

The Progress in Taiwan Modern Printmaking: Woodcut & Its Variations

Curator : HWANG Yue-Sheng

I. Foreword

As the exhibition's title, "The Progress in Taiwan Modern Printmaking: Woodcut and Its Variations" suggests, this article will show the progress and development of woodcut printmaking in Taiwan. The title, when translated into Chinese, especially replaces "woodcut" with "wood," so that more types of printmaking that use "wood blocks and other related mediums" can be included. They are: woodcut wood engraving; wood lithography woodcut in intaglio or both intaglio and relief; "quasi woodcut" which replaces woodblock with easier-to-cut linoleum, synthesis plate or sugar cane plate and woodcut which is combined with other types of print. The following description and reference of the aforementioned types of print will focus more on their artistic forms.

In this article, I will mention a few important things about woodcut prints outside Taiwan first. Then, a systematic review of the origin, backgrounds and turning points of woodcut will be given. I will also mention the representative printmakers in Taiwan and their works of art. Finally, I will address the present condition of printmaking in Taiwan and invite readers to think about how to improve it. I believe an exhibition must be able to inspire people to care more about the issues that it addresses.

II. Development of Woodcut outside Taiwan

The printmaking process is closely related to the ways people think and how they keep records in a certain period of time. A print is usually based on a reversed picture, except lithographs. This mirror-like work of art not only helps the audience to learn how the original picture looks, but also indicates the perspective taken by the artist when he or she cuts the block and prints the picture. A print can be simple, complicated, realistic or expressive. It can be used to express the artist's personal feelings or to deliver a propaganda message. Because multiple prints can be made with just one block, printmaking enables

people to pass things down from one civilization, country or era to another. In fact, no matter in simple settlements or in mature, developed societies, printmaking has always been a common practice. Rubber and wood stamps are an early example, and today we have four-color chromolithography. Be it an archaic artistic print, a medieval book, or a modern journal, printmaking makes it easy to present texts and illustrations to more people. In a digital age like today, an image can even go viral around the world thanks to the Internet. From ancient times till now, the act of reproduction and the will to spread the messages around have remained essential to human communications. When it comes to woodcut printmaking in the West, I will discuss it in two chapters, "Concealing the Fine Cutting Process" and "Revealing the Act of Cutting and an Artist's Original Idea." The spreading of color woodcut prints in Japan—Ukiyo-e, as well as how the establishment of Guanlan Original Printmaking Base has resulted in the rapid growth of printmaking in China, will also be discussed. They are worth being studied for printmaking professionals in Taiwan.

2-1 Concealing the Fine Cutting Process

Image printing and woodcut illustrations only developed by the 13th Century in Europe with the emergence of papermaking. Early woodcut prints were extremely rough. They feature a few black lines accompanied by a large empty background. They go with stories so that the illiterate majority can also get the message. They were also sold at festivities and religious rites, just like souvenirs or gifts that tourists buy today. The original drawing of a print contains simple outlines that can be transferred to a woodblock. An artisan would then cut the block following those lines. It was only until the 15th Century that artists began to notice woodcut prints' artistic quality, rather than seeing them as mere functional tools. German artist Albrecht Dürer was among the first to

realize that special expressions can be made through simple woodcutting techniques. By expressing himself through woodcutting, he achieved much more artistically than his peers, and turned a new page for woodcut.

In the early days, to make a woodcut print, one had to make a reverse drawing, transferr it to a wood block, and then cut it out. What Dürer did, however, was to directly make a drawing on the block (usually made of pear wood), so that the prints retain the original style and tone, and look exactly like the drawing itself. His prints are so refined that viewers tend to forget they have been printed with a carefully cut block. Dürer's major challenge was to take image reversion into consideration when he drew. Considering the complexity, Dürer's work has become canonical over time, and his prints are constantly studied by art historians. There is an invisible "gap"—the woodcutting process—between the artist and the final print. An artist must draw and cut meticulously so as to succeed.

Woodcut in 16th Century Italy is especially impressive because almost every printmaker/artist of this time manifested a unique style. While Titian adopted relatively traditional approaches, Giuseppe Scolari emphasized innovative white woodcut lines in his work (see *The Man of Sorrow*). Intaglio master Hendrik Goltzius incorporated his North European background and his studies in Italy for a strong and special style. His landscape woodcuts are characterized by flowy black lines. He also used white lines to highlight the contours of his subjects for an impressive contrast of light and shades.

2-2 The Development and Spreading of Colored Woodcut Prints

Color woodcut prints were quite common in China by the second half of the 15th Century. But it is Ukiyo-e, or "pictures of the floating world" in 17th Century Japan, that

brought this category to a peak. Just when Commodore Matthew Perry forced Japan to open its gate to the West in 1854, Ukiyo-e was also introduced to this oceanic nation and it soon became highly popular. Ukiyo-e originated from the *Mustard Seed Garden* painting catalogue introduced from China around 1679-1701. The book, which features a substantial number of fine woodcut illustrations in either colors or black and white, captured Japanese artists' attention and inspired them to devote to the making of woodcut prints. Ukiyo-e is a kind of painting that describes the hedonistic aspects of the world. It also represents an extremely strong link between printmaking and commerce, and printmaking and industry. An Ukiyo-e artist, once commissioned to make an image, would attach the designed image to a main wood block and registers the colors and text before sending it to a wood-cutting artisan. Aside from the main wood block, various other color blocks, each to be used to add one color to the picture, would be made. The number of the color blocks can vary depending on the colors needed. Since Ukiyo-e's main patrons were the middle class, it is important to make the working process cost-effective. The publisher, the artist and the wood block artisan are essential to Ukiyo-e's development. Their collaborative relationship has remained until today.

Once the publisher finished making an Ukiyo-e, he or she may sell the original blocks to another publisher, who would then print the same Ukiyo-e again. To cut down the cost, during the printing process, this second publisher may skip using some of the color blocks. Thus there are no fixed editions for an Ukiyo-e, and sometimes the color scheme may be modified when the blocks are handed to another publisher. The damaged parts of a block may be re-cut, and then the image can look different when the re-cutting is done. But Ukiyo-e is valuable because it not only makes colored woodcut

prints more common but also strengthens the ties between artists and wood-cutting artisans.

2-3 Revealing the Act of Cutting and an Artist's Original Idea

In Asia, it is important to polish the wood block and mark the printing area and the position of the printing paper in advance for a precise multicolor printing result. All details are attended to and every step is taken with caution. But in Europe, Paul Gauguin and Edvard Much's woodcuts are much rougher. The blocks are usually abraded, although wood patterns sometimes are retained. The most representative work is *The Kiss* (1897) by Edvard Munch. German Expressionist artists learned from Munch and pushed woodcut prints to a new level. They emphasized the woodcutting process a lot because that's a way to vent their innermost feelings and impulses. Pablo Picasso tried out a wide range of printmaking methods, including traditional woodcut, before settling on a specific method of his own. He replaced wood with linoleum and was famous for his reduction printing technique. This refers to cutting away more and more of a single block's surface in-between each color printing to acquire a multi-color print. Every time an area is cut out and ink is rolled onto the surface of the block, the sheets of paper in the edition must be printed before taking the next step. There is risk in reduction printing because an advanced, thorough plan must be made. When an area is cut out, it can't be retrieved. If there's a mistake, it stays there. Thus it is often described as the "sudden-death round" in printmaking.

In German artist Georg Baselitz's prints, even more drastic changes are made to traditional woodcut. His giant blocks are often more than two meters high, and his cuts are highly Expressionist. He would press-print his work by hands, and thus the end results are therefore crude and inaccurate. He would even turn his image upside-down. With such artworks, Baselitz hopes to show the resistance of an artist against conventional printing materials and tools, as well as refined woodcut

lines . Sometimes Baselitz even diminishes the explainability, narrativity and anecdotability of an image as he plays with the theme and the image.

By the 21st Century, it is all the time popular among relief woodcut artists to make large prints, even at the cost of being cheap and unrefined. These artists would collect materials that can replace conventional wood blocks on the streets as if they were rag pickers and eagerly occupy needed space. They are also constantly looking for ways to replace printing -press printing. Thomas Kilpper in 2000 spent months carrying out a project entitled *The Ring*. In a deserted office, he used industrial electric tools to chisel the beech floor and then printed this magnificent 400 square meter image with a full-sized industrial roll. The print was finally hung on the building's exterior from a window.

2-4 Origin County of Woodcut in the East

Traces of early printing in China can be found in the decorative patterns on Neolithic pottery and bone inscriptions of the Shang Dynasty. In the Eastern Han Dynasty, Cai Lun improved paper making skills (A.D. 105) and paper soon became more common. Along with the invention of stamping and stone rubbing, woodblock printing finally came into being by the Tan Dynasty. The earliest woodblock print ever recorded in the Chinese history is the *Diamond Sutra* published in A.D. 868. It contains the earliest woodcut illustrations acknowledge by scholars. The Tan Dynasty enjoyed a prosperous economy and frequent exchange with Xi Yu (the "Western Regions" that contained many foreign states). Buddhism was highly popular at the time, too. As a result, representatives from Xi Yu were sent to China to learn printing skills. In this way, woodblock printing became widespread, and the same skills acquired variations when they reached different western states. It is considered that printmaking finally became largely different in the East and the West at this point in history.

In modern China, because Realism is quite popular, woodcut prints have mostly been themed by everyday life,

although different techniques have developed in different regions. There were three major schools competing in the woodcut scene in the 1960s China: the black and white Sichuan school, the colored Heilongjiang school, and the water-soluble ink Jiangsu school. Due to the Cultural Revolution, Chinese artists were refrained from learning overseas modern painting movements. They only rejoined their international peers at a later time. Printmaking even stopped developing for some time in China until in 1977 the teaching of it regained momentum. The China National Academy of Fine Arts (CNAFA), formerly the National Hangzhou College of Arts, is one of the origin institutions of the New Printmaking Movement. Bearing its past honor and tradition, the CNFA founded the Water-soluble Ink Woodcut Studio. Woodcut continued to stand out among all art genres in the 1980s, when restrictions had just been lifted in mainland China. Because of its long history, its reflections on the people and their times, as well as its many achievements, woodcut has had a solid status in China. In 2008, the Chinese government founded the Guanlan Original Printmaking Base in Shenzhen. Renowned printmakers from around the world have been invited to take residency and make art here, and the base also provide artisans to assist the manufacturing of printing blocks and the printing process. Materials, tools and daily necessities are offered, too. The international printmaking community has been interested in this base. Different cultural ideas and creative techniques have thus been introduced to China through this institution, helping printmaking to grow in China. Its collection has expanded to tens of thousands of pieces in just a few years.

III.Woodcut in Taiwan

Taiwan is on the geographical margin of the Asia Pacific. It is, however, a place where several cultures meet. Indigenous people and ethnic Chinese immigrants from all parts of China share this land. It has been inspired by foreign cultures (Dutch, Spanish, Japanese and American) at different times, and its culture and arts show the vigor of Nativism and the diversity of trans-Orientalism. Blessed with this cross-cultural background, printmaking in Taiwan

has grown to be really diverse, both in content and form. Woodcut in Taiwan mainly derived from two things. First, promotion of this artistic method by Japanese painters during the Japanese Rule. Second, a number of Chinese woodcut printmakers' moving to Taiwan after the Second World War ended in 1945. By the mid Japanese Rule, Japanese cultural agencies noticed that folk culture in Taiwan was on a decline. Thus they encouraged Japanese scholars to study and analyze Taiwan's history and its folk customs. Printmakers were also invited to help keep a record with their work. The most noteworthy is the founding of the *Mazu* (sea goddess) journal in 1934 by Japanese poet and writer Nishikawa Mitsuru. In the journal are woodcut illustrations and articles introducing woodcut prints. Nishikawa also founded the Creative Woodcut Society in Taipei, 1936 to actively promote woodcut art. Another important figure is Japanese painter Tateishi Tetsuomi who edited and published monthly *Folk Culture Taiwan* in 1941 with Kanaseki Takeo and Ikeda Toshio near the end of the Japanese Rule. Nishikawa Mitsuru was responsible for the *Taiwan Folk Customs* column and published 101 such illustrations in total. The subjects he addressed include social phenomena, street scenes, folk beliefs and folk customs in all parts of Taiwan, not just from the north to the south, but also the east which was still difficult to reach at the time. It is fair to say that he was a key member who "sowed the seeds of woodcut printmaking" in Taiwan. During the Japanese Rule, however, woodcut had not become an independent art form in Taiwan. It was limited to folk illustrations; only artist YEN Shui-lung dabbled a little in this field.

3-1 Pioneers of Traditional Woodcut in Taiwan

When the Second World War came to an end, a group of woodcut printmakers active in the Nationalist controlled territories during the Second Sino-Japanese War came to Taiwan, such as HUANG Jung-Tsan, CHU Ming-Kang, HUANG Yen, CHEN Ting-Shih, CHEN Chi-Mao and CHEN Horng-Jin. Most of them, influenced by LU Xun's New Woodcut Movement, were leftists to some

extent. Their work are empathetic and realist. Because they were curious about island Taiwan, they made quite a few artworks on its culture and people. But when the 228 Incident took place in 1947, leftist printmakers felt they were in danger. They either left Taiwan or just never shout out loud again. The only remaining artists, HUANG Jung-Tsan and CHEN Ting-Shih, learned to keep their head down. When Taiwan became somewhat peaceful again, a few more woodcut printmakers came, such as WANG Mai-Kan, CHOU Ying and CHIANG Han-Tung. In 1949, even more artists came with the relocating Nationalist government. Such are FANG Hsiang and CHU Wei-Bor who were in the army, and young CHIN Sung and WU Hao who moved with their fathers and elder brothers. While after the 228 Incident a few more prints which address political issues were still released, since 1949 the Nationalist government implemented the Martial Law, woodcut prints disappeared for some time in public. However, it was also during this time that western artistic movements flourished and spread all over the world.

As Art historian CHEN Shu - Sheng noted, “The government started to encourage ‘anti-Communist literature and art’ in the 1950s, and thus woodcut became the most convenient option as it could be used to spread political thoughts. Woodcut printmakers like FANG Xiang, CHEN Hung-Chen, CHEN Chi-Mao, CHOU Ying and CHU Hsiao-Chiu all published propaganda prints that encourage people to fight (against the Communists).” But by the late 1950s, quite a few printmakers in Taiwan had learned about the West’s artistic ideas and its experiments on mediums. They started to care more about the texture of an artwork, and their themes were no longer just about the state, people and politics. Profoundly influenced by Abstractionism, they also adopted a freer approach to art. Soon, the age of modern printmaking began in Taiwan. The Modern Woodcut Society founded by CHEN Ting-Shih, LEE Shi-Chi, Yu Yu YANG, CHIANG Han-Tung and SHIH Hsiao in 1958 was among the representative institutions of this period. The artworks by its members were very successful at international

printmaking exhibitions, too. They not only broadened fellow local artists’ visions but also gained presence for Taiwanese printmaking art around the world. Because of a series of foreign affair failures, however, Taiwan was forced to withdraw from major international arts events in the early 1970s and printmaking also fell into an impasse. With many of its members moving abroad, the Modern Woodcut Society was dismissed in 1972.

Artist WEN Yi-Duo was assassinated by the Nationalists on July 15, 1947 due to his “inappropriate speeches.” In support of the repressed Taiwanese people, HUANG Yen made a print entitled “One Man Falls Down, Tens of Millions Rise Up” on both Wen’s death and the situation in Taiwan. The picture says that the torch of democracy will be passed down. When one man falls down, tens of millions will rise up to fight for freedom. The original drawing was modified several times; HUANG Yen spent nights and days solely working on it, but still could not finish it by the time he left Taiwan for Hong Kong due to the worsening political climate in July 1948. Eventually, the work was completed in Hong Kong. The print was published by the Takung Paper and was hailed by the artistic circle. Wen and Huang were not alone. When CHU Ming-Kang lived in Taiwan, he once received warning from intelligence police because he was discovered to be reading forbidden publications. Based on this experience, he made *Persecution*, which describes HSU Shou-Shang’s sudden kidnap. Hsu was the head of the National Institute for Compilation & Translation and professor at National Taiwan University.

3-2 Leading Figures of Woodcut in Taiwan

As soon as LIAO Hsiu-Ping returned to Taiwan in 1966, he had a solo exhibition at the National Taiwan Museum (formerly Provincial Museum in Taipei) to show his etching and multi-color monoprints made at the “Atelier 17” studio in Paris. He hope that the art community in Taiwan could thus have a rough idea about how to make modern colored intaglio prints and be inspired to try new things. In 1973, invited by the National Taiwan

Normal University, Liao officially moved back to Taiwan to teach and promote modern printmaking. With his effort, printmaking became popular on the island again. Liao even founded the “Evergreen Graphic Association” in 1974 to further the scope of printmaking art in Taiwan. As a leading figure in modern printmaking, Liao himself made a number of simple, black and white woodcut series in 1999, such as *Knot and Silent Image*, to express his wish of seeing social disturbance decline and that order and harmony be regained. His works during this time are not as bright and colorful as the preceding ones. Instead, they feature heavier symbols. A rectangular frame represents a shackled, orderly society. Intertwined ropes, on the other hand, indicate the complexity of an ever-changing world. The frame and the ropes strike a conflicting balance between order and change. The “silent image,” moreover, represents the artist’s personal reflections—that is, his critical yet wise thoughts on the many social problems. Liao has produced bountiful works of art throughout his life; woodcut is not his main focus. But he has adopted a very special approach to make woodcuts. He doesn’t cut the block, but hits the block with a nail for certain effect and texture. These hits can feel as powerful as the physical hits on one’s chest. In a statement, LEE Shi-Chi said, “My early woodcuts are romantic; I take viewers meander through the Qinhuai River and the Epang Palace in their dreams. We pass by ancient castles in the West and penetrate wartime memories. Our erupting passion is strong as fermented sorghum liquor. For my complex and changing artistic style, I have been praised as the ‘bird of changing tones’ in the painting circle.” Lee mainly focused on half-figural woodcuts with architectural themes around 1961. But he also tried making some abstract art during this time. He abandoned the traditional method, which is to draft and cut the block before printing. Rather, he uses the “rubbing” technique to “rub-print” objects onto paper, although works of this kind dot not fit into the popular “multiple print” category of the time. The Taiwan government launched the Chinese Culture Revival Movement in 1970, and the Graphic Art Society of The Republic of China was

also founded to promote printmaking education. Taiwan withdrew from the United Nations the next year in 1971, and Nativist themes became popular again. Thanks to the rise of Nativism, folk prints were again valued and discussed again. Representative printmaker LIN Chih-Hsin already produced woodcuts on countryside scenery in the 1950s. His works are small in size and are only printed in black and white. All of them were published through newspaper and magazines as illustrations. During the Nativist trend, he was so much touched by folk goddess Mazu’s divine deeds that he started making *Celebrating the Matsu Festival*, a giant woodcut that’s 124 meters long, to depict the annual parade that dedicates gratitude to the sea deity. It then took Lin 20 years to complete this work. While he worked on this project, he delved more and more deeply into folk art in the early 1980s and produced a number of other artworks on folk belief celebrations. As Lin noted, “I aim to understand my homeland and embrace its culture. I am proud to say that I’m bold, vigorous and unsophisticated in cutting. I render bright colors to my creations to depict the joy and momentum of life. I want to show the warm, bright, happy and delightful sides of life, in the meantime illustrating an amiable, comfy country life and a healthy society.” Artist CHU Wei-Bor likes to experiment on medium. He is also a pioneer of the Modernist Movement in post-war Taiwan. A predecessor, he continues to make art today. He started making prints themed by “love and peace” in 1969. In the series of images on man and nature, he shows a leisurely attitude towards life. His *Bamboo Town* series is inspired by the scenes and people of an agricultural village. In a way, it serves as a note on his new life in Taiwan since retreating from Nangjing, China. These woodcut prints vividly present slices of his fulfilling, peaceful life in contrasting black and white. Versatile WU Hao has participated in the Ton Fon Art Group with his oil paintings and the Modern Print Association with his prints. He was confirmed as a social artist and a modern printmaker for his woodcuts on illegal housing in 1965. Printmaking is no doubt the most important vehicle through which Wu strengthened the otherwise feeble lines. Fragments of

childhood life and the longing for his hometown, afloat in his early oil paintings, are substantiated through concrete things like toys, kites and chickens in his later woodcuts. Remote memories are then captured before they are gone. NI Chao-Long looks for his subject matters among countryside scenery and historic sites. He applies traditional methods to make woodcuts, such as printing several colors at one printing from different areas of a block with water-based or oil-based ink. He is dedicated to promoting fine arts education for children and making art himself. His woodcuts address both contemporary issues and stories of the past. Spiritual or folk religion themes are among his interests, too. His prints look sturdy and rhythmic. Their lines are tough and strong. One can almost feel the strength of the cutting knife through those lines.

CHIOU Jong-Jiun is a key printmaker in water soluble ink woodcuts. His early works are mostly about the unsophisticated charm of countryside people and the graceful places they live. Chiou began to worship the Buddha in 1984 and thus became more focused on Buddhism. His solemn woodcuts of this period are about religion and faith. His style varies from time to time, but all of his works bring peace of mind. The artist was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease more than ten years ago. His muscles are stiff, his arms and legs keep shaking, his movements are slow, and his speech becomes hard to understand. Despite all this, Chiou never ceases to make art, including watermark woodcuts and calligraphy. His creative works of art illustrate his philosophies of life, his underived artistic talent, and the perseverance only found in ethnic Hakka people like him. Swallow LIN has been deaf since six years old as a consequence of meningitis. Her artistic talent started to show while she received formal education. Her creations have included watercolors, prints, sculpture and pottery, all exuding childlike fun and vivaciousness. Lin's early artworks are influenced by Op Art. The underived abstract black lines in her work are dynamic and full of visual power, sometimes to the extent of hallucinating. Also, the interesting geometric shapes and lines in her woodcuts

well reflect the intricate human minds. PAN Yuan-Shih has spent decades on art administration and art education. In this way he has helped numerous young talents. Pan is deeply attracted to bookplates, a combination of literature and fine arts. In fact, he has been promoting the art of bookplates for years in Taiwan since he learned about it. A bookplate is a woodcut in miniature. Embedded in a book, it shines like a pearl on paper. A bookplate also means that the book owner loves, cherishes and collects books. It not only manifests the meaning of a book but also brings fine arts to a whole new level.

3-3 Pillars of Woodcut in Taiwan

Printmaking in Taiwan adopted a new path in the early 1980s. The first International Biennial Print Exhibit, ROC was held by the Council for Cultural Affairs (regrouped to be the Ministry of Culture in 2012) under the Executive Yuan in 1983. This is the first time the government held an international printmaking event in Taiwan. The exhibit had three goals: First, to hold a free competition. Second, to invite renowned printmakers from around the world to join this event. Third, to introduce traditional prints to the world. Moreover, in light of the importance of the promotion of traditional New Year prints, in 1986, the CCA organized the ROC New Year Print Competition so that traditional New Year prints could be cherished by more and that new viewpoints could be developed. Today, printmaking is a full-fledged category at the National Art Exhibition of the Republic of China, National Student Art Competition, Kaohsiung Awards, Da Dun Fine Arts Exhibition, Nan Ying Art Exhibition, and New Taipei City Fine Arts Exhibition. These are all wonderful platforms through which printmakers can release their works. As a result, new talents continue to rise and senior woodcut artists also persist.

LO Pin-Ho challenges the limits of woodcuts. In *Epitomes for the World*, he takes a personifying approach to illustrate the competitive present-day society and a damaged nature in a food chain chart. He uses finely engraved dots, lines and planes to compose this longish

picture, and enhances shades of black, grey and white in the most aesthetically graceful way. The end result is comprised of ten large and small wood engravings. It takes a lot of effort and time to complete this artwork; such is a meticulously crafted alarming epitome of the world. TSAI Hong-Lin in *Praise of the People* depicts some pious folks expressing their beliefs in an incense dedication rite at the Nankunshen Temple. The artist was much in awe when he saw this temple parade one day. He realized that, no matter how advanced society and the state has become, people would still humbly worship the gods in exchange for stability in life, event just basic survival. *A Specialty of Taiwan* is a humorous monotype oil-based woodcut print in both intaglio and relief on “betel nut beauties” giving a seductive dance by a highway interchange.

Wood engraving is HUANG Seng - Hsun's sole concentration. All of his works have been small bookplate prints. Huang once produced a memorial exlibris for the 10th ROC International Biennial Print and Drawing Exhibition in 2001, and has bagged quite a few golden prizes and important awards at international bookplate competitions. His wood engravings are made in a refined and skillful manner, and the cuttings are precise and accurate. His prints exude an understated kind of charm and perseverance, and the space and light arrangement in these works reveal the artist's masterly sketching techniques. Artist WU Hong-Chang also switched to wood engravings in 2003. His prints mostly describe homeland memories and affection. His cuttings are fine and smooth, and his composition is complex and well-woven. The horizontal structure gives his work a kind of visual extensiveness, which responds to the message of life it delivers. A running horse plays a key role in *Run to Happiness*. Blooming peony flowers and dancing butterflies make its background. This picture symbolizes a wealthy, happy and wonderful life. Its expression is refined, and its overall rendition is elegant. The lines in *God of Water, Buffalo Yoke, and Mountain Winds* are dynamic and its spatial arrangement is quite mature. This

is Wu's three-chapter fable in which figural forms are translated into abstract shapes to demonstrate surrealist imagery. Wu's another woodcut print, *Rattans and Trees*, is full of the wild fun and flowing emotions. With its intriguing lines, texture and space, it leaves plenty of room for imagination for viewers.

CHEN Yuan-Cheng's style is highly realistic. In a changing era, he keeps records of those dwindling traditions and cultures with love. *Sentiments in the Autumn Sun* is a masterly work showing the texture of bamboo and fiber. *Noon Break* depicts a corner of some fishery wharf, a laborer's space. Not a single man is present, which responds to the title, “noon break.” Note the intriguing portside view behind the two boats to be repaired. *Yesterday* depicts a corner of an old house in which the last-generation tools for everyday life lie. The print shows an especially fine and realistic texture of wood. CHENG Cheng-Huang's *Dark Fairy Tale* series features the image of a baby. The artist accentuates the black color to suggest his deep reflections on present-day society. His metaphorical imagery seems to be asking viewers how the next generation is going to survive in this ever-worsening world, and how the current generation should react to the predicaments resulting from environmental changes. In a way, these images also indicate fear for the disasters to come. It can be said that black is Cheng's favorite color, as it is simple, straightforward, unpretentious, strong, dense, crude and cool. TIEN Wen-Pi's works show the traces of life and the artist's inner feelings. Every single dot, line and plane in his woodcuts reveals a fragment of his life. Following threads of memory, the artist tries to string myriads of flowing thoughts and past experiences together as he chisels a woodcut picture. All of his life experiences and reflections, in this way, have thus been translated into abstract lines and shapes in his works. CHEN Yung- Chin's *Expectation* shows that water is essential to human existence, and that even a young child dares to explore the colorful outside world as long as s/ he is supported by his/her mother. This is just like all living beings are children of mother Earth, and that as long as

the Sun and the Moon continue to shine, the world will flourish. In *Spring on Old Street*, an old street regains its past glory after refurbishment. People walk past the street; they seem to be saying that they, too, have lived their golden days.

While trying to enhance the oriental charm of traditional landscape in his prints, HSU Ming-Feng experiments on a variety of mediums and reinvent conventional techniques. He utilizes the crude texture and the raised and sunken areas of the wood block to render visually striking prints in black and white. His works look solid and ethereal at the same time. His mountains and waters exude quiet charm and grace. PAN Chin-Jui's *Small Island Diary (4) Rebirth* highlights the problem of global warming, which he deeply relates to because he was born on an island and has lived through floods resulting from it. *Above the Land* brings two seemingly irrelevant images together to form a brand-new symbol through rough wood cuttings printed in black and white. A house emerges from a bamboo hat. No golden rice grains or paddy fields can be found in sight. Such indicates the artist's concern for a polluted land. WANG Wu once noted that he hopes to put some of the dignity, integrity and brightness found in ancient calligraphy master YEN Chen-Ching's regular scripts into the wood block as he cuts. He also wants to simulate the kind of brushstrokes that have a powerful start and a light end, just like a silkworm raising its head or a swallow tapping its tail. He believes that woodcut prints, especially the black and white ones, are more straightforward than others. No "twilight zone" can be kept in these works. Moreover, when Wang makes a portrait, he would cut the picture on the woodblock without a draft or a reference photo. He looks into the world's truths and vigor by constantly observing and describing them, and thereby establishes an extraordinary artistic grammar of his own. It is by producing art that he makes his life meaningful. KIM Hyun-Jin's *Expectation from the Self Portrait* series describes the momentum inspired by expectations in life. When one makes effort in the now, a seed deep inside his or her heart will be nourished by the rain drops of sincerity, and grow and bear fruit.

LIN Yi-Shu's expresses her ideas through art, not words. Her prints are like miscellaneous notes on life or records of her inner feelings. No matter she's happy, angry, sad or delighted, Lin finds comfort in the act of woodblock cutting. While blackness seems to occupy most spaces in her work, the core of her art lies in those smooth fine white lines, twisting and meandering. An extraordinary order is shown through these tidy lines, and a rich sense of space is found in the seemingly plain composition. She is truly a young woodcut printmaker full of creativity and artistic potential. LI Ping-Yi left her countryside hometown to pursue higher education in big cities years ago, but the pure and beautiful nature still resonates in her heart. She ruminates over how she can retain the refreshing, primitive charm of nature to the current generation's urban living environment. She hopes to find a point where urbanity and ruralness stand in harmony, and to introduce the spirit of nature to a metropolitan public. She used to just express her personal feelings, but now she focuses more on society. While the artificial and the natural may seem contradictory, she has successfully merged the two for a "heterogeneous coexistence."

LIU Zi-Ping's *Monologue of a Generation* is a giant organic work of art that documents the human civilization and history. Within this limited printed space, mankind lives and procreates, and the cycle of life goes on. The meaning of life is found in this unique story of life, and a macroscopic view is constructed upon many little things. Infinity is eventually achieved within all these limits. In *Chronicle of Formosa I: Vicissitudes of History*, Liu unveils Taiwan's colonial history through historical architecture. As the river of time meanders into infinity, traces of memory shall also dissolve into the past. HSU Chieh's work comes from the depths of her memory. Her fictional characters look so cold that they give viewers the chill like ghosts. While these characters only seem to be gently touching the viewers' hearts, even the heaviest armor can't stop the coldness. They can even make viewers feel they have helplessly fallen into the void. The artist believes that bad memory always finds a way to strike back, and that one's

inner devil tends to hide beneath the self. People often get trapped by the norms they insist to follow, and worry about the things that they have imagined for themselves. As printmaker TSENG Mei- Chen stated, "Colorfulness in not the feature of my work. I use lines to produce the depth of field and the visual contrast that I need. And I believe that endless creativity exists in the simple black and white, just like piano keys. All of the variations must be created by the artist himself/herself. As if they were playing a piano, they cut the wood block to print. They must try to 'talk' to the block so that they can create vigorous images which carry musicality, warmth and rhythm together."

3-4 "Quasi-woodcut" in Taiwan

After the Martial Laws were lifted in 1987, Taiwan gained major economic and social breakthroughs. By 1990, in response to the Wild Lily Student Movement, the Nationalist government grudgingly ended the "Temporary Provisions Effective during the Period of National Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion," and Taiwan officially became a much freer society. Artists during this time produced more creative artworks and developed new approaches and ideas to express more innovative content. Along with technological advancement and the introduction of modern art, printmaking was also made anew. From then until now, each printmaking style has harried on the past while paving a way for the future. With skills and experiences gained, new steps are being taken one after another. In this chapter on "quasi-woodcuts," I will explore some of the alternative materials replacing wood blocks. The cutting and printing skills are about the same though. Pablo Picasso already explored linoleum in the early 20th Century, and pioneering Taiwanese woodcut printmaker CHEN Ting-Shih has also replaced wood blocks with medium-density fiber plates (also widely known as sugarcane plates). Younger artists followed through, making printmaking more diverse in terms of medium. There are even synthesis plates developed by the block providers in Taiwan, as genuine wood blocks are on a limited offer and even alternative

plywood blocks are not as useful due to their specific patterned surface, which artists have to compromise with.

Artists adopting alternative blocks include LIN Chih-Hsin, who mainly uses linoleum to make multi-color prints that depict the ongoing history of Taiwan. It is fair to say that he is a linocut pioneer in the country. LEE Ching-Lung excels in a variety of block printing. He is especially good at woodcut and linocut. He tries to take an objective perspective to look at the world's evolution, but in his works viewers can find he actually disagrees with ideas like "the weak are the prey of the strong" or "survival of the fittest." He especially fiercely protests against environmental pollution. Finally, while Lee is also quite achieved in alternative prints, one must not forget about his dedication in traditional woodblock prints. CHEN Hua-Chun vents his feelings through printmaking. As he said, "Desire can't be repressed. One must find a way to let it out." His works of art are characterized by love, a major form of desire. He believes that, while rational lovers see platonic love as their highest ideal and despise sexual pleasure, their repressed selves will eventually transform into all kinds of monsters as shown in his artworks, running toward the other extreme, so wild and free like a beautiful, loud jazz song. LAI Chiu-Mei replaces wood blocks with synthesis plates. She brings to life the indigenous Paiwan people in beautiful garments through meticulous cuts, and bases the background upon fine, parallel slanting lines. She applies colors to a number of blocks which are printed in sequence to construct the print's depth of field and to highlight the protagonists in her work. YANG Ziyi adopts medium-density fiber plates (sugarcane plates) to replace wood blocks. He believes that present-day society is full of traps, and that one must act tough to protect himself/herself, no matter how timid they really are. Yang's work deals exactly with such contradiction between one's appearance and their inner selves.

3-5 New Looks of Woodcut in Taiwan

In this section, I would like to discuss non-relief woodcut, such as intaglio print, linograph or a combination of

methods. Copying, image transfer, collagraphy and chine-collé can be applied, too. Sometimes even oil-based ink and print paper are replaced with paper pulp for a hybrid kind of print.

KUNG Chih-Ming's works of art feature multiple dimensions and modern thinking. He believes that, other than working to express their true selves through art, artists should also dedicate to learning the cycles of life and nature. His creations have included intaglio woodcuts, combined multiple and monotype prints with reliefs and transferred images, etc. He tries to break with convention and make printmaking more diverse and innovative. LIU Yang-Che is an expert in almost all kinds of prints. His subject matters have been taken from everyday life, and his images are a mixture of Taiwanese folk art and traditional Chinese woodcut. His special artistic grammar derives from western painting concepts and printmaking techniques. His prints are half woodcut and half screen prints. It can be said that he is a representative printmaker specializing in combined methods in Taiwan.

CHUNG You-Hui has been much inspired by nature and his living surroundings. He likes to examine his own deeds as he makes prints, and expresses his feelings on life and eternity. He enjoys exploring the many possibilities of the making of art. The plants in his prints are flourishing and colorful. They illustrate the wonderfulness of life and the fun of a changing world. He makes combined prints using wood blocks and screens. LIN Hsueh-Ching looks into the virtual and the real and the subjective and the objective. She finds out that the world has much been constructed upon yin and yang. A beautiful harmony can be achieved when the real is turned into the virtual and the objective becomes the subjective. It is by turning things inside out that the force of life can be felt. She would utilize symbols, metaphors, comparisons and simulations to form an imagined, unrestrained time and space that transcends the real world. She especially likes to use butterflies to suggest free will in addition to constructing her own metaphysical space with the natural wood patterns on the blocks.

CHU Che-Liang's woodcut prints not only retain an old-time charm but also exude a strong sense of modernity. This makes his gentle-looking prints more in touch with the present trends. It can be seen from his prints that he has attempted to bring multiple experimental techniques together and widen and deepen the scope of woodcut printmaking. The orderly rows of birds in CHENG Cheng-Huang's *Black Metaphor* are simple and unique. Its background is reminiscent of Chinese folk paper cuts. With such a daring arrangement, this picture becomes immensely eye-catching when the delicate red patterns meet the black woodcut images. Roughness and elegance, folk art and high art...strong contrasts can be found in this one single print. This renders an uncommon viewing experience for spectators. Thus Cheng is considered a key figure in new woodcut art.

For PAN Meng-Yao, printmaking helps him gain peace of mind. He feels he can leave myriads of thoughts and imagery behind and search for his most profound self. He explores all possibilities in printmaking, including its expressions and special artistic grammar, as well as the elasticity of graphics, by first reflecting upon his own life experiences and then translating them into his printed visual imagery. He hopes to bring medium and content closely together. Sometimes he would spread iron sand on a wood block by hand or paste objects to it, in addition to cutting lines. He would make an intaglio print in black and white first and then add other colors to it with a relief method. GUO Rong-Hwa admires puppeteers who can “tell stories of a thousand years old and plays millions of soldiers with both hands.” In his detailed article *Puppets Speak My Mind*, Guo delves into the world of hand puppet theatre, studying its history, the specific garments and headdresses for different characters, the characters' personality, and how the puppets are played on stage. Based on such in-depth research, his woodcut of the same title is thus imbued with cultural imagery. It quietly reveals the artistry of puppet theatre and resounding humanity. What's more, Guo has rendered woodcut a new look by bringing together water-based ink woodcut and a combination of intaglios and reliefs.

SHEN Hin-Yuan utilizes a wide range of modern printmaking techniques and mediums from the West to depict both oriental and western stories. He is more of a artist who enjoys the spontaneous way of making art. He would combine intaglios and reliefs, mix chine-collé with other conventional techniques, or make multi-color prints with one single block to break with tradition. LAI Cheng-Hui manipulates the fine, graceful natural patterns on wood to express his artistic sensibility and a Zen style. His artworks have stabilizing, uncommon compositions matched with harmonious colors. All of his prints have certain oriental flavor found in ancient Chinese paintings. It can be seen that he adores old-time art. Lai likes to use abstract shapes to indicate his subtle thoughts. He hopes to bridge the gap between the modern and the classical, and brings his inner realm and the outside world together through masterly spatial arrangements in his work. YANG Ming-Dye went to the USA in 1995 to pursue further studies. During his overseas stay, he learned to apply a variety of materials, such as handmade paper, glass, cast metal and wax to his prints. His three-dimensional glass prints are usually presented in the form of installations and the exhibit space is also taken into account. His work on display at this exhibition is based on wood. Yang uses a laser engraving machine to cut his picture and replaces print paper with paper pulp, thus rendering a new look to woodcut.

While we have tried our best to include as many great woodcut printmakers in Taiwan this time, I'm afraid not all of the dedicated artists working on this category have been discovered. This is inevitable, however.

IV. Conclusion

An exhibition is not only to showcase art but also to promote and reflect on it. Whenever I talked to the participating artists during the curatorial process, I constantly asked that if it is possible for them to make new prints for this event. I did so in the hope of encouraging them to show more strengths and bring woodcut prints in Taiwan to a new level with us. Starting with overseas

woodcut history, we go into details about woodcut prints in Taiwan. By comparing and discussing, we hope to find issues that we can address and improve. In *Contemporary Printmaking in Taiwan: Inertial Thinking on Printmaking*, CHENG Cheng-Huang divides *print* into four types according to the production method: commercial illustration, print as reproduced painting, artistic print, and print-based art. The first two types of print are more about their practical use, while the last two deal with the artistic function and the role that a printmaker plays. Let's first explain the last two types of print: Cheng said that an artistic print has the form and texture of a painting. But it is not just a copy or replica of a certain painting. It is presented as a print to illustrate the artist's ideas. The maker of a print-based art only takes the block (printmaking) as one of the many materials (artistic genre) that he or she uses. The printmaker may use it and other materials at the same time to make something that's freer in content and form. Also, sometimes, printmakers of this kind would work with printmaking artisans. Thus skill is not a major concern in for these printmakers, and respective artistic and technical breakthroughs can also be more easily made.

Today, commercial illustrations are usually made with computers. A picture is analyzed by software and then printed through four-color linography. Some authors may sign their names by hand on the final prints, but because much task is automatically taken care of by machines, the artistic value of the print is rather low. It is considered as a replica of something at its best. Print as reproduced painting, in more accurate terms, is “two-dimensional painting reproduced in the form of a print.” For instance, the Louvre Museum once invited a printmaking artisan to cut an oil painting masterpiece on wood. The resulting pictures manifest the artisan's superb skills and concentrated effort. It is no doubt that the artisan has put his love into the print during the woodcutting process. Aesthetically speaking, prints of this kind allow viewers to compare, look into and feel the original

painting and the reproduced print, and thus they do have certain artistic value.

In the previous paragraphs, “concealing the fine cutting process” has been discussed alongside the development of woodcut overseas. One may wonder whether some of the prints are just copies of a certain draft or sketch. This is likely, and Dürer is perhaps the key to answering this question. Printmakers before his time would usually make a draft first and take image reversion into consideration. They would transfer the image onto the block and then cut it out. But Dürer would directly draw the picture on the woodblock and then cut it. Hence the content and the artisticness of the prints can vary. Social circumstances, available materials and printing technologies are all factors affecting the quality of a woodcut. Woodcuts were used as illustrations alongside texts in the early days (this is still in practice today). While they are smaller in scale, illustrations still contain the author’s thoughts and affection, and thus they have certain artistic value. In other words, artisticness is there when the author decides to make his or her work artistic. Sadly enough, in today’s collector-controlled artistic world, sometimes the market decides something has artistic value or not.

From a contemporary artistic viewpoint, artistic print and print-based art can be taken as “multiple print,” and I think print-based art needs to be discussed the most urgently in Taiwan. As aforementioned, Ukiyo-e was only made common with joint effort from artists and artisans. That is, artists need artisans to take over those technical tasks in the printmaking process, so that they can focus more on the artistic aspects of a print. But, despite the government is supportive of the arts and cultural industry, economy is not doing well as a whole in Taiwan these days. What should we do to make the printmaking industry grow? Years ago, at the ROC New Year Print Competition, CHIOU Jong-Jiun was commissioned to make a water-based ink woodcut print. Because technically it was difficult to make the required 2,500 copies, the task was

eventually outsourced and completed in mainland China. This means it is not mission impossible, but whether the person in charge has the will to accomplish it. It is true that there are plenty of individual printmaking studios in Taiwan. But they are either too small in scale or only make one single type of print (mostly screen print). A real printmaking studio must be larger and has a stronger team that deals with different tasks. Professional artisans in relief printing, intaglio printing, lithography, and screen print must all work together, and more importantly the central government must offer support. Only in this way will more artists participate in printmaking.

In just a few years, China has advanced rapidly in printmaking art. This has largely to do with the newly established Guanlan Original Printmaking Base, which attracts printmakers from around to world to stay and make prints. The base offers a group of trained print artisans to assist the artists in residence to make blocks and prints, and this has truly enabled the industry to rocket high. Professional printmaking studios and artisans definitely play a key role. The Taiwan government has realized the importance of professional education over the recent years and encourages the arts and cultural industry to develop sellable products. It should note that, to further develop printmaking in Taiwan, more professional printmaking artisans must be cultivated and more large-scale printmaking studios must be set. When a thorough training system and a clear task-division scheme are in place, people in the third category (artistic print) shall not be so much trapped, as Cheng once worryingly said. According to Cheng, printmakers who immerse in this category can easily focus too much on perfecting skills than creativity or content. They can value convention too much and thus forget about innovations. Sometimes they get trapped in tradition.

Cheng’s words are an alarming reminder, but he never means to blame anyone. If a printmaking artist is willing to advance his or her skills to more freely express

their ideas, the artistic circle should also acknowledge their effort. In all, the actions taken by a printmaking professional have to do with his or her will. Is it because Taiwan is a small place, a small market, so that the industry has been based on small-scale businesses whose owners often have to take several roles at once? Or is it because people just don’t know how to do teamwork or divide the work?

For now, most printmakers in Taiwan take multiple roles. They are artists, artisans, instructors, students, developers and promoters of woodcut. Compared to other kinds of art, woodcut indeed requires more skills. If artists must be artisans at the same time, it becomes difficult for them to concentrate on the artistic quality of their work. Thus printmaking artists and artisans should work together, just like in a mature society and a fully developed world of art, the avant-garde and the traditional, and the realistic and the abstract coexist. Artists should not be scared when printmaking artisans want to improve their skills either. If one day they start making art, it helps the advancement of artistic prints in Taiwan.

Looking at the past, one shall see that Taiwan has always been in tug of war. Epic movie *1895* directed by HUNG Chih-Yu reviews the time when Hakka people fought against the Japanese army. WEI Te-Sheng’s *Seediq Bale* tells the story of indigenous tribal chief Mona Rudo and his people who carried out the Revolt of Wushe against the Japanese Rule in 1930. Taiwan was “returned” to the Republic of China in 1945, but the 228 Incident soon broke out due to misunderstanding between the new ruling class and local people. The Nationalist government made a full retreat to Taiwan from mainland China in 1949 and the Martial Laws Period began. During the most intense cross-strait conflicts, the government and the people in Taiwan suffered from the aftermaths of the 228 Incident. White Terror followed suit and brought about irrevocable social harm. The Wild Lily Student Movement took place in 1990, forcing the nationalists

to end the “Temporary Provisions Effective during the Period of National Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion” in the next year. Taiwan embarked on a new, freer chapter, but as economy takes off, labor disputes and protest banners become omnipresent. Taiwan has been split by politics, too. People fight when they find each other supporting different “colors.” Blue represents the Nationalist Party or pro-reunification. Green symbolizes the Democratic Progressive Party or pro-independence. They also fight endlessly over controversial issues like nuclear energy and Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement. As there are no “grey areas” in black and white woodcut prints, I believe they can well document and respond to the society of Taiwan and its history in the making.

I picked up a thrown-away can of a drink, pressing it to turn it into a block. I applied a number of colors at one time to make a print. The print is entitled *Over My Dead Body*, a popular quote of the 318 Sunflower Movement that took place earlier this year in Taiwan. I hope this work of art can serve as my concluding explanation to the ultimate meaning of printmaking art.