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ORIGINAL

Analysis on the Artistic Style of Chinese Printmaking (1980 - 2000)

Análisis del estilo artístico del grabado chino (1980-2000)

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ABSTRACT

In the twenty-first century, Chinese printmaking has evolved towards introspection and integration with contemporary cultural landscapes. To analyze the development of Chinese printmaking in the past decade. The study used bibliographic review and analysis of printmaking exhibitions, artworks, and theoretical frameworks. Over the past decade, Chinese printmaking has shown increased activity, evolving its own contemporary language and ecological features. Exhibitions like the National Printmaking Exhibition and Mission Hills International Printmaking Biennale have been crucial in this development. Chinese printmaking has successfully revitalized its ontological language, establishing a distinctive aesthetic and cultural identity that responds to contemporary challenges.

Keywords: 21st Century; Last Decade; Printmaking Development; Ontological Return; Cultural Self-Awareness.

RESUMEN

En el siglo XXI, el grabado chino ha evolucionado hacia la introspección y la integración con los paisajes culturales contemporáneos. Para analizar el desarrollo del grabado chino en la última década. El estudio utilizó la revisión bibliográfica y el análisis de exposiciones de grabado, obras de arte y marcos teóricos. En la última década, el grabado chino ha mostrado una mayor actividad, evolucionando su propio lenguaje contemporáneo y sus características ecológicas. Exposiciones como la National Printmaking Exhibition y la Mission Hills International Printmaking Biennale han sido cruciales en este desarrollo. El grabado chino ha revitalizado con éxito su lenguaje ontológico, estableciendo una identidad estética y cultural distintiva que responde a los retos contemporáneos.

Palabras clave: Siglo XXI; Última Década; Desarrollo del Grabado; Retorno Ontológico; Autoconciencia Cultural.

INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the quiet and detached nature of printmaking at the close of the 20th century, after the turn of the millennium, printmakers have started to engage in serious introspection and research, as well as to fully embrace the contemporary cultural landscape.⁽¹⁾ The effect of the “New Third Edition” no longer scares them, and they no longer mindlessly adhere to the “mysterious” formalism and “image collage” ideas of Western modernity.^(2,3,4) Conversely, as they experiment with new materials, digitalization, pictorialization, and other rich media, they establish a direct connection between printmaking art and current local culture. They have regenerated and adapted to a wider range of artistic disciplines, merging and changing as a result of taking

in Western imaging notions and traditional printmaking language.⁽⁵⁾ After accumulation and precipitation, printmaking art has realised the return of its ontological language, particularly in the last ten years. This has allowed Chinese printmaking to develop its own contemporary language and ecological features.⁽⁶⁾

Exhibition of printmaking and printmaking ecology building

The China Artists Association proclaimed 1980 as the “Year of Printmaking” in honour of the 80th anniversary of the founding of “China’s Emerging Woodcut Movement” and the 130th anniversary of Mr. Lu Xun’s birth.

Following this, a sequence of associated exhibitions and scholarly events were organised consecutively, providing an excellent introduction to the growth of printmaking over this decade.⁽⁷⁾ When considering the printing shows that took place during this time, it can be claimed that a variety of shows were held. Statistics from the Chinese Printmaking Yearbook, edited by Dong Xiaoming and Guang Jun, show that there are, on average, over 200 printmaking exhibitions held in China annually.⁽⁸⁾

These exhibitions include solo shows, academic invitational exhibitions, thematic exhibitions, and other comprehensive exhibitions. Traditional printing shows organised by government agencies and art schools are among these exhibitions, as are experimental and exploratory printmaking shows that are hosted by private art galleries and museums.^(9,10,11) Among these, the Mission Hills International Printmaking Biennale, the National Printmaking display, and the National Art Exhibition’s printmaking display have all continued to garner significant market and industry attention.

One of the printing exhibits in China with the longest history and the highest level of professionalism, the National printing Exhibition (henceforth referred to as the National Printmaking Exhibition) were established by the China Artists Association and has a significant academic impact.⁽¹²⁾ The exhibition has developed a consistent style throughout the years, methodically shown the state of study and creation of printing art today, emphasised representing the development trend and vein of contemporary printmaking, and emphasised the importance of printmaking art. Predictability, guidance, and inheritance define the exhibition. From 1980 to 1999, the number of exhibited works in the National Printmaking Exhibition climbed year over year, with 1,017, 2,358, 2,282, 2,306 and 2,370 works, respectively, according to data posted on the China Artists Association’s official website. Furthermore, information regarding the age distribution of the participating artists and awards also indicates that printmaking has demonstrated a trend towards increasing activity over the past ten years, drawing artists of various levels and ages to actively participate in this significant exhibition activity.⁽¹³⁾

Furthermore, the authors carried out a statistical examination of the geographical locations of the chosen artists from the 20th, 21st, and 23rd National Printmaking Exhibitions. They discovered that over the previous ten years, the provinces hosting the exhibition and their environs essentially accounted for the majority of the selected works.⁽¹⁴⁾ Heilongjiang, Sichuan, Jiangsu, and Yunnan—traditional printing regions—have continued to have an advantage in the quantity of chosen pieces. Guangdong Province is a notably active printmaking region in contrast to other traditional printmaking locations. The international centre of printmaking creativity that has emerged in Guangdong has made a significant contribution to the development of printmaking in China and to international exchange with the completion of the International Printmaking Base in Guanlan, Shenzhen (May 2007), the opening of the China Printmaking Museum (October 1994), and the establishment of the International Printmaking Workshop in Guanlan.⁽¹⁵⁾ Furthermore, the Printmaking 100 Collection Exhibition and the Chinese Printmaking Yearbook edited by the Shenzhen Academy of Painting have not only amassed a wealth of phenomena and documentary materials in the field of academic research, but they have also positively impacted the vibrant printmaking market.⁽¹⁶⁾

Examining the ages of prize-winning artists in significant national exhibitions based on information from multiple official websites has made rejuvenation a clear characteristic. The post-70s and post-80s accounted for 11 of the 15 award-winning printmakers in the 12th National Art Exhibition, or 73 % of the total, demonstrating the calibre and creative strength of youthful artists. Additionally, of the nine winners (including nomination awards) in the 13th Art Exhibition, the post-70s, post-80s, and post-90s collectively accounted for 73 %. The post-1970s and post-1980s winners held a distinct advantage in these two art shows, although the post-1990s emerged as the dominant group among the printing winners in the National Art Exhibition.⁽¹⁷⁾ Furthermore, the Chinese winners’ average age has been declining annually, with the youngest winner born in 1994. The Chinese winners’ average age was 45 in 1980, 36 in 1993, 34 in 1995, 31 in 1997, and 35 in 1999. This data comes from the Collection of Works of the Mission Hills International Printmaking Biennale. The frontier and subsequent potential of Chinese printing development are demonstrated by these data, which clearly reveal that the post-1970s and post-1980s new generation is becoming the primary force behind Chinese printmaking innovation. Chinese printing has a strong base for long-term, healthy development: a young, well-organized creative team of talents. The themes, shapes, and artistic conceptions of printmaking shows will also become more varied and rich as the core group of emerging Chinese producers continues to grow.⁽¹⁸⁾

Co-founded by Jiangsu Province and the China Artists Association, “China’s Hundred Jinling Painting Exhibition” is a very important national art show. One of the most prominent aspects of the two thematic exhibitions, which

took place in 1993 for the first time and again in 1998 for the second time, has been the resurgence of woodcut printmaking among the show pieces. In the 1993 exhibition, woodcuts were used in nearly 80 % of the chosen works; in the 1998 exhibition, woodcuts remained in 70 % of the works. The “Watermark for a Thousand Years - Chinese Watermark Printmaking Exhibition,” held in the Zhejiang Art Museum in 1998, systematically sorted out the development history and geographical lineage of watermark printmaking and showcased contemporary watermark printmaking. Watermark woodcut is a traditional Chinese printmaking art form with rich historical and aesthetic connotations. It illustrated the state of contemporary watermark printmaking, investigated the connection between Chinese and Japanese ukiyo-e, and showcased the oriental aesthetic ideas ingrained in the process, paving the way for new aesthetic directions in Chinese contemporary printmaking.

The world of art has long been fascinated by artist Chen Qi’s experiments with watermark woodcutting, and the 1998 exhibition “Chen Qi Gezhi: An Experiment in Display and Understanding” provided a thorough analysis of Chen Qi’s development and many phases of creative output. This show, according to curator Qiu Zhijie, is a manifestation of the artist “saying goodbye to the various new artistic trends and returning to his heart” as well as sublimation from the exterior “deep exploration of craftsmanship” to the interior “pursuit of serenity”. It is also the process of elevating the “pursuit of tranquilly” within to the “deep exploration of craftsmanship” outside. The exhibition’s presentation of Chen Qi’s personal artistic journey illustrates how Chinese printmaking has evolved and self-adjusted since the 1980, moving from figurative to pictorial to imaginative, all while reflecting and breaking away from Western art. The artists’ deeply ingrained aesthetic spirit and cultural DNA play a crucial role in this returns, which eventually comes down to the subject’s cultural spirit’s self-consciousness. Additionally, this is a superb real-world example for developing the modern linguistic structure and artistic spirit of Chinese printmaking.

The deliberate reversion to the vernacular and the exploration of modern printmaking vocabulary are what give Chinese printmaking its own appeal and a more diverse and self-assured presence on the global scene. The Mission Hills International Printmaking Biennale has always been notable for its “internationalisation” features since it was founded in 2009. When examining Chinese contemporary printmaking from a global standpoint, it is evident that for the previous ten years, there has been a discernible internationalisation tendency in the calibre of Chinese printmaking production.

Jiang Lu, the curator of the 1999 Mission Hills International Printmaking Biennale, said: “Decades ago, it was often evident to discern the difference when Chinese prints were contrasted with foreign works...Although the domestic works were excellent in form and thought, it was unfortunate that they frequently gave the impression of being sloppy and unfinished, which made it difficult to attain artistic excellence. Nowadays, the situation has radically changed. The calibre of our printing productions is now on level with that of other nations, despite the fact that there are still weaknesses and opportunities for development amongst them.” Relevant official statistics show a consistent upward trend in the number of submissions to the Mission Hills International Printmaking Biennale between 1980 and 1999 (from 3,697 to 4,598) and the number of printmaking artists exhibiting in the show (from 1,991 in 1980 to 2,551 in 1999).

Furthermore, more regions and nations are taking part in the show every year; as of 1999, there are more than 100. Following over a decade of perseverance and development, the Mission Hills International Printmaking Biennial’s platform and selection process have gained widespread recognition within the domestic and international printmaking community. As a result, its influence has grown internationally, positioning it as a communication platform that truly stands on par with the cutting edge of international printmaking. Chinese printmaking artists hold fast to the essence of printmaking, actively explore and express the contemporary nature of the aesthetic spirit of local culture, and their unique language system and aesthetic connotation are the embodiment of the oriental charm of Chinese printmaking on the international stage.

Localized interpretation of “contemporaneity” in printmaking

According to Roggese in *The Origin of Art*, “Art is always the expression of society, and no matter what the times are, no matter where the nation is, it is about to be impossible to understand its true nature and meaning by considering it merely as a personal phenomenon.” Modern Chinese printmaking has its roots in social movements and has served a particular social purpose during a particular historical era. With its distinct aesthetic language, printing plays an indispensable part in the formation of themes and has been reintroduced into the nation’s significant historical theme programmes since the turn of the twenty-first century. Though it seems as though thematic requirements constantly stifle artistic originality, thematic creation is frequently seen as being at odds with the artist’s own declaration. The National Art Creation Project, on the other hand, “respects the subjective existence and consciousness of painters, understands the real ability and level of painters, comprehends the expressive characteristics and styles of painters, and tolerates the individual claims and exploration of painters, which is the key to guaranteeing the artistic standard of thematic art creation,” as theoretical circles have been emphasising for the past ten years.

In 1980, the launching of the “Chinese Civilization Historical Subjects Art Creation Project” marked the

launching of a series of important cultural and artistic projects, which provided important support for the creation of prints on major historical subjects. The process of fusing artistic and historical truths in the production of prints on significant historical topics has also been investigated in academic discourse and creative practice, demonstrating the relevance of historical theme works in the modern era. The majority of the 17 prints that were chosen for the “Chinese Civilization Historical Subjects Art Creation Project” are large-scale pieces that measure more than two metres.

The prints’ increased scale draws attention to the way that numerous time and place are expressed, creating a network of connections and switches between them in addition to the episodic portrayal of the moment. For printmaking, which is accustomed to conceptualising and producing in the original size and material, this presents a clear obstacle. Some of the prints in the exhibition are shown as original woodcuts, such as “Oracle Bone Carvings”, “Four Traditional Chinese Festivals”, and “The Four Books and the Seven Pavilions of the North and South”, which intuitively demonstrate the knife skills and woodiness of woodcuts, and at the same time, boldly wipe the colors on the undulations of the knife marks, presenting a very different effect from that of the paper copies, and forming a colorful sense of hierarchy under the light of the exhibition halls.^(19,20) Leading the creative team for “Chinese Construction Method,” Qi Xu is a specialist in Southwest Folk Art, skilled in the fusion of printmaking and comprehensive materials.

The work, in the form of a “stacked woodblock,” incorporates traditional architectural elements and the folklore of the New Year’s carving process, reshaping the elements of national culture into a new form of art with a distinct aesthetic connotation. This was confirmed by artist Hou Yimin, who proposed the theory that “the more the artistry should be viewed, the more the theme is emphasised.” Qi Xu’s “Chinese Epic Exhibition” reflects his insistence on his own artistic concepts. Prints on significant historical themes are not just straightforward replicas of historical events or scenes; rather, they offer a deep interpretation of the theme’s significance and value within the overall theme, where the uniqueness of the artistic subject and the universality of social values interact.

China has a rich history of producing woodcut prints. In terms of the language of woodcut, the innovation and growth of original printmaking are found in the ongoing assimilation of tradition along with the study of the forms and aesthetic implications of the language of other print media in order to make the necessary corrections and advancements to meet the constantly evolving requirements of contemporary aesthetics. For instance, Qingming in the Lake and Mountain by Ying Jinfei conveys a virtual scene while also hinting at the spirit of the writing era through the flexible texture language of copper plate dry engraving and corrosion.

The key figures from the early days of the China Academy of Art are arranged in this work, and the deep atmosphere produced by the copper plate language gives the image a sense of “full of tranquilly and solemnity after a long baptism of time,” which not only reflects the artistic spirit of the past but also shapes the artistic value of the present. The painting is over two metres in size, and it was created using the copperplate process, which calls for a high degree of professionalism and greater technical proficiency from the artist in order to achieve the work’s delicate significance. This type of painting technique challenge for huge copperplate prints was quite uncommon prior to 1990.

Using a traditional watermark woodcut technique, Chor Yanmiao’s “Night Watch - Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the New Culture Movement” builds up the three-dimensionality of the characters layer by layer and absorbs the “serenity and solemnity” shaped by the language of the copperplate prints in order to create an overall atmosphere that is similar to “The Clear Light of Lake Mountain” in terms of picture form. The “serenity and solemnity” shaped by the language of copper engraving, which is comparable to the “Clear Light in the Lake and Mountain” in the form of picture, are absorbed into the overall atmosphere of the painting. While “The Night Watch - Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the New Culture Movement” and “Clear Light in the Lake and Mountain” employ distinct plate languages and techniques, they nevertheless produce expressive effects that are similar, highlighting the flexibility and openness of the language of traditional watermark woodblock prints. The artists have consistently exploited the traditional language of woodcut in their practice, and have broken through its inherent restrictions, actively integrating the essence of other plate languages, being compatible and inclusive, and finally accomplishing self-renewal and breakthrough.

The prominence of realist topics demonstrates the artists’ concern for the richness of current life and the quest of the humanistic spirit, as printmaking gradually returns to the expression of subjective consciousness and the social aspect of art. These pieces frequently centre on everyday situations and people in everyday social situations, highlighting the exceptional social reality through the portrayal of everyday people and illuminating the distinct viewpoint of the era. Realist art emphasises the artist’s distinct emotions that are derived from life, and the meticulous depiction of common people in the pieces shows the artist’s attention to personal reality and emotional expression.

Realist themes are distinct from major historical themes in that they place greater emphasis on the fusion of the artist’s personal emotions and social values. Characters from everyday life are frequently used as the theme in realist works, expressing the artists’ distinct emotions and realistic concerns. For instance, Teng Yufeng

started experimenting with black-and-white woodcut techniques in the 1990s, concentrating on depicting the image of farmers on the plateau. His work, *Cangsheng No. 3*, uses traditional black-and-white woodcut techniques to depict an elderly farmer, with careful lines highlighting the farmer's gravity and resilience, indicating the work's shaky temperament. Using the traditional European woodcut method, Peng Wei's "The Year of the Man" profoundly depicts the thoughts and state of existence of a thirty-year-old young man in contemporary society. The piece illustrates a new kind of woodcut language and the spirit of artistic innovation by graphically expressing the inner complexity and difficulties of the young man's life through subtle lines and contrasts of light and dark.

The emergence of these pieces highlights the artists' bravery in the face of societal obstacles and their inventive use of age-old woodcut techniques, enriching Chinese printmakers' expressions and choices in the investigation of the realism style. Sichuan printmaking has consistently upheld its concern for common people and fidelity to black-and-white woodcut techniques, from Li Huanmin, Xu Kuang, to Peng Wei, demonstrating the vitality of continual evolution.

We can observe Sha Yonghui's deft use of overlay woodcut in her artwork when we examine her creative creation history. Before 1990, her works largely used screen-printing method, showing scenes of ordinary life, such as the series of "Highlights". Since 1990, she has switched back to overlay woodcut printmaking, and the ideas and issues she explores in her works have progressively transcended the articulation of singular ideas to reveal a humanistic concern for reality and history. Works that deal with contemporary realities, including *Dream Building Poems* and *City Music*, as well as works with significant historical subjects, like *Zhao Shangzhi in the Battle of Ice Trip*.

The piece "Golden Autumn Era" by Sha Yonghui took home the Gold Medal in the 13th National Art Exhibition. In the artwork, the younger generation of Northern Great Wilderness settlers is shown seeing the new region via a drone controlled by the older age of pioneers. The image's visual symbol—the elderly pioneers staring at the drone—creates tension in the plot, ties history to the present, and plays a unique semiotic role. Through the rationally arranged color blocks and the knife-flavored power of traditional Beidahuang overlay woodcuts, the artist blends the contrast between the sky and the ground, as well as the special emotions of each generation of Beidahuang pioneers for the construction of the motherland, creating a unique artistic style.

The "Golden Age of Autumn" preserves the format of the Northern Great Wasteland's classic woodcuts, but Sha Yonghui has achieved a breakthrough in the development of her ontological language. She eschews the second generation of printmakers' plain and rustic painting language in favour of an exploration of the more delicate overlay woodcut style. She demonstrates, for instance, a transcendence and breakthrough in the language of traditional Beidahuang overlay woodcuts in the subtleties of her face expressions and attire patterns. At the same time, the contemporary printmakers' regional cultural heritage is also evident in the audacious and uninhibited painting style.

The Jiangsu school of watermark woodcutting, represented by Wu Junfa, used the Jiangnan water town's natural and humanistic surroundings as well as the Taihu Lake system as its artistic mediums in the 1950s and 1960s. The scenery of Jiangnan was shown in Huang Pimu's *Spring Rain in Jiangnan*, Zhang Xinyu and Zhu Qinbao's *Green All Over Jiangnan*, and other works that used overhead compositions to convey the warmth and delicacy of Jiangnan through the employment of woodcut traces and watermark colours. The artists' passionate quest for a better existence is highlighted by their candid portrayal and endearing articulation of the realities of life following the establishment of New China.

The artwork of Gu Zhijun differs greatly from conventional watermark prints. His piece "Tired of Flying, Take a Break" offers the spectator a fresh aesthetic experience and provokes contemplation by fusing contemporary Internet words with aspects of Suzhou's historic gardens. The phrase "Let the house price fly for a while" is scrawled on the fence's right side in the image, playfully hinting to society's impotence in the face of exorbitant housing costs. Gu Zhijun employs the classic watermark woodcut language to extract fascinating real-world events, communicate unique creative notions, and add to the growing body of work on Chinese modern printmaking. His paintings have a deeper sense of antiquity since he used the traditional woodblock print engraving method in his technique.

"Six of the Screen Era" by Fang Limin depicts "head-down people" in congested everyday settings including tube stations and hospitals. He depicts the unaware group of "low-brows" unease and powerlessness through the haphazard lines created by a slash knife. While Fang Limin's paintings are more succinct and colourfully colourful than Gu Zhijun's, they all emphasise the distinctive aesthetic meaning and allure of watermark woodcut.

Young and middle-aged watermark woodcut artists draw from richer sources of inspiration for their works; they are not restricted to expressing local items and sentiments, but instead examine and foresee real life from a more minute viewpoint. For instance, You Yu used the water cups from his memories as the creative materials in "Enamel - Red Double Happiness," and he used tiny perspective to give the enamel water cups a serene, neutral colour tone. The artist must have a great deal of control over the humidity throughout the watermarking

process in order to achieve this realistic effect. The massive water cup dominates the entire image, surpassing the typical volume, as if frozen in time and space, giving people a tremendous visual impression. The slightly dense watermark appears to suggest that this is a foggy recollection from memory.

It is evident from You Yu's works that the traditional watermark woodcut technique is merely one of the mediums used to portray the works' current ideas; the artist's unique ideas and cultural conceptions serve as the link between tradition and contemporaneity. You Yu's *Boundary*, Zhang Yuanhao's *Memories of the Past*, Zhou Zijun's *The Silence of Nature, No.1*, Qiu Guilan's *Orchid in the Empty Valley*, Huang Yilin's *Dreams and Thoughts*, and Hu Xiaoxia's *Chapters* are some other prints that have a similar micro-expression. By closely examining and analysing everyday activities, these artists employ various printmaking languages to imbue commonplace objects with profound philosophical insights and beautiful meanings.

Other plate languages have been added to the field of printmaking in addition to the conventional woodblock, copperblock, lithograph, and silkscreen due to the ongoing development of new technology and materials. Lithography, for instance, encompasses metal, PS plate, and lithography. The artwork "Gazing Towards the Light" by Zhang Hui use the PS plate presentation method to highlight the image's delicate quality. In contrast to the conventional black-and-white woodcut method, the PS plate's language may purposefully reduce the amount of picture in the piece. This series of paintings features three panels that are each the size of a mobile phone screen. This size was chosen to reflect the behavioural traits of people reading, modifying, and sharing images in the digital age, as well as to portray the widespread practice of reading on cell phone displays. This piece conveys worry for the situation of contemporary youth and subtly suggests the modern traits of the digital era through the portrayal of three distinct identities of young people: instructors, white-collar workers, and workers.^(21,22)

Comprehensive printmaking appears to be able to maximise the ontological language of printmaking's breakthrough and realise a variety of creative expression possibilities, in contrast to the expression of a single type of plate. Comprehensive printmaking demonstrates the beauty of the contrast between several printmaking languages through the combination of many print kinds and materials. Li Can's *Southwest Colourful Clouds*, Li Fang's *Summer Cool Breeze No. 8*, Liu Jingjing's *Misplaced Bus Driving at High Speed*, and Wang Sheng's *Twilight Night* are just a few examples of the increasing number of integrated printmaking examples in recent years. Wang Lixing's composite prints have formed a unique artistic language. He focuses on the graphic value of ink and color structure in composite prints, and explores the unique experiment of "ink printmaking" by using ink and silkscreen printing on rice paper and combining collage and embossing techniques. His abstract forms in "Literati Peak," "We Walk," and "Grey Snow" express the artist's ideas on life. Zhou Jirong's *Landscape* series showcases the beauty of contrasts between various painting languages, demonstrating his wider experimentation with materials and techniques. These pieces intentionally distort the main scene and combine dark tones to evoke a sense of unease and anxiety that is derived from the artist's personal feelings regarding social life and urban transformation. Because composite prints are not restricted by edition type or method, and because their social and conceptual basis is often concealed in a close reading of the work, they are more capable of producing complex and unique forms of expression. As a result, thorough printmaking frequently functions better for the experimental investigation of the creative spirit of the artist, and some even progressively shift their focus to another area of current art.^(23,24,25,26)

In the 21st century, Chinese printmaking, after experiencing the rise of fine printing technology and the richness of media elements, has come to stress the expression of profound humanistic concern. The artistry of printmaking is enhanced by the inherent fusion of materiality and spirituality because artists recognise that printmaking's continuous integration and crossing as a medium is a feature of its contemporary nature. They also intentionally highlight the local cultural connotations and contemporary aesthetic connotations while adhering to the essence of printmaking.

Accumulation of printmaking theory from "crossover" to "return"

As the benchmark for the creation of art, art criticism shapes not only the scholarly and aesthetic preferences of the day but also the construction of new artistic conventions and styles during the evolution of the medium. The concept of "contemporaneity" has been the primary subject of theoretical investigation and accumulation in printmaking art criticism during the last 10 years. The printmaking industry has long blamed a lack of "contemporaneity" for the "cold" printmaking issue. Printmaking did not closely reflect the aesthetic mood of the times until the first decade of the twenty-first century. This was especially true of the works from the 3rd Guanlan International Printmaking Biennale and the 19th National Printmaking Exhibition.

The shapes and contents of the pieces in these two exhibitions, according to Shang Hui, "remained in the era of agricultural and industrial civilization." As a result, Shang Hui identified three major problems with the evolution of printmaking in his article published at the start of the second decade of the twenty-first century. These problems include the division between the expression of humanism in the process of urbanisation and printmaking, the gap between the visual language created by printmaking and the aesthetics of contemporary

technology, and the issue of the continuous growth of creative talent training in printmaking.^(27,28)

Amidst these challenges, theoretical circles during the subsequent decade have consistently acquired fresh perspectives and directed their attention towards the matter of printmaking's "contemporaneity" in conjunction with creative practice. Theoretical circles have been increasingly optimistic about the new wave of return to the path of Chinese printmaking, from the "cross-border" on the level of technology and media to the definition of the connotation and extension of printmaking ontology to the research on the revival of the ontological language of woodcutting and the local cultural self-awareness.

Since 1990, theorists have explored the "comprehensive" and "transgressive" aspects of printmaking in an attempt to provide a path forward for the modern evolution of Chinese printmaking. The 1980 "Printmaking as a Starting Point - Synthesis and Crossover Practice - The 11th Annual Conference and Exhibition of Printmaking in Colleges and Universities of China" is the focus of Hu Xianwu's article, "Synthesis and Crossover is a Way of Thinking." Hu Xianwu emphasises that synthesis and crossover have evolved into a way of thinking in the teaching of printmaking in colleges and universities, therefore disrupting the original way of thinking.

It is noted that the traditional approach to teaching printmaking has been broken as synthesis and crossover have evolved into ways of thinking in college and university printmaking curricula. Hu Bin published "A Brief Discussion on Crossover Exploration and Contemporary Transformation of Chinese Printmaking" in 1992. In it, he provided a detailed summary of various points raised in the discussion of the issue of printmaking's contemporaneity, including the benefits of printmaking's crossover naturally occurring, an examination of the factors contributing to printmaking's lack of popularity, and strategies used by printmakers to address the problem.

He believes that the characteristics of printmaking's "plurality" and "indirectness" make it more possible to carry out cross-border practice in terms of media and technology. These are all methods of visual forms, from the instructional mode of employing 'crossover' as a way of thinking to the 'crossover' practice based on the qualities of printmaking's 'plurality' and 'indirectness'. All of these are analyses of the "contemporaneity" of visual media. Hu Bin states as he wraps up his piece, "A variety of modern changes carrying local baggage have evolved, and the Chinese art world is still in a condition of adhesion between varied historical legacies and the new interface towards the world. When it comes to individual practice, art is less bound by rules and expectations." According to Hu Bin, printmaking's local baggage limits its current expression, but individual "cross-border" practice can lead to a more expansive creative space. Of course, the crossover of painting is included in the concept of crossover, not just the crossover of mediums and materials.^(29,30)

Dai Daquan (1992) noted in his paper "On the Self-Consciousness of Chinese Printmaking" that printmaking's overall significance and worth exactly mirror the worth of Chinese history and culture. According to him, printmaking settings and tendencies vary depending on one's historical and cultural background. Each piece of printmaking has a unique life history, and its actual power comes from constant development, nurturing, and maturing. The paper by Dai Daquan suggests the distinct manifestation of printmaking ontology and highlights the limitations of printmaking as a discipline. Shengwei also notes in "Seeing the Small, Knowing the Big, Having the Tolerance--Reviewing the 20th National Printmaking Exhibition" that breaking through and establishing printmaking's boundaries is essential to the process of self-awareness of the subject. She thinks that the creative process is moving between boundary-breaking and confirmation.

Shengwei further emphasises that "printmaking" is merely a tool and not an end in and of itself, and that it is more crucial to use direct involvement or participation to convey the spirit of the times and the modern society. Shengwei attempts to straddle the line between printmaking and other media, transforming the troublesome contradiction into an issue of societal expression and temporal spirit. In *Analysing the Changes of Prints and the Meaning of the Times in 70 Years of New Chinese printing*, You Yi, a young researcher, also addresses the blurring of boundaries between prints or printing styles.

According to her, this blurring aims to continuously transcend linguistic boundaries in order to show the free expression of artistic spirit rather than conceal the pictorial nature of printmaking. It actually illustrates the two directions of the self-consciousness of printmaking ontology: the highlighting of the inner individuality of printmaking ontology and the extension of the ambiguity of printmaking boundaries on the outside. This self-consciousness of the "quality of life" of printmaking ontology is demonstrated by Dai Daquan and is continued by Sheng Wei and You Yi. The research of Chinese printmaking's "contemporaneity" based on boundary-crossing has advanced as a result of these conversations about the ontology of printmaking. The ongoing debate within academic circles on the limits and ontological aspects of printmaking has, in part, indicated the path forward for Chinese printmaking's "contemporaneity" practice.

Feng Minsheng presents a significant point of view regarding the overall evolution of Chinese art in his article "The Return and Transcendence of Chinese Contemporary Art in the 'Age of Images': as China's cultural self-consciousness and self-confidence continue to grow, Chinese contemporary art should return to the fundamental qualities of art and the spirit of the country's art in order to transcend the discursive dilemma that the Western contemporary art scene faces. Chinese contemporary art should revert to the fundamental principles of art

and the national artistic spirit in light of China's growing cultural consciousness and self-assurance. This will help Chinese contemporary art avoid the discursive conundrums that confront Western contemporary art and guarantee its continued, healthy development. This frame of view is equally relevant to the evolution of Chinese printing. Chinese printmaking investigates the social aspects of printmaking by developing significant historical and social reality subjects, all the while adhering to the laws of creative evolution and aiming to fuse the individual spirit of the artist with societal aesthetics. Chinese printmaking, which is the pursuit of the social value of "contemporaneity" in Chinese printmaking, realises the unification of the vital value of art and the national artistic spirit against the backdrop of globalisation.

The revival of printmaking exhibitions and works has resulted in an active trend in the theoretical study of printmaking since the turn of the twenty-first century. The timing of reviews, works, and exhibitions in printmaking has given the exploration of printmaking creation timely attention and feedback, either validating or challenging it. Specifically, the debate over "contemporaneity" has influenced Chinese printmaking's return to the ontological language and the essence of regional culture and art to some extent.

CONCLUSION

Chinese printmaking has entered a new phase of ontological language return and subjective spiritual self-awareness, following the study of a single printmaking language and the impact of digital images and visual conceptions. Rather than emphasising the "contemporaneity" of globalisation, printmakers appear to be going back to the foundation of the ontological language of printmaking, utilising the strengths and benefits of tradition while fusing it with the contemporary cultural milieu to create a modern language system for Chinese printmaking. As a result, there is more spiritual tension, more openness and self-assurance, and an overall calmer, more steady state of mind following such a return and awakening. It is possible that printmaking's "plurality" and "public nature" predestine it to be more accepting and tolerant than other art forms.

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