

A Study of Chinese Seal Carving

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THE SUBJECT

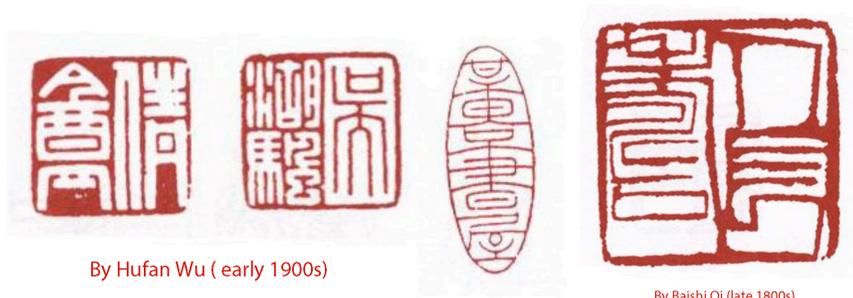
Seal Carving is a form of traditional Chinese art which entails carving out ancient words and short proverbs on the bottom of a seal. Starting in Shang Dynasty (1122 to 1030 BCE), seals began to be used in governmental affairs, representing power and authority. Special artisans began to emerge ever since, but the type of characters used on seals differs. Later in Qin Dynasty (221 to 206BC), character was unified and therefore artisans mostly use the same type of character, Xiaozhuan. Even today, this character is still being used mostly in the art of seal carving. With the passage of time, seal carving has become a valued form of art in modern China, because it represents the combination of history and craftsmanship.

The art of seal carving requires demanding techniques, knowledge of Chinese history and characters, mastery of Chinese calligraphy, and essentially, time commitment. It entails even more commitment as the artist tries to develop a unique style.

The following are some works done by modern seal carving artists, all of whom are also masters in Chinese traditional watercolor painting and calligraphy.



By Foyan Ding (early 1900s)

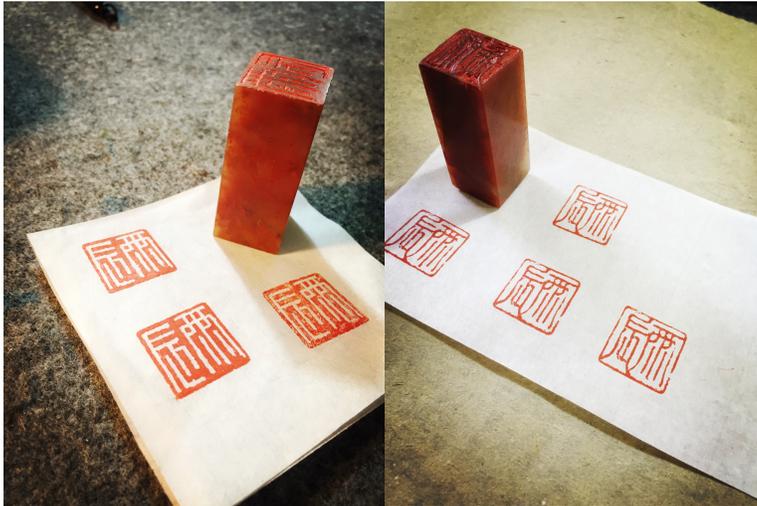


By Hufan Wu (early 1900s)

By Baishi Qi (late 1800s)

PROJECT SUMMARY

I took a private course in seal carving last summer break back in my hometown, Chengdu, China. The teacher, AGui, is a renowned local artist, active in the community of seal carving artists in Chengdu. I found out about him through my family and I was able to audit his class for several times, because I didn't have enough time during summer and I couldn't take the course with a fixed schedule. Although the class was quite flexible and I took less than ten courses, I learned a lot of background knowledge of this art, learned about the aesthetic standards of the seals, and grasped some basic techniques of seal carving. I carved out seals of my name in two different styles and I also carved short proverbs using bloodstone (one of the most commonly used material for seals). The following are pictures of my works last summer:



(My name, YUCHEN, with two styles of carving)



(Living by the side of woods and stones(left); A smile sweeps everything away(right).)

This special and ancient art form appeals to me because while making each piece of art, I have to deliberately make it look old by cutting out some small edges and tapping tiny caves on it, to create the feeling of history. However, this technique cannot go far as to make the whole seal seem fake. Thus, to me, seal carving is an art that entails great control over even the slightest part of the process of making it. To me, it's not duplicating or faking history, but bringing history back. In this way modern artisans do their maximum effort to show their own modernized style while still incorporating the original look of a seal, as a respect to history.

In such a new era when almost everything becomes digital, I believe we are missing some more traditional type of art, and seal carving is definitely among those art forms that we are losing day by day. Handwriting and signing can vary every time when a person signs, but the delicately carved seals make the characters last for centuries. Also, to me, arranging the characters of a word (or sometimes even longer sentences) on a small square on the bottom of the stone is itself another kind of graphic design.

Based on my previous knowledge of Chinese calligraphy and my previous experience in making art, I learned fast. Therefore, I believe I can learn more and create finer works if I spend more time exploring this form of art during the summer break of 2016.

During the summer of 2016, from early July to late August, I plan to officially enroll in the course with the artist every week and meanwhile I'll spend a considerable amount of time exploring the art of seal carving by myself. I'll go to exhibitions with my teacher and connect to other seal carving artists. I'll read the history of this art form to study the styles of renowned artists and examine their techniques to develop my style. I will write up an analysis based on my study and I will have ten carved seals of different styles. I'll also explore different materials. For instance, I'll try harder stones instead of the relatively soft bloodstone.

There's also a further goal of my project. I've always had a strong interest in sculpture and I plan to take a course in sculpture next fall semester. I believe, after

studying Chinese seal carving and knowing enough techniques in sculpture making, I will design small sculptures that include elements of seal carving. For example, instead of only carving out words on the bottom side of each seal, I can design the overall shape and form of the seal itself to make every seal my own art. I plan to have a portfolio of this form of art by the summer of 2017.

BUDGET SUMMARY

Looking for a fund of \$1400

Details:

Tuition Fee for the Course \$1000

Materials---

25 Pieces of Stones \$10*25 = \$250

Knives, Ink and Abrasive Papers \$50

Books for Study and Research \$100

(2 books of history and 3 art portfolios of previous award-winning works)