

Art of Print and Characteristics of the Times in China

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Abstract: Chinese print is an ancient painting with a history of thousands of years. Today, with the development of science and technology and social progress, it still maintains a vigorous artistic style, exudes enduring charm and forms a unique art. Chinese print not only has important artistic appreciation value, but also vividly reflects and depicts the distinct characteristics of the development and progress of the times in which artistic style and social politics, economy, culture and science and technology are in line in different historical periods.

"Print is one of the kinds of paintings. It is a picture printed on wood, stone, hemp, glue, copper, and zinc, which is engraved or etched on a plate, such as a knife or a chemical. It has gone through two stages from copying to creation"^[1]. It is usually printed on a plate or etched with a knife or a chemical, and then printed on a medium such as paper or enamel. The emergence of prints is closely related to the invention of paper-making and printing. As we all know, China is the inventor of paper-making and printing. These two great inventions directly promote the development of Chinese woodblock prints, making China the home of woodblock prints.

1. Artistic characteristics of Chinese ancient print

1.1 Chinese prints date back to more than two thousand years.

Mr. Lu Xun said that "the earliest print in the world is China." It is also recognized internationally that China is an inventor of prints ^[2]. The origin of Chinese print includes Han Dynasty, Eastern Jin Dynasty, Six Dynasties and Sui Dynasty ^[3]. The earliest print in existence in China, which has been engraved for years, is the first volume of the world-famous Xiantong edition of "King Kong Prajna Polo" in Tang Dynasty. According to the inscription, it was written in 868 A.D. ^[4]. The prevalence of Buddhism in Tang Dynasty promoted the development of carving, printing and duplicating woodcarving, and block printing and duplicating woodcarving promoted the spread of Buddhism. The two Song and Jin Dynasties are the period of comprehensive development of China's reproduction of woodcuts. With the prosperity of the small-scale peasant economy, the demand of people's cultural life and the development of folk literature, the application of woodcut has expanded, the print is not only to express religious content, but also to print additional illustrations of various books, such as "The Legend of Women" of Southern Song Dynasty and "Five Kinds of Pinghuan" of Yuan-Zhi period and other popular literary and artistic books ^[5]. This shows that woodcut prints have gradually been liberated from religious bondage, and have a secular character, and continue to be popularized to meet the needs of people of all walks of

life.

1.2 The woodcut prints of the Ming Dynasty reached their peak.

From an economic point of view, the capitalist production relations in Ming Dynasty have begun to sprout, and the rise of industry and commerce has promoted the development of the carving handicraft industry. From a cultural point of view, citizen literature is becoming more and more prosperous, and the opera, novels, singers, and legends are very popular. In order to attract readers and promote the publications, booksellers add a lot of woodcut illustrations. At that time, there were dozens of illustrations in the popular melody book "The Romance of West Chamber", and 240 prints in "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms". It can be seen that literature provides a broad use for woodcut prints. The prosperity of the woodcuts of Ming Dynasty was manifested not only in a large number, but also in the color printing technology^[6]. Before Ming Dynasty, woodcuts were still unable to copy color paintings. The color of overprints of Yuan Dynasty were only red and black. In the Ming Dynasty, the method of overprinting was widely used in folk New Year paintings, especially the bamboo block printing invented at the end of Ming Dynasty^[7], which was the first color printing in the world.

Ancient Chinese prints have formed a unique national heritage in the long historical development. Although there is no lack of feudal dregs, some works with folk characteristics can also give people spiritual edification. Even some religious prints, to a certain extent, embodies the character of "benevolence" and "love of beauty", especially in terms of formal skills, which has produced inexhaustible nutrients for future generations of painters, and also provided the necessary conditions for the development of woodcut prints.

2. Characteristics of the times of modern printing

2.1 The childhood of Chinese prints

The childhood of Chinese prints started from 1931 to 1937. At the end of the 20th century, Mr. Lu Xun systematically introduced the creation of foreign prints, and became the forerunner of the rise of China's new prints. In June 1936, China announced the rise of new prints. Subsequently, with a fighting attitude and a critical spirit of realism, he devoted himself to the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolutionary torrents. This stage was mainly based on black and white woodcuts. As far as skills are concerned, it was not mature enough and belonged to the initial stage of imitation in the history of creative print.

2.2 The growth period of the creation of prints

The time of 1937-1949 was the growth period of the creation of prints. The outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japan caused a major turning point in the emerging print movement. First of all, the author of print walked out of the narrow pavilion, went to the war zone and the countryside, participated in actual struggles, and contacted the working people. Through this action, the familiar understanding of the object of expression and its life has enriched and deepened the connotation of the works, and the image of the characters was more vivid than before. In addition, in the contact with the client, the aesthetic taste begins to approach, and issues such as popularization and national form are more valued and gradually resolved. After 1942, under the guidance of Mao Zedong's spirit of "Speech at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art", it not only established the national style, changed the tendency of Europeanization, but also carried out major historical changes in the subject matter and content, depicted the new life in the liberated area and made the great change of

the appearance of the new edition. The main artists and works at this stage included "He is not dead" made by Huang Xinbo, "Masonry" by Wang Qi, and "Reconstruction" by Li Shaoyan. Some artists' artistic styles were formed during this period, marking the maturity of emerging prints.

2.3 The mature period of the creation of print

1949-1966 was the mature period of Chinese print. The founding of New China opened up broad prospects for the development of creative prints. Although it was constantly impacted and interfered by the "Left" trend of thought, it was no longer like the war years, which required that prints should be closely integrated with political movements. At this time, prints began to pay attention to their own independence and aesthetic value. Before the founding of New China, the number of creative prints in China was very small. After the exploration in the 1930s and 1940s, there are many kinds of prints, such as color woodcut, watermarking woodcut, copperplate prints and lithograph, and some influential works emerge at the same time, such as "traverse the South China Sea" and "Young People" made by Huang Xinbo, "Mountain Production" by Li Hua, "Yang Museum" by Yanhan, "Images of Lu Xun" by Zhao Yannian, "Beihai Spring" by Wang Qi, "Social Cadre Meeting" by Li Xiqin. Local print had formed such creative themes as Sichuan print, Beidahuang print, and Jiangsu watermarking. It mainly based itself on the locality and appeared in the painting circle as a group or even a school. Aesthetic features are regional, showing the prosperity of creative prints.

2.4 The mid-life of the print

1966-1976 was the "Cultural Revolution", at which time the creation of prints was in its mid-life. Due to political turmoil, most of the printmakers were shocked and lost their stable creative environment and mentality, which led to the decline of print. At this time, the rise of workers, peasants and soldiers was the main feature of this period.

2.5 The comprehensive development period of Chinese prints

Since 1977, Chinese prints have been fully developed. Reform and opening up have broadened people's horizons and updated the concept of printmakers. It is reflected in the diversity of plates, editions, craftsmanship, and the multi-layer of creative subjects. The print group has appeared in the old and middle-aged, and the local genre has appeared in Heilongjiang prints, Yunnan prints, and new editions of the three editions, industrial print groups, children's prints, and book collections. In the new era, the reform and extension of print, on the one hand, inherit the fine tradition of print, and develop the print into a skillful situation. On the one hand, it diverts from this traditional diversion and integrates into the riverbed of modern Chinese art with a new attitude in an attempt to meet the new social needs in the process of development. At this stage, the traditional concept of print is weakened, and the modern concept is enhanced; the subjective consciousness is enhanced, and the mass concept is weakened; the construction of the printmaking ontology is strengthened, and the social function is weakened.

The transformation of Chinese prints in the 20th century took place under different social backgrounds and cultural forms. During this period, Chinese prints experienced the collision and blending of Chinese culture, the confrontation and unity between tradition and modern. The development trend of print is to get rid of the burden of history and move towards the essence of the body, to evolve from single, closed, subsidiary to multi-dimensional, open and independent, from general political propaganda and shallow reflection of life to the profound spiritual connotation. In short, it is still a long way to develop the connotation of national culture and world culture, and to

reshape the spiritual structure of print.

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