

Discussion on Chinese traditional painting-making

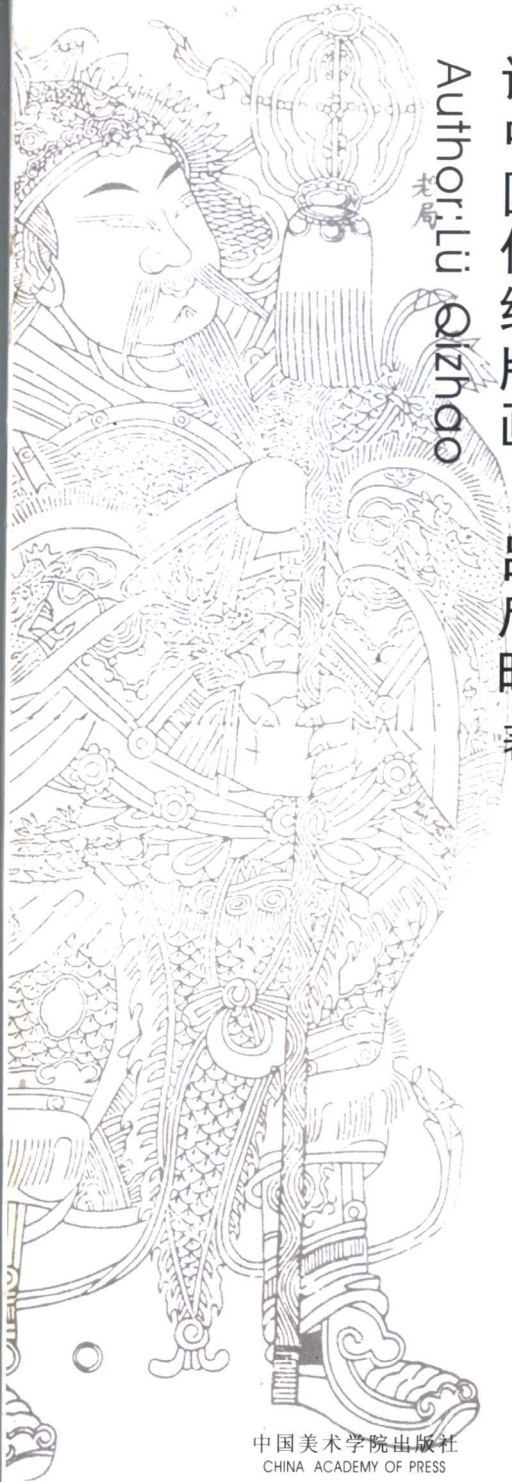
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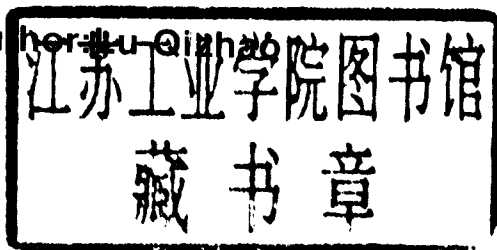
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Discussion on Chinese Traditional Print-making

I. Brief introduction of Chinese ancient print-making

i. Ancient times

It is well known that we Chinese people have centuries-old history and splendid cultural traditions. According to the existing excavated material, our history of Fine Art has undergone a course of seven thousand years, which is just like a running river has been surging forward days and nights. Reviewing world history of civilization, China is the cradleland of print-making. Mr. Lu Xun once said that Chinese print-making had had a creditable history. This “credible” has many facts to prove instead of our imagination.

Our history of painting could start from the rock art and painted pottery in primitive society, when our history of print-making also originated.

Any kind of fine art has its origin. The beginning of the headstream

maybe only few dribs and drabs, but it gathers different to become a great river in long-time running. "Print-making" means some print engraved on "printing plate". In China, we have xylograph before "print-making", and we have characters or other symbols prints before xylograph. As to "printing plate", there's some kind of explanation: we call a piece of wood "printing plate", in "Shuo Wen Tongxun Dingsheng", it explained as follows: "we chop the wood into pieces, named them as plates." Engraving is some kind of craftwork, which shares many things with xylograph in common. "Printing plate" is kind of wood "piece", from which we could say gallet, spicule, jade slip and bamboo strip are also these kinds of things. By parity of reasoning, we have stone plate, jade plate and mud plate etc. Engraved on the wood plate with knife, then is printed as painting, which we call it xylograph painting. That's why in the end of 19th century and beginning of 20th century, people hold different opinion on the word "Print-making", which exists in the old edition of "Cihai". Edited by Mr. Shu Xincheng, 1936's edition of "Ci Hai" was published by Chung Hwa Book, the "print-making" in this book refers to "Copy the paintings to printing plates like wood or bamboo, or lithographed with xylograph, both paintings are called print-making", which means we could call the paintings are "Print-making" as long as they are lithographed on the "painting plates". We also call tablets in ancient times as "print frottages". To this point, we could call any paints which are engraved on plates by knives or flints as print-making. Of course, print-making has its own adscription. Now we should also view print-making with the approved conception of "print-making" in fine art circle. Review from the historical retrospect of print-making (xylograph) or from the origin of print-making (xylograph), we have to trace to the rock art of primitive society and the Neolithic Age. All those pictures were engraved or pounded on the plate of rock with cuspidate pointed thing. Though at that time, we didn't use print or frottage skills, but the expe-

rience gained from engraving on plates with cuspidate things with thousands of years really needs our attention to see its continuity, no matter from the aspect of development of things or from the aspect of improvement of the cultures. That's why we have to pay attention to the Lithograph when we're studying the history of our paint-making; also we need to see the engraving on animal bones, ivories, boulders, wood plates, potteries and bronzes. Like the prior rock arts from Inner-Mongolia Guyin Mountain, Gansu Black Mountain and Jiangsu Lianyungang, like some engraved pig and pair of birds on pottery earthen bowls of Neolithic Age from Zhejiang Hemudu, like engraved veins on plenty of jade articles from Liangzhu, like "Fancy-clay" of Shang Dynasty from Hubei Huangshipo, all those reflect the situation that our ancestors engraved on flat "plate" from a long time ago. Same as other kind of arts like sculpture or art of building, our print-making also has its own "ancestor" and this "pedigree" of printmaking needs us to read.

From the development of the early time, if we want to review the print-making history more specific and closer to the so-called paint-making traditions, we could trace to the creation of the characters by our ancestors and the oldest first "engraved book".

Our ancestors have spent many time on recording their language and thoughts to create a unique characters in our country. We had characters in Yin and Shang Dynasty, and it gets matured in the latter half time of Yin and Shang Dynasty. The earliest record for those characters is "Bu Ci", which is engraved on the animal bones or tortoise shell found in An Yang and other places.

According to the statistics of oracle-bone inscription experts, we have found more than 0.2 million pieces of oracle-bone, among them there

are more than 4 thousand un-repeated characters, and we could read and understand for more than 1.5 thousand words.

Oracle-bone inscription were engraved by knives, and some were filled with vermilion after engraved. Tortoise shell inscription means the characters are engraved on the tortoise shell, while bone inscription means they're engraved on the shoulder blade of the cattle (some times they are engraved on the animal bones or skull of the deer).

Those oracle-bone inscriptions are the records of our ancestors did auguries or won the battles. Those records of characters help us to find out the living condition of our ancestors and get more valuable reference when we do research on the ancient history.

About the artistic characteristics and valuable of the oracle-bone inscription, Mr. Guo Moruo had a description in his book "Yin Qi Cui Bian". He said: "'Bu Ci" was engraved on oracle-bones, the masterly and fine engraving skills made the posterity like us so charmed. The characteristics of characters were different from different dynasties, in Dingwu times, the characters were strong; and in Dingyi times, the characters were elegant. The elegant ones could be engraved for dozens of words on a small piece, while the strong ones could have one word to cover the whole piece. And the row spacing, words spacing will have to be in perfect order. When we met some curtness ones, we could judge them as Bingxin or Kangding times, though they are down and poly postures, they gained their characteristics."

From above we could see the oracle-bone engraving had already got artistic beauty. Since all those were engraved on "plates" by knives, no matter what was the usage quality or intention was, they were still engravings to

record characters. We could call those characters on the oracle-bones as our oldest engraving book from the characteristic of engraving on plates with knives.

Some people regard oracle-bone inscriptions the records of the words with no picture, which has no relation with the develop", "horse". They all had simple designs and dermatoglyphic pattern and characteristics of art image. Though we have to call it as characters, but we could understand that our ancestors had considered the shape before they created the characters.

Furthermore, the experience of engraving and carving has more relationship with origin and rise of the print-making. We know, there's another engraved character on bronzes with oracle-bone inscription at the same time called "Bronze Inscription". Till Zhou Dynasty, this kind of engraving words on bronze is common occurrence. Besides, we could see the words engraved on the jade plates. The experience accumulation of engraving words on bones or bronzes has some "continued" relationship with the creation of ancient block print and the appearance of xylograph print-making.

To sum up, we could call oracle-bone inscriptions as our oldest "engraving book" in our history, which is the culture achievements that our ancestors had spent decades of painstaking effort to gain. When we look back to see the very beginning of the print-making,nt-making artist in the end of 20th century engraved a piece of work called "Deer" according to the word "deer" in oracle-bone inscription. It shows the first "engraving book" has some "accumulation" in history, which do help to the origin and rise of the print-making, and the engraving image in this "book" also help the print-making artist after thousands of year to create again.

ii. Print-making of Sui Dynasty, Tang Dynasty and

Five Dynasties

As to the print-making of Tang Dynasty and Five Dynasties, we have plenty of existent paintings from that time, which could show us the level of drawing, engraving and printing at that time.

In the year of Zhenguan 3rd (AD 629), Xuan Zang went to India for finding lections. And he brought back many Buddhism classics in the year of Zhenguan 19th (AD 645). Mr. Wang Lice, who went back to China five years later, brought back four Buddha Seals. After that, Yi Jin introduced the condition that Buddhists used print-making to print Buddha pictures. It had some stimulation on improving the quality of our Buddha engravings.

It was also recorded that in Tang DeZong Emperor time, eastern local military governor – Mr. Feng Su gave presentation to emperor that to abandon the mass to print engraving history records, he said: “in western mountain of Jian Nan and Huai Nan, people usually printed engraving calendars in markets, at the beginning of every year, the new calendars were everywhere in country”. In book “Old Tang History, Wenzong Part”, Tang Wenzong Emperor also said “I required that no local department get the right to print engraving calendar personally”. In these two cases, it shows that in Tang Dynasty engraving calendars are very popular among common people. In fact, there are many nongovernmental engraving calendars in collected books of Dunhuang Caves. In the year of Tang Zhonghe 2nd (AD 882), the almanac listed “The calendar of Fan Shang in Chengdu City of Western Mountain Jian Nan District”, which shows the secure evidence that print-making originated from Tang Dynasty and tells us that print-making of Tang Dynasty not only focus on engraving Buddha pictures also focus on literatures

and nongovernmental books.

In Five Dynasties, Mr. Feng Dao launched to engrave “Nine Lektion”, which lasted for over twenty years and had big influence. In Chinese history, it was called “Five Dynasties’ block-printed edition”. The engraved “Nine Lektion” was emendated by professionals, after first correction, the book will be emendated again by scholars. After confirmed there’s no mistake, the book will be transcribed by good handwriting, then engraved. Nowadays, both “Tang Yun” and “Qie Yun” in French National Library is “Five Dynasties’ block-printed edition” found in Dunhuang. Reviewing the quality of the block-printed edition, we could see the book-engraving skill is outstanding in the world.

In the year of Tianfu 5th (AD 940), Jing Emperor Mr. Shi Jingtang required Taoist Mr. Zhang Jianming to engrave “Tao Te Ching”, which is also a big event in “Five Dynasties’ engraving book”. It is also recorded besides South-Tang and Wu Yue in Five Dynasties, Meishan in Chuanshu, Shazhou out of Yumen barrier to district of Qilu have many refined engraving books.

iii. Song Dynasty, Yuan Dynasty, Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty

Song and Yuan Dynasty

Our engraving industry, from engraved Buddha Lektion, Buddha Painting to collected books, medical book and history books, after the large-scaled “nine lection” engraving in “Five Dynasties”, it finally laid groundwork for engraving prints. Especially when engraving prints turned to literature and nongovernmental daily books, it blazed a trail for engraving prints.

The development for engraving prints is gathering momentum in Song and Yuan Dynasties; this kind of engraving prints are everywhere, from Central government to local offices, from officials to personals. These do have influences on developing print-making and the improvement on arts.

In more than four hundred years of Song and Yuan Dynasties, it has many reasons to impulse the development of engraving prints beside the urgent political requirements: (1) the development of craftwork skills; (2) the improvement of peoples' literature. Now we will have a brief introduction of above two reasons combined with some situation of print-making.

The relationship between advancement of the skills in Song, Yuan Dynasties craftwork industry, and the development of the print-making is listed as follows:

In Song Dynasties, the advancement of the North Song Dynasties' economy impulse the craftwork skill, which made the latter achieves a big improvement. The three big inventions in middle Ages: powder, compass, characters typography, which shows the fabulous achievements that craftwork has gained in North Dynasties times. Especially, the invention of characters typography increased the amount of the prints and publishing.

Characters typography was invented by a civilian called Bi Sheng in Song Ren Zong Qing times (AD 1041-1048). In Mr. Shen Kuo's "Meng Xi Bi Tan", there are many details: "In Qing Li times, someone called Bi Sheng made Character Typography. Methods are as follows: Engrave words on clay, which is thin as coin edge. Every letter is a seal, and then treats them

with fire to produce a hard surface. We can put an iron plate with turpentine wax and paper ash on it. If we want to print something, we could put a iron pattern on a iron plate, then put on the clays on it, when it is full, put the plate on fire to roast. When the wax is melting, put a plate on its face, then the word is on the plate. It was amazing quick when you have to print thousands of books.” Apparently, it is a big progress on the print skills.

At the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty, the court demanded the craftsman in the whole country to work for the few baronages, which related to more than 100 thousand people. For example, till the year of Yuan 21st (AD 1284), there were more than 300 thousand people were craftsmen in Jiangsu and Zhejiang area, among them more than 100 thousand craftsmen were force to serve for baronages. In handcraft industry, there were countless industrial workshops like money workshop, stipulation workshop and picture-mounted workshop, some of them produced paper, some engraved painting and various figures of Buddha (Buddha figures workshop). This kind of setting accordingly promoted the development of block prints. The ancient art of print-making gains improvements in the development of block prints.

To sum up, from the end of 13th century to the beginning of 14th century, China had much destruction in commercial industry, but compared to Europe, it was still in the head of the world. In the book of Marco Polo, there were plenitudinous narrations.

Both the improvement of people’s culture and the rise of nongovernmental light literature had positive impression on the development of block prints.

Both North and South Song Dynasty had made great achievement in the cultural development. The most important thing is the rise of pop culture, especially the development of traditional opera. In North Song Dynasty, there were “Acrobatics Opera” and “Santao and Xiaoling songs”, during South Song Dynasty, there were “story-telling script”, “novel” and “South opera” in Wenzhou, which were all brilliant achievements in Yuan Dynasty traditional operas and related to the development of the block print.

Song Dynasty had many centralized districts of block prints. Like the capital of North Song Dynasty — Bianliang (Kaifeng), Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province, Jiangyang in Fujian Province and Meizhou in Sichuan Province. When North Song Dynasty was perdition, Nuzhen people took the engraving craftsmen and books that robbed from Bianliang as foundation and built a new center of block prints in Pingyang (Linfen in Shanxi Province). Till Yuan Dynasty, this industry was raised in Dadu (Now we call it Beijing).

The formation of these four engraving districts in both North and South Song Dynasty has its own reason. Bianliang is the capital in North Song Dynasty, the centre of politics and economics of the whole country, some important and urgent things needed to be block-printed in Bianliang. In Five Dynasties, Hangzhou of Zhejiang Province was the capital of Wuyue, which was the politics and economics center of the south China, almost all the great craftsmen were gathered here. That's why “Jianben Books” of Song Dynasty were almost produced from Zhejiang Province. When the royalty moved capital to south, Hangzhou (in ancient, people called it Lin'an)'s block-print industry were more developed. In Hangzhou city of South Song Dynasty, Wazi Street, Zhong'an Bridge, Che Bridge, Muqin lane, Mao'er lane and Royal Ancestral Temple were all the centralized places for block-

print of books. Like places around Zhong'an Bridge, there were many block-print stalls, which almost made it as the culture street at that time. Till Yuan Dynasty, Hangzhou was still the center of the block-prints. Also because the develop of the nongovernmental of pop culture, besides the printing for Confucian Classics and the historical books, common cultures like colloquialism novels, traditional operas were also large-scaled printed according to the mass' need. Jianyang in Fujian Province is a place of producing paper, as the convenience of using local materials, it developed well on block-prints. Jianyang in Fujian Province once was the center of block-prints, that's why in "Jianyang Records" of Jiajing times there were a picture of book workshop to show the prosperity of the print industry in this district. Other places like Meizhou in Sichuan Province were places abundant of goods also with human assembled. The communication of words and circulation of classical books helped to develop the block- print industry and improve the quality. The famous "Kai Bao Zang" is in Chengdu, which was a masterpiece of more than 5 thousand rolls sutra with all the craftsmen in Sichuan Province spent 12 year to engrave. Same as the "Dong Du Shi Lve" engraved by Mei Mountain Chengshe people, they both were famous at that time. Unfortunately, till the end of Song Dynasty, after the destructions of wars in Meizhou, posterities didn't have much inherited edition. However, block-print of Sichuan provided the firm foundation for the large-scaled development for the block-print industry in the hinterland.

Above certain economic foundation, the development of a time's culture was gained by many different interactive influence and impulse. The rise of Song and Yuan Dynasty's print-making was due to the improvement and development of block-printing.

To sum up, during the Song and Yuan Dynasty, like painting, print-making was getting to get rid of the religions. Many religious arts were

secularized, which began to relate to the emotions and life of the common people. This good phenomenon is the key point to make print-making art can have florescence in Ming Dynasty.

Ming Dynasty

At the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, handcraft craftsmen were liberated from slaves and they were inspired the ardors to produce in more steady society. This is the most important reason for develop of handcraft industry in Ming Dynasty. Aspects like smelting, spinning, lacquering, block-printing and others all showed great improvement. Because of the improvement of the production and the development of social division of labor, the commercial industry of Ming Dynasty were blooming for these 2 reasons and showed that the capitalism economic was sprouting.

All of these effected the development of print-making in Ming Dynasty. Lu Xun said: "Chinese xylograph had some honorable history from Tang to Ming Dynasty."¹ It is true that the print-making had splendid achievement and development in Ming Dynasty and exceeded Song Dynasty. Print-making welcomed in its heyday in Ming Dynasty, which is recorded in our history of fine art.

When we talked about the splendid achievement of print-making, there was the reason of the society, but the efficient amse was the bloom of the block-print industry. We have talked about the flourishing phenomenon of the commercial industry were based on the improvement of the production and the development of social division of labor, and the block-print industry was developing under the condition that the whole society was developing the social division of labor. From the development of block-print industry, Anhui, Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Fujian were very popular at that time. To book businessman, book industry was the most active

in the whole business.. Booksellers of Huizhou went out everywhere for trading books, most of them gained big fortunes and have family property over millions. From the property of booksellers, we could see the volume of the market is big too. It reflects that the flourishing of the commercial industry in Ming Dynasty and also helps us to know the development and prevailingness of block-print at that time. The prevailingness of block-print had offered the best conditions for the development of print-making. It was the same in Western Europe, the Germany artist master Duerer, he was living in the period of the latter part of 15th century to the middle of 16th century, that was the middle time of Ming Dynasty in China. The development of typography in Nuremberg had big influence on him; especially he was a print worker in Koboger, this experience “has the decisory influence on the creativity in his later art life of print-making”.

Till this time of Ming Dynasty, there was many big artistes came out to draw for block-print, which was an advantage for the improvement of print-making. In history, the painting was well developed in Song Dynasty; outstanding painters of imperial art academy in both Song Dynasties were over hundreds according to the records. But we could not clearly recognize that those print-making at that time were from those outstanding artistes. Though there were examples like “The picture of clubs: Xi Shen” by Song Boren, which was a single rare example. While it was much different in Ming Dynasty, the famous painter of Wu faction — Tang Ying, he once had draw iconographs for “The stories of West Chamber”, Qiu Ying — famous folk painter drew the iconographs for “Stories of exemplarious women”, and Chen Honshou in the end of Ming Dynasty, who was a great painter had big contribution to print-making, his “Bo Gu Leaves”, “Water Margins Leaves” and the iconographs of “Li Sao ” were all unique and were commended by people. And “The Picture of famous

Mountains” in Chongzhen times was engraved by several famous artistes like Zheng Qianli, Zhao Wendu, Liu Shuxian and Lan Tianshu etc. From those 50 delicate works, we could see the interests that artistes at that time had shown on producing print-makings. Others like “Bai Mei Tu Yong” of Gu Zhengyi, “Wangli He Ping Bei Xi Xiang” of Wang Genghui, “The picture of society in Small Yingzhou”, “The stories of Jade Hairpin” by Liu Mingsu, Cai Yuanxun and Zhao Bi, “Letter of swallow” by Lu Wuqing, “The great word of Confucius” by Cheng Qilong, “The change of Kwan-yin” and “Ink House” by Ding Yunpeng, all those works could show the interests and ardors that the painter in Song Dynasty had paid, which was also a fashion at that time

In the techniques of print-making, the achievement in Ming Dynasty was very distinct. Common works were having big improvement on portraying of characters than the block-prints in Song and Yuan Dynasty. Iconographs of several famous legend traditional operas were commended by the readers at that time, books like “The stories of West Chamber”, “The stories of the Lute”, “Letters of Swallow”, “Autumn in the Han Palace”, “The Pavilion of Moon-Worship”, “The plum in the Golden Vase”, “Tale of Water Margin” had representative iconographs, and those iconographs had exceeded the one in the Dynasty before Ming Dynasty. According to the history of painting, the portraits were less after Yuan Dynasty, pictures of mountains, rivers, flowers and bird were popular, while the condition of print-making was just the opposite, that kind of portrait with meaning characters were getting more popular, and showing that print-making was stepping forward with these steps. Besides, in aspect of print-making, the famous Shizhu room watermark xylograph was an example of breach. The appearance of Shizhu room watermark xylograph showed the new achievement in our art of print-making in our country. That water color block printing chromatically skill pushed the block-print to a unprecedented level,