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THE CONTRIBUTION OF LU XUN, AN ARTIST DURING WAR
AGAINST JAPANESE, THROUGH PRINTMAKING AS A
MEDIUM OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract:

During China's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931 – 1945), Lu Xun introduced the modern woodcut movement, which combined painting, engraving, and printing techniques into a unified artistic expression. This movement aimed to create a 'powerful beauty' in printmaking, using the contrast of black and white to convey strong ideological messages. The historical method is employed in this study, as it provides a rigorous framework for analyzing documentation from archives, records, books, journals, and electronic data. This method is essential for understanding the context and evolution of artistic movements, particularly in relation to the social and political forces of the time. This paper further analyzes the artistic techniques and visual elements of woodcut prints during the war period, investigating how these elements contributed to the propagation of anti-Japanese sentiment and the broader cultural movement.

Keywords:

Emerging Printmaking, Modern Woodcut Movement, Visual Communication Media

Introduction

The 1930s were marked by extreme political and social turbulence in China, largely due to ongoing conflicts, particularly the Japanese invasion. This period of instability not only disrupted daily life but also profoundly affected the nation's artistic environment. Given the significant role that art played in reflecting and shaping public sentiment during this tumultuous period, it is essential to study the contributions of Chinese artists to the anti-Japanese resistance. During this time, numerous woodcut artworks were created that were not only beloved by the general public but also highly praised by artists, becoming classic representations of wartime art. These works continue to inspire contemporary artistic approaches and offer valuable insights for current creative practices. Understanding their work not only enriches our knowledge of this crucial historical period but also sheds light on how art can serve as a powerful tool for political and social mobilization.

In this unique historical context, in August 1931, Lu Xun organized the first and highly influential woodcut workshop in Shanghai (Figure 1). As the organizer of this workshop, Lu Xun not only served as a translator but also prepared a large number of original woodcuts and books for the participants, helping them to broaden their horizons and cultivate artistic thinking. Under Lu Xun's advocacy, the emerging print movement gradually emerged, becoming not only a medium of artistic expression but also a powerful tool for widespread propaganda. Lu Xun's definition of Emerging print was primarily reflected in his innovation and promotion of the art form, particularly in introducing and advancing European creative printmaking to meet the needs of revolutionary struggle. Following this, as exhibitions and other activities unfolded (see Table 1), many young woodcut artists spread across the country like sparks, igniting woodcut movements in various regions.



Figure 1: Li Hua "Mr. Lu Xun at the Woodcut Workshop"

Source: Collected In The Art Museum of China Central Academy of Fine Arts. (1956)

In 1934, Lu Xun wrote in the preface to *Woodcut Chronicles*: "Chinese woodcut illustrations had a respectable history from the Tang to the Ming Dynasty. However, the new woodcuts of today have little connection to this history. The new woodcut is influenced by European creative woodcuts." He noted that the introduction of emerging print began with the "Morning Glory Society," whose five volumes of *Art Garden Morning Glory*—although not meticulously crafted and disregarded by renowned artists—nevertheless attracted the attention of young apprentices. This series of events marked the birth of modern Chinese emerging print and ushered in a new chapter in Chinese printmaking art.

Table1: Basic Information About Lu Xun's Participation And Exhibitions Of Foreign Prints

Exhibition Name	Exhibition time	Exhibition Venue	Number of works
Western Woodcut Exhibition	19930.10.04--- 10.05	Shanghai North Sichuan Road Dixie Road (Now Liyang Road)	More than seventy European and American works
Exhibition of prints by German writers	1932.06.04 - 06.25	Ying Huan Book Company, 42 Jing'an Temple Road, Shanghai (Germany)	About fifty works
Exhibition of woodcuts by modern writers(German and Russian printmaking exhibitions)	1933.10.14 - 10.15	40 Qian'aili, Shi Gaota Road, North Sichuan Road, Shanghai(Now No. 38, Lane 2, Shan Yin Road)	66 pieces of artwork
Russia, France Book Illustration Exhibition	1933.12.02 - 12.03	40 Old Target Road, Shanghai(Now 183 Wujin Road)	100 pieces of artwork

This paper seeks to explore the role of artists during this period, particularly how they utilized their talents to contribute to the war effort. These artists were not merely creators of aesthetic objects; they were active participants in the political struggle, using their work to inspire resistance, promote national unity, and criticize the social and political issues of the time. By aligning themselves with political organizations like the Communist Party of China and the Chinese Nationalist Party, these artists transformed their creative output into powerful tools of propaganda, shaping the ideological landscape of wartime China.

Emerging prints are simpler than other paintings in terms of production and materials, and they can be produced very quickly, and the reproducibility of prints can be used to produce numerous prints in a short time for various newspapers, publications and cultural propaganda activities, which meets the social situation of China's internal and external problems and the low literacy rate of the nation. In September 1931, Japan launched a war of aggression against

China in the northeast, occupying the three eastern provinces, the Chinese people's anti-war sentiment was high, and printmaking movements sprang up everywhere. Under the leadership of Lu Xun's woodcut movement, many artists chose to use realism to represent life and society during the war, such as depicting the tragic scenes of the war and showing the unity of the military and the people. Artists also used their works for propaganda and morale boosting, producing a large number of prints. These works were of a strong political propaganda nature, conveying the anti-Japanese sentiment and patriotic spirit of the Chinese people through strong visuals.

Printmaking as a medium of communication was no longer limited to traditional Chinese prints of woodcuts of literati, but was transformed and enlightened society through the emerging prints with their strong visual contrast of black and white, which were given political force and democratic nature through Lu Xun's woodcut movement. This essay provides a historical perspective on Lu Xun's leadership of a group of printmakers during China's war of resistance against Japan by producing prints with strong visual effects as a medium of communication, and these prints are important messages of great value to China (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2: May 1, 1933 Shanghai Nicheng Bridge (1933).

Source: Shanghai Art Review (2011)



Figure 3: Going to The Front (1932).

Source: Collected In Guangdong Museum of Art (1929)

Historical method is used in this discussion through documentation from archive's records, books, journals, and electronic data. This article is also used to examine the prints that define the printmaking and woodcut movement and the role of the artists in propaganda for China's 14-year war against Japan. It is hoped that this article will enable us to understand the content and means of literary propaganda during the war, and to clearly see how young Chinese artists, led by Lu Xun, used prints to participate in the act of resistance, further filling in the study of China's cultural history during the war against Japan. At the same time, woodcut printmaking as an art form, but also played a very active political role in the war against Japan, and this study can provide a way to use the visual communication of printmaking as a medium of communication in state propaganda in modern society. Overall, printmaking plays an important role in the visual effects of public communication.

Lu Xun And His Influence On The Art Of Printmaking

Woodblock printing originated in China, flourished in the Ming Dynasty, and then declined in the Qing Dynasty. During China's war against Japan from 1931 to 1945, Lu Xun introduced Western printmaking and created prints by combining painting, engraving and printing, also known as emergent printmaking, which started the modern Chinese woodcut movement. Lu Xun (1881-1936) was a great master in modern Chinese literature, as well as a versatile artist, thinker and cultural celebrity, whose literary works are known for their profound social critical significance and exploration of human nature. Lu Xun's life and cultural background had an important influence on the formation and development of his printmaking art. His upbringing and early experiences were an important source of his creativity. Lu Xun's family had a wealthy background and a large collection of books, which laid the foundation for his later literary and artistic creations. Lu Xun studied medicine in Japan, and this experience also gave him a unique understanding and feeling for Japanese culture and art. In addition, Lu Xun was also exposed to traditional Chinese culture and art in his early years, such as calligraphy and seal engraving, which also provided important references for his artistic creations.

Although Lu Xun himself was relatively inexperienced in relevant art creation practices, he was advanced and visionary in his art concepts because of his foreign study experience, work responsibilities and personal preferences. The printmaking movement advocated by Lu Xun was another important contribution to the field of art and an important part of modern Chinese printmaking. In the early 20th century, Lu Xun's choice of printmaking was prompted by the fact that, as he once said, "at the time of the revolution, printmaking was the most widely used, and could be done in a moment, though in great haste" [6]. easy to do, even in times of war, it is also possible to continue to propagate." It can be seen that Mr. Lu Xun led the emerging printmaking movement to cultivate emerging Chinese printmakers, with the aim of giving woodcut printmaking the mission or ideological function of transforming society and enlightening the masses through the visual communication medium of printmaking, which made an important contribution to the anti-Japanese war.

From 1929 to 1930, Lu Xun published five volumes of paintings under the name of "Chaohua Society", including two books of "Selected Modern Woodcuts" with 12 prints each (Figs. 4 and 5), most of which were selected from the British books "TheWoodcutofTo-day", "TheStudio", and "TheSmallerBeasts". TheSmallerBeasts," which are mostly landscapes and scenes, are certainly progressive for Chinese artists who continued to paint ink drawings. Moreover, Lu Xun introduced the prints in the album in detail, and the decorative prints in the album could be considered the first learning material for learners who were studying emerging woodcuts at that time, and also provided the theoretical basis for the emerging prints as a propaganda tool for the war against Japan later on, which was the first enlightenment activity Lu Xun started when there were no emerging woodcuts in China. During the same period, Lu Xun advocated realist art, and advocated emerging printmaking as a concrete practice of his idea of "social art".



Figure 4: Viaduct

Source: Modern Woodcuts Selectiont (1929)



Figure 5: A Farmer's Life

Source: Modern Woodcuts Selectiont (1929)

On August 17, 1931, Lu Xun organized the "Woodcut Seminar". Afterwards, under his influence and advocacy, woodcut societies blossomed in a few years. Lu Xun personally visited woodcut exhibitions and talked with artists about the principles and techniques of artistic creation. The works he showed to young artists in class, such as Kole Huizi's Peasant War, later became a model for Chinese woodcutters. Many of the prints made during the War of Resistance against Japan depicted battle scenes in which the spirit of resistance and the power of justice expressed in the images clearly showed traces of the influence of Coleridge.

In short, Lu Xun's life and his cultural background had a profound impact on the formation and development of the printmaking art he led. His family background, early experiences and creative background gave him a unique understanding and feeling of traditional Chinese culture and art, Japanese culture and art, as well as the political, social and cultural issues in China at the time, which also provided valuable creative materials and inspiration for the printmaking movement he promoted.

The Spread And Influence Of Emerging Prints During The War Period

During the Anti-Japanese War, the printmaking artists led by Lu Xun played an important role in propagating and inspiring the people, promoting the spirit of anti-Japanese resistance, and inciting national pride. The following is a detailed discussion of the status and role of emerging prints in the anti-Japanese war.

The Creation Theme Of New Printmaking

Emerging prints are created with a wide range of themes, among which anti-Japanese war resistance is one of the main contents. Mainly through depicting the heroic deeds in the war and showing the cruelty of war and national sufferings, it expresses the people's firm

determination to resist the war and the sentiment of resistance. The national pride and patriotic sentiment expressed in the emerging prints inspired the fighting spirit and morale of the people and strongly promoted the development of China's anti-Japanese war. Representative works include: Zhang Wang, *Wounded Head* (Figure 6); Li Hua, *Hunger* (Figure 7), etc. All of them express the spirit of resistance by portraying heroic figures and scenes of popular resistance.



Figure 6: A Wounded Head 1933

Source: Collected In National Art Museum Of China (1934)



Figure 7: Li Hua, Hunger 1937

Source: Collected In National Art Museum Of China

The Propaganda And Inspirational Role Of Emerging Prints

Emerging prints are a form of visual art that expresses Chinese reality and reflects Chinese culture, and have become an important visual propaganda medium. These emerging prints promoted progressive ideas and culture, which contained strong patriotic feelings, and were widely disseminated through newspapers, posters, and propaganda posters. The creative content and style of the emerging prints were deeply loved by the people, inspiring their will to resist the war and patriotic enthusiasm, and inspiring the courage and perseverance of the nation in the war. The general public's deeper understanding of China's cultural traditions and reality further strengthened the self-confidence and cultural self-awareness of Chinese national culture. The success of the emerging prints not only demonstrates their importance in anti-Japanese propaganda, but also reflects the influence of Lu Xun as a cultural celebrity in Chinese printmaking.

The Social-Critical Role Of Emerging Prints

In addition to depicting anti-war themes, the emerging prints also criticized the social phenomena and political system of the time by reflecting social reality. For example, prints such as "Roar! China" (Figure 8) and other prints reflected the corruption and bureaucracy of the national government at the time and advocated the spirit of opposing corruption. The emergence of these critical works not only served as a propaganda to vent popular discontent and raise national self-esteem and self-confidence, but was another important contribution of the emerging prints.



Figure 8: Roar! China (1935)

Source: Collected In National Art Museum Of China

The Cultural Transmission Role Of Emerging Prints

Emerging prints are an important chapter in the history of Chinese printmaking art. These works represent a new aesthetic trend and creative approach, and have had a profound impact on the modernization and internationalization of Chinese printmaking. The artistic language and connotation of the emerging printmakers' works expressed their sympathy for the people

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and their praise for the resistance of the masses as well as their rebellion against the Nationalist government's failure to resist the war, and they linked their works to the black mud of the old society, providing new ideas and methods for the development of Chinese printmaking art. The emerging printmaking community grew rapidly after the war, and used printmaking to promote the war and contribute to the resistance of the Chinese nation, and became the brightest emerging group in Chinese printmaking art throughout the war.

The Dissemination Of Emerging Prints During The War Period

The dissemination of emerging prints during the war period mainly included the following: magazines and newspapers. Emerging prints were initially disseminated through magazines and newspapers. Lu Xun published a series of woodcuts by Kōle Huizhi entitled "War" in the inaugural issue of Beidou magazine on September 20, 1931, including this one, "Sacrifice" (Fig. 9), which was in fact selected by Lu Xun to commemorate the five martyrs of the "Left League", including Roushi. [12] These publications had a wide distribution range and were able to spread throughout the country, so the emerging prints were able to spread rapidly throughout the country by means of magazines and newspapers.

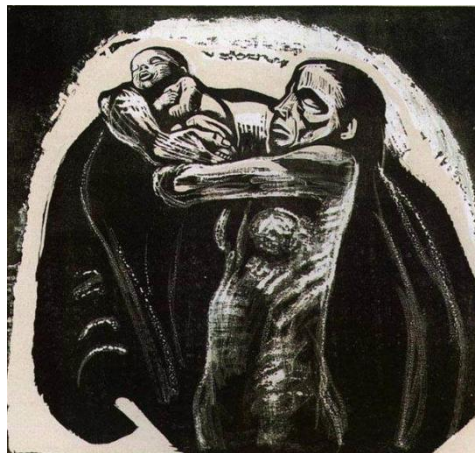


Figure 9: The Sacrifice (1922)

Source: The People's Literature Publishing House (1981:487-488)

In 1936, the National Woodcut Exhibition (later changed to the Second National Woodcut Exhibition), which was organized by the Modern Printmaking Society, was about to open. This can be seen from the "First All-Woodflow Exhibition" in 1935 and the "Second All-Woodflow Exhibition" in 1936, where it is clear that modern woodcuts have expanded from a narrow and poetic range of interest to a wide range of microcosms of social life. Not only the content and theme of the portrayal of life, but also the general passionate emotions of the times, such as the situation of the Northeast Volunteer Army against the enemy, and the passionate sentiments of the student movement, could express the patriotic thoughts and national consciousness of the nation as much as possible on the picture." [15] In 1936, the artist's work was published in the Chinese Academy of Fine Arts. [15] Some of the more famous prints depicting the Northeast Volunteer Army's resistance in 1936 include Jiang Feng's "Northeast Anti-Japanese Volunteer Army" (Figure 10) and Noe's "Our City Land" (Figure 11).



Figure 10: Northeast Army anti-Japanese Volunteers (1941)

Source: Collected InThe Museum Of Chinese Revolution



Figure 11: Nao's "Defending Our City Land"

Source: Artists Who Share Life with the Chinese Nation

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Conclusion

The results of this study include a detailed examination of the themes, motifs, and stylistic choices employed by the artists of the period. Additionally, the analysis reveals the reception and impact of these works on contemporary Chinese society. This study's findings are supported by qualitative analysis, visual analysis, and a comparative study of various prints from the period, which together provide a comprehensive understanding of the role that modern woodcut art played during this era.

The way emerging prints were disseminated during the war period was not only the propaganda and dissemination of their works themselves, but also the transmission and influence of their artistic ideas and creative methods. What's more, with its distinctive national flavor and unique artistic style, it attracted the attention and support of readers and viewers, and became an important tool for people to propagate the war and oppose Japanese aggression. At the same time, the emerging prints also aroused a wave of attention and fervor among the public, making more people understand the significance and importance of the war of resistance. The diversified and wide dissemination of prints during the war reflects the pioneering and innovative spirit of visual communication of emerging prints, and also proves the important contribution of Chinese printmakers in the anti-Japanese war and the war against Japan at that time. In short, Lu Xun's contribution through printmaking as a medium of visual communication cannot be ignored. The printmaking works created by the printmaking artists he led not only expressed the spirit and philosophy of the anti-Japanese resistance, but also made great contributions to the anti-Japanese resistance and the development of Chinese art at that time. These prints are not only an important part of the creation of printmaking art, but also a cultural heritage of great significance in the history of Chinese art. Therefore, studying the significance and value of Lu Xun's prints transmitted through visuals not only helps us understand the history and heritage of Chinese culture, but also provides useful references and inspiration for the development of the Chinese art world, and helps guide contemporary artists.

Lu Xun, one of the most famous literary figures during China's war of resistance, made important contributions to China's war of resistance against Japan and cultural construction in a variety of ways, including literature and art. Among them, as the promoter of emerging prints, Lu Xun led artists to create prints that played an important role in visual communication during China's resistance period and made outstanding contributions to the mobilization of Chinese society and the advancement of the war effort. Since its inception, neo-woodcut prints were imbued with a heavy political consciousness and the historical burden of transforming society. Unlike the ancient woodcuts, which had a strong religious and secular flavor, it began its ontological construction by absorbing advanced techniques from abroad and being influenced by various modern Western art schools. The new woodcut movement made the new printmaking art more far-reaching among the people, enhancing the people's fighting power, opening the eyes of the woodcut youth and improving their skills. These prints are not only artworks but also historical documents, reflecting the political, cultural and artistic landscape of Chinese society at the time, social and political realities, providing important references and inspiration for later Chinese artists, and becoming one of the most important ways to understand modern Chinese cultural history. It is also important for the study of modern Chinese history, cultural history and art history, and provides important references and inspiration for Chinese artists. In conclusion, the study highlights the significant contributions

of Lu Xun and the artists he inspired, illustrating how their works not only reflected the turbulent times but also shaped the ideological landscape of wartime China.

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