



A NEW ART FOR A NEW CHINA

MODERN CHINESE PRINTS FROM THE IHRMAN COLLECTION



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A NEW ART FOR A NEW CHINA

MODERN CHINESE PRINTS FROM THE IHRMAN COLLECTION

INTRODUCTION

The history of modern Chinese printmaking can be divided into four broad phases. The first phase lasted from the early 1930s through the 1940s. The modern Chinese print movement was initially inspired by the ideas of author and critic Lu Xun (1881-1936), who believed that art should serve a moral purpose and be used to improve society. Most of the prints created during the first phase of the movement were protest-themed, Expressionist-style woodcuts modeled after European, Russian, and Japanese examples. Because these early prints were made and used in a period of great turmoil, they were often not preserved and are consequently quite rare today.

The second phase of modern Chinese printmaking history began in 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party gained control of mainland China and lasted until the late-1970s. Party leader Mao Zedong (1893-1976) believed in using art as a tool for political and social class struggle, and thought that prints were especially well-suited for conveying party goals and ideologies to a mass audience. With Mao's support, the modern print movement expanded significantly between the 1950s and 1970s, with new schools, styles, and subjects evolving in response to changing political conditions and priorities.

The 1980s and 90s marked the third phase in the history of the modern Chinese printmaking. As the Chinese government adopted more liberal economic, social, and cultural policies, art was freed from its subservience to politics and printmakers were able to explore a broader range of styles and subjects. This was a time of great experimentation and innovation in Chinese printmaking, but also a time of considerable uncertainty as many artists struggled to find

a balance between art that was politically acceptable and also commercially viable.

The fourth phase in the history of modern Chinese printmaking began around the turn of the 21st century with the emergence of China as a global superpower and continues today. The spirit of experimentation and innovation that began in the 1980s has been renewed in recent decades, and Chinese printmaking is now more diverse and more connected than ever before to international printmaking trends and markets. Contemporary Chinese printmaking is technically sophisticated, aesthetically complex, and intellectually engaging, and it reflects the confidence and maturity of the Chinese nation as a whole.

This exhibition features a selection of Chinese prints dating from the late 1930s to the early 2020s that reflect the broader history of China and Chinese printmaking during that period. Most of the prints in the exhibition were donated to the Krizenga Art Museum by Michigan-native Dr. David Ihrman. The artworks belong to a collection of more than 1,500 modern Chinese prints that was formed by Dr. Ihrman and his late wife, Huang Dong Ihrman, between the late 1980s and early 2000s. The Ihrman collection is extraordinary in its quality and scope, and it ranks among the largest collections of modern Chinese prints to be found outside of China. The Krizenga Art Museum is immensely grateful to Dr. Ihrman for his generosity.




1931 Lu Xun calls for a modern Chinese printmaking movement

1934 First major exhibition of modern Chinese prints

1937 Japan invades China

1942 Mao Zedong delivers his Yan'an talks on art and literature

1945 World War II ends, China's civil war resumes




1949 The People's Republic of China is founded

1950 China invades and annexes Tibet


1950 Korean War

1953 The First Five-Year Plan begins


1958 The Second Five-Year Plan (Great Leap Forward) begins



1960 Nationwide famine kills approximately 30 million people



1966 Mao Zedong launches the Cultural Revolution



1973 The "Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius" Campaign begins

1976 Mao Zedong dies, end of the Cultural Revolution

1978 Deng Xiaoping comes to power, initiates Open-Door period



1978 Beijing Democracy Wall Movement

1985 New Wave Art Movement



1989 Tiananmen Democracy Movement



1997 Hong Kong returns to China

2001 China admitted to the World Trade Organization

2008 Beijing XXIX Olympic Games

2013 Xi Jinping becomes President, begins Belt and Road Initiative



2020 Global Covid-19 Pandemic

Section One:

REFORM, RESISTANCE, AND REVOLUTION

1931—1948

The history of printmaking in China stretches back more than a thousand years, but the modern period of Chinese printmaking only began in 1931 when writer and educator Lu Xun called for the development of a new print movement to support the cause of national revitalization. Modeled after modern European, Russian, and Japanese schools of printmaking, the new modern Chinese print movement was meant to help reform Chinese society and government by exposing injustice, inequality, and corruption. The first major public exhibition of modern Chinese prints occurred in 1934 and featured 58 Expressionist-style woodcuts depicting a variety of subjects and themes. The exhibition was acclaimed both within China and abroad, and established printmaking as a major force in modern Chinese art.

The modern Chinese print movement rose to even greater national prominence after Japan invaded China in 1937. Many print artists became involved in anti-Japanese resistance activities, using their skills to create propaganda images that bolstered China's larger war effort. The Chinese Communist Party was especially supportive of the modern print movement during the late 1930s and early 40s, and even established schools to train print artists at various places around its base territory in northwestern China. After World War II ended, many of the Communist-trained artists continued to work on behalf of the party during the 1945-49 civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists, producing images that no longer simply called for reforms but instead demanded a revolution.





Famine Victims

Li Pingfan (Chinese, 1922-2011)

1939

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.1235

Famines were a regular occurrence in China during the 20th century, afflicting many regions of the country and killing tens of millions of people. Here, a line of famine victims with gaunt faces and patched clothes stand with food pails in hand to receive emergency rations. Clearly influenced by early 20th-century European and Russian woodcuts, the print's blocky forms and strong tonal contrasts are intended to evoke a visceral, emotional response in the viewer. Expressionist woodcuts of this type were popular among well-educated Chinese artists and audiences in the 1930s and 40s, but they failed to impress less-educated, working-class audiences who found the images difficult to comprehend visually.



貧病交迫

邵克萍 1941 作

Hard-pressed by Poverty and Sickness

Shao Keping (Chinese, 1916-2010)

1941

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.1244

Millions of Chinese people suffered from chronic poverty and poor health during the 1930s and 40s. Decades of inept government and civil war combined with the devastation caused by Japan's invasion of China in 1937 severely disrupted the economy and slowed the development of modern medical care in the country. This print by Zhejiang artist Shao Keping depicts a haggard-looking woman standing beside her bedridden husband with an empty rice pot in her hand and a small child tugging hungrily at her clothes. With its starkly realistic style, the image effectively conveys a sense of despair and powerlessness in the face of forces far beyond the family's control.



Jialing Boat Trackers

Wang Renfeng (Chinese, 1918-2010)

1943

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2022.91

The Jialing River in Sichuan province feeds into the larger Yangzi River not far from the city of Chongqing, which served as the temporary capital of free China during World War II. Prior to the introduction of mechanically-powered vessels, boats traveling up the Jialing River were hauled against the current by human trackers using long ropes. It was hard, grueling work and the Jialing boat trackers became symbols of the Chinese people's strength and endurance. Some sense of the trackers' toughness can be gleaned from American journalist Pearl S. Buck's description of an encounter she had with a tracker in another part of China: "Once when I was traveling on the Grand Canal in the province of Kiangsu, the boatman dipped his bowl in the muddy water and drank deeply. 'Do you not fear to drink the dark water?' I asked him. 'Foreigner, you cannot drink it,' he replied. 'But I need not fear. The river gods are my gods.'"

When Enemies Search the Mountains

Yan Han (Chinese, 1916-2011)

1943

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.1491

Art became an important weapon in China's war with Japan during the late 1930s and early 40s. Prints depicting acts of resistance against the Japanese invaders were publicly exhibited and published in newspapers and magazines throughout the non-occupied areas of the country. This woodcut shows a Chinese soldier, with bandoliers of grenades and ammunition slung across his torso, shooting at enemy soldiers from a trench where he is supported by other members of his platoon. We can tell from their uniforms that these soldiers belong to the Chinese Communist army. Operating from their stronghold in northwestern China, the Communists played a major role in stopping and eventually reversing the Japanese invasion of China during World War II. The experience the Communists gained in both fighting and government administration during the war with Japan proved crucial for their eventual conquest of the entire country in 1949.



As the Japanese invaders aimlessly rummaging among the mountain valley
By Yan Han



Helping Them Hide

Yan Han (Chinese, 1916-2011)

1944

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.1486

In the late 1930s, artist Yan Han traveled to the Communist base area in Shaanxi province where he became one of the party's most effective and prolific propaganda artists. His prints include images that depict the Communist army's fight against the Japanese as well as the protection and assistance the army provided to Chinese civilians. This woodcut depicts a group of peasants and soldiers lowering people into a cave shelter where they can hide from Japanese aircraft attacks and infantry patrols. Because art supplies were scarce during the war, most wartime woodcuts were made using only one woodblock and one color, usually black. This image is unusual in that it was printed using multiple woodblocks and colors.

Oxen Plowing Mutual Aid Team

Hu Yichuan (Chinese, 1910-2000)

1943

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.134

The Chinese Communist Party experimented with land reform and collectivized labor practices as ways to win popular support and increase economic productivity in the areas they controlled during World War II. Party cadres broke up the large estates of wealthy families and redistributed the land to smaller groups of peasant families who were organized into “mutual aid teams” to work the land together. The mutual aid teams shared seeds, tools, work animals, and their own labor, thereby limiting the burden on each individual family and allowing them to share in a greater collective prosperity. These wartime mutual aid teams proved so successful that the party instituted them across the country after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Artist Hu Yichuan created this image of a mutual aid plowing team in 1943 as part of the party’s propaganda effort to promote the benefits of life under Communist rule. Hu had been one of the first Chinese artists to take up modern printmaking in the early 1930s, and he remained an important figure in the movement until his death in 2000.



Moving North to Shanxi

Yan Han (Chinese, 1916-2011)

1944

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.1489

In 1942, Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong delivered an important series of lectures about art and literature at the Communist stronghold in Yan’an. In these lectures, Mao urged artists to emulate the styles and forms of traditional Chinese folk arts in order to make their

artworks more relevant and comprehensible to a mass audience. This print depicting peasants, workers, and soldiers in Communist-controlled Shanxi province cooperating happily and sharing resources is a good example of the new artistic directions that followed Mao’s Yan’an lectures. The print’s plain style and three-tiered composition derive from New Year prints that had been part of Chinese popular culture for centuries. Folk art-inspired prints like this continued to be made into the early 1950s before eventually being supplanted in the late 1950s and 60s by images made in the Soviet-influenced Socialist Realist style.



After the Food Collectors Leave

Li Hua (Chinese, 1907-1994)

1946

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.30

Chinese Communist and Nationalist forces observed an uneasy truce for much of World War II as they focused on fighting their common enemy, the Japanese. After the Japanese were

defeated, however, the two sides quickly entered into a civil war for control of China. As they had done before the war, Communist and left-leaning artists used prints to criticize Nationalist policies and practices. This image depicts Nationalist soldiers stealing baskets of grain and a goat from an impoverished working-class family. A sign on the family's door reads "Victory" in Chinese, emphasizing the ironic fact that many Chinese people who survived the Japanese invasion later fell victim to the predations of their own government.





Human Market

Zhang Yangxi (Chinese, 1912-1964)

1947

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.56

The miserable conditions that prevailed in many parts of China during the 1945-49 civil war are captured by this grim image of a marketplace in the city of Chengdu where desperate people have gathered to sell the only things they have left: themselves. In the center of the print, an older man and woman present a younger woman—perhaps their daughter—to a fedora-wearing pimp, exposing her breast to convince him of her suitability to work as a prostitute. Similar transactions can be seen taking place around the central group as other touts evaluate, gesticulate, and bargain for the bodies of women whose faces and postures reflect their feelings of resignation and despair.





Rice Riot

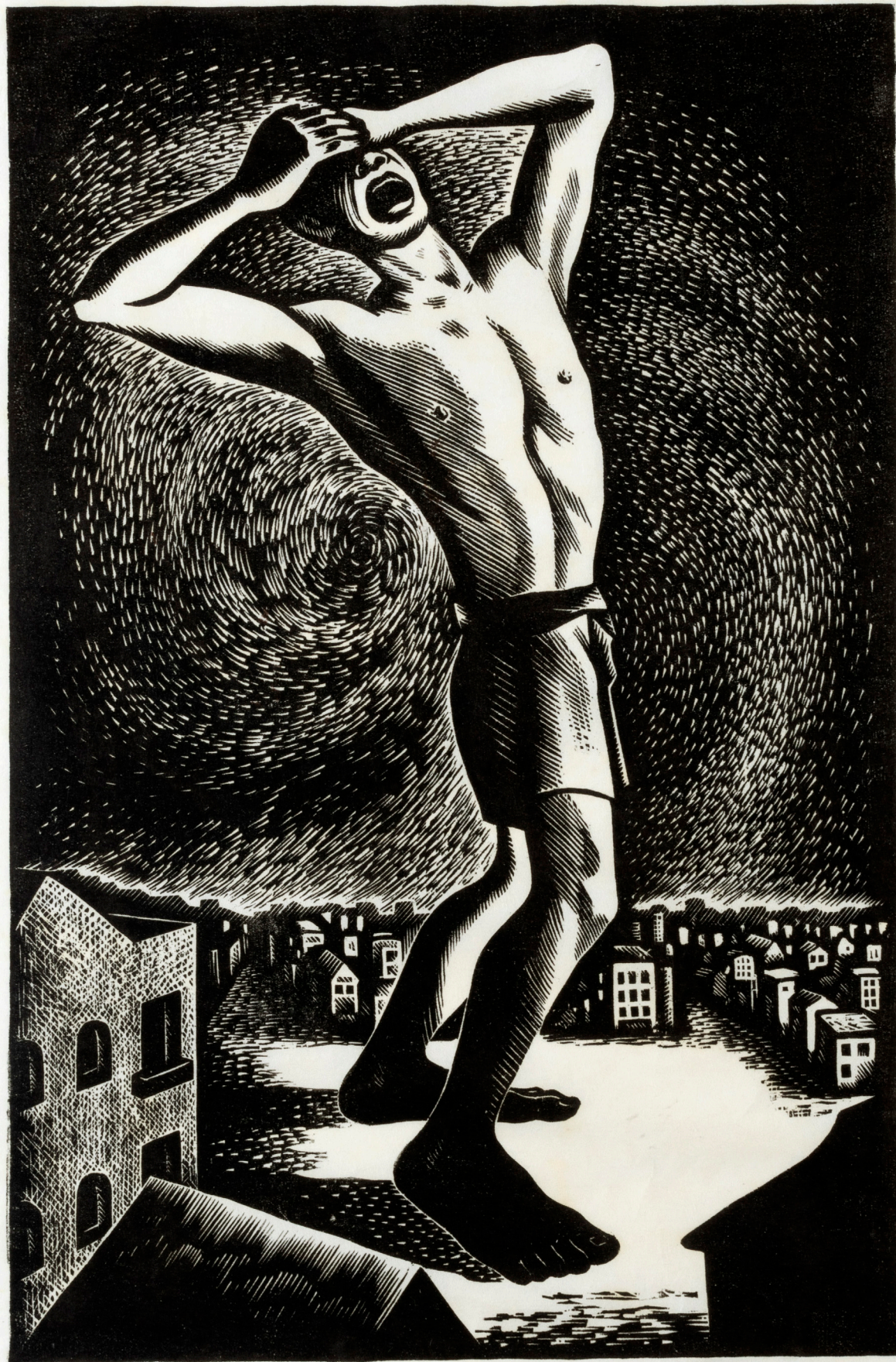
Zhao Yannian (Chinese, 1924-2014)

1947/reprinted 1992

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.94

A seething crowd driven to desperation by hunger smashes its way into a rice company's storerooms. Such acts of public violence occurred regularly in China during the 1945-49 civil war, when fighting between the Communists and Nationalists regularly led to shortages of food and other goods in many regions of the country. Artist Zhao Yannian's dense composition and frenetic linework effectively convey the power of the mob and the revolutionary spirit that was growing in China at that time.



After Selling Blood

Huang Xinbo (Chinese, 1916-1980)

1948

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.61

Artist Huang Xinbo created this print in 1948 while he was living in Hong Kong. Although Hong Kong was a British colony at the time, it was filled with refugees fleeing the chaos and destruction of China's civil war. The print depicts a man screaming with anguish and rage after selling his blood to obtain money for food. By unnaturally enlarging the man's figure so that he towers over the nearby houses, Huang lets us know that this print does not simply portray the pain of a single man, but the plight of an entire people who must rise up and fight back to save themselves.

賣血後

郭波作 据原板复制
1948

Section two:

BUILDING THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

1949—1965

The modern printmaking movement continued to enjoy considerable prestige and government support after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Following directives laid out by Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong, prints were used to promote state priorities and objectives, especially among the uneducated masses of peasants, workers, and soldiers. Virtually all state-sponsored art made during the first few decades of the People's Republic was political, and print artists had limited opportunities to create images for purely aesthetic reasons.

In contrast to prints of the 1930s and 40s that typically featured images of suffering and oppression, the prints of the 1950s and early 60s were generally more cheerful and optimistic. They tended to focus on the achievements of the Chinese Communist Party and the benefits of living under party rule. Different schools and styles of printmaking evolved in different regions of China during this period, with some artists drawing on native Chinese art traditions while others were more influenced by Soviet Russian models. Although most of the images were ideologically driven, the best among them possessed aesthetic and emotional qualities that elevated them above the status of mere propaganda.





Border Guard

Fu Hengxue (Chinese, 1933-2014)

1956

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.44

Securing the nation's borders was a primary concern of the Chinese Communist Party after it gained control of mainland China in 1949. Over the previous century, China had faced numerous threats and suffered multiple territorial losses to the imperialist powers of Europe and Japan. The trauma of those historical events was exacerbated by the proxy war China fought with the United States for control of neighboring Korea from 1950 to 1953. The heightened attention to national security issues in the 1950s is reflected in this woodcut depicting a border guard standing heroically on a mountain peak as he watches over the rugged terrain below. Although the print is meant to portray a contemporary scene, its composition and style are reminiscent of traditional Chinese landscape paintings depicting scholar-hermits surveying the natural world from their mountain abodes.

The Cuckoos Are Singing Again

Wu Fan (Chinese, 1923-2015)

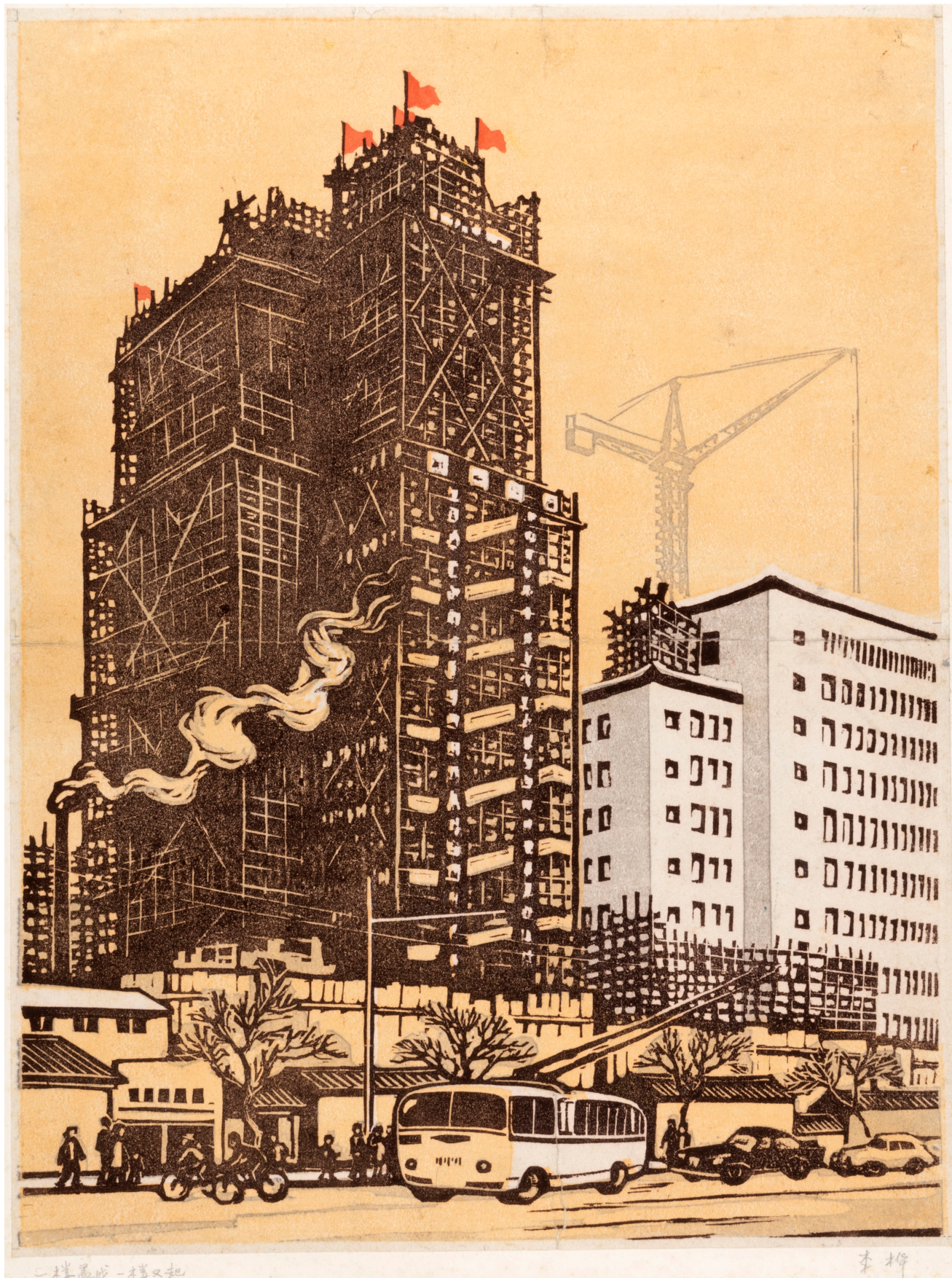
1956

Woodcut

*Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman
Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2022.81.2*

In 1953, the Chinese Communist government announced its First Five-Year Plan for restructuring the nation's economy. Based on Soviet Russian models, the plan emphasized the expansion of heavy industry, the development of national power supplies, and the transformation of agriculture through mechanization and the use of chemicals. The plan's goals were soon reflected in the visual arts, often using a new, more realistic style that was also based on Soviet Russian models. This image of a woman standing in a field beside a tractor exemplifies the Socialist Realist style that took hold in China during the mid-1950s. The title suggests that the bird seen flying in the upper left corner of the image is a cuckoo, a traditional symbol of spring in Chinese culture which here may also symbolize the rebirth of the entire country.





One New Building After Another

Li Hua (Chinese, 1907-1994)

1959

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2022.81.1

Artist Li Hua created this image of new, high-rise buildings being constructed on a street filled with buses and cars in 1959 to celebrate the prosperity and progress that China achieved during the first decade of Communist rule. The print's warm ochre tone along with the cheerful red flags that fly atop the construction scaffolding convey an optimistic sense that life is steadily getting better in the People's Republic of China. In fact, life was about to get much worse in China as mismanaged industrial growth coupled with poor agricultural harvests resulted in a famine that killed an estimated 30 million people between 1960 and 1962.



“天下无难事” (1953年)

朱鳴岡作

There Is Nothing Difficult in This World

Zhu Minggang (Chinese, 1915-2013)

1953

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.14

A worker sits on a bench during his lunch break playing a saxophone. This print reflects the decree issued by Chairman Mao in his 1942 Yan'an lectures that Chinese culture should expand to include participation by peasants, workers, and soldiers. However, it is unclear if the worker in this image is someone from a humble background who has learned to play a musical instrument, or if he is a trained musician who has been sent to work in a factory as a form of reeducation. Both scenarios would have been possible in 1950s China and both would have been seen as legitimate ways to achieve Mao's cultural goals.

Reading

Li Huanmin (Chinese, 1930-2016)

1959

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.257

China invaded and annexed the neighboring country of Tibet in 1950, ostensibly to save the Tibetan people from the forces of feudalism and imperialism, but also to secure the headwaters of China's most important rivers. The Chinese government tried to legitimize its invasion by encouraging Chinese artists to portray positive images of Tibetan life under Chinese rule. This print by Sichuan-based artist Li Huanmin depicts a Tibetan herdsman out in the countryside reading a book, suggesting that the Communist Party's educational reforms have reached even the furthest regions of the nation. It is interesting that the herdsman appears to be carrying a rifle on his back. Farmers and herdsman in rural areas of Tibet often used guns to protect their crops and animals from pests and predators. But such guns could also be used for fighting, and indeed Tibetan resistance groups launched several armed uprisings during the 1950s and 60s, leading the Chinese government eventually to confiscate most privately-owned weapons.





AP 第一道脚印

泥 1960

First Footprints

Chao Mei (Chinese, born 1931)

1960

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.1168

Artist Chao Mei joined the People's Liberation Army in 1948 while he was still in his teens. He was eventually assigned to work in one of the army's art and propaganda units, and in 1958 was sent to Heilongjiang province as part of the Great Leap Forward to help document the government's efforts to develop agricultural and natural resource industries in that region. Together with artist Zhang Zuoliang, Chao became one of the founders of the Beidahuang (Great Northern Wasteland) School of printmaking, which typically used oil-based inks to create dramatic images of people and animals set against the wilderness landscapes of northeastern China. This poignant 1960 woodcut depicting a band of soldiers blazing a trail through the snow ranks among the early masterworks of the Beidahuang School.

Channeling the Huai River to the North

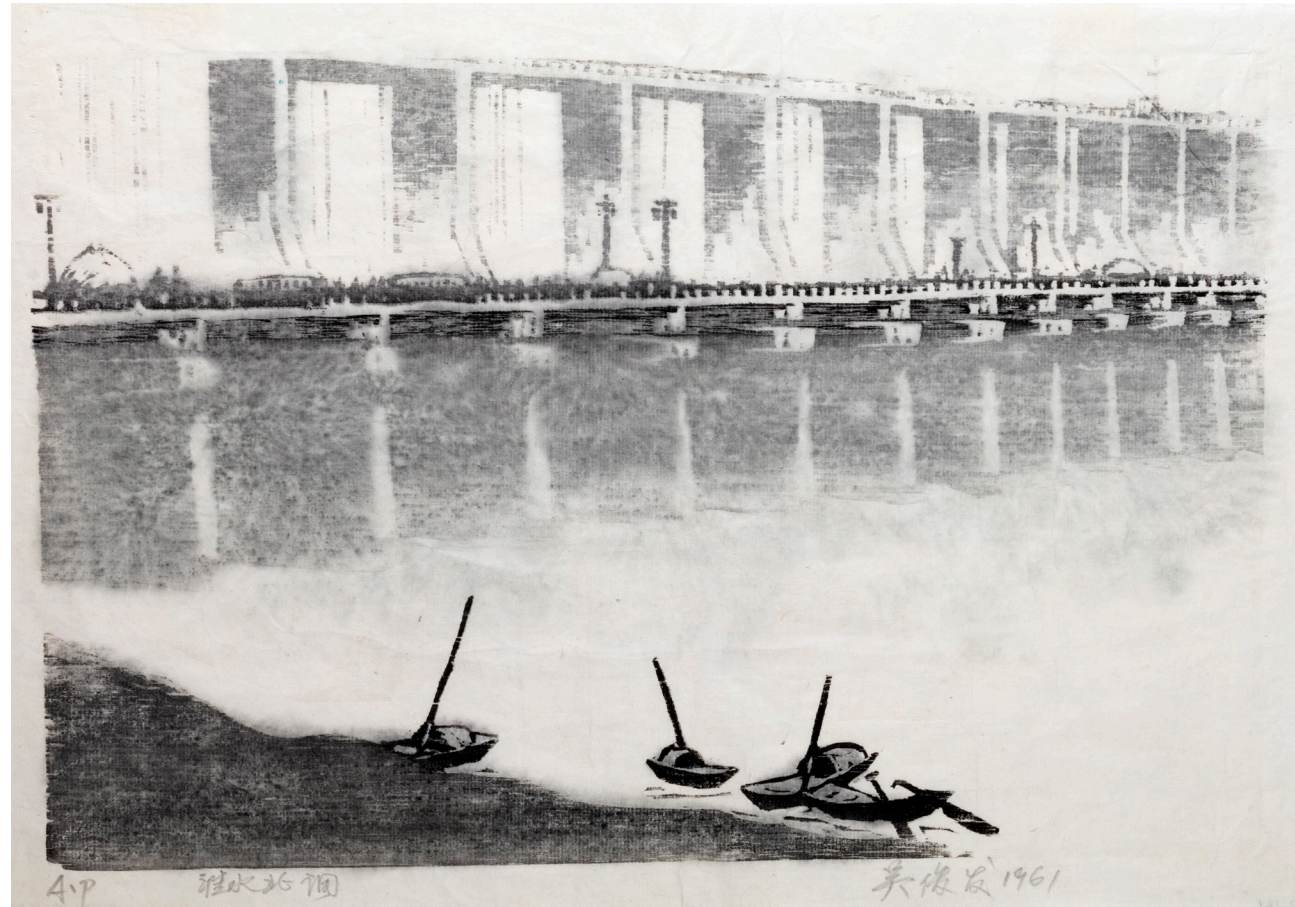
Wu Junfa (Chinese, 1927-2019)

1961

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, *The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman*, 2021.2.120

The Huai River is a major waterway running through central China between the Yellow River and the Yangzi River. The Huai was historically prone to severe floods that led to catastrophic property damage and loss of life. As protection against such floods, the Communist government constructed a series of dams and flood barriers along the Huai during the 1950s and 60s to control the volume and direction of the river's flow. This print depicts one of the flood barriers that was built in northern Jiangsu province where the Huai River enters Hongze Lake. The Chinese government encouraged artists to portray major engineering and construction projects like this as a way to celebrate the improvements and advances that were made under Communist Party rule.



The Rice is Fragrant in Southern China

Song Xianbang (Chinese, born 1938)

1965

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, *purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints*, 2023.13

After the horrific famine that killed an estimated 30 million people in China between 1960 and 1962, the Chinese government invested heavily in agricultural infrastructure improvements and scientific crop research programs to ensure larger,

more reliable harvests in the future. This 1965 woodcut depicting people working in the fields of a communal farm in southern China reinforces the idea that the government is leading the country toward an era of greater food security. The print's propaganda function is confirmed by the fact that it was published in a June 1965 edition of the *People's Daily* newspaper, which still serves as an official mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party.

Section Three:

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND ITS AFTERMATH

1966—1977

The Cultural Revolution was a political mass movement launched in 1966 by Chairman Mao Zedong as part of his efforts to reclaim political power after the failure of the Great Leap Forward and complete his vision for transforming China into a communist utopia. It was a chaotic, violent period during which millions of people were killed, imprisoned, or sentenced to years of hard-labor “reeducation” in the countryside. Traditional social values and cultural practices were attacked, and numerous historical buildings and artworks were destroyed. The most intense period of the Cultural Revolution lasted from 1966 to 1968, but the political machinations, social turmoil, and economic upheaval continued until Mao’s death in 1976.

As in the early years of the People’s Republic, art was subservient to politics during the Cultural Revolution and was used both to document and to implement the government’s ideological objectives. Printmakers who were fortunate enough to continue making art during the Cultural Revolution often worked in teams under the watchful supervision of Communist Party officials. The range of acceptable styles and subjects narrowed as did the emotional tone of most prints, which were typically either angrily aggressive or cloyingly cheerful. Perhaps the most innovative development in Chinese printmaking during the Cultural Revolution was the widespread use of offset lithography to reproduce millions of prints and other artworks for distribution within China and abroad.



打碎旧世界
创立新世界



上海红卫兵《破四旧》造反大军 1966

Smash the Old World, Create a New World

Chinese

1966

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2022.95

Officially launched by Chairman Mao's Red Guards in August 1966, the campaign to destroy the "Four Olds" was one of the first mass movements of the Cultural Revolution. The "Four Olds" were Old Ideas, Old Culture, Old Customs, and Old Habits. Exactly what was included in each category of "Olds" was never precisely defined, and the campaign was used to attack a broad range of people, places, and things that were deemed antithetical to Mao's vision for transforming the country into a communist utopia. This image of a red guard using a sledgehammer to smash symbols of the "Four Olds" appeared in a number of posters published between 1966 and 1968. The inscription at the bottom of this poster says it was published in 1966 by the "Destroy the Four Olds" Rebel Army of the Shanghai Red Guards.



Chairman Mao Zedong

Chinese

Ca. 1970

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.1481

Artists created thousands of images of Chairman Mao during the Cultural Revolution, turning him into an almost god-like figure. Those images portray Mao in hundreds of different contexts and poses that reflect different episodes in his life as a political and military leader. This woodcut depicts Mao wearing an army cap and greatcoat with his arm raised in a triumphal salute or wave of acknowledgement to his legions of supporters. The smile on his face makes him seem friendly and approachable as befits his status as the “father of his country.” The print is not signed or dated, but similar images of Mao can be found in other prints, paintings, and sculptures dating from the late 1960s to the early 1970s.

Heroes Everywhere

Zhang Chaoyang (Chinese, born 1945)
1972

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-
century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of
Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman,
2021.2.1409

A young woman sits in a field writing in her notebook as a line of workers harvests wheat in the background. She is not identified but is probably one of the millions of urban young people who were sent to work in the countryside as a form of reeducation during the Cultural Revolution. The print's cheerful colors and romantic style cast the scene in a positive light, but the reality of being sent down to the countryside was often traumatic and painful. Forcibly separated from their families, the young people were frequently ill-equipped for lives of hard physical labor in unfamiliar places. Furthermore, the villages and towns to which the youths were sent often did not want them and considered them to be more of a burden than a help.



Emphasizing a Matter of Great Importance

Li Zhongfan (Chinese, born 20th century)
1974

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-
century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of
Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman,
2021.2.699

Numerous mass political campaigns were launched during the later stages of the Cultural Revolution by different factions within the Chinese government that were jockeying for power. One of these was the “Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius” campaign that was initiated by Chairman Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing, in 1973. Lin Biao was a close comrade of Mao who played an important role in the founding of the People’s Republic and in the early stages of the Cultural

Revolution, but who later died in a plane crash after being accused of trying to assassinate Mao. Confucius was an ancient Chinese philosopher and statesman who was often used during the Cultural Revolution as a symbol for the traditional social and cultural values the revolution was meant to destroy. By linking these two figures, the “Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius” campaign sought to undermine attempts by certain senior Communist Party officials to reign in and reverse some aspects of the Cultural Revolution. This 1974 print depicts a party cadre explaining the campaign to a group of peasants and soldiers as they prepare banners and loudspeakers for a public rally. The print thus functions both as a visual document of the “Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius” campaign and as a piece of propaganda art within it.



United Against a Common Enemy

Li Zhongxiang (Chinese, born 1940)

1976/reprinted 1991

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.263

Artist Li Zhongxiang graduated from the Yunnan Academy of Art in 1965 and has spent the remainder of his life living and working primarily in that province. He created this print depicting a Chinese soldier embracing a freshly unshackled Tibetan fighter in 1976. The comradely expressions and heroic postures of the two men suggest that the print could have been made to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Chinese "liberation" of Tibet in 1951. Yunnan borders Tibet and is home to many ethnic Tibetan people whom the Chinese government have long sought to integrate into the People's Republic by emphasizing their shared history and interests with the Han Chinese people.

Home

Li Fan (Chinese, born 20th century)

1977

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.640

The Cultural Revolution ended following the death of Chairman Mao in 1976. Hua Guofeng and the other leaders who succeeded Mao emphasized economic growth as a way to help the nation recover from the chaos of the revolution years. Oil production emerged as an especially important industry in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, and for the first time became a major subject in Chinese visual art. This 1977 print by artist Li Fan depicts a makeshift work camp located at the edge of an oil field. Although the scene appears desolate and dreary, it was probably meant to highlight the gritty determination of the oil workers who were helping their country become wealthy and powerful.



Section Four:

THE OPEN-DOOR PERIOD

1978—1989

The emergence of Deng Xiaoping as leader of the Chinese Communist Party in 1978 heralded a new phase in the history of modern China and modern Chinese printmaking. Although he had excellent revolutionary credentials, Deng was also a pragmatist who realized that China could truly flourish only if it struck a compromise between its utopian ideals and historical realities. His Reform and Open-Door policies allowed the Chinese people to enjoy more social, economic, and cultural freedoms while still maintaining tight government control over politics and the legal system. Deng also oversaw major changes in China's international relationships, permitting more foreign businesses and consumer goods to enter China while simultaneously sending Chinese students abroad and developing the nation's export industries.

For Chinese printmakers, the Open-Door Period was a time of great innovation and experimentation. Artists had greater freedom to explore new styles and subjects and were exposed to new influences from the United States, Europe, and Japan. While woodcuts remained the dominant form of printmaking in China, artists also began to experiment with other techniques including engraving, etching, mezzotint, lithography, and screen printing. Regional printmaking schools and professional associations proliferated during the 1980s, and for the first time in decades mainland Chinese artists began to participate in the global art market. Sadly, the spirit of adventure and optimism that prevailed in Chinese printmaking during Open-Door period was sharply curtailed in 1989 when the Chinese government's crackdown on the Tiananmen Democracy Movement ushered in a new era of political and cultural conservatism.



Winter Morning

Jiang Gufeng (Chinese, 1934-2008)

1979

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.111

Mobility was essential for people who wanted to participate fully in the new, more dynamic economy of the Open-Door Period. Because private cars were expensive in China at that time, most people got around using public transportation or bicycles. This 1979 print depicts a crowd of bicyclists riding down the snowy streets of Changchun in northeastern Jilin province. Today, Changchun is a major hub of China's automobile manufacturing industry.





General Store

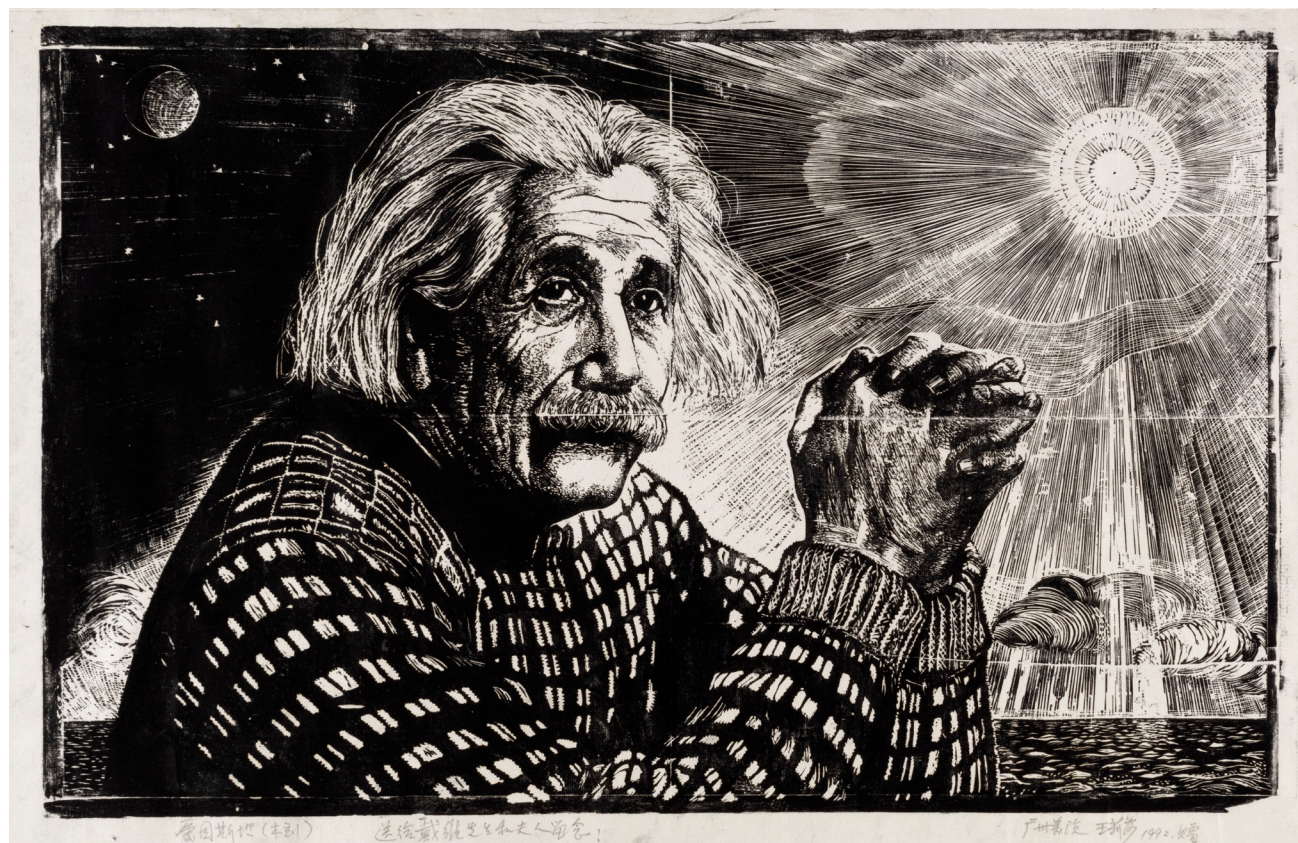
Yang Kaihong (Chinese, born 20th century)
1982

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.433

Small-scale private enterprise flourished in China during the Open-Door Period. Millions of Chinese opened shops, restaurants, and a wide variety of service businesses that competed for customers and profits in the new, less regulated economy.

These businesses were initially concentrated mainly in cities and larger towns, but over the course of the 1980s they spread even to smaller towns and villages throughout the country. This woodcut depicts a young woman pushing a child in a stroller as she gazes at the merchandise of a small clothing shop. The print's style and color palette resemble those of 20th-century Japanese *sosaku hanga* woodcuts, and it is possible that artist Yang Kaihong was influenced by Japanese prints he saw illustrated in foreign-art books and magazines, which became increasingly widely available in China during the 1980s.



Einstein

Wang Lisha (Chinese, born 1934)

1979

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.555

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) was a German-born theoretical physicist who developed the theory of relativity and other important ideas that have been crucial to the advancement of modern physics. During the Cultural Revolution, Chinese government officials criticized Einstein as a symbol of bourgeois, academic, and reactionary ways of thinking. His reputation in China was rehabilitated during the Open-Door Period when he became a symbol of scientific progress and the free pursuit of knowledge. This woodcut is based on a famous 1948 photograph of Einstein by Canadian artist Yousuf Karsh. Wang Lisha created the print in 1979, perhaps inspired by the Democracy Wall Movement that arose in Beijing at the same time and called for greater political and intellectual freedom in China. The Democracy Wall Movement was suppressed by the Chinese government in late 1979, but interest in science and freedom of thought persisted in China throughout the 1980s and 90s.



春水

张朝阳 1983

Spring Water

Zhang Chaoyang (Chinese, born 1945)

1983

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.88

Chinese artists experimented with a wide range of styles and printmaking techniques during the 1980s. This image of a woman adjusting her hair as she gazes at a reflection of the moon on the surface of a wintry lake is a good example of the Romantic Realist style. Romantic Realist paintings and prints typically feature sensuous, softly-lit images of women caught in moments of private contemplation. The mild eroticism of Romantic Realism challenged both traditional Confucian and modern Communist social values, and expanded the boundaries of what was considered acceptable in Chinese art during the Open-Door Period.

In a Distant Place

Xu Kuang (Chinese, born 1938)

1986

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.258

As a young man, artist Xu Kuang studied at the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing where he received a thorough grounding in the Socialist Realist style. In 1958, he was sent by the government to Chongqing in Sichuan province where he joined a group of woodcut artists who were known for creating evocative images of local people and places. Xu became interested in Sichuan's numerous ethnic minorities and soon began portraying them in his prints. This woodcut depicts a young Tibetan man on horseback. It is done in the almost photographic, Hyper-Realist style that became popular in China during the 1980s. Unlike Socialist Realism which glamorizes its subjects for ideological purposes, Hyper-Realism aims to portray subjects with an almost scientific objectivity that emphasizes aesthetics over politics.





Autumn

Shen Minyi (Chinese, born 1941)

1984

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.267

During the Cultural Revolution, Chinese artists often used sunflowers as symbols of the Chinese people, standing tall and always turning to face the metaphorical sunlight of their leader, Chairman Mao Zedong. This 1984 print, by contrast, depicts a patch of sunflowers with ragged leaves and heads that are bowed by the weight of the seeds they contain. The symbolic connotations of these sunflowers—fertility and abundance—are still positive, but they lack the overtly political significance of the earlier images and are meant to be appreciated instead for their aesthetic qualities. The print's distorted perspective and saturated colors are reminiscent of European Expressionist art and reflect the desire felt by many Chinese artists of the time to escape the limitations of primarily realistic styles.

Freedom Moat

Xu Bing (Chinese, born 1955)

1985

Lithograph and silkscreen

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.972

Woodcuts remained the dominant printmaking technique in China during the Open-Door Period, but many print artists also experimented with other techniques, including etching, engraving, mezzotint, lithography, and screen printing. This print by artist Xu Bing was made using a combination of lithography and silkscreen techniques. After being sent to work in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, Xu was admitted in 1977 to the printmaking program of the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing. He graduated from the Central Academy with a Bachelor's degree in printmaking in 1981 and a Master's degree in 1987. In 1985, the year this print was made, Xu participated in the New Wave Movement of artists who explored non-traditional art materials, techniques, and subjects. The print belongs to a series titled *Youth and the Forbidden City* and depicts a group of young people in bright clothing ice skating on a frozen moat near the outskirts of the Forbidden City, the former residence of China's imperial family. The contrast between the gray, rigid buildings and the colorful, dynamic skaters symbolically represents the tensions that existed in mid-1980s China between the conservative political and social values of the older generation and the progressive values of the country's younger, more avant-garde generation.





Beautiful Autumn at Wusu

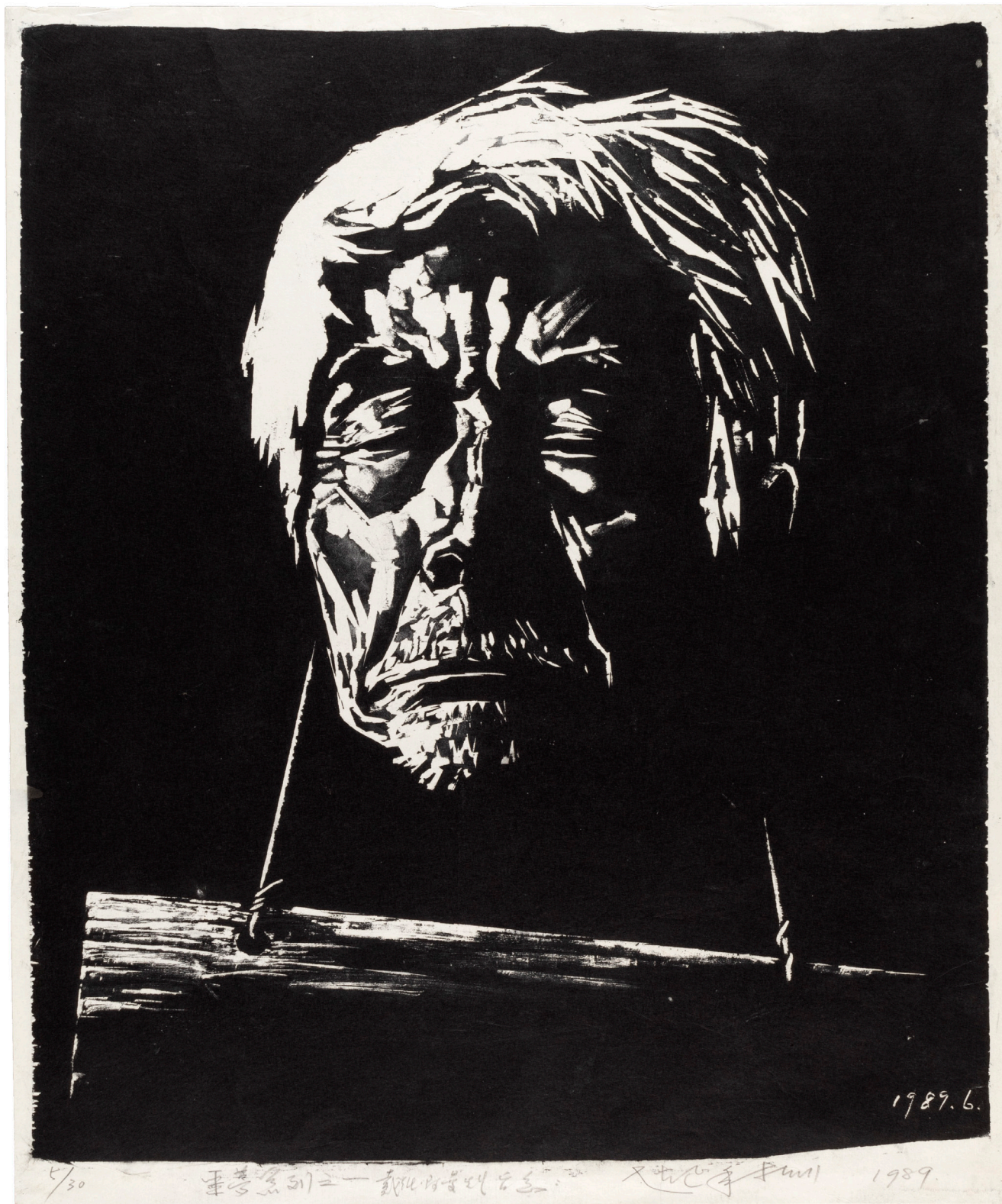
Hao Boyi (Chinese, born 1938)

1987

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.1184

Although Beijing and Shanghai were the primary centers for avant-garde art in China during the 1980s, the interest in experimentation and innovation was shared by artists in many other regions of the country as well. Artist Hao Boyi belongs to the Beidahuang (Great Northern Wasteland) School of printmakers that has flourished in Heilongjiang province since the late 1950s. In this highly stylized, nearly abstract 1987 woodcut, Hao depicts a single boat sailing on a river beneath a stony bluff. He has used the natural grain of the printing blocks to convey the textures of the rocks and water, and by carefully controlling the color values he creates the illusion of two distinct spatial planes. The name Wusu in the title of the print refers to a town located near the Chinese-Russian border at the confluence of the Wusuli and Heilongjiang Rivers.



Nightmare

Zhao Yannian (Chinese, 1924-2014)

1989

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.712

The head of an older man with a pained expression on his face and a wooden signboard hanging around his neck floats in an undefined dark space. For many mainland Chinese people, this image immediately recalls the numerous political persecution campaigns of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s when wealthy landowners, business people, intellectuals, and others deemed enemies of the state were arrested and subjected to harsh public punishments. Artist Zhao Yannian—who lived through those tumultuous decades—created this woodcut in June 1989, shortly after the suppression of the Tiananmen Democracy Movement. It reflects the bitter disappointment felt by many people in China at the time and their fear that the country would be once again plunged into a nightmare of political violence and economic chaos.

Section Five:

SEEKING BALANCE

1990—2001

On June 4th 1989, the Chinese government sent military forces into Beijing's Tiananmen Square to crush the center of a popular nationwide pro-democracy, anti-corruption protest movement. Following the suppression of the Tiananmen Movement, China's leaders recalibrated many of their domestic and foreign policies, seeking to find a new balance between political control, economic growth, and social stability. Culturally, China became more conservative during the 1990s with many artists looking inward rather than outward for inspiration and ideas. Although there was a small, underground avant-garde art movement within China that continued to push the boundaries of political acceptability, most Chinese artists either stuck to safer themes or moved overseas to find full creative freedom.

There were not many technical or stylistic differences between Chinese prints of the 1980s and 1990s, but there were notable differences in content and tone. Faced with greater scrutiny from government censors, Chinese print artists in the 1990s focused more on the formal and aesthetic qualities of their work. Their images often contain historical references and reflect an interest in philosophical and even spiritual issues. Some of the differences between Chinese prints of the 1980s and 90s may also be attributable to market forces. As government funding for the arts decreased in the wake of the Tiananmen Movement, many printmakers—and many artists generally—had to adapt their work to suit the demands of the commercial art market both within China and overseas.





The First Movement (A)

Fan Chuiyu (Chinese, born 1944)

1990

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.264

For years after the suppression of the Tiananmen Democracy Movement, Chinese government watchdogs were on alert for anything that was critical of the nation's political leaders and policies. This meant that artists—especially those who worked for government-funded academic institutions and cultural organizations—had to be careful about the subjects they portrayed and the styles they used. This image of a worker laboring at an industrial site was a safe subject for that time, although the Cubist-influenced style gives it a decidedly avant-garde edge. The print was created in 1990 by Fan Chuiyu who, before becoming an artist, worked in the Daqing oil fields in Heilongjiang province. Fan produced other similar images of workers in the late 1980s and early 90s, but the fact that the figure here seems to be entangled by the dense lines of the composition makes it difficult not to interpret this print as a reflection of the fear and paranoia felt by many Chinese people in the post-Tiananmen period.

Ancient Chinese Culture Series, Number 30

Liu Shuohai (Chinese, born 1955)

1991

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.653

One consequence of the conservative atmosphere that existed in China during the 1990s was a renewed interest in the country's early history. This print by Tianjin artist Liu Shuohai depicts an arrangement of oracle bones set against a background of almost Zen-like simplicity. Oracle bones are fragments of ox bones and turtle shells that were used in ancient Chinese culture for divination purposes. They are often inscribed with texts written in early forms of Chinese characters that explain the purposes of the divination rituals and their outcomes. Oracle bones have been recovered from ancient archaeological sites in China for centuries, but it was not until the 20th century that scholars fully recognized their significance for understanding the origins of Chinese civilization.



Steel Summits

Wang Shenghong (Chinese, born 1957)
1992

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.369

This print depicting workers constructing a massive steel-hulled ship in a riverside dockyard presents a modern subject in a traditional way. Many elements of the image are borrowed from classical Chinese landscape painting, including the elevated perspective, the diagonal composition, the repetition of shapes to build up forms, and the alternating juxtaposition of horizontal and vertical planes. Artist Wang Shenghong lives and works in the coastal city of Tianjin, which has been an important center of shipbuilding and other maritime activity in China since the 19th century.



The Dream of the Butterfly

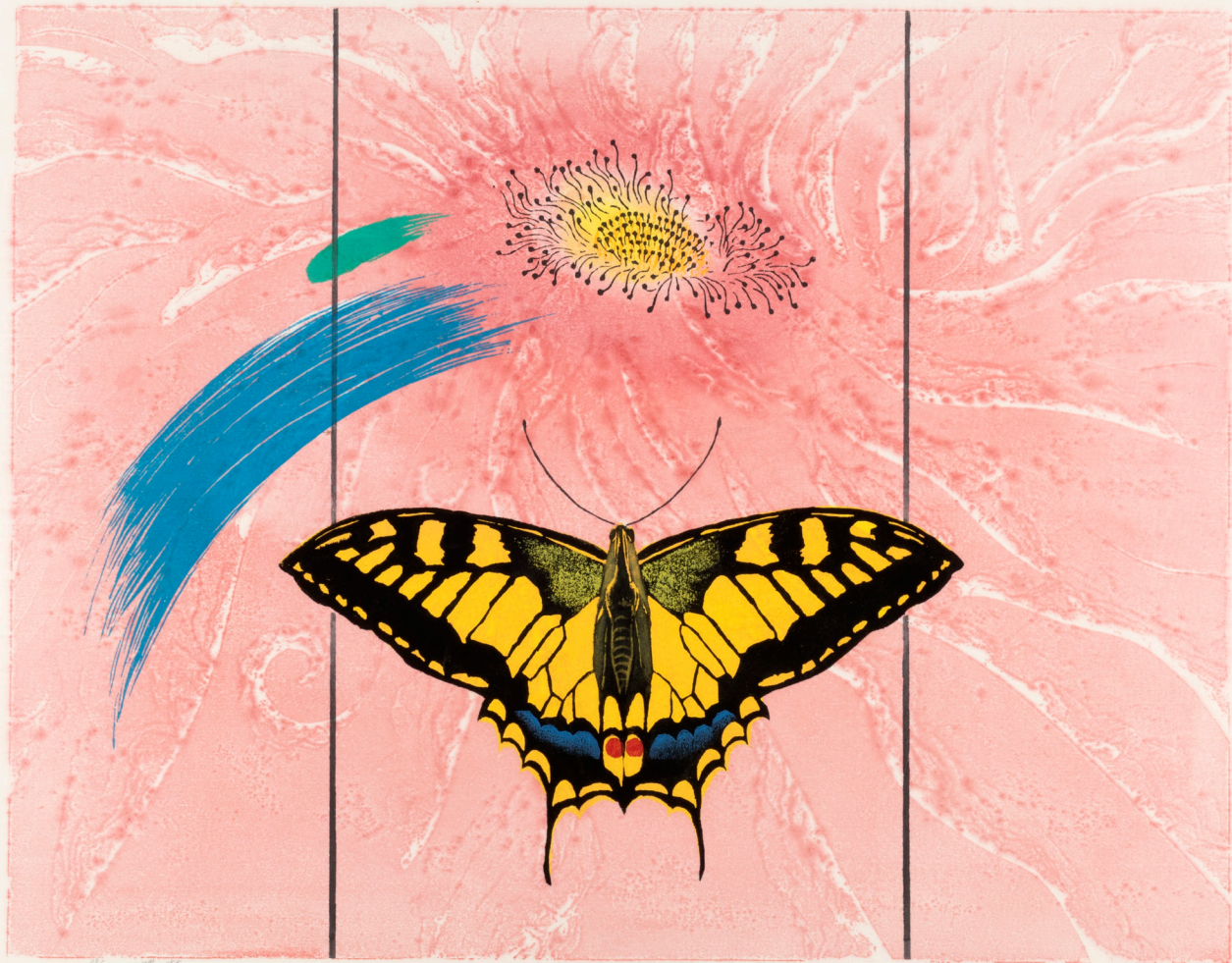
Shao Mingjiang (Chinese, born 1956)

1993

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.1100

The *Zhuangzi*, an ancient Daoist philosophical text, includes a story about a man who falls asleep and dreams he is a butterfly. When he awakens, he questions whether he is a man who dreamed about being a butterfly, or a butterfly who is dreaming about being a man. The *Zhuangzi* story has long been used in China to support philosophical arguments about the malleability of existence and ambiguous nature of reality and illusion. Such arguments gained renewed relevance in the rapidly changing social environment of 1990s China as the government sought to balance the contradictions that arose from maintaining a one-party socialist political system while simultaneously allowing the development of a free-market capitalist economy.



Boat Reflected on a Bright Lake

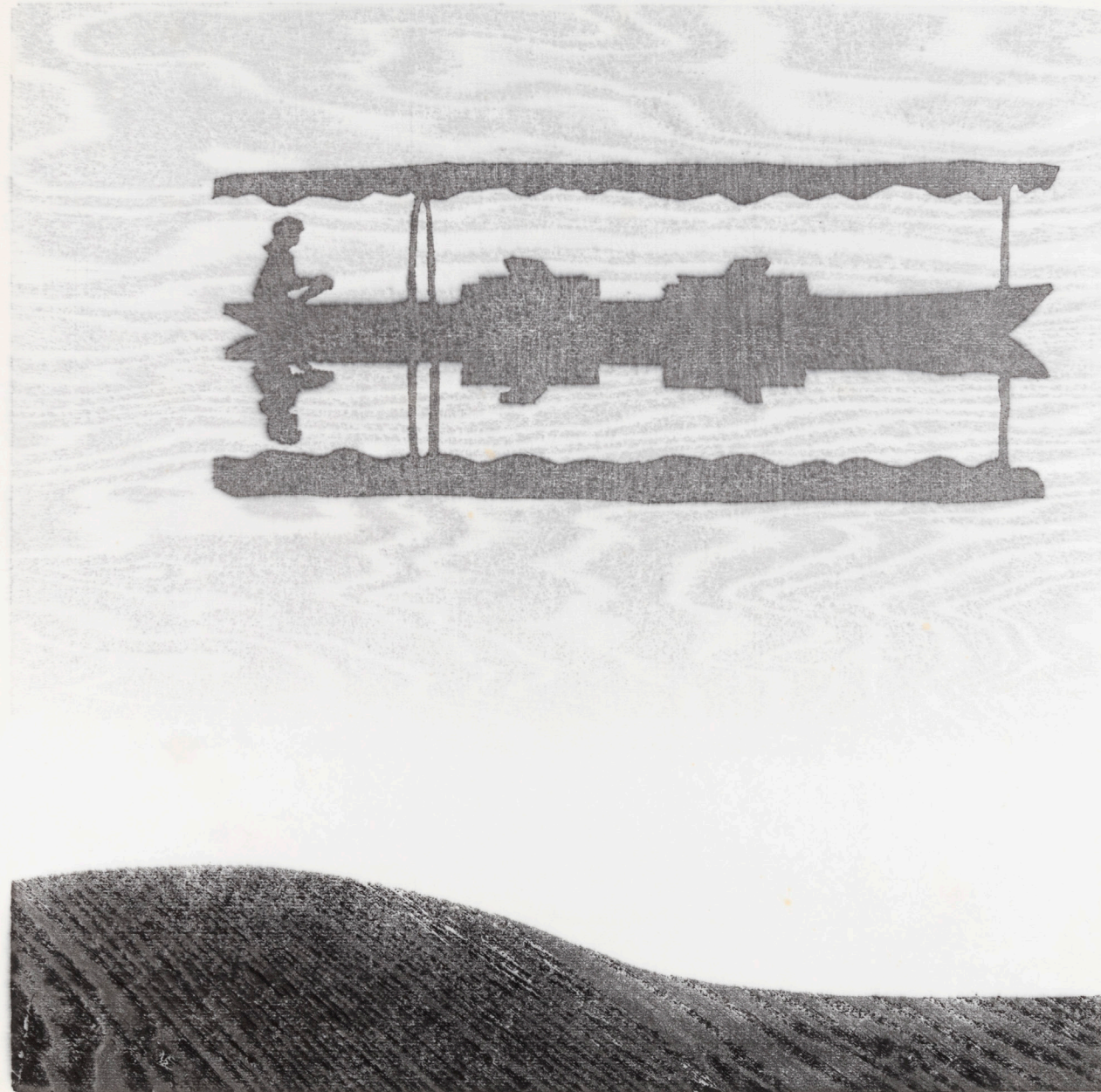
Li Yitai (Chinese, born 1944)

Ca. 2000

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2023.4.1

A canopied boat rowed by a single oarsman is reflected in the silvery water of a calm lake. Such lyricism was embraced by many Chinese woodcut artists in the 1990s as an antidote to the country's relentless focus on politics and economics. Li Yitai came of age as an artist during the Cultural Revolution. After years of producing primarily political propaganda art, Li switched in the 1980s to creating art that was more evocative and focused on aesthetic concerns.



12/150 湖光舟影

李以泰

Harvest Season

Chen Nan (Chinese, born 20th century)

1996

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2023.12

Waste-block prints are woodcuts that are printed using only a single woodblock, which is re-cut multiple times during the printing process to create different elements of the design. Because the woodblock is destroyed by the successive stages of re-cutting, only one edition is possible for any waste-block print. The choppy, ragged style of this 1996 waste-block print by artist Chen Nan is typical of works associated with the Yunnan school of printmaking. The print's subject—a woman standing in a field surrounded by symbols of the natural world's abundance and fecundity—is conventional, but its style is unconventional and seems to undermine its expected meaning. Instead of celebrating the prosperity of the nation under the current Communist government, the scratched and battered-looking figure in this print suggests that not all is well for ordinary Chinese people living in the countryside.



9/12 丰收时节 30 x 30 cm 套色木刻 陈楠 1996·版纳



He Weimin (Chinese, born 1964)
1999
Woodcut

Small Group Life

He Weimin (Chinese, born 1964)

1999

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.1405

Large numbers of people in China moved from rural areas to cities during the 1990s in search of better jobs, better education, better health care, and an overall better standard of living. To limit the scale of this internal migration, the Chinese government restricted access to housing and other services for people who had not been given official permission to move. Nevertheless, many people moved anyway, relying on family and friends to help them make new lives in the cities. This process of urbanization is reflected in multiple prints created by artist He Weimin during the 1990s and early 2000s. As in this image of two people lying on the floor of a small city apartment, He's images often feature densely patterned, black and white designs that require concentrated looking in order to fully comprehend.

Section Six:

THE RISE OF GLOBAL CHINA

2002—PRESENT

China's admission to the World Trade Organization (WTO) at the very end of 2001 set the stage for the nation's emergence as a true global superpower. Its preeminent international status was confirmed by the highly successful Beijing Olympic games in 2008, and by the 2013 launch of the Belt and Road Initiative that provides physical infrastructure ties between China and countries across Asia and around the world. Over the past two decades, China has surmounted many of the problems that historically held it back, and it is now a strong, confident nation that fully expects to be a dominant world force for the remainder of the 21st century and beyond.

The rise of China as a global power has had a positive impact on modern Chinese printmaking. The cultural conservatism of the 1990s has been replaced by a renewed interest in artistic innovation and experimentation. There is unprecedented cross-fertilization between printmaking and other arts such as painting, sculpture, and photography. Chinese printmakers today are more connected than ever before to international printmaking trends and markets, and their works show higher levels of technical, aesthetic, and intellectual sophistication. After more than ninety years of development, modern Chinese printmaking has reached a mature stage that reflects the strength and confidence of the Chinese nation as a whole.





Sunrise

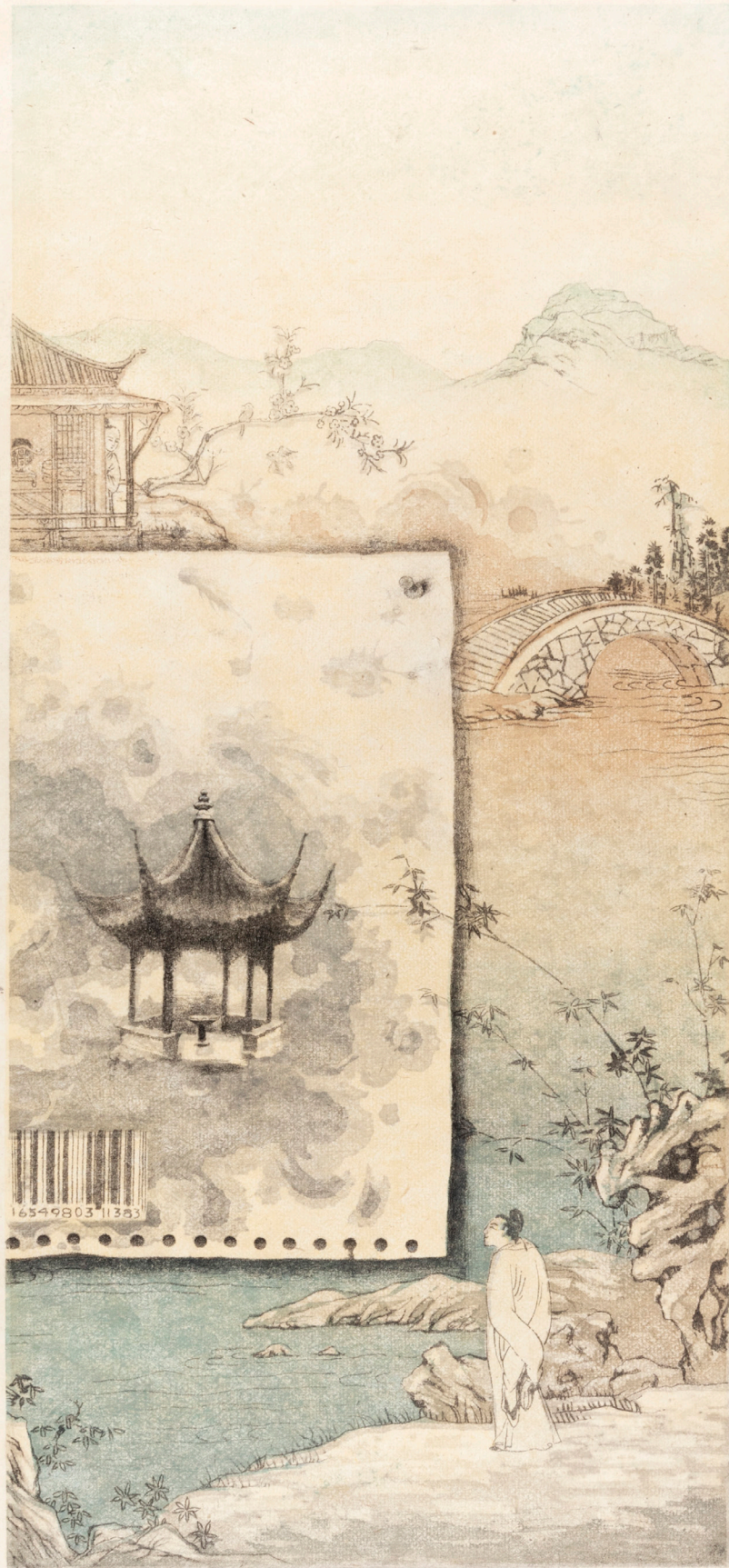
Zhang Hongxun (Chinese, born 1957)

2004

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, The Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints: Given in Loving Memory of Huang Dong Ihrman and Donald and Lynne Ihrman, 2021.2.1524

Since the 1950s, Chinese artists in a variety of genres have used the sunrise as a metaphor for the successful rule of the Chinese Communist Party and the benefits it provides to the nation's citizens. This 2004 image by Heilongjiang-based artist Zhang Hongxun continues that tradition, portraying a red sun casting its early morning rays across a lush, densely textured landscape filled with people, animals, birds, and various types of plants. The scene looks like some kind of mythical paradise and conveys a sense of the tremendous prosperity and power that China has come to enjoy in the WTO era.



9/15 游园惊梦 2010

Peony Pavilion

Gu Zhijun (Chinese, born 1961)

2010

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2023.4.2

Artist Gu Zhijun is a leading figure in the contemporary Suzhou school of printmaking. His prints often combine historical and modern references to comment on the persistence and strength of traditional Chinese culture, but also its susceptibility to change in the face of commercialization and globalization. The title of this print refers to a famous 16th-century play about a beautiful young woman whose dreams about a love affair with a handsome scholar miraculously become reality. The uncertainty about what is real and what is illusion in the play—and perhaps by extension in Chinese society and culture more broadly—is highlighted in the print by having the pavilion appear to be a separate drawing that has been pinned onto the composition, covering some other element that we cannot see.



Autumn in the Mountains

He Kun (Chinese, born 1962)
2014
Woodcut

Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2023.7.1

This dynamic, almost frenetic image of farmers working their fields in an autumnal mountain landscape was made using the waste-block technique, in which a single woodblock is carved

and printed in successive stages from light to dark colors to create the final composition. Yunnan-based artist He Kun ranks among the leading practitioners of the waste-block technique in China, and often uses it to achieve bold, expressionistic visual effects. Here, he brilliantly undermines the familiar tropes of traditional Chinese landscape art by taking a scene that we expect to be beautiful and serene and making it seem harsh and unstable.



8/10 2015 李磊

A Lotus in the Mouth

Liao Lei (Chinese, born 1989)

2014

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2023.23.4

Traditional Chinese Buddhist art sometimes depicts deities and sages with blossoming lotuses emanating from their mouths as a sign of their sanctity and purity. This image of a figure blowing a stream of cigarette smoke into the air subverts that convention, making the flower-form cloud of smoke a symbol of vice rather than virtue. Artist Liao Lei studied printmaking at the Guangxi Academy of Arts, earning a Bachelor's degree in 2008 and a Master's degree in 2015. His distinctive mosaic-like woodcuts combine elements of Expressionism and Pop Art to offer postmodern commentaries on contemporary Chinese society and culture.



Untitled

Jiao Wensi (Chinese, born 1991)

2015

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2023.23.3

From a distance, this print by artist Jiao Wensi looks like an abstract design composed of overlapping shapes and lines. Closer inspection, however, reveals that some of the shapes are images of hands held in various gestural poses. Hands are one of the most expressive parts of the human body and are often used to help communicate, sometimes even in place of language. But here the meanings of the hand gestures are jumbled and unclear, making the image a trenchant metaphor for the difficulty of communicating in an era of information overload.



left:

Untitled

Fang Lijun (Chinese, born 1963)

2017

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2023.8

Trained as a painter and printmaker at the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing, artist Fang Liun was a leading figure in the Cynical Realist Movement that first emerged in the early 1990s to critique the injustices and absurdities of China's political and social structures in the post-Tiananmen period. He is perhaps most famous for his images of bald-headed figures who often appear to be caught in awkward moments of action or contemplation. This small 2017 woodcut belongs to a series of figure studies that portray heads and faces from different angles and with different expressions. The bold colors capture the effects of light and shadow on the figure's face, but also suggest the hidden presence of strong emotions and feelings within him.

right:

Theater Landscape—Waterfall in a Bowl

Cao Ou (Chinese, born 1987)

2019

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2023.7.2

Penjing is the traditional Chinese art of using miniature trees, rocks, and plants to create landscape arrangements in ceramic, metal, or wooden containers. This playful reference to *penjing* features faceted, geometric landscape forms that look as if they were inspired by an early video game. Hangzhou-based artist Cao Ou created the print using multiple woodblocks, one for each color. Ensuring that each block aligns properly with the others in the overall design requires great skill and patience, and it sometimes takes Cao an entire month to complete a single print edition.





Clippity Clop

Guo Shuang (Chinese, born 1990)

2020

Woodcut

Hope College Collection, purchased for the Ihrman Collection of 20th-century Chinese Prints, 2023.7.3

There is a long tradition in Chinese art of using horses as symbols for the Chinese people or the Chinese nation. Artist Guo Shuang has explained that she created this print during the Covid-19 pandemic when, like many people, her social life and work life were greatly restricted by government-mandated lockdown measures. In her mind, the herd of horses in this fantastical mountain landscape represents the instinctive desire of people to be together and to enjoy harmonious relationships with each other and with the natural world.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Kruizenga Art Museum is to educate, engage and inspire the students, faculty, staff and alumni of Hope College, as well as the broader communities of Holland and West Michigan. By presenting art from a wide range of cultures and historical periods, the museum fosters the qualities of empathy, tolerance and understanding that are essential components of Hope College's mission to provide an outstanding Christian liberal arts education while preparing students for lives of leadership and service in a global society.





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