which means ‘fair,’ and it is only me who think they are good enough to get by. The difficulty of judging one’s own work is not to be understood by others.”<sup>77</sup> The endless pursuit of art by Deng Erya drove him to strive for a solid foundation of his skills and knowledge of seal carving. Sha Menghai commented in his work *Shacun yin hua*: “Deng Erya of Dongguan and Yi Da’an of Heshan are the most skillful of all the seal carvers in the south.”<sup>78</sup> Sha’s comment shows that Deng Erya held a high position in the world of seal carving and that he was a worthy member of the old and honorable family of seal carvers (his ancestors of the 14th to 18th generation were all good at seal carving).<sup>79</sup> Deng Erya was even able to extend his influence over his family since his wife, children and nephews also practiced seal carving. Therefore, he said proudly of his family, “Seal carving is nothing special in my family, where there are seal carvers in every generation.”<sup>80</sup>

Seal carving is seemingly a minor skill, but it requires knowledge of philology, calligraphy and the aesthetics of seals, etc., all of which one needs to acquire bit by bit and day by day. As seen from Deng Erya’s journey to becoming a seal carver, seal carving is by no means easy. By virtue of his extensive reading and constant practice, he gradually developed his own style characterized by “elegant charm and originality” and wrote much on seals in his poetry and essay manuscripts. He had a sound knowledge of seals that he could talk about their history at any time. In every seal he carved, careful consideration has been given to the selection of characters, spacing and cutting

76 See *Deng zhai yin ke 1*.

77 Ibid.

78 Sha Menghai. “Shacun yin hua” in *Sha Menghai lunshu wenji* (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1997): 377.

79 See: Deng Erya. *Xi yan* (Washing an Inkstone), an unpublished manuscript.

80 Deng Erya. “Ti waisheng Rong Geng xiongdong ji *Dongguan yinren zhuan* (Written for Biographies of Duanguan Seal Carvers Compiled by Rong Geng and His Brothers My Nephews),” in Deng Erya. *Lüqi yuan shiji*, eds. Rong Geng, Chen Ji and Shang Yanliu (Hong Kong: [s.n.], 1960): 66-67.

technique within the small surface of a seal. I have been fortunate to have seen a few of his albums of original seal impressions, which allowed me to know about his travels and his friendship with other literary men besides his seal carving.

Chen Wenyan is Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

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