

Research on the Creative Characteristics of Woodblock Prints in Ganzi Prefecture

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Abstract: Woodblock prints refer to print works created using realism techniques since 1929, depicting the history of China and the monumental achievements in construction. This article analyzes the woodblock prints in Ganzi Prefecture, summarizing their creative features that include portraying history, displaying natural landscapes, and depicting accomplishments in development. These woodblock prints not only serve as precious records of the history and culture of Ganzi Prefecture, but they also vividly express the achievements made since the founding of the People's Republic of China. Therefore, studying the creative characteristics of woodblock prints in Ganzi Prefecture can offer artistic practitioners insights and directions, enabling them to create more woodblock prints that are culturally distinctive, relevant to their times, and innovative.

Keywords: Ganzi Prefecture; Subject Matter; Woodblock Prints; Creative Characteristics

1. Introduction

In the grand river of China's history, Ganzi Prefecture, as a region steeped in memories, has nurtured numerous outstanding woodblock print works. These prints not only serve as a reenactment of history but also vividly convey the valiant struggles and aspirations for a contented life among the people of Ganzi Prefecture. Through the study of the creative attributes of these print works, we can not only gain a richer understanding of Ganzi Prefecture's memories and cultural legacy but also draw creative insights from them, offering valuable references for future artistic endeavors. Yin Shi discusses the connotation and developmental trajectory of red printmaking in the article "The Developmental

Course and Artistic Characteristics of Red Printmaking." It emphasizes the historical, spiritual, and artistic value of red printmaking, while also proposing insights into its contribution to the localization of art. ^[1] In the article "Artistic Characteristics and Evolution of Red Printmaking: A Study," Chen Lulu discusses the concept, scope, and historical development of Chinese red printmaking. The developmental history of Chinese red printmaking is divided into stages including the budding period, developmental period, flourishing period, and extraordinary period. Based on this framework, the author summarizes the creative characteristics and artistic features of red printmaking during each period. By analyzing the creative patterns of exceptional print artworks, insights are derived concerning the realization of artistic nationalization. ^[2] The article "A Preliminary Exploration of Printmaking's Involvement in Cultural Tourism Creative Products: A Case Study of the Peng Memorial Hall," authored by Long Chehong and Wen Mujiang, uses the Peng Memorial Hall as a case study to investigate the current development and existing issues of creative products in tourism. The authors attempt to incorporate printmaking into the design of creative products within the memorial hall. ^[3] In the article titled "Research on the Development of Cultural Heritage Sites and Famous Tourist Attractions Souvenirs in Zhangjiakou: A Case Study of Miniature Printmaking and Commemorative Bookplates," authored by Gu Xiangjun et al., the current state of destruction and demolition of cultural heritage sites in Zhangjiakou is elaborated upon. In light of this, the article proposes the development of miniature printmaking and commemorative bookplates as innovative tourist souvenirs, aiming to promote the historical and cultural heritage of Zhangjiakou. This endeavor is intended to contribute to the conservation of

Zhangjiakou's cultural resources.^[4]

2. Analysis of the Creative Characteristics of Woodblock Prints in Ganzi Prefecture

2.1 Depicting Historical Events in Ganzi Prefecture

Ganzi Prefecture, located in the western part of Sichuan Province, China, is one of the significant areas in the China. Due to the occurrence of numerous historical events in Ganzi Prefecture, the woodblock prints from this area often focus on depicting the history events and heroic figures. This is done to portray the magnificent scenes of the brave Army soldiers and the masses of people in the war. "The woodblock prints of the 1950s and 1960s in New China embodied the aesthetic essence of the laborers' poetic lives, using the artistic language of realistic depiction to explore the realism of imagery."^[5]

The woodblock print created by Jiang Bibo in 1961 is a typical representation of woodblock prints depicting historical events in Ganzi Prefecture. As shown in Figure 1, the scene depicts Army soldiers engaging in fierce combat on Luding Bridge, brimming with passion and bravery, showcasing the spirit of fearless determination and valor as they advance bravely for the cause. In terms of artistic style, it employs realism techniques, utilizing bold and powerful lines and strong contrasts in brightness to emphasize the soldiers' courageous charge on the suspension bridge. This approach delivers a strong visual impact. Viewers can sense the soldiers' resolute determination and unwavering courage in the face of danger, evoking a powerful emotional resonance. In summary, Jiang Bibo's work is a potent and deeply moving woodblock print from Ganzi Prefecture. Through its vivid portrayal of a significant event in Ganzi Prefecture's history, it embodies the spirit of heroism and showcases the artist's skillful craftsmanship and expressive power. It's worth noting that this work has been collected by institutions such as the National Art Museum of China, the National Museum of Chinese History, and the Museum of the Chinese People's Military, and it is widely circulated as an illustration in national primary and secondary school textbooks.



Figure 1. "Luding Bridge"

Image Source: "Imprints of the Era: Seventy Years of Sichuan Woodblock Prints"

2.2. Portraying the Natural Landscape of Ganzi Prefecture

Ganzi Prefecture's geographical location is exceptionally unique, serving as a crucial passage connecting Sichuan and Xizang, and bridging the transition between the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau and the Sichuan Basin. Specifically, it lies on the eastern edge of the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau, borders the Sichuan Basin to the east, Qinghai Province to the west, Aba Xizangan-Qiang Autonomous Prefecture to the north, and Yunnan Province's Degen Xizangan Autonomous Prefecture to the south. This geographical positioning has endowed Ganzi Prefecture with a diverse range of terrains and climatic features, giving rise to a distinctive and magnificent natural landscape characterized by majestic snow-capped mountains, vast grasslands, clear lakes, and rushing rivers. Within Ganzi Prefecture's boundaries, there are numerous renowned snow-capped mountains such as Mount Gongga, Mount Zheduo, Mount Dangli, Mount Yala, Mount Meru, and Mount Que'er. These mountains are perpetually covered in snow, their summits shining brilliantly in the sunlight. Additionally, the Jinsha River, Yalong River, Dadu River, and many other rivers wind through the mountains, creating unique highland canyon landscapes. Furthermore, Ganzi Prefecture boasts expansive and boundless grasslands, including Maoya Grassland, Tagong Grassland, Gemu Grassland, Nila Grassland, Wuxu Sea Grassland, and more. The emerald green grasslands stretch to the horizon, merging with the azure sky. Herds of yaks and goats wander across the vast grasslands, accompanied by pastoralists. This composition forms a grand

and vibrant natural tableau. It can be said that Ganzi Prefecture's unique natural landscape offers abundant creative materials and boundless inspiration for artistic practitioners. Within woodblock prints of Ganzi Prefecture, numerous exceptional artworks depict its natural scenery, such as "Spring on the Grassland," "Highland Gorge," "Holiday," and "This Side of the Scenery Is Unique." Artists often portray the continuous snow-capped mountains, expansive grasslands, and rushing rivers, vividly expressing their deep affection for Ganzi Prefecture and the snow-cove plateau.

Renzhen Langjia, born in Luding County of Ganzi Prefecture, is a Xizangan painter cultivated by New China. During his time living and working in his hometown Ganzi Prefecture, he created numerous woodblock print works that showcased the natural landscapes of the region. By depicting elements such as snow-capped mountains and grasslands, he conveyed the unique and magnificent natural scenery of Ganzi Prefecture. Ren zhen Langjia's "Spring on the Grassland," created in 1978, is a woodblock print that features the vast grasslands of Ganzi Prefecture as its scene, reflecting the transformative changes in the region. As shown in Figure 2, the artwork presents extensive green grasslands, forming a dominant green color palette. Flocks of white sheep dot the landscape, along with a convoy of trucks bearing the phrase "Gong ye xue da qing" (Learn from Daqing's Industry), showcasing the expansive grassland scenery of Ganzi Prefecture. In the distance, faintly visible snow-capped mountains emerge, adding depth to the composition against the backdrop of blue skies and white clouds. This highlights the distinctive natural landscape of Ganzi Prefecture.



Figure 2. "Spring on the Grassland"

Image Source: "Imprints of the Era: Seventy Years of Sichuan Woodblock Prints"

2.3. Reflecting Xizangan Culture and Ethnic Characteristics

Ganzi Prefecture is a region inhabited by the Xizangan ethnic group. Therefore, when creating woodblock prints, artists often incorporate elements of Xizangan culture such as traditional clothing, architecture, dance, and folk crafts into the compositions. This enriches the content of the artworks, making them more regionally specific, historically rooted, and culturally distinctive. Specifically, artists frequently use traditional Xizangan clothing as a significant means to depict characters. The vibrant and colorful Xizangan attire, including Xizangan robes, belts, and boots, becomes unique visual symbols within the prints. The use of these traditional garments not only emphasizes the Xizangan people's sense of ethnic identity but also infuses the artworks with a strong ethnic flavor. Beyond clothing, artists portray Xizangan traditional crafts like embroidery, weaving, carving, and pottery, reflecting the richness of the ethnic culture. This adds a distinct local flavor to the woodblock prints and showcases the wisdom and creativity of the Xizangan people, as well as the determination of the people of Ganzi Prefecture in supporting construction despite challenging conditions. "During the 1950s and 1960s, along with the liberation and democratic reforms in Xizang, mainland Chinese artists, organized by relevant departments, gradually ventu into the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau, giving rise to the first wave of artistic creation cente around Xizangan themes in the history of Chinese art." [6] Moreover, artists often depict traditional Xizangan dances, dramas, celebrations, and folk activities to convey the joyful new life of the Xizangan people. The graceful postures of ethnic dances, the lively scenes of celebrations, and the festive atmosphere of folk activities add vibrancy to the artworks.

The woodblock print "Weaving a Flower Carpet" by Li Huanmin is a artwork that embodies Xizangan culture and ethnic characteristics, immersing the viewer in a rich Xizangan cultural ambiance. Li Huanmin created this artwork based on his experience during his assignment in Ganzi Prefecture. He witnessed people weaving carpets in the backyards of chieftains' homes. Despite their ragged clothing and poverty, the carpets they

wove were exceptionally exquisite and moving. [7] As shown in Figure 3, the composition portrays two Xizangan women carefully weaving a flower carpet. Adorned in traditional Xizangan attire, they are surrounded by a variety of threads, reflecting the production and life scenes of craftspeople in the Xizangan regions of Ganzi Prefecture. This artwork employs realism techniques, with meticulous sketching skills aiming to capture the fullness and beauty of the characters. The focus is on harmonizing the relationships between individuals and between people and their surroundings. [8] Moreover, the artist skillfully uses carving techniques to depict details. For instance, to represent the texture of the carpet's surface, a unique method is utilized, involving the use of triangular engraving to create various-sized white dots. These dots are then densely arranged to form shadows on the leaves, portraying a scene of bright spring sunlight. "Weaving a Flower Carpet" is a heartwarming and culturally distinctive woodblock print. Through the artist's brushstrokes, it presents the unique cultural traditions and ethnic charm of the Ganzi Prefecture area.



Figure 3. "Weaving a Flower Carpet"
Image Source: "Li Huanmin Art Collection"

2.4 Reflecting the Achievements of Construction in Ganzi Prefecture

"The most prominent characteristics of the woodblock prints from the 1950s and 1960s are the authors' focus on social realities, their emphasis on the fundamentals of life, and their alignment with the perspectives appreciated by the masses." [9] In 1950, with the peaceful liberation of Ganzi Prefecture, local were emancipated and embarked on a hopeful new

life. This marked the start of vigorous construction and development. Within the realm of woodblock prints in Ganzi Prefecture, a significant portion portrays local economic development, educational advancement, and improvements in people's livelihoods. Works such as "Newly Built Xizangan Elementary School," "Junior Accountant," "New Song from the Mountain Village," "Golden Autumn," "Revealing New Beauty in the Snowy Mountain Gorge," and "Tent School" showcase the remarkable achievements Ganzi Prefecture has made in the realm of construction. These artworks effectively capture the substantial accomplishments of Ganzi Prefecture in areas like economic development, education, and the enhancement of people's lives within the context of construction. "The printmakers in Sichuan regarded the life in ethnic minority areas as the source for their understanding of life and art." [10]

Li Huanmin's "Newly Built Xizangan Elementary School" vividly portrays the significant achievements of construction in Ganzi Prefecture through its intricate depiction. As shown in figure 4, the artwork depicts the scene of a Xizangan elementary school under construction, symbolizing the crucial educational advancements achieved by Ganzi Prefecture after the establishment of New China. In the history of the Xizangan people, only aristocrats and monks had the opportunity to receive formal education. However, in New China, everyone was granted the right to education. The construction of Xizangan elementary schools facilitated the popularization of education in Ganzi Prefecture, providing the Xizangan people with opportunities to receive education and acquire cultural knowledge, thus laying the groundwork for their development and progress. Li Huanmin drew inspiration from the actual scenes he observed during his immersive period in Ganzi Prefecture, capturing the enthusiasm of the Xizangan people as they built schoolhouses and their eagerness for cultural knowledge. Through "Newly Built Xizangan Elementary School," Li Huanmin vividly depicts the significant achievements of Ganzi Prefecture in the process of construction. This includes the promotion of education, the spirit of hardworking people, and the inheritance of

cultural knowledge. The artwork portrays the true face of construction in Ganzi Prefecture, showcasing the new life and hopes that the Xizangan people have gained in the building of New China. At the same time, it conveys the artist's sincere admiration for this historical moment.



Figure 4. "Newly Built Xizangan Elementary School"

Image Source: "Li Huanmin Art Collection"

3. Ganzi Prefecture Woodblock Print Creation Directions

In the future, the creation of prints in Ganzi Prefecture will exhibit a trend towards diversity, elevated craftsmanship, and strengthened regional characteristics. Firstly, the creative content will become more diversified and varied. With the progress of society and the exchange of cultures, the future print creations in Ganzi Prefecture will incorporate a wider range of themes and expressive forms. In addition to continuing to depict historical events and achievements in construction, artists will also infuse richer content from ethnic culture, social life, natural landscapes, and more expansive perspectives, resulting in more innovative print creations. Secondly, skills and innovation will be further elevated. Future print creations in Ganzi Prefecture will build upon traditional techniques while incorporating more contemporary artistic methods and techniques. Artists can utilize a broader array of materials and techniques, such as digital technology and mixed media, to give the print works a more modern and contemporary form. Thirdly, regional characteristics and cultural heritage will remain crucial directions for creation. Future print creations in Ganzi Prefecture will continue to focus on uncovering and preserving local regional characteristics and ethnic culture, thus endowing the print works

with distinctiveness and representativeness. By integrating elements of traditional Xizangan clothing, architecture, folk arts, and more, the expressions will persist in portraying the profound attachment of the people of Ganzi Prefecture to their homeland and their cherished traditional culture. Fourthly, encouraging the participation of the younger generation of artists in the creation of prints in Ganzi Prefecture will infuse new creativity and vitality, facilitating a stronger resonance with the younger audience. In summary, the direction of print creation in Ganzi Prefecture will closely integrate with social development and the inheritance of ethnic culture, employing innovative forms of expression and profound meanings, thus continuing to convey the spirit of the times, promote outstanding culture, and actively contribute to the artistic development of Ganzi Prefecture.

4. Conclusion

As a region with profound history and rich ethnic culture, Ganzi Prefecture's woodblock prints exhibit distinct regional characteristics and artistic styles in portraying history, natural landscapes, ethnic features, and achievements in construction. Through research, the author has discovered that in depicting historical events, woodblock prints from Ganzi Prefecture primarily focus on magnificent scenes and heroic figures, vividly recreating those exciting moments in history. In portraying the natural landscapes of Ganzi Prefecture, these prints delicately depict and skillfully employ cutting techniques to present the magnificent views of snow-capped mountains and grasslands, creating a unique regional flavor. Furthermore, artists cleverly integrate Xizangan culture and ethnic features into their works, showcasing the deep affection of the Xizangan people for their homeland and their dedication to preserving traditional culture through elements like traditional attire, architecture, and folk art. Most importantly, Ganzi Prefecture's woodblock prints express admiration and emotion for the great progress and fruitful achievements since the founding of the People's Republic of China by depicting the achievements in construction. These woodblock print works are not only precious records of Ganzi Prefecture's history and culture but also expressions of anticipation for the new life and bright future of the people in

the new era of Ganzi Prefecture. It is believed that these works will continue to inspire the inheritance of the spirit, promote the core values, and contribute to the realization of the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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