

Analysis of the Artistic Characteristics of Traditional Culture Printmaking in Ganzi Autonomous Prefecture

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Abstract: Traditional culture printmaking in Ganzi Prefecture refers to the printmaking works created using realistic techniques since 1929, reflecting the history and great achievements in construction in Ganzi Prefecture. It inherits the cultural tradition of emerging printmaking and holds significant social and artistic cultural value. This article analyzes the traditional culture printmaking in Ganzi Prefecture and summarizes its artistic characteristics that combine ethnicity and artistry.

Keywords: Ganzi; Traditional Culture; Woodcut Prints; Artistic Features

1. Introduction

Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture, abbreviated as Ganzi Prefecture, is located in the western part of Sichuan Province, China. From May 1935 to July 1936, the Army's First, Second, and Armies successively passed through Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture. They traveled through and stayed in fifteen counties including today's Luding, Danba, Daochu, Luohuo, and Ganzi for a total of fifteen months, leaving behind numerous sites and .^[1] In addition, in 1950, the 18th Army of the Chinese People's Army marched into Xizang from Ganzi Prefecture. They fought battles while simultaneously constructing the Sichuan-Xizang Highway, which could be said that the soldiers of the Army paved a great road to liberate millions of people with their own bodies. It is because of the sites, , and stories left in the Ganzi area during the Army's entry into Xizang that Ganzi Prefecture now possesses rich traditional cultural and tourist resources. In recent decades, many artists such as Li Shaoyan, Niu Wen, Li Huanmin, Jiang Bibo, Qijiadawa, Renzhen Langjia, Nima Zeren, Kang Gesangyixi, and others have immersed themselves in life in Ganzi

Prefecture, collected materials, and created a batch of excellent printmaking works that depict Ganzi Prefecture's traditional culture, including 'When the Good News of the Peaceful Liberation of Xizang Reached the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau,' 'Opening Up,' 'Newly Built Xizang Primary School,' 'Morning Sun,' and others. 'These works inherit the cultural tradition of emerging printmaking and the fighting style of area printmaking, and have a strong contemporary atmosphere, serving construction'.^[2] Researching and understanding the artistic characteristics of Traditional culture printmaking in Ganzi Prefecture will help us better understand, appreciate, and create Traditional culture printmaking works.

2. Overview of Traditional Culture Printmaking

Chinese Traditional culture Printmaking emerged in the ever-changing early 20th century as a product of the modern emerging printmaking movement guided by left-wing literary and artistic thoughts."^[3] The concept of Chinese Traditional culture Printmaking, as an independent subject of art history study, holds significance not only for its value within the realm of art history and imagery but also from a perspective of social history, where its historical significance becomes even more pronounced.^[4] Compared to "Traditional culture Printmaking" created between 1929 and 1976, the Traditional culture Printmaking discussed in this paper refers to printmaking works created since 1929 using realistic techniques that reflect China's history and the remarkable achievements of development. Its scope is broader, and it possesses a more contemporary relevance. The content of Traditional culture Printmaking primarily revolves around Chinese history, warfare, heroes, the working class, human development,

rural development, and the production and livelihood of the people. Important historical events, heroic figures, and the new lives of the people are significant subjects of creation. It can be said that these Traditional culture Printmaking works carry the memory of modern and contemporary Chinese history, reflecting the great achievements of so development and the contemporary era's character.

3. Analysis of Traditional Culture Printmaking Works in Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture

3.1 Works by Qijiadawa

Qijiadawa, born in 1946 in Ganzi County, Ganzi Prefecture, Sichuan Province. Orphaned at a young age, he was later adopted by the government, which supported his education. In 1964, Qijiadawa graduated from the Ethnic Art Department of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute and subsequently joined the Sichuan Artists Association. During his time there, he created numerous printmaking works such as "My Childhood," "Opening Roads," "Rural Joy," among others, which depicted the lives of his hometown's people.

Qijiadawa's early representative work, "My Childhood," was created in 1965, with each individual piece measuring 28.5cm×21cm. This set of nine prints depicts his childhood experiences and transformation from a period of suffering to a new life. For example, prints four and five portray Qijiadawa being beaten as a young lama at the local monastery and falling off a ladder, while prints seven and eight reflect his tragic life as an orphan. The ninth print illustrates the moment when the People's Army sent him to Chongqing to pursue his education, marking a significant turning point in his life. The first eight prints in this set are predominantly in black tones, creating a gloomy and eerie atmosphere, whereas the ninth print (Figure 1) is bright and full of sunlight. "My Childhood" is a typical example of Traditional culture printmaking. By depicting his childhood experiences, Qijiadawa reflects the hopeful new life of the emancipated people in Ganzi Prefecture after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Qijiadawa, as a Xizang artist who experienced the hardships of a life as a social underclass slave and later became a master of his own

destiny, wholeheartedly engaged in printmaking. He fully utilized the expressive language of printmaking to celebrate the customs and practices of the Xizang people as they took a giant leap forward under the leadership of the china, heading toward a rapidly changing society.^[5]



Figure 1. "My Childhood," Group 9
Image source: "50 Years of Opening Roads
- Research Documents on Qijadawa's Art"

3.2 Works by Li Huanmin

Li Huanmin was born in Beijing in 1930. In 1947, he was admitted to the National Beiping Art Specialized School's Department of Fine Arts. In 1948, he went to the liberated areas, and in October 1949, he joined the "Meigan Class" of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. After graduating in 1951, he was assigned to work at the Sichuan Provincial Artists Association.^[6] From 1953 onwards, Li Huanmin visited Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture several times to experience life there. He created a series of printmaking works reflecting the production and life of the people in Ganzi, including "Weaving Flower Blankets," "Building a New Xizang Primary School," "Medicine," "Plateau Canyon," and more.

Li Huanmin's representative work, "Building a New Xizang Primary School," was created in 1954, with dimensions of 20cm×37.5cm. This artwork is in the form of copperplate engraving and depicts scenes of Xizang people in Ganzi Prefecture constructing a Xizang primary school. In this artwork, whether it's the portrayal of the characters, the composition, or the handling of light, you can see the influence of 19th-century Western classical painting. As shown in Figure 2, the central

figure in the composition is a young Xizang girl leading a cow, followed by an elderly person. On the right side of the image, several women are busy working, some kneading mud, others carrying wood, all working with great enthusiasm. In the background of the crowd is a Xizang-style building under construction, with the words "Xizang Primary School" written in both Xizang and Chinese. Li Huanmin created this work because during his immersion in life in Ganzi Prefecture, he witnessed scenes of Xizang people building a school. At that time, the Xizangs working at the construction site were enthusiastic and showed a strong desire for acquiring cultural knowledge. In the early days of the People's Republic of China, the construction of new Xizang primary schools was a groundbreaking development. In Xizang history, only the nobility and lamas had access to education, but in the new China, every person had the right to receive an education. "Building a New Xizang Primary School" portrays the hopeful new life of the Xizang people in Ganzi Prefecture after the establishment of the People's Republic of China.



Figure 2. "Building a New Xizang School"
Image source: "Li Huanmin's Art Collection"
Li Huanmin's another representative work, "Plateau Canyon," was created in 1956. This artwork reflects the artist's unique feelings towards the natural scenery of Ganzi Prefecture, blending the magnificent plateau landscapes with the heroic deeds of medical workers. Through the medium of printmaking, it presents a real and moving scene to the audience. As shown in Figure 3, this artwork is a multi-color woodcut print that depicts a medical worker carrying a medicine box and crossing a gorge on a zip line to provide medical care to the Xizang people. The towering mountains, blue sky, white clouds, rushing river, and steep cliffs in the picture

create a unique highland gorge landscape, offering viewers an expansive and spectacular visual experience. Through the portrayal of the natural environment, the artist not only showcases the topography and geology of Ganzi Prefecture but also conveys his love and admiration for the highland scenery. At the same time, the medical worker in the artwork is highlighted in the perilous natural environment, carrying a heavy medicine box and crossing the zip line. The zip line was a common primitive means of transportation in the highland gorge areas, known for its danger. The artist vividly portrays the selfless dedication and unwavering spirit of the medical worker against the backdrop of this challenging natural environment. According to the artist's recollection, in 1953, he accompanied a medical team to the agricultural and pastoral areas of Ganzi County to provide medical services to the Xizang people. At that time, the central government's policy required medical teams entering Xizang-inhabited areas to rely on themselves for food, clothing, shelter, and transportation. The young medical workers, selected from major hospitals in Beijing, Shanghai, and other places, faced hardships, dangers, and self-reliance, but their wholehearted dedication to serving the ethnic communities deeply moved him and inspired his creative inspiration. Li Huanmin once said, "The era has educated me, the Xizang people have nurtured me, and I do my best to depict this era and shape the spiritual outlook of the Xizang people of this era."



Figure 3. "Plateau Canyon"
Image source: "Time Imprints: Seventy Years of Sichuan Printmaking"

3.3 Works by Kang Gesangyixi

Kang Gesangyixi, born in 1943 in Kangding City, Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture, graduated from the Ethnic Arts Department of

Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in 1962. He was later assigned to work at the Cultural Center of Xiangcheng County, Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture. In 1995, he was transferred to Sichuan Kangding Ethnic Teachers College (now renamed as Sichuan Minzu College) and became the head of the Department of Fine Arts. In 1999, he joined Sichuan University as a professor and master's supervisor at the School of Arts.

Kang Gesangyixi's black and white woodcut print, "Xizang Opera," created in 1978, effectively highlights the Xizang culture and ethnic characteristics of Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture. Also known as "Joyous Grasslands," "Xizang Opera" depicts Xizang people watching a Xizang opera performance in front of a tent. The artist combines scenes of joy with traditional elements, portraying the Xizang people's joyful new life. As shown in Figure 4, the top of the image features a white tent adorned with traditional Xizang auspicious patterns, deer, and scrolling vine motifs. On the stage beneath the tent, performers are dressed in Xizang opera costumes and masks, passionately delivering their performance. Below the stage, the audience is filled with people wearing traditional Xizang attire. Some women wear headscarves, while others adorn themselves with intricate ethnic headpieces and belts, adding a rich ethnic flavor to the artwork. In this piece, we can observe that Kang Gesangyixi began to focus on the painting style and pattern designs of his own ethnic group. His meticulous depiction of the patterns on the tent, attention to detail in the characters' clothing, and deliberate inclusion of auspicious cloud motifs all reflect a strong ethnic identity.

[7]



Figure 4. "Xizang Opera"

Image source: "Local Care and Artistic Exploration - A Study of Kang Gesangyixi's Painting Art"

4. The Artistic Features of Traditional culture Woodcut Prints in Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture

4.1 National Character

The spiritual father of Chinese red woodcut prints, Lu Xun, once put forth a series of theories regarding woodcut print creation, such as "Woodcuts are for the masses, with people at the center, requiring excellent skills, being understandable, inheriting heritage, and pursuing nationality." [8] These theories effectively summarize the artistic characteristics of Traditional culture woodcut prints and continue to influence the field to this day. Lu Xun believed that Chinese red woodcut prints should, first and foremost, reflect their nationality by portraying Chinese characters, regional settings, and ethnic characteristics. "Strive to make characters exhibit the features of Chinese people, so that viewers can immediately recognize that they are Chinese and Chinese matters." [9] When it comes to the artistic characteristics of Traditional culture woodcut prints in Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture, the choice of themes should primarily possess a national character, employing a realistic style to depict the people and events of Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture. Many artists have immersed themselves in the life and culture of Ganzi, observing and documenting the appearances, expressions, clothing, and living environments of the local people. They incorporate these elements into their woodcut print creations, thereby reflecting the ethnic characteristics of Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture. For instance, artists like Kang Gesangyixi with his works "Xizang Opera," "Good Menba," "Little Accountant," and "Former People' Transformation," as well as Li Huanmin with his works "Xizang Girl," "Weaving Flower Blanket," and "Building a New Xizang School," all demonstrate rich Xizang characteristics in the clothing and stylization of their characters, showcasing their pursuit of ethnicity in the content of their creations. Furthermore, Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture's Traditional culture woodcut prints also emphasize depicting the region's distinctiveness. Elements such as plateaus, canyons, snow-capped mountains, and grasslands, which are characteristic of the

region, are often incorporated into the creation of woodcut prints. Examples include Li Huanmin's "Plateau Canyon," Renzhen Langjia's "Spring on the Grassland," and Qijadawa's "The Scenery on This Side is Unique." These woodcut prints authentically capture the unique features of the region, emphasizing the ethnic characteristics of the area.

4.2 Artistry

The artistic qualities of the Traditional culture woodcut prints in Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture are mainly manifested in three aspects: the texture of the cutting tool, the texture of the wood, and the use of color. In the creative process, variations in the cutting techniques and the choice of wood give the red woodcut prints their distinctive texture from both the cutting tool and the wood. In terms of line application, red woodcut prints employ the "knife in place of the brush" technique, characterized by the "beauty of strength." This technique is simple, unadorned, has strong contrast, and is filled with rich decorative meaning, impact, tension, and artistic appeal. Regarding the use of color, Traditional culture woodcut prints in Ganzi are primarily divided into two forms: black and white and multicolor. "Black and white, as a color system, lacks color, but it possesses infinite creativity. These two extremes in color expression richly depict natural objects. They represent both form and emotional symbols, expressing both brightness and color." [10] Therefore, black and white woodcuts are characterized by their strong summarization, good decoration, simplicity, and rusticity. For example, Qijadawa's series of woodcut prints titled "My Childhood" uses the black and white woodcut technique to depict the artist's childhood experiences and the new life after the founding of the People's Republic of China. In contrast to black and white woodcuts, multicolor woodcuts have a more lyrical quality. Kang Gesangyixi's woodcut print "Mountain Village New Song," created in 1975, is an example of a multicolor woodcut. As shown in Figure 5, this artwork vividly portrays the scenes of Xizang people working and harvesting. The artist skillfully uses multicolor woodcut techniques to convey the joy of the harvest, allowing viewers to feel the richness and beauty of village life while appreciating it. In terms of character portrayal,

Kang Gesangyixi employs concise cutting techniques that minimize details, emphasizing the effects created by color. He follows the principle of "simplicity triumphs over complexity" in the use of colors, using shades of golden yellow as the main color scheme to symbolize the harvest. He also incorporates variations in temperature to create a smooth transition of colors, resulting in natural and layered color effects in the artwork.

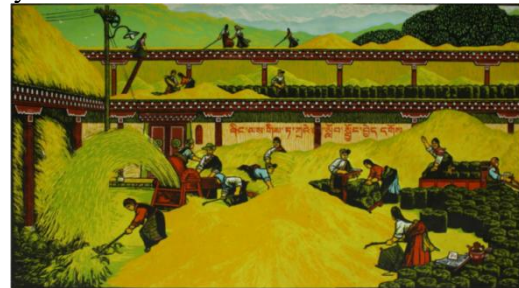


Figure 5. "Mountain Village New Song"
Image Source: "Local Care and Artistic Exploration - A Study of Kang Gesangyixi's Painting Art"

5. Conclusion

Traditional culture woodcut prints played a crucial role in political propaganda during China's era. With their full passion, concise lines, and vivid colors, they vividly portrayed heroic figures and spirit to the people. They not only propagated the china's theories but also ignited the will, patriotism, and national pride of the people. Today, Traditional culture woodcut prints serve not only as a review and inheritance of history but also as a reflection and guidance for the present, holding significant social and artistic-cultural value. These artworks have an important role in promoting social development, cultural inheritance, and guiding values. Ganzi Xizang Autonomous Prefecture's Traditional culture woodcut prints, reflecting the history and great achievements in construction, possess a unique blend of ethnic and artistic qualities. They continue to play a crucial role in promoting traditional culture and strengthening the awareness of the Chinese national community.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported in part by a grant from "Creation and Application Research of Traditional culture Woodblock Prints in Ganzi Prefecture" (Project Number: XYZB2222SB), Funded by: General Humanities and Social

Sciences Project, Sichuan Minzu College,
2022

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