

Highlights of the Development of Seal Carving in Hong Kong over the Past 150 Years

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Hong Kong has played an integral role in the development of the Lingnan seal community for a significant amount of time. As early as the 1930s and 1940s, the number of migrant scholars, epigraphers (*jinshi jia*) and seal carvers in Hong Kong dramatically increased as a result of the ongoing civil war in Mainland China. These artisans and scholars often either stayed in Hong Kong briefly, settled permanently, or regularly travelled between Guangdong and Hong Kong. Over the course of several decades, countless seal carvers, scholars, influential figures and activities were involved in the burgeoning seal community. Through teaching, cultural gatherings, publishing, organising exhibitions and establishing societies, these participants laid the cornerstone for the development of the Hong Kong seal community.

Despite this, there has not yet been any significant research regarding the history of seal carving in Hong Kong – only a very small number of scholars have conducted research in this area, and only several articles have been written about it in the past century. Tang Cheong-shing, a contemporary seal carver, first wrote “Xianggang zhuanke fazhan gaikuang (An overview of the development of seal carving in Hong Kong)” in 1988 and the content of this article has been more or less repeated in his subsequent writings, including “Xianggang zhuanke fazhan shi (The history of seal carving development in Hong Kong)” (1989) and “Seal Carving in Hong Kong – Retrospection” (1995), which provided an overview of the development of Hong Kong seal carving between the 1940s and 1980s. These articles provided anecdotal evidence regarding the author’s first-hand experience of seal carving at the time, which have since served as important references for the study of sigillography (*yinxue*) in Hong Kong.¹ Following this, the

¹ See Tang Cheong-shing, “Xianggang zhuanke fazhan gaikuang (An overview of the development of seal carving in Hong Kong)”, in *Yinlin* (The world of seals), no. 53 (October 1988), pp. 50–54; Tang Cheong-shing, “Xianggang zhuanke fazhan shi (The history of seal carving development in Hong Kong)” (Parts 1 and 2), separately published in *Shupu* (Essays in calligraphy), no. 86 (1989), pp. 76–77, and *Shupu*, no. 87 (1989), pp. 63–68; Tang Cheong-shing, “Xianggang zhuanke fazhan shi (The history of seal carving development in Hong Kong)”, in *Xianggang zhuanke bao* (Journal of Hong Kong seal carving), no. 1 (March 1989) edited by Hong Kong You Sheng Seal Society, pp. 1 and 8; Tang Cheong-shing, “Seal Carving in Hong Kong—Retrospection”, in *The Annual Journal of Hong Kong Visual Art (1993–94) Volume 1: Indirection*, ed. Lam Hon-kin (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Visual Arts Research

article “An Overview of Early Hong Kong Seal Carvers” (2005) by Tong Kam-tang Vincent of the Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, revealed the development of Hong Kong sigillography up until the late 1940s. This article is useful for understanding the Hong Kong seal community during its initial stage as it provides historical materials relating to the early period of the Hong Kong seal community.²

Information about Hong Kong seal carvers is scattered across various publications, with the majority approaching the topic from the perspective of the far-reaching culture of Guangdong. Relevant studies were available as early as in “Yinxue yuanliu ji Guangdong yinren (The origins of sigillography and Guangdong seal carvers)” (1947) by Deng Erya, and then later in *Jindai Guangdong yinren yizuo huiji* (A compilation of posthumous works of Guangdong seal carvers) (1974) edited by Yu Zuming. Ma Guoquan (1931–2002) wrote a compiled account of Guangdong and contemporary seal carvers in *Guangdong yinren zhuan* (The biographies of Guangdong seal carvers) (1974), *Jindai yinren zhuan* (The biographies of contemporary seal carvers) (1988), among others, which covered first-hand material and anecdotal testimony of Hong Kong seal carvers.³ Additionally, a number of individual local seal carvers compiled seal imprint books (*yinpu*) of their own works, and several seal carvers co-produced catalogues or exhibition programmes, which were more often seen up until and during the 1990s. These did not only preserve valuable historic records, but also offered a

Society, 1995), pp. 83–85; Tang Cheong-shing, “Xianggang zhuanke fazhan shi (The history of seal carving development in Hong Kong)”, in *Lingnan shuxue yanjiu lunwen ji* (A collection of articles on the study of Lingnan calligraphy), eds. Lin Yajie and Zhu Wanzhang (Guangzhou: Guangdong People’s Publishing House, 2004), pp. 130–135; Tang Cheong-shing, “Xianggang zhuanke fazhan shi (The history of seal carving development in Hong Kong)”, in *Xianggang zhuanke mingjia zuopin ji* (A collection of works by renowned Hong Kong seal carvers) (Hong Kong: Yau Ma Tei and Tsim Sha Tsui Culture and Arts Association, 2005), back of the book (no page number).

² See Tong Kam-tang Vincent, “An Overview of Early Hong Kong Seal Carvers”, in *Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2005*, ed. Mok Kar-leung Harold (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2006), pp. 145–182.

³ Deng Erya, “Yinxue yuanliu ji Guangdong yinren (The origins of sigillography and Guangdong seal carvers)”, in *Nanjin* (Hong Kong: Nanjin Xuehui, debut issue of 1947), pp. 13–16; Yu Zuming, *Jindai Guangdong yinren yizuo huiji* (A compilation of posthumous works of Guangdong seal carvers), Taiwan: The Commercial Press, Ltd., 1974; Ma Guoquan, *Guangdong yinren zhuan* (The biographies of Guangdong seal carvers), Hong Kong: Nantong tushu gongsi, 1974; Ma Guoquan, *Jindai yinren zhuan* (The biographies of contemporary seal carvers), Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1998.

glimpse into a previously unrecorded aspect of the Hong Kong seal community.

In recent years, mainland scholars have begun to categorise and recognise the importance of the development of Guangdong sigillography, and the result has drawn more attention to this art form and its significance in Guangdong. Under the advice of Shang Zhitan (1933–2009) in 2010, the Sun Yat-sen University Library revised Xian Yuqing's (1895–1965) *Guangdong yinpu kao* (A study of Guangdong seal imprint books)⁴, which is the publication that has collected, by far, the largest number of Guangdong seal imprint books. The research involved in this publication covered information about Hong Kong sigillography. In 2016, “Lingnan Seal Society” and “Lingnan Painting and Calligraphy Academy” organised the “International Symposium on Lingnan Sigillography” for the first time. The 48 articles involved were compiled into *Yin shuo Lingnan: Lingnan yinxue guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji* (The stories of the seals of Lingnan: Collection of papers presented at the International symposium on Lingnan sigillography). Although Hong Kong sigillography was not the central focus of the symposium, more than ten articles touched on the subject matter of Hong Kong sigillography.⁵ There have also been other topical publications, including *Lingnan zhuanke yishu shilun* (Essays on the history of Lingnan seal carving) by Guo Shouyun (2017), *Lingnan zhuanke shi* (The history of Lingnan seal carving) by Liang Xiaozhuang (2017), all of which explored Lingnan seal carving in relation to the Hong Kong and Macao regions.⁶

In summary, whilst Hong Kong has played an integral role in the history of Lingnan seal carving, it is obvious that the relevant information is either widely dispersed and incomplete, or lacking in information and waiting to be verified. In addition, contemporary research on the topic is almost completely absent. In order to reconstruct the history of Lingnan seals, the regional study of Hong Kong sigillography must not be overlooked.

⁴ Xian Yuqing, *Guangdong yinpu kao* (A study of Guangdong seal imprint books) (revised edition), Beijing: Cultural Relics Press, 2010.

⁵ Xu Chang and Qu Bin, eds., *Yin shuo Lingnan: Lingnan yinxue guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji* (The stories of the seals of Lingnan: Collection of papers presented at the International symposium on Lingnan sigillography), Beijing: Oriental Publishing, 2016.

⁶ See Guo Shouyun, *Lingnan zhuanke yishu shilun* (Essays on the history of Lingnan seal carving) (Guangzhou: South China University of Technology Press, 2017), pp. 156–158; Liang Xiaozhuang, *Lingnan zhuanke shi* (The history of Lingnan seal carving) (Guangdong: Guangdong People's Publishing House, 2017), pp. 467–469.

Hong Kong as an important location in the development of Lingnan sigillography

The history of the Hong Kong seal community began in 1872. Xu Sangeng (1826–1890), a seal carver of the late Qing dynasty, visited Hong Kong from Shanghai at the invitation of his associate Wang Tao (1828–1897). Xu carved the seal “*Taoyuan cang*” (1872) with the following side inscription: “For an old friend Ziquan. Mid-autumn of the year of *renshen*. Made during a trip to Guangzhou via Hong Kong. Noted by Xu Sangeng.” This is by far the earliest evidence of Chinese seals in Hong Kong.⁷ In 1909, renowned seal carver Qi Baishi (1864–1957) stopped over in Hong Kong for eight days on his way to Qinzhou. According to the records in *Jiyuan riji* (Diary of Jiyuan) by Qi Baishi, the Qinzhou trip was made at the invitation of Guo Renzhang (?–1922) and lasted for about half a year. More than 250 paintings and over 280 seals were produced during this trip. When Qi stopped over in Hong Kong, his friend Li Tiehuan (dates of birth and death unknown) implored Qi Baishi to carve the characters “*Tianyu*” for his ancient zither (*qin*).⁸ However, there were no records of how many of these 280 seals were actually carved in Hong Kong and, because the works were scattered and lost, there were no means to find out further information. Nonetheless, these historical records left an important mark on the early seal community in Hong Kong.

Despite a history originating from the late Qing dynasty, the study of Hong Kong seal carving is still considered to be in its infancy because the study of Chinese sigillography did not begin until relatively late, especially in relation to comparable Chinese art forms such as Chinese calligraphy and painting. There was a widespread lack of textual records and a very weak emphasis on preservation, as such, the study of this art form has yet to mature. Because the art of calligraphy and seals share the same origin and often complement each other, the two art forms have always been discussed side by side. Comparatively, seals have been more often overlooked than calligraphy and very

⁷ See Guo Fengli, “Xu Sangeng you Yue kao (An inquiry into the Guangdong trip of Xu Sangeng)”, in *Yin shuo Lingnan: Lingnan yinxue guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji*, eds. Xu Chang and Qu Bin (Beijing: Oriental Publishing, 2016), pp. 175–179; also see Tong Kam-tang Vincent, “An Overview of Early Hong Kong Seal Carvers”, p. 145.

⁸ See Qi Baishi, *Jiyuan riji* (Diary of Jiyuan) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House, 1985), pp. 70–72; also see Xiao Fenqi, “Qi Baishi Xianggang qi ri you (Qi Baishi’s seven days in Hong Kong)”, in *Visual Colours: Essays on the History of Hong Kong Visual Culture*, ed. Lai Kin-keung Edwin (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (Hong Kong) Co. Ltd., 2002), pp. 90–92.

few researchers have focused their studies on them. The situation is particularly evident in Hong Kong, where there is still a large amount of knowledge to be acquired. However, when considering the historic progress of sigillography in Hong Kong, there are two important stages that must be discussed. The first one can be considered the “Crucial Period of Development” (circa 1940s and 1950s): in which Hong Kong became an important city in establishing the cultural legacy of Lingnan sigillography. As a result of the civil war in Mainland China, seal carvers, epigraphy scholars, and collectors fled to Hong Kong, bringing with them valuable artefacts to keep safe from the chaos of war. The volume of works by seal carvers gradually grew and the backdrop of the period facilitated the substantial development of the Hong Kong seal community over the next three decades. During the second stage of development, “The Zenith” (circa 1970s and 1980s), the influences of the forerunners of this art form became evident in the next generation, as there were more local seal carvers and events frequently held. Sigillography was actively promoted, forging connections with local and foreign communities, including Chinese mainland, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and others. Hong Kong played an important role in fostering and continuing the development of Lingnan seal carving.

(I) Crucial Period of Development (circa 1940s and 1950s)

During the 1940s and 1950s, the talents and artefacts of the Guangdong region became more prevalent in the city. Hong Kong, as a result, became an important place where documentations and artefacts were preserved and Lingnan sigillography grew. In 1940, the “Chinese Culture Association” initiated by Ye Gongzhuo (1881–1968) joined up with cultural workers in Hong Kong and organised the “Guangdong wenwu zhanlanhui (Guangdong cultural artefacts exhibition)” at Fung Ping Shan Library, The University of Hong Kong. The exhibition recorded a turnover of 200,000 visits and the book *Guangdong wenwu* (Guangdong cultural artefacts) was subsequently published. It did not only give a detailed account of the circulation and preservation conditions of the complete collection of artefacts, but also incorporated a substantial volume of valuable information, pictures and related articles about the artefacts.⁹ Items that are relevant to epigraphy and seal carving include: ancient official and private seals of Guangdong throughout the dynasties, as well as seals from various

⁹ See Guangdong wenwu zhanlanhui ed., *Guangdong wenwu* (Guangdong cultural artefacts) (3 volumes), Guangzhou: Guangdong People’s Publishing House, 2013; also see Lai Shu-tim, “Feng Pingshan xiansheng yu tushuguan (Mr. Fung Ping Shan and library)”, in *Journal of Hong Kong Library Association*, no. 8, (1984), pp. 51–56.

schools of the Ming and Qing dynasties, seal books, articles and books on sigillography. Amongst them, some of the Guangdong seal carvers involved, which were: Xie Jingqing (1735–1806), Li Jian (1747–1799), Chen Li (1810–1882), Ke Youjin (1814–1885), Zhu Guangye (dates of birth and death unknown), Pan Yizeng (dates of birth and death unknown), Li Wentian (1834–1895), and Liang Yuwei (1842?–1913). Luo Yuantong (1889–1942), who served as the director of “Hong Kong Society of Calligraphy, Painting and Literature” as well as the editor for a number of local art journals wrote the article “Guan wenwu zhanlanhui shu gan (Afterthought of visiting the Guangdong cultural artefacts exhibition)”. It recorded how local seal carver Jian Jinglun (1888–1950) produced seals on location.¹⁰

The first example of a seal society emerged in Hong Kong in 1949. This is the year He Xiaokuan (1916–?) founded “Yiyi Seal Society” on Tung Man Street in Central. Initially, private seals and business seals were carved for clients and later it became an agent for calligraphers and seal carvers, holding exhibitions and conducting sales of materials and tools.¹¹ Tong Chek-sing (1927?–2010) was a local seal carver who once worked for “Yiyi Seal Society”. He was largely responsible for seal carving and was skilled at carving various types of wood, stone, ivory and jade. In his recollection, renowned local carver Deng Erya (1884–1954) visited the society quite frequently and would even partake in seal carving on site as a visiting carver. His students Zhang Xiangning (1909–1960) and Liu Yulin (1901–1950) would often shadow their teacher and observed day-to-day practices. In addition, Feng Kanghou (1901–1954), Luo Shuzhong (1898–1968) and others also visited the location frequently to discuss seals and other various art forms.¹²

During and before this period, there were many cultural gatherings, exchange sessions and exhibitions held by local calligraphy and painting groups. Amongst various events organised, some involved seal carvers who exchanged their insights about seal art.

¹⁰ Luo Yuantong, “Guan wenwu zhanlanhui shu gan (Afterthought of visiting the Guangdong cultural artefacts exhibition)”, in *Guangdong wenwu* (Guangdong cultural artefacts) (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 1990), p. 260; also see Liang Xiaozhuang, *Lingnan zhuanke shi*, pp. 467–469.

¹¹ See Tang Cheung-shing, “Xianggang zhuanke fazhan shi (The history of seal carving development in Hong Kong)”, *Xianggang zhuanke bao*, no. 1 (March 1989), pp. 1 and 8.

¹² See Tang Wai-hung, “A Brief Account of Tong Chek-sing and His Seal-carving Art”, in *Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2011*, ed. Tong Kam-tang Vincent (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2012), pp. 130–133.

However, records of “seal societies”, i.e. groups with the objective to bring seal enthusiasts together and enrich the art form of seal carving, were yet to be verified. Following “Yiyi Seal Society”, Feng Kanghou founded “Nantian Seal Society” (1962), and Zhao Heqin (1894–1971) founded “Society for the Three Arts of Calligraphy, Painting and Carving” (1969), both of which were quite important in the field of seal carving but only lasted a short time. Despite being lesser known than the other two societies, the artisans involved with “Yiyi” formed a cohesive bond during this time and experienced their own share of prominence in the Hong Kong seal community.

Subsequently, He Xiaokuan, Feng Kanghou, Luo Shuzhong organised “The First Joint Exhibition of the Works by Seal Carvers of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao” in the summer of 1958. Held on the second floor of Man Yee Building, more than 30 seal carvers participated in the exhibition and the catalogue *Xiandai zhuanke heji* (Collection of seal carving of the present time) (1958) was published. It listed close to 220 seal images by 20 seal carvers, including: Ou Jiangong (1886–1972), Zhao Heqin, He Xiufeng (1898–1970), Li Tsou-yiu (Li Zuyou) (1897–1965), Luo Shuzhong, Chen Lifeng (dates of birth and death unknown), Feng Kanghou, Liu Pingyu (1904–1985), Chen Yushan (1904–1987), Chen Zongyu (dates of birth and death unknown), Huang Siqian (1907–1985), Lin Jingmu (1909–?), Yi Yueshi (1912–2007), He Xiaokuan, Guan Zezhe (dates of birth and death unknown), He Shaoqiang (1917–?), Chen Bingchang (1921–1999), Lin Shichang (dates of birth and death unknown), Lin Jin (1923–2004), and Luo Xiaoshan (1924–?).¹³ Because the majority of seal carvers were active in Hong Kong, this exhibition clearly demonstrates that Hong Kong played a key role in the exchange of knowledge and development of Lingnan seal carving.

It is also notable that one of the exhibition participants, Yi Yueshi, who was a renowned local epigrapher, carved a seal for another exhibition participant Li Tsou-yiu as a symbol of friendship and shared appreciation of the art form. The side inscription even recorded the pre-exhibition preparation meeting, which involved some 20 seal carvers of different generations. This side inscription reads: “Mr. Tsou-yiu is highly attained in epigraphy, calligraphy and painting; he is also skilled in seal carving. At home and abroad, he is the one and only practitioner of western medicine with this level of artistic attainment. In April of the year of *wuxu*, I have resided in Hong Kong for the ninth year. At the grand event held at the Li’s, some twenty friends gathered to discuss the first joint exhibition. All the talents of different age and seniority attended. As such, I asked

¹³ *Xiandai zhuanke heji* (Collection of seal carving of the present time), Hong Kong: Nanyang yinshua gongsi, 1958.

for a stone for carving. This seal marks our friendship and common interest in epigraphy. I wish we could become good friends and good teachers to each other. A seal gift by Yueshi.” (*Li Zuyou yin*”, 1958). The inscription was a first-hand account of a seal carvers’ event, and served as added information for the history of Hong Kong seals.

This seal of Li Tsoo-yiu, alongside more than 50 other seals that were used by him before his passing, is now a part of the collection of the Flagstaff House Museum of Tea Ware. They are now considered important artefacts for the museum. In addition to Yi Yueshi, the seals were also carved by Lin Qianshi (1918–1990), Feng Kanghou, He Shaoqiang, Gao Tianxin (1915–?), Jian Jinglun, Zhang Chiliang (dates of birth and death unknown), He Xiaokuan, Tao Shoubo (1902–1997), Zhang Xiangning, Xu Banyu (1914–1968), Luo Shuzhong, and Fang Quji (1922–2001); most of whom were Hong Kong or Guangdong seal carvers. Although Li Tsoo-yiu was not famed for his art, he was very enthusiastic about Chinese calligraphy and painting, as well as seal carving, and had frequent encounters with members of the Hong Kong art community. He also acquired a rich collection of epigraphy pieces and books. Fung Ping Shan Library of The University of Hong Kong acquired his book collection, which totalled 3,218, in 1967. Amongst them, 219 titles were books containing collections of seal imprints, and these made a significant contribution to the conservation of documentation, in addition to promoting the development of sigillography.¹⁴ However, in spite of this, the name of Li is almost unheard of in today’s seal community. Detailed study and verification of his legacy would fill some knowledge gaps and benefit the history of both Hong Kong and Lingnan seals.

(II) The Zenith (circa 1970s and 1980s)

The cornerstone in the development of the Hong Kong seal community was laid in the 1940s and 1950s and this development continued to until the 1970s. Because of the cumulative achievements of their predecessors, the new generation of seal carvers became more and more active and forthright in taking part in exchanges and in promoting the art of seals, up until the founding of the “You Sheng Seal Carving Society”, which brought the development of Hong Kong seal carving to its summit.

Xianggang zhuanke bao (Journal of Hong Kong seal carving) (1989), edited by “Hong

¹⁴ See Lai Shu-tim, “Feng Pingshan tushuguan jianshi (A brief history of Fung Ping Shan Library)”, in *Essays in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of the Fung Ping Shan Library (1932–1982)*, ed. Chan Ping-leung (Hong Kong: Fung Ping Shan Library, 1982), pp. 16–30.

Kong You Sheng Seal Society”, gave a detailed account of the founding of the “You Sheng” society and its events. In early 1978, Tang Cheong-shing, Huen Siu-chan, Hui Man-ching, Chan Shue-yi, Hui Ching-yeh, Li Wai-him, Tan Kin-chwee and Wong Chik-kong, intended to follow the example of the “Xiling Seal Carving Society” (1904) and so founded “You Sheng”. The words “*yousheng*” came from *Shijing, Xiaoya, Famu* (Fa Mu, Minor Odes of the Kingdom, the Book of Poetry): “The bird cried to seek a companion.” The society was formed because the members wanted the echo of companionship from each other. There were 11 members when the society was first founded, however the number later grew to approximately 40, with various members of different ages. Some of the society’s main members were Chen Bingchang, Lam Zeng-cung, He Jixian, Kong Pingsun (1924–2016), Liang Qiubai, Chen Liyuan, Mao Darong, Peng Zhiliang, and Ou Dawei, among others. To date, some of these seal carvers are still active in the local seal community, continuing the legacy of the “You Sheng” society. There have been a number of seal carving publications produced over the years, including: 12 Volumes of *Yousheng yinji* (You Sheng collection of seals) (1978–1987), *Xianggang shengji yinxuan* (Selected seals of Hong Kong) (1982), *Xianggang si jia yinpu* (Seal imprint books of four Hong Kong carvers) (1985), *Zhongguo shi da fengjing mingsheng yintuo* (Seal imprints of ten scenic attractions of China) (1988), *Yinpu kuaixun* (News flash of seal imprint books) (1988), *Yousheng tongxun* (You Sheng newsletter) (1988), *Xianggang zhuanke bao* and other seal imprint books by individual members, and so forth. By regularly producing seals, publishing artworks and articles, introducing the activities of the society, and exchanging views about the art of seals and achievements, the society was highly praised by like-minded individuals and the materials of the “You Sheng” served as a historical account of the local seal carvers and their activities in Hong Kong.¹⁵

In the ten years following the formation of the seal society, frequent events were held in which the objective of bringing together seal enthusiasts and enhancing their art form was clearly conveyed. Through continuous publications, education, curation of exhibitions and exchange events, the seal art created by Hong Kong seal carvers was promoted both in China and overseas. The seal society had received many renowned seal carvers in Hong Kong, including: Tseng Shao-Chieh (1910–1988), Liang Naiyu (1927–2001), Hsueh Ping-Nan, Huang Shangming, Zheng Duokeng from Taiwan, Shi Xiangtuo and Tan Kin-chwee from Singapore, Haruo Nakajima from Japan, Cheong Wanching from Korea, Qian Juntao (1907–1998), Han Tianheng, Zhu Guantian, Yu Zheng, Chen Zhenlian from the Chinese mainland, among others. A unique platform

¹⁵ See Hong Kong You Sheng Seal Society ed., *Xianggang zhuanke bao*, no. 1 (March 1989), pp. 1–8.

for exchange was established through the society. In addition, numerous cross-region events were organised, some of the important ones were; a visit to Hangzhou in 1983 to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the “Xiling Seal Carving Society” and to attend the opening ceremony and various events, and in 1984, the society worked in collaboration with seal carvers from Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, United States, United Kingdom and organised “The First International Exhibition of Seal Carving” in Seoul.¹⁶

Undoubtedly, “You Sheng” can be described as the most formative and largest epigraphy and seal carving society, which was involved with the largest amount of seal carvers in the history of Hong Kong. The extensive scope of its activities became an important hub to promote and to pass on the legacy of Lingnan seal carving during the 1970s and 1980s. At the same time, the summit of development for the Hong Kong seal community was also demonstrated through the abundance of publications that examined the reference collections of seals and sigillography. During the late 1970s to early 1980s, epigraphy research specialists Ma Guoquan and Wang Renchong moved to Hong Kong and became active players in the city’s seal community. Their writings were wide-ranging, covering the brief history of seal carving, study on ancient seals, various schools of seal carving of the Ming and Qing dynasties, Guangdong sigillography, as well as biographical sketches of contemporary seal carvers. Up till now, these prolific writings still serve as important references in the study of sigillography, both at home and abroad.

Ma Guoquan was a regular commentator for *Ta Kung Pao*, a well-known newspaper in Hong Kong; he also served as a research fellow for the Centre for Chinese Archaeology and Art of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, as well as an instructor of calligraphy and seal carving at the Department of Fine Arts of CUHK. He received many invitations and travelled to lecture and to host exhibitions in Japan, Korea, Singapore and the Chinese mainland. As a prolific author, he wrote quite extensively on calligraphy and seals. Some of the sigillography titles he published in Hong Kong are: *Zhuanke yishu xuanji* (Collected works of the art of seal carving) (1970), *Guangdong yinren zhuan* (1974), *Seals of the Name of Guangdong Counties* (1992), and *Mingjia tan zhuanke* (Discussion on seal carving by eminent figures) (2001).¹⁷ Wang Renchong previously

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ma Guoquan, *Zhuanke yishu xuanji* (Collected works of the art of seal carving), Hong Kong: Wanyue chubanshe, 1970; Ma Guoquan ed., *Guangdong yinren zhuan* (The biographies of Guangdong seal carvers), Hong Kong: Nantong tushu gongsi, 1974; Ma Guoquan and Ma Dawei, *Seals of the Name of Guangdong Counties*, Hong Kong: Hanmoxuan Publishing Co. Ltd., 1992; Ma Guoquan, *Mingjia tan*

held roles as an assistant research fellow, a research fellow and then progressed to honorary research fellow for the Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. During this time, he also worked as a part-time lecturer for the Department of Fine Arts of CUHK. His writings were mainly published by the Art Museum of CUHK, including: *Xianggang zhongwen daxue wenwuguan cangyin ji* (Seals collected by the Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong) (1980), *Yinzhang gaishu* (An overview of Chinese seals) (1982), *Xinchu lidai xiyin jishi* (Newly excavated Chinese seals through the ages) (1987), *Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbei chao guanyin yanjiu* (Research on Qin Han Wei Jin dynastic seals) (1990), *Xianggang zhongwen daxue wenwuguan cangyin xuji I, II, III* (Seals collected by the Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong – sequels I, II, III) (1996, 1999, 2001), *Symposium Proceedings on Ancient Chinese Seals* (2000), and *Gu xiyin yu gu wenzi lunji* (Essays on ancient seals and ancient scripts) (2000).¹⁸

Although the original focus of these writings was not to categorise the history of Hong Kong seals, they are now of extremely high academic value and are representative of the research results of local sigillography, as both Hong Kong seal carvers and local collections of ancient seals were covered. When compared with some of the most important topical essays on sigillography over the course of the past century, for instance, *Yinlin xianhua* (Casual talks of the seal community) by Cai Shou (published as a serial in Hong Kong: *The Chinese Mail*) (circa 1919), *Zhuanke zhiyan* (Goblet words about seal carving) by Deng Erya (year to be confirmed), *Lidai yinxuejia gaishu*

zhuanke (Discussion on seal carving by eminent figures), Hong Kong: The Commercial Press (Hong Kong) Ltd., 2001.

¹⁸ Wang Renchong, *Xianggang zhongwen daxue wenwuguan cangyin ji* (Seals collected by the Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong), Hong Kong: Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1980; Wang Renchong and Luo Fuyi, *Yinzhang gaishu* (An overview of Chinese seals), Chung Hwa Book Co. (H.K.) Ltd., 1982; Wang Renchong, *Xinchu lidai xiyin jishi* (Newly excavated Chinese seals through the ages), Hong Kong: Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1987; Wang Renchong and Ye Qifeng: *Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbei chao guanyin yanjiu* (Research on Qin Han Wei Jin dynastic seals), Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1990; Wang Renchong, *Xianggang zhongwen daxue wenwuguan cangyin xuji I, II, III* (Seals collected by the Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong – sequels I, II, III), Hong Kong: Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1996, 1999, 2001; Wang Renchong and You Xuehua eds., *Symposium Proceedings on Ancient Chinese Seals*, Hong Kong: Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2000; Wang Renchong, *Gu xiyin yu gu wenzi lunji* (Essays on ancient seals and ancient scripts), Hong Kong: Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2000.

(An overview of sigillographers through the ages) by Yi Yueshi (1999), and Kong Pingsun's *Kong Pingsun yinlun ji* (Collected essays on seals by Kong Pingsun) (original title *Yinwen zhi'e* [Common errors on characters of seals]) (2002)¹⁹, the outcome of research during the 1970s and 1980s is particularly evident. It helped raise the status of Hong Kong sigillography to its historical zenith.

Huang Mufu and the Hong Kong seal community

Hong Kong sigillography has largely inherited the style of Guangdong seal carving, in which the mainstream style originated from the “Lingnan School” of Huang Mufu (1849–1908). Because Huang was a native of Yi County in Anhui province, the school was also known as the “Yishan School”. His style of seal was most prevalent in Guangdong during the late Qing and early Republican periods, and its influence also spread from the Mainland to Hong Kong. The main reason for this was the wide dissemination of the works of Huang Mufu amongst renowned Lingnan seal carvers and quite a large number of his seal imprint books have survived – over 60 of his titles are currently recognised with more than 2,400 remaining signets, his style of seal was widely circulated and has far-reaching influence.²⁰ Nonetheless, only very few seal carvers were personally taught by Huang Mufu himself. Aside from his son, Huang Shaomu (1879–1953), Li Yinsang (1882–1945), Yi Da'an (1874–1941), Deng Erya, and Liu Qingsong (1863–1920) were followers of his art and teachings. Yet, they brought various influences to the Hong Kong seal community and established a strong foundation for the “Lingnan School” to grow in Hong Kong. The following discussion will consider these four key persons and examine the paths of development of Lingnan seal carving in Hong Kong.

In 1918, Li Yinsang, Yi Da'an, Deng Erya and others founded “Haoshang Seal Carving Society” in Guangzhou to actively promote the development of Lingnan sigillography. In his writing *Anchi Jingshe yinhua* (Discussion of seals of Anchi Jingshe) (1982),

¹⁹ Cai Shou, *Yinlin xianhua* (Casual talks of the seal community), a serial published in Hong Kong: *The Chinese Mail*, around 1919; Yi Yueshi, *Lidai yinxuejia gaishu* (An overview of sigillographers through the ages), Hong Kong: Zhongguo fojiao wenhua chuban youxian gongsi, 1999; Kong Pingsun, *Kong Pingsun yinlun ji* (Collected essays on seals by Kong Pingsun), Macao: Focus Art Center, 2002.

²⁰ Lau Ho-man, “Suo zhijian Huang Mufu yinpu chuanben (What I learnt and heard about the handed down version of the seal imprint books of Huang Mufu)”, in *The Ambiance of Lingnan – Studies in Chinese Seals and Seal Books by Dr. Lau Ho Man* (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2018), pp. 122–149.

renowned contemporary seal carver Chen Julai (1904–1984) said: “For modern-time seal carvers, we have Li Xizhai (Yinsang), Deng Erya (Wansui), and Yi Da’an (Xizhi) of the south. They are all important successors of Mufu and each had their own strengths, therefore a comparison can hardly be drawn between these artists and their contemporaries.”²¹ This indicates that the three seal carvers were the heirs apparent of the “Lingnan School” and were very reputable in the contemporary seal community.

Li Yinsang was a direct disciple of Huang Mufu. When Huang was working for Jiaoshu Tang of the Guangya Bookstore, Li studied under Huang for approximately four to five years. Huang carved many seals for Li Yinsang, and about 50 of these signets have survived. One of the seals came with the following side inscription: “This is one out of dozens of stones that Mufu considered outstanding; it is amiable and honest, and no imitation of this has offered any surprising delight. I hope Mingke would treasure it.” (“*Shishi Changnian*”, 1899 or earlier) Personally instructed by Huang, Li inherited the characteristically complete and clean style of his teacher. Li delved into the study of pre-Qin seals; and was enlightened by the merits of seeking changes in perceived regularity. A number of these seal imprint books have survived till now.²² Other students of Li Yinsang were Ou Mengliang (1888–?), Feng Yan’e (1911–1954) and Li Buchang (1902–1970) – the son of Li Yinsang. Amongst them, Feng Yan’e taught in Hong Kong and also compiled with Li Tianma (1908–1990) the book *Li Xizhai xiansheng yincun* (Seal collection of Mr. Li Xizhai) (year to be confirmed). He also compiled a collection of some 50 imprints of seals carved by Huang Mufu into *Shuangqing Ge tieshu jingyan lu* (A compilation of seals from Shuangqing Ge) (year to be confirmed). Images of the seals made by Huang Mufu and his followers are preserved through these titles.

Before his passing, Huang Mufu handed over the collection of his self-carved signets, 13 Volumes of *Huang Mufu yincun xubu* (Supplementary volumes to the seal collection of Huang Mufu) (1908)²³ to Li Yinsang, which undoubtedly indicated the transfer of

²¹ Chen Julai, “Anchi Jingshe yinhua (Discussion of seals of Anchi Jingshe)”, in *Yinxue luncong – Xiling Yinshe bashi zhounian lunwen ji* (Collected essays on the study of seals – in commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the Xiling Seal Carving Society) (Hangzhou: Xiling Yinshe, 1987), p. 15.

²² Seal imprint books by Li Yinsang, see *Datong Shifo’an yingao* (Seal copies for Datong Shifo’an), *Li Xizhai xiansheng yincun* (Seal collection of Mr. Li Xizhai), *Wuyin yingao* (Seal copies of the year of wuyin), *Li Mingke xiyin liuzhen* (Seal collection of Li Mingke), *Li Yinsang yincun* (Seal collection of Li Yinsang), etc.

²³ Huang Mufu ed., *Huang Mufu yincun xubu* (Supplementary volumes to the seal collection of Huang

his learnings and his regard of Li as the bearer of his legacy. Li treasured this seal imprint book but he lived in extreme poverty during his twilight years. Under financial pressure, the seal imprint book was given to local scholar Gao Zhenbai (1906–1992). Gao planned to publish these for wider dissemination and invited Deng Erya to write the foreword. However, the seal imprint books were not published for reasons unknown. In addition, because of a fire at the printer, the manuscript of Deng was also lost. Fortunately, the article of Deng had previously been published in the debut issue of the *Nanjin* magazine of Hong Kong (1947), and therefore, the contents of the foreword have survived. In his foreword, Deng recorded the insights of Li Yinsang towards the carving skills of his teacher: “The master has adhered to the ancient style of carving; his knife was held absolutely straight, which was no different from holding a calligraphy brush. This is particularly visible on intaglio. In each of the strokes, from start to finish, the knife was held absolutely straight with no hesitation. The outcome was akin to prolonged use with accumulated seal paste. After the cuts are washed clean, a light pick up with a knife confirms the effect.”²⁴ It is believed that Deng and Li were both heavily influenced by Huang Mufu. Subsequently, the seal imprint book was transferred from Gao Zhenbai to Hong Kong art collector Lam Zeng-cung, which is now housed under Songyin Xuan. This is the sole existing copy recorded close to 700 signets, most of which have not been seen in other seal imprint books. As such, this collection provides extremely valuable materials for the study of Huang Mufu.²⁵

Yi Da’an studied at the Guangya Academy in his early years, making it very convenient for him to seek instruction from Huang Mufu. Yi’s seals were a transformation derived from Huang’s style, but were not aimed at imitation of appearance and form. His seals featured the innovative ideas of clay sealing and bronze chiselled seals. Yi was also skilled at layout and his visual composition was unusual; his works had an important standing in the seal community in the Republican period. A number of Yi’s seal books were also published.²⁶ In addition to engaging

Mufu), 13 volumes; other information unknown, circa 1908.

²⁴ Deng Erya, “Foreword to *Huang Mufu yincun xubu*”, in *Nanjin* (Hong Kong: Nanjin Xuehui, debut issue of 1947), back of the book (no page number).

²⁵ Lau Ho-man, “Huang Mufu liupai yinren (Seal carvers of the school of Huang Mufu)”, in *A Study of Huang Mufu’s Life and Seal Engraving Art* (dissertation for Ph.D. in Chinese Art History, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2012), pp. 121–129.

²⁶ For seal imprint books of Yi Da’an, see *Qinzhai Weizhai xiyin hegao* (Compilation of seal copies from Qinzhai and Weizhai), *Weizhai xiyin ji* (Seal collection of Weizhai), *Da’an yinpu* (Seal imprint book of Da’an), *Da’an jushi zaixiang yinji* (Collection of statues and seals of Master Da’an), *Ruzhai zike yincun*

in frequent discussion on seal art with Li Yinsang and Deng Erya, which led to the founding of “Haoshang Seal Carving Society” (1918), Yi later moved to Beijing, and founded “Ice Society” (1921) which had approximately 40 members, including Luo Zhenyu (1866–1940), Chen Banding (1876–1970), Shou Shigong (1886–1949), and so forth. He has had seminal influence in the spreading of the Lingnan style of seals. Some of the students who studied with him were Jian Jinglun, Pan Jing’an (1916–2000), and He Xiufeng, all of whom were core figures in the early days of the Hong Kong seal community.

Deng Erya demonstrated a love of seal carving from a very young age. His father Deng Rongjing (1834–1903) once taught at the Guangya Academy and was a friend of Huang Mufu. Although he had not received personal instruction from Huang, Deng was almost certainly influenced by him and his works.²⁷ Deng’s seal carving revealed its singular origin from the works of Huang Mufu and was developed to become a wide-ranging form that encompassed many styles, including pre-Qin seals, Han seals, Wei steles, Yuan monogram seals and figurines all became the subject of his seal works. The carving style of Deng is straight and clean and he was particularly good at layout. He once tried to describe Huang’s seals: “Particularly skilled at layout (setting the white space), which employed both straight lines and curves with well-connected contrasts; the crossing of lines demonstrates boundless variations.”²⁸ Deng went on to write many books on epigraphy and seal carving,²⁹ and eventually he settled in Hong Kong during his twilight years and made his living by teaching and passing on his art. Yu Zhongjia (1908–1942), Zhang Xiangning, and Liu Yulin were some of Deng’s students and his sons, nephews and second wife were all skilled seal carvers. Deng also had frequent encounters with the local seal community. An important exhibition was the “Deng Erya, Feng Kanghou, Feng Shihan, Lu Dinggong, Lin Qianshi – Lingnan wu mingjia zhuanke shufa zhan (Seal carving and calligraphy exhibition of five renowned Lingnan artists – Deng Erya, Feng Kanghou, Feng Shihan, Lu Dinggong, and Lin Qianshi)” (1947) that was organised by Hong Kong “Yuen

(Collection of self-carved seals for Ruzhai), *Guxi Shuwu yinji* (Collection of seals for Guxi Shuwu), etc.

²⁷ Xie Guanghui, “Huang Mufu Lingnan yinshi kaoshu (A study of Lingnan seal marks of Huang Mufu)”, in Huang Shiling yincun (Collection of seals of Huang Shiling), eds. Lin Ming and Xie Guanghui (Beijing: Cultural Relics Press, 2010), pp. 23–24.

²⁸ Deng Erya, “Foreword to *Huang Mufu yincun xubu*”, back of the book (no page number).

²⁹ Writings of Deng Erya: *Yin ya* (Elegant seals), *Zhuanke zhiyan* (Goblet words about seal carving), *Yin ying* (Accompaniment to seals), “Yinxue yuanliu ji Guangdong yinren (The origins of sigillography and Guangdong seal carvers)”, *Wenzi yuanliu* (The origins of characters), etc.

Society”. As an influential figure, and through his works, Deng had a profound impact on Lingnan seal carving in Hong Kong.

As a successor of the “Lingnan School”, Liu Qingsong was less prolific than Deng Erya. He was an associate of Huang Mufu, and his personality and knowledge were both praised by Huang Mufu. For the “*Liu Pinsun*” seal carved by Huang (1890), he recorded: “The year of *jimao* I received a guest from Jiangxi. It was the first time I learned of Liu Pinsun. Five years later, I visited eastern Guangdong and we met for the first time. We met again six years later. As old friends, we learned more about each other. I listen to his talks and read his writings, and then realised he has a wealth of superior knowledge. Together we studied and verified the merits and uncovered any errors of each other’s writings and works; therefore, we agreed to become friends. Confucian said, ‘When soil accumulates, it can turn into a hill.’ Pinsun had the advantage standing at the hill, but he knew his accomplishment could surpass that and can be measured. The friendship of Pinsun and Ling does not only last for one day over banquets and visits. I wrote this because of his merits. In the sixth month in the summer of the *gengyin* year. Huang Shiling of Yi.” The text shows that Huang and Liu shared a deep friendship. Although Huang Mufu was 14 years older than Liu Qingsong, their mentor-and-friend relationship lasted for 20 years. Initially, the seal carving of Liu followed the “Zhe School” when he cut into his seals. He was later influenced by Huang and turned to the pushing cut. The style of the seal was sharp, clean and swift; it showed boldness and vigour. Subsequently, Chen Rong (1876–1955), Feng Kanghou and his nephew Liu Yulin all studied seal carving with him, and Liu became an important bearer of the “Lingnan School”.

A student under Liu, Chen Rong demonstrated a unique style of seal that is both elegant and sharp. He also possessed a rich collection of seals and had compiled seal imprint books with the seal carving of Huang Mufu, Liu Qingsong and Feng Kanghou. His collection included: *Yong Yuan cangshi* (Seal collection of the Yong Yuan) (1935), *Chen Xiezhi xiansheng suo cang Huang Mufu keyin* (Seals carved by Huang Mufu as collected by Mr. Chen Xiezhi) (1948), and *Huangmei Huawu yinji* (Seal collection of Huangmei Huawu) (year to be confirmed). All of which played an important role in the circulation of the seal style of Huang Mufu. Another student of Liu, Feng Kanghou, had profound influence over the Hong Kong seal community. Feng began studying seal carving with Liu Qingsong at the age of 13. Under the guidance of Liu, he repeatedly practiced the works of Huang Mufu. Feng also learned from and was deeply impressed by the seal copies, calligraphy, seals and side inscriptions of Huang collected by his elder second cousin Ouyang Wuyun (1864–?), and as such, his studies

were akin to receiving direct instruction from Huang Mufu himself. The seal style of Feng is characteristically diverse; it demonstrates precise cuts and is very refreshing, indicating that he inherited the style that was first seen in the school of Huang Mufu. Around 1949, Feng Kanghou moved to Hong Kong and founded “Nantian Seal Society” and then later, “Guangya Calligraphy Academy” (1967) to provide instruction in calligraphy, painting and seal carving. He also instructed courses offered by the United College of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and extramural courses of The University of Hong Kong. He was a trendsetting pioneer and nurtured many local seal carvers. He was one of the “Five Veterans of Hong Kong”, alongside Deng Erya, Luo Shuzhong, Chen Yushan, and Lu Dinggong (1903–1979), and facilitated the growing popularity of Lingnan seal carving in Hong Kong.³⁰

Because of its development and the succession of their skills by Li Yinsang, Yi Da’an, Deng Erya, Liu Qingsong, the study of Huang Mufu demonstrates that there were very clear paths of development that were passed to Hong Kong. The role of Deng Erya was particularly crucial in fostering the expansion of the “Lingnan School” in Hong Kong. He trained a large number of students and was a key contributor to disseminating the seal art of Huang Mufu. Following the 1950s, Feng Kanghou, a student of Liu Qingsong, became the most influential seal carver. His students and next-generation students have dominated the Hong Kong seal community and have continued the practice of passing on the school of Huang Mufu. The founding of “You Sheng” was also supported by Feng Kanghou. Those who studied with Feng, and those who were influenced by him, all became accomplished in their field and enabled the transfer of practices and prosperous development of the Lingnan seal carving.

If one considers the artscape of Hong Kong seal carvers in detail, one may discover that Huang Mufu is not the only school that enjoyed a large following. Many seal carvers learned from their own teachers and took reference from other schools or came up with their own original concepts. In particular, in the advanced information age of the 21st century, individual regional styles have gradually faded, and the creative directions are more diverse and varied. This could be described as the most prominent feature of contemporary Hong Kong seal carving. Nonetheless, Hong Kong still remains an important branch of Lingnan seal carving, and the mainstream regional style still demonstrates the features that have been inherited from Huang Mufu.

³⁰ Lau Ho-man, “Huang Mufu liupai yinren”, pp. 121–129.

Enhancing foundations for the study of Hong Kong sigillography

Hong Kong has been established as an important location for the development of Lingnan seal carving, in particular between the early 1950s and late 1980s. The “Lingnan School” started by Huang Mufu gradually extended to Hong Kong. The scope of research on Hong Kong sigillography should acknowledge the origins, the passing on of expertise and influence of the “Lingnan School”. However, since the 1990s, the study of Hong Kong sigillography has undergone a significant decline in popularity, and the focus of development has shifted back to the Chinese Mainland. Some seal carvers remain active in the local seal community and a few tertiary institutes and organisations have hosted exhibitions and courses, however any continuity in development has been somewhat lost and it appears that a gap in succession has been created over the last few decades. When compared with Mainland China, Japan and Taiwan, sigillography has not maintained a high profile in the Hong Kong art community. The art and its study lag behind that of the counterparts and, as a result, there is a lack of academic research and much further progress to be made in the region of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong has both the foundations and resources to reintroduce and develop the local seal carving community. The “Five Veterans of Hong Kong”, the early seal carvers including Deng Erya and Feng Kanghou, as mentioned above, who trained many students and established good reputations. Following in their footsteps to promote the art of seal carving were the members of “You Sheng”, some of whom are still active in the contemporary seal community, now with their own outstanding achievements and continuing to enhance the influence of Hong Kong in the Lingnan seal community. Amongst tertiary institutes, systematic programmes to nurture new seal carvers are offered not only by The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, but also The University of Hong Kong School of Professional and Continuing Education. Recently, “Xiling Academy” (2017) held its first exhibition in Hong Kong which displayed seals and seal copies collected by the “Xiling Seal Carving Society”. In addition, the Academy started its own seal carving course earlier this year. Furthermore, other local groups have hosted their own exchange events, such as lectures and public exhibitions. Some of the most significant events include “Yau Ma Tei and Tsim Sha Tsui Culture and Arts Association”, which organised the “Invitational Exhibition of Renowned Hong Kong seal Carvers” in 2005 and 2014. Each exhibition gathered between 50 and 70 seal carvers, and their works were compiled into

publications.³¹

The study of sigillography is largely based on seals and seal imprint books. There is a relatively rich collection of materials in this area. Close to 2,000 titles of seal imprint books have been collected both publicly and privately in Hong Kong, which is the largest collection both at home and abroad. One significant collection is owned by Hong Kong private collector Songyin Xuan; equally important are the over 200 titles collected by the Fung Ping Shan Library of The University of Hong Kong – which has rarely been requested for research purposes; highlighting the need for such study.³² The largest collection of ancient seals that has been compiled, which totals at over 1,000 items, is housed in the Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. The seal collection was initially donated by the Bei Shan Tang Foundation and has been subsequently added to over the years. Many exhibitions and publications were produced to showcase the achievements, as can be seen in the numerous writings of Wang Renchong, detailed above. In 2000, “The Art of Chinese Seals through the Ages” exhibition and “International Symposium on Chinese Archaic Seals” were held in collaboration with the Zhejiang Provincial Museum to facilitate exchange; the outcome was quite favourable for the future study of sigillography.³³ In addition to this, Hong Kong now houses the world’s biggest collection of Nestorian Crosses (*jingjiao yin*) of the Yuan dynasty – including more than 990 items; the collection is now housed by the University Museum and Art Gallery of The University of Hong Kong. The seals were initially assembled by F.A. Nixon, which was subsequently acquired by the Lee Hysan Foundation and donated to The University of Hong Kong. More than 700 items were shown in the exhibition “Nestorian Crosses of the Yuan Dynasty” (2015). When considering the Ming and Qing and the contemporary schools of seals, the collection of the Hong Kong Museum of Art and its branch museum, the Flagstaff House Museum of Tea Ware, is equally important. The collection features close to 1,000 items in total, most of which were generously donated by the K.S. Lo Foundation. Additional donors

³¹ *Xianggang zhuanke mingjia zuopin ji* (A collection of works by renowned Hong Kong seal carvers) (Hong Kong: Yau Ma Tei and Tsim Sha Tsui Culture and Arts Association, 2005); *Xianggang zhuanke mingjia zuopin ji* (A collection of works by renowned Hong Kong seal carvers) (Hong Kong: Yau Ma Tei and Tsim Sha Tsui Culture and Arts Association, 2013).

³² Lau Ho-man, “Xianggang gong si cang yinpu jiyao (Highlights of the publicly and privately collected seal collections)”, in *The Ambiance of Lingnan – Studies in Chinese Seals and Seal Books by Dr. Lau Ho Man* (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2018), pp. 16–55.

³³ Wang Renchong and You Xuehua eds., *Symposium Proceedings on Ancient Chinese Seals*, Hong Kong: Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2000.

include Wong Hon-kiu (1914–2005), a student of Jian Jinglun, and Phung Le-hong, the widow of Lau Ping-hang (1915–2003) – a descendent of Ding Yanyong (1902–1978). Amongst them, there are approximately 200 carved seals that originated from Hong Kong and Guangdong with around 60 seal carvers involved in their production. This fully demonstrates the rich and diversified seal style that is characteristic of Lingnan, which is considered highly valuable. If these collections were to be studied in depth, they could supplement the gap of knowledge surrounding the history of seal carving in Hong Kong, and Lingnan sigillography overall.

In conclusion, valuable research materials for the study of sigillography do exist in Hong Kong and they have attracted the interest of both local, Mainland Chinese and foreign scholars. Amidst the trend that has seen Guangdong sigillography gradually becoming the focus of attention in the contemporary seal community, some scholars have visited Hong Kong to collect information, or to take reference of the achievements of local sigillography to propagate Chinese art and culture. On the contrary, Hong Kong sigillography, with its unique features and progress, should have stood at an advantaged position. However, advancements in this area have been slow over the past few years, and the outcomes from scholarly research have been scarce. This ongoing situation should not be disregarded by artisans and scholars. Successors should work to collate the outcomes of their predecessors and carry out a systematic compilation of historical materials in order to construct an archive of local sigillography information, and to facilitate the education and promotion of seal carving, so that Hong Kong sigillography can continue to innovate and advance. By outlining the development of the local seal community over the past 150 years and establishing the regional significance of Hong Kong in relation to Lingnan and throughout China, this article aims to unveil the direction for the study of Hong Kong sigillography.