

is a “complex” of bodily and technological gestures (78). In examining the various physical movements that go into picture-taking, Stimson draws a revealing contrast between Henri Cartier-Bresson’s perception of photography as a quest for decisive moments to be arranged and captured, and Robert Frank’s treatment of the camera as “a device for distancing, othering, abstracting, a device that throws photographer and beholder back on themselves” (80).

In *Migrations*, essays about film and dance sit side-by-side with those on photography and painting. It is clear that the editors of the volume deliberately chose not to classify the essays according to art form, though doing so perhaps would have helpfully underscored the similarities and differences between the various treatments of a given medium. Still, it is apparent that such a structure would have been too rigid for a series of essays devoted to exploring the diffusion of meanings among people, geographies, technologies, and artistic and cultural bounds. The collection and its organization reveal some of the many ways that embodied movement transmits cultural meanings, showing just how “place-like bodies can be, and how gesture-specific places can be” (278).

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Xiaobing Tang. *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008. 318 pages.

Tang Xiaobing’s book is like a grand history painting that portrays its main subject—the woodcut movement that emerged in Republican China in the 1920s and 30s—against a complex backdrop of political upheavals, institutional changes, and competing discourses. Tang convincingly argues that the woodcut movement was truly avant-garde because it not only challenged the prevailing aesthetics, but also established the woodcut print as “an incomparably expedient and politically relevant” medium in modern China (218).

The book opens with the reform of art education in the 1910s, championed by Minister of Education Cai Yuanpei and realized by young art educators like Liu Haisu, Lin Fengmian, and Xu Beihong. Cai believed that *meiyu* (aesthetic education) would, as Tang claims, “foster cultural cohesion as well as social harmony in modern China”

(11). His agenda was to instill the liberal-humanist vision of the European Renaissance in the Chinese urban bourgeoisie. Although young woodcut artists later would depart from Cai's artistic taste and political alignment, his program nonetheless established two fundamental themes in twentieth century Chinese art: its inseparable link to the nation's political agenda and its unceasing struggle between western influences and Chinese traditions.

Chapter 2 focuses on the remarkable shift during the 1920s toward left-wing cultural politics in the art world. A series of radical essays published by members of the Creation Society between 1927 and 1930 cultivated the theoretical foundation for a proletarian art movement. Exposed to Marxist theory during their studies in Japan, Guo Moruo, Cheng Fangwu, and Feng Naichao, among others, consistently argued that the mission of an avant-garde cultural movement was to "join forces with the political movement" of the left (72). As Tang observes, the meaning of *biaoxian*, a key term in Chinese art theory, migrated during this time from "subjective consciousness to be expressed" to "external reality to be represented," thus creating an alignment between the discourse of avant-garde art and Marxist politics (67).

The next three chapters describe the birth, growth, and culmination of what Tang calls the "urban stage" of the woodcut movement, which progressed at lightening speed. In 1929, a student group at the National Art Academy in Hangzhou organized the first public exhibition of creative woodcut prints. Only six years later, the *National Joint Woodcut Exhibition* was staged in Beiping (as Beijing was called then), Shanghai, and several other major cities, presenting six hundred works to a national audience. A number of factors propelled the movement's rapid development. For instance, the increasingly grim social malaise and Japanese military threats at the time motivated young artists to expand the subject matter of their art to human suffering and contemporary events. As a result, many adopted representational realism as their primary visual language. The symbiosis between literary journals and black-and-white prints also allowed woodcut artists to realize the medium's potential for mass circulation. The lower strata of society thus became the main subjects and viewers of this art form, making woodcut prints one of the most popular mediums in the twentieth century.

As Tang demonstrates with abundant detail, the movement was a triumph of solidarity, both nationally and internationally. Across the country, a large number of woodcut societies united individual artists and formed an important organizational layer that

supported the production of exhibitions, publications, and manifestos. One exception was Lu Xun, who worked individually but played a pivotal role in linking young Chinese artists and the global woodcut movement. He translated theoretical texts, published foreign prints, and organized an important workshop in 1931 for Chinese art students to learn from a Japanese master. In 1934, he helped curate the exhibition *Painters and Printmakers from Revolutionary China*, which brought Chinese prints to Paris. Lu Xun's efforts thus exemplified the international solidarity of left-wing cultural politics in general and woodcut prints in particular.

The main chapters focus more on historical events and texts than woodcut prints, but Tang compensates for this imbalance with the conclusion's animated visual analysis of a single print: Li Hua's *Roar, China!*, published in 1935. As he claims, this print demonstrates that, "to visually render a voice, to project it, and then to elicit an expressive response from the viewer is a complex operation of evoking and calling forth subjectivity" (219). Thus, Cai Yuanpei's advocacy of art as part of a nation-building program—discussed in the very first chapter of the book—finds its reflection in this work. *Roar, China!* represents the powerful transformation of "national awakening" as a cultural metaphor into a "political imperative" (222). As Tang's reading asserts, the woodcut movement responded to China's historical condition and, in turn, contributed to the revolutionary course upon which the country would embark.

Many important themes of modern and contemporary Chinese art can be traced back to the woodcut movement. The very idea that a new form of art could be promoted as a movement through public exhibitions and discourse building was inherited by later artists and theorists, including those of the '85 New Wave. The debate between "art for art" and "art for life"—and variations such as art for nation-building, art for revolution, or art for public well-being—is still highly relevant today. Tang ends his book with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, an event that compelled young artists to migrate from urban centers to rural areas controlled by the Communist Party, and thereby leaves the second stage of the woodcut movement to a future study. A complete picture of the woodcut movement will further elucidate its historical consequences: how the revolution of a single medium affected not only art, but also larger cultural developments in China.

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