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## **An Analysis of Deng Sanmu's Seal Cutting Emulation-Centering on Ancient Seal, Qin Seal and Han Seal**

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### **Abstract**

*In November 1983, Deng Sanmu's wife, Zhang Jianquan, donated a large number of Deng Sanmu's original seal carving stones and seal cutting scores to the Heilongjiang Provincial Museum in China. Therefore, the Heilongjiang Provincial Museum of China is the richest and most authoritative place to collect Deng Sanmu's original seal cutting stones and seal carving scores. According to the fieldwork, the original seal cutting stones and the seal cutting score donated by Deng Sanmu's wife, Zhang Jianquan, include Deng Sanmu's seal cutting inscriptions made between 1922 and 1963. In addition, Deng Sanmu's own life and career in the art are documented in detail in his markings, so the seal cutting inscriptions of Deng Sanmu in the collection of the Heilongjiang Provincial Museum of China are quite representative.*

*We paper is a documentary review and study of the seal inscriptions of Deng Sanmu in the collection of the Heilongjiang Provincial Museum in China. For the accuracy and richness of this study, a total of 89 representative seals in the collection are used as primary sources to study Deng Sanmu's seal cutting emulation method. The specific content is centered on ancient seals, Qin seals, and Han seals, from which the lineage of Deng Sanmu's emulation methods of seal cutting is further clarified.*

**Keywords:** *Deng Sanmu, Seal Cutting, Emulation Methods*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The seal field of the Republic of China was a period of inheritance and enlightenment, which was short-lived but of great research value. It not only inherited the prosperity of the Ming and Qing dynasties, but also followed its inherent development pattern, smoothly and without losing its highlights. Since the Republic of China maintains the tradition of the Ming and Qing dynasties, there are many influential seal cutting artists in the Republic of China. As an influential seal cutting artist in the history of seal cutting in the Republic of China, Deng Sanmu's early seal cutting art was all-inclusive. After studying seal cutting under Zhao Gouni in 1928, he gradually began to draw nutrients from seal clay, Han stele, brick inscriptions and simplified characters, and finally formed his unique seal cutting style. Throughout his life, Deng Sanmu maintained a rigorous attitude towards his studies and a spirit of hard work. According to the biography of Deng Sanmu published in 1996, he once made his own "self-course" on a page of red-striped eight-line letterhead, saying: "In the morning: at six o'clock to diligently study; at seven o'clock to practice calligraphy; at nine o'clock to

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seal; at eleven o'clock to read. In the afternoon, he would practice his seal at one o'clock, write at three o'clock, forbid drinking at seven o'clock, and read at nine o'clock. On Saturday and Sunday afternoons, he would meet with guests at leisure, and would not see guests during working hours." According to his wife Zhang Jianquan's recollection, Deng Sanmu began to study in accordance with this provision long before the formulation of this "self-course" on October 11, 1940.

After moving to Beijing in 1955, Deng Sanmu began to actively participate in writing simplified characters, and in his later years, he published more than ten books and posters on the subject, making immeasurable contributions to the promotion of simplified characters. Deng Sanmu was good at summarizing his experience in seal carving, and despite the illness of his right wrist in his later years, he still insisted on using his left hand to make seals. His posthumous book "Seal Cutting" is one of Deng Sanmu's representative books, which uses more than 80,000 words in small regular script print, and covers the evolution of seal cutting characters, types of seals, development of different schools, connotation of the style, calligraphy layout techniques, use of blade technique, and miscellaneous knowledge. The theory of seal cutting proposed in the book is still very influential today, and is an important theoretical book for learning seal cutting theory and techniques at home and abroad. In 1983, the "Deng Sanmu Art Exhibition Hall" was built in the Heilongjiang Provincial Museum in China, and the research on Deng Sanmu's seal cutting art gradually increased, but the main focus of the research on Deng Sanmu's seal cutting art has been on the staging of his seal cutting style, the use of seal cutting techniques, and the appreciation of his seal cutting works. In recent years, Deng Sanmu's seal cutting art has been cited as an auxiliary factor in the research articles, but there are no articles that objectively analyze the method of seal cutting with Deng Sanmu's seal cutting style as the main factor. Therefore, this paper will analyze Deng Sanmu's seal cutting method based on his seal cutting markings in the collection of the Heilongjiang Provincial Museum.

## **2. ANCIENT ROYAL SEALS AND QIN SEALS**

The aesthetic consciousness of the ancient seals of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States provided rich artistic nourishment for the Qin seals. Although the ancient royal seal began in the Warring States period, it was not until the middle of the Qing Dynasty that the ancient royal seal began to be widely used by seal carvers as an object of emulation for artists. In terms of materials, copper is the most common, and most of the Yang (raised text) seals are cast, while most of the Yin (sunken text) seals are cast with chisels and have a side bar, or a border in the middle of the text.

Among the seal cutting markings in Deng Sanmu's collection, there is one that says, "I copied the writing of the ancient royal seal for Mr. Su counter-insurgency, Laotie (Sanmu). This seal was made in 1911, when Deng Sanmu did not study under Zhao Gou clay, and the four words " copying the writing of the ancient royal seal" in the mark indicate that Deng Sanmu was in the stage of copying the writing of the ancient seal. In 1936, when Deng Sanmu engraved the ancient royal seal in Yin script (sunken script) for Huifu, he said: According to the request of Mr. Huifu, the seal was a work of Sanmu copying the ancient royal seal in January of the twenty-fifth year of the Republic of China. At this time, the words " copying the ancient royal seal" began to appear in Deng Sanmu's seal cutting markings. As Deng Sanmu studied the ancient royal seals, his understanding of copying the ancient royal seals became more mature, and he mentioned " copying the ancient royal seals" in his mark. The full text of this mark reads, "Fen Weng(Sanmu) copying the ancient royal seal in the autumn of the twenty-seventh year of the Republic of China, with great similarity.

Deng Sanmu's imitation of the ancient royal seal script can be seen in the mark "Qi Gang" in Yangwen (raised characters) (Fig. 1): The script of Qi Gang is a reference to the script of the ancient royal seal and can be verified, as seen in the Sacrificial Master Ding, on the day of rest in the second half of the lunar calendar in

January of the twenty-fifth year, Fen Wen (Sanmu) records. In the same year, Deng Sanmu made an ancient royal seal in Yin script (recessed script) for Jia Yi, saying (figs.2): In February of the twenty-fifth year, he made a seal in ancient royal script for Mr. San Jian (Jia Yi), Fen Weng(Sanmu). This seal uses the classic layout form of the ancient royal seal to highlight the diagonal echoing relationship. In the process of imitating the ancient royal seals, Deng Sanmu gradually began to make innovations in the seal script, such as the Yin script seal "Xianglun" (figs.3), in which the vertical drawing of the character "Lun" is used to form a boundary. In this mark, Deng Sanmu uses the oracle bone script and form to record the mark, which says: "It is an emulation of the ancient royal seal by Mr. Qigang, Sanmu (粪公). The seal cutting work of Deng Sanmu, which is based on the copying of the ancient royal seal and the innovation of the material of the seal stone, can be seen in the seal "Qiu Changyin" made of onyx in Yin (sunken script) (Fig. 4). The mark reads: Sanmu emulates an ancient royal seal.



Figure 1.  
Qi Gang



Figure 2.  
Royal Seal of Jia Yi



Figure 3.  
Xiang Lun



Figure 4.  
Qiu Changyin

Through the interpretation of the seal cutting inscriptions in the collection which are based on the ancient royal seals, it can be clarified that Deng Sanmu was rigorous in his conception of the ancient seals, and that he dared to innovate in the process of creating the ancient royal seals, not only by adding the characters of the ancient royal seals to the seal carving surface, but also by making new breakthroughs in the seal style of the ancient royal seals and the materials of the seal stones.

Most of the official seals of the Qin dynasty are sunken texts, which are written in seal script, ancient script and pre-Han script, with slender characters and smooth lines. The private seals of the Qin dynasty were mostly chiseled, with border bars on the surface, and the strokes of the seal script were beautiful and lovely, and the knotted bodies were sparse and dense. Because of the short history of the Qin dynasty, not many seals have survived, so Deng Sanmu's records on the marks taken from the Qin dynasty are rare.

In 1936, Deng Sanmu wrote about imitating the seals of the Qin dynasty. This is reflected in the mark "Cai Shou" in the Yin script seal, which combines the naivety of the character "Cai" with the solemnity and elegance of the character "Shou", making it quite interesting. The mark of this seal says: In the fifth month of the twenty-fifth year of the Republic of China, Dung Sanmu imitated the Qin Xiao Xi (Qin Xiao Xi) seal for Mr. Zhefu. Deng Sanmu mentions "imitating Qin Xiao Xi" in this mark, and a discussion of "Qin Xiao Xi" can be found in Xia Yiju's "A Brief Examination of Ancient Seals"[1] and Sun Guangzu's "Ancient and Modern Seal Systems"[2], both written by the Qing dynasty sealer Xia Yiju. In these two treatises, the Qin seal is referred to as "Qin xi (ancient royal seal of the Qin dynasty)" or "Qin xiao xi (small ancient royal seal of the Qin dynasty)", respectively. The combination of the words "imitating the Qin Xiao Xi seal" and the words

"imitating the Qin Xiao Xi seal" mentioned in this mark shows that Deng Sanmu not only imitated the Qin seal in seal carving, but also was good at the viewpoints of seal art drawn from the writings of Qing dynasty seal art.

"The Han Dynasty's Old Ritual" says: "Before the Qin dynasty, the people had gold, silver, copper, rhinoceros, and elephant seals, each for their own use. During the Xia, Shang, and Zhou periods, the seals of the emperor and the common people were called "Xi", but since the Qin Dynasty, only the emperor's seal was called "Xi", and it was made of jade, so the ministers did not dare to use it." [3] This shows that the seal management system of Qin was relatively perfect. From the discovered bamboo slips of the Qin dynasty, it can be seen that the system of granting seals to officials on appointment was already widespread during the Warring States period, and the seals were used extensively at that time. Deng Sanmu's rigorous style of Qin seals is reflected in "Meichuan Juzheng", which he made in the summer of 1936, using the classical form of the Qin seal grid on the surface of the seal, with the text of the seal echoing diagonally, showing that when Deng Sanmu took the Qin seal, he focused on unity in change. The inscription on this seal reads: In the scorching summer of the 25th year of the Republic of China, an imitation Qin seal was made for Mr. Jue Sheng, Feng Weng (Sanmu). According to the record of Deng Sanmu's emulation of the Qin seal inscriptions, it is evident that Deng Sanmu focused on taking up the tradition and maintaining the simplicity of the Qin seal in his creation of the Qin seal. Although Deng Sanmu's emphasis on Qin seals differs from that of ancient seals, the two seals in the collection that are based on Qin seals also reflect Deng Sanmu's transition from "Ancient Royal Seals" to "Han seals" in his seal carving.

### 3. HAN SEAL

Yang Shixiu proposed in his book on seal studies, *The Mother of the Seal*, that "the ancient seals esteemed the Qin and Han, while the modern seals esteem the seals of 'Wen' and 'He'." [4] Yang Shixiu pointed out that the study of ancient seals should be based on the seals of Qin and Han, from which the essence of "the authenticity of seals lies in Qin and Han" was revealed. Since Deng Sanmu's seal carving art was influenced by the idea that "the authentic seal lies in the Qin and Han dynasties", there are not only records of emulating Qin seals in Deng Sanmu's seal carving markings, but also records of Deng Sanmu's approach to Han seals according to the author's combing of seal carving markings in his collection. In the Yuan dynasty, Wu Yan wrote in his book, "Han and Wei seals are made with Yin text, which is only about an inch in size. The court seal was all cast, so it could be chosen at a certain time to seal worship, and there was no need for urgency. The military seal was much chiseled, because it was urgent to execute the order, and could not be slowed down." [5] According to what Wu Yan said, it can be seen that in the Han Dynasty, civil officials were assigned "cast seal" and military officials were assigned "chiseled seal", and the seal text was all in Yin form. Deng Sanmu followed this method in the treatment of Han seals, so most of the seal engraved marks in the collection are in Yin form.

Among the seal carving markings in the collection of the Heilongjiang Provincial Museum, Deng Sanmu's various imitations of Han marks can be seen, such as the mark of "The Seal of Xu Qi" (Figure 5), which reads: "Fen Weng imitates Han Seals. Although this seal is not marked with the method of taking the Han cast seal, the surface of the seal is quite similar to the flavor of the cast seal. Another seal cutting surface with the same flavor of a Han cast seal can be found in his "Yuese Shoujin Shu", which he made for Tan Yuese in 1936. The full text of this seal reads: In the April of the twenty-fifth year of the Republic of China, Fen Wen (Sanmu) made an imitation Chinese seal for Mrs. Yuese. This seal has a round shape in a square text, and the surface of the seal has the feeling that "the sparseness allows horses to run, while the density of the seal does not even allow the wind to penetrate". Later, Deng Sanmu produced a seal in the style of a Han dynasty seal for Tan

Yuexie, "Passing on to the next generation Chuan Yi Hou Ren" (fig. 6), which reads: Fen Weng (Sanmu) emulates the style of the Han dynasty seal. Deng Sanmu's simulation of the stately elegance of a Han seal can be seen in his "Weifo Collecting Words" made for Zhao Zuwang, which reads in full: Weifo (Zhao Wangzu) Seal of Collecting Words, Fen Weng (Sanmu) Simulating a Han Dynasty Seal. The four characters on the face of this seal are independent and coordinated, and all four characters in the seal text reflect a sense of casting. Deng Sanmu and his old friend would also exchange ideas in their markings, as can be seen in the markings on the Yin seal "Jian Jing Lun Seal", which reads: My teacher, Mr. Zhao Guni, learned his seal cutting skills from Ku Tie, and my teacher's skills advanced by leaps and bounds, eventually forming his own school, just like the end of the old era and the successor of the new. In June of the twenty-fifth year of the Republic of China, a seal in the style of the Han dynasty, simulated for Qin Zhai by the method of my teacher Zhao Guni, is hereby recorded - Feng Weng (Sanmu).



Figure 5. Xu Qi's seal



Figure 6. Chaun Yi Hou Ren

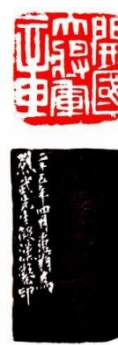


Figure 7. Seal of the Founding General

Because of the frequent military deployments and military urgency in the Han Dynasty, the seal of Han Dynasty generals was mostly a "general seal" made by chiseling. Deng Sanmu used this chiseling method to make the "Seal of the Founding General" ( Fig. 7), with the following mark: In the fourth month of the twenty-fifth year of the Republic of China, Fen Weng (Sanmu) made a seal for Mr. Liewu (Bo Wenwei), imitating the chiseling method of the Han dynasty. The use of the chisel method combining single and double blades in this seal is very attractive and unique in style, reflecting the essence of Han chisel seals. The signature of the seal made by Deng Sanmu for Hu Daojing, a member of the Southern Society (a revolutionary social group during the Republic of China), also records the imitation of the Han chisel seal, and the inscription on this seal says, "On the third day of the February of the twentieth year of the Republic of China, imitating the method of the Han chisel seal to make a seal, Sanmu (Dung Weng).

Sun Guangzu of the Qing Dynasty referred to "Han Zhuwen (Han Dynasty raised script seal)" as "full Zhuwen (raised Yang script) private seal (imitation seal), thin-edged coarse Zhuwen (raised Yang script) private seal (imitation seal)" in his "Ancient and Modern Seal System". [6] Since most of the Han seals appear in the form of Yin (recessed script) seals, there are fewer records on the seal carving techniques of Han Zhu (raised script) seals. A record of the imitation method of Han Zhuwen (raised script) appeared in Deng Sanmu's seal carving mark in 1918, which reads, "On the 17th National Day of the Republic of China, I imitated the making of Han Zhuwen (raised script) seal for Shu □ zhang, Feng (Deng Sanmu).

Deng Sanmu said, "There were also popularized seals in the Han Dynasty, and nine-tenths of them had auspicious characters attached to or underneath the name, such as someone would get a lot of wealth, someone would be lucky, etc. Among these popularized seals, those that only indicated the name were rare." [7]

Although the form of "name only" in Han popularized seals is not common. However, the use of this form can be seen in the seal "Li Ang" made by Deng Sanmu in 1937 ( Fig.8). The signature on this seal reads: "On the first day of December in the year 26, Fen Weng made a Han dynasty popularized seal for Pei Lin in imitation of the Han dynasty, and Deng Sanmu's use of the Han dynasty popularized seal form in combination with the blade method of the Han dynasty chisel seal is reflected in the name seal "Hui Kuan" in Yin (a recessed script). The name seal "Hui Kuan" in Yin text (in recessed script), which is inscribed as follows: Chiseled for Master Hui Kuan, Fen Weng simulates the popularized seal of the Han dynasty.



Figure 8. Li Ang



Figure 9. Ruo Shi



Figure 10. Wang

In the Han Dynasty, it is stated: "Emperor, jade seal, tiger button; Empress, gold seal, tiger button; vassal kings, gold seal, camel button; Crown Prince, Marquis, Prime Minister, Lieutenant and the three generals, front and back, left and right generals, gold seal, turtle button; middle two thousand Dan (one Dan is equal to about 120 pounds), silver seal, turtle button; thousand Dan, six hundred Dan, four hundred Dan to two hundred Dan Above that, bronze seal with nose button. The vassal kings were called seals, and the lord of the province, the marquis of the township and pavilion, the general's subordinates, and the governor of the county were all called seals." [8] The materials used for seals were divided into gold, jade, silver, copper, rhinoceros, ivory, bamboo, etc., according to their ranks. Deng Sanmu imitated the bronze seal of the Han Dynasty when he made the Yin text (recessed script) seal "Ruo Shi" (Fig. 9) for Wang Nan Ting, and the mark reads, "Made at the request of Mr. Nan Ting, imitating the bronze seal of the Han Dynasty, in the twenty-fifth year of the Republic of China, Fen Weng (Sanmu). Deng Sanmu, in his discussion of Han zodiac shape seals, said, "One of them is purely pictorial pictographs; the other is those with writing attached to the pictographs." [9] Therefore, Deng Sanmu took the second form and made the zodiac-shaped seal "Wang" for Wang Xisheng, a member of the Southern Society (Fig. 10), and the mark reads: This imitates a Han dynasty seal made for Wang Xishen, Feng (Sanmu). Since copying Han seals is a must for every seal carving artist to learn seal carving, Deng Sanmu copied 61 seals of kings and lords of the Eastern and Western Han dynasties between 1938 and 1957. Among these seals, Deng Sanmu copied them all in the form of yin (sunken script), and he examined the provenance of each of the 61 kings and lords of the Eastern and Western Han dynasties in his seal carving mark. In the following table, 28 of the representative seal inscriptions are interpreted. Since copying Han seals is a must for every seal carving artist to learn seal carving, Deng Sanmu copied 61 seals of kings and lords of the Eastern and Western Han dynasties between 1938 and 1957. Among these seals, Deng Sanmu copied them all in the form of yin (sunken script), and he examined the provenance of each of the 61 kings and lords of the Eastern and Western Han dynasties in his seal carving mark. In the following table, 28 of the representative seal inscriptions are interpreted.

In summary, Deng Sanmu's seal engraving marks that were taken from Chinese seals can be summarized

into two parts: one is Deng Sanmu's creation of Chinese cast seals, Chinese chiseled seals, Chinese Zhu (raised "Yang") seals, Chinese Ban Tong (popularized) seals, Chinese bronze seals, and Chinese zodiac-shaped seals, which were mainly created from 1918 to 1937. The second is Deng Sanmu's copying of the seals of the Kings and Marquises of the Eastern and Western Han dynasties, which was mainly focused on the period from 1936 to 1957.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the above, this paper classifies Deng Sanmu's seal carvings in the collection of the Heilongjiang Provincial Museum as ancient royal seals, Qin seals, and Han seals, thus further filling the gaps in the study of Deng Sanmu's seal carving markings. Based on the above-mentioned literature, it can be seen that Deng Sanmu's seal carving is rich in the methods of seal carving. In his seal carving works, he was involved in the methods of ancient seals, Qin seals, Han seals, seal clay, and Ming and Qing sealers, and later, influenced by the methods of seal carving, he gradually added elements such as eaves tile text, brick texts, ancient pottery texts, Han stele, and simplified characters to his seal carving creation. By interpreting the documents in the collection on Deng Sanmu's extra-printing style, I can clearly grasp his exploration of extra-printing style in different periods, and these explorations eventually pushed Deng Sanmu to form his own unique seal carving style.

Under the influence of the "Deng Sanmu Art Exhibition Hall" built in the Heilongjiang Provincial Museum in China, academics gradually began to study Deng Sanmu's seal carving art, and subconsciously incorporated Deng Sanmu's seal carving elements into their own seal carving creations. At this stage, the research on Deng Sanmu's seal carving art is increasing year by year, but the research on the art of Deng Sanmu's seal carving markings has been neglected, and it is a pity that the documentary value contained in his seal carving markings has not been noticed. We hope that the research results of this paper can serve to draw attention to the research on Deng Sanmu's seal carving markings, so that scholars can gradually strengthen the attention to the research on Deng Sanmu's seal carving markings and conduct a comprehensive and detailed investigation of Deng Sanmu's seal carving art.

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