



The Artistic Language of Black and White Woodcut Prints: Representing Sichuan Ethnic Minorities

Jiangyu Ou^{1*} and Pisit Puntien²

Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand

^{1*}Corresponding E-mail: s64584948046@ssru.ac.th, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9077-6286>

²E-mail: pisit.pu@ssru.ac.th, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4495-9147>

Received 18/02/2025

Revised 27/02/2025

Accepted 27/03/2025

Abstract

Background and Aim: Sichuan minority subject prints have evolved in the course of history, with diversified development in the choice of subject matter and the styles and techniques presented in the works. By investigating how the artistic techniques of Sichuan minority subject prints reflect and convey cultural identity, this study provides a source of inspiration for contemporary Chinese printmaking art and promotes the innovation of ethnic art.

Materials and Methods: This study adopts a mixed research method, with qualitative research as the main focus and quantitative research as a supplement. In the qualitative research, methods such as literature review, field survey, and creative practice are used to explore the creative history of Sichuan minority printmaking. In the quantitative research, the researchers use content analysis to explore the significance of their woodcut works as a guide to the creation of contemporary printmaking art.

Results: The results of the study show that through artistic practice, the unique artistic techniques of Sichuan minority printmaking, such as knife language, black and white composition, and imprint expression, are studied to further reveal the uniqueness of printmaking in artistic expression, and to demonstrate the beauty and significance of the thematic prints of the Sichuan minority.

Conclusion: This study contributes to promoting awareness and understanding of ethnic cultures, reveals the internal logic in the creation of prints by ethnic minorities in Sichuan, and provides insights and inspiration for the creation of contemporary printmaking art in China. It also influences cultural policy, emphasizing the importance of supporting and funding the arts, and protecting and promoting ethnic minority culture and arts.

Keywords: Ethnicity; Minority Printmaking; Creative Practice

Introduction

China is a multi-ethnic country, and in artistic creation, paintings expressing the spirit of national culture have always been one of the themes that artists are keen on. The core significance of ethnic themes as the content of paintings is to excavate the ethnic cultural phenomena and spiritual civilization, so that the viewers can feel the unique cultural personality and spiritual outlook of the ethnic groups (Fei, 2017). The character traits, aesthetic orientation, and cultural connotation of an ethnic group are closely related to the geographical environment in which it is located. Sichuan is located in the southwest of China, where Tibetans, Qiangs, Yi, and other minorities are mainly distributed, and there are Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, and Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. These ethnic groups have been living on the plateau in western, northwestern, and southwestern Sichuan for generations, surrounded by mountains, and have long been in a self-sufficient social state, forming a unique ethnic appearance, character traits, and cultural system in the course of history. Therefore, the minority cultures represented by the Tibetans, Qiangs, and Yi have occupied an important position in Sichuan's cultural history and have become common themes in Sichuan painting art. Artists vividly and accurately depict the life, emotions, character traits, and the bold and unrestrained inner world of the minorities through their paintbrushes.

Objectives

To create the artistic styles and aesthetic appeal of woodblock print creation by focusing on the cultural life of Sichuan's ethnic minorities, and to enrich the application of ethnic minority-themed woodblock prints in promoting cultural dissemination and art education.



Literature review

Critical Review of Literature

The study of ethnic representation in printmaking intersects with several key theoretical frameworks, including cultural identity theory, visual semiotics, and the socio-historical approach to ethnic art (Coetzee & Fighting, 2002). The existing literature provides valuable insights into the artistic and technical evolution of Sichuan ethnic-themed woodcut prints. However, significant gaps remain in understanding how these prints negotiate the tensions between tradition and modernity, local and global artistic influences, and the evolving expectations of contemporary audiences.

Theoretical Foundations and Challenges in Ethnic-Themed Printmaking

The discourse on ethnic artistic forms often revolves around Stuart Hall's cultural identity theory, which posits that identity is not fixed but rather continuously reconstructed through cultural expressions. In the context of Sichuan's ethnic-themed printmaking, this framework suggests that artworks are not merely static representations of minority groups but active negotiations of identity in response to socio-political and aesthetic shifts (Zhenchao & Fauzi, 2024).

The findings from a study by Wang (1998) with *"Winds and Clouds of the Artistic Sea - Memoirs of Wang Qi"* remarked that the development of new national art forms should be rooted in the ancient folk tradition of woodcutting, while incorporating contemporary themes. This perspective aligns with the broader debate in ethnic art scholarship regarding the balance between cultural preservation and artistic innovation. However, Wang's work primarily focuses on technical adaptations rather than the ideological implications of ethnic representation in printmaking. In addition, his assertion that modern ethnic printmaking must "reduce Western influences" is also contentious, as contemporary scholars highlight the fluidity of cultural exchange rather than a rigid dichotomy between "Western" and "Chinese art" (Lü, 2012).

Historical Perspectives on Sichuan Printmaking

The finding from a study by Ling & Ling (1992) with *"History of emerging printmaking in Sichuan"* shows that a comprehensive study of Sichuan's modern printmaking, detailing its historical trajectory from its emergence to its periods of flourishing and decline. The book provides valuable documentation of the growth of ethnic-themed printmaking and the increasing participation of minority artists. However, it primarily presents a chronological narrative rather than engaging in critical discourse on how ethnic representation in Sichuan printmaking intersects with broader themes of identity politics, cultural commodification, and regional artistic autonomy.

In addition, the book does not adequately address how Sichuan printmaking has responded to state policies regarding the artistic representation of ethnic minorities. State-dominated representations of minorities in Chinese art tend to exoticize and homogenize national culture, and a critical analysis of how Sichuan printmakers navigated these representational politics would take the discussion beyond a purely historical framework (Long, 2022).

Techniques and Pedagogical Approaches in Ethnic-Themed Printmaking

Gan (2009) shows *"Ethnic-Themed Printmaking Creation,"* which is a valuable instructional text that compiles decades of ethnic-themed printmaking practices, categorizing techniques, and analyzing exemplary works. While this book offers a systematic approach to technical execution, it does not engage deeply with the cultural or theoretical implications of these artistic choices (Li, 2015).

One of the key gaps in Gan's work is the absence of discussion on the reception of ethnic-themed printmaking among ethnic communities themselves. Future research should investigate whether ethnic minorities in Sichuan see these prints as authentic representations of their culture or as external artistic interpretations shaped by mainstream artistic trends (Song, 2007).

Gaps in the Literature and Contribution of the Current Study

While the existing literature provides a strong foundation for understanding the history and techniques of Sichuan ethnic-themed printmaking, several gaps remain: 1. Lack of critical engagement with identity politics – Most studies document ethnic-themed printmaking without interrogating how these representations contribute to or challenge dominant narratives about ethnic minorities in

China.2.Insufficient analysis of audience reception – Little research has been conducted on how both Han and ethnic minority audiences perceive these works, particularly in the context of contemporary cultural discourse.3.Limited discussion on global influences and artistic hybridity – While some scholars emphasize the need to "resist Western influence" in ethnic printmaking, a more nuanced discussion of how international artistic trends interact with local traditions is needed.

This study aims to address these gaps by critically examining the artistic language of black and white woodcut prints in representing Sichuan's ethnic minorities. By integrating cultural identity theory, visual semiotics, and audience reception analysis, this research will provide a deeper understanding of how ethnic-themed printmaking functions as both an aesthetic practice and a site of cultural negotiation.

Conceptual Framework

This study on the artistic language of black and white woodcut prints representing Sichuan ethnic minorities is grounded in interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives that bridge ethnic representation, printmaking aesthetics, and visual semiotics. By integrating theories of ethnic representation, printmaking aesthetics, and visual semiotics, the study offers a structured approach to analyzing how Sichuan printmakers navigate tradition and modernity in their artistic depictions of ethnic minorities.

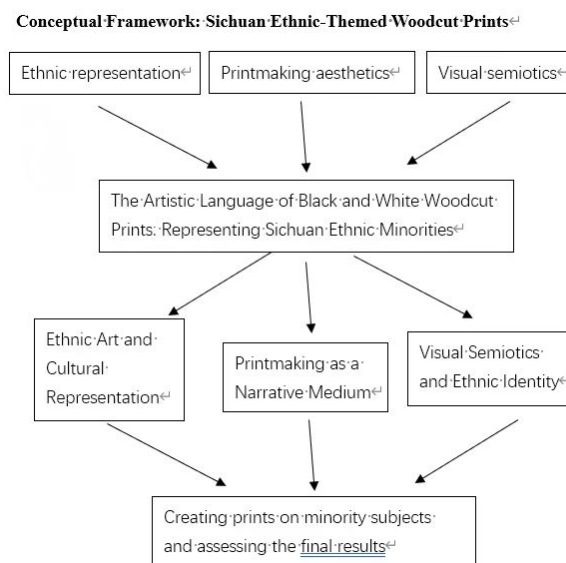


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework
Source: Author (2025)

Methodology

The research methodology used by the researcher in this article is as follows:

1. Research Design

This study adopts qualitative research as the main method and quantitative research as the supplementary method, through the author's creative practice, to systematically explore the means and methods of creation of Sichuan minority prints. Step 1: Through literature review, the researcher collects, reads, and organizes the works and related literature on printmaking of minority subjects in Sichuan. Detailed reading of historical books such as the history of modern Chinese printmaking written by Mr. Li Yunjing, Mr. Fan Meng, and Mr. Qi Fengge to sort out the development of Sichuan minority printmaking. Step 2: The researcher employs methods such as content analysis and thematic analysis to conduct in-depth interpretation and analysis of the collected relevant materials, focusing on selecting representative Sichuan printmaking artists or artworks, and conducting in-depth research on the creative practices and applications of Sichuan minority printmaking during these periods, as well as the representative works of different types

of prints. Step 3: The researcher adopts the in-depth interview method to conduct in-depth interviews with five experts and scholars of Sichuan minority printmaking and seven representatives of ethnic minorities to collect their suggestions on the creation of Sichuan minority printmaking. The researcher will understand their creative stories in the creation of prints with minority subjects and analyze them in depth. Step 4: The researcher will carry out the creation of prints with the theme of ethnic minorities, complete the creation of prints with the theme of characters with ethnic minorities, express the revelation gained from the research in his/her creation, and add his/her innovative way of expression to express his/her understanding and feelings about the painting of this theme. Step 5: Summarize the final results, analyze the collected information, organize the research results, and write a report. The report will be based on the relationship between the thesis and the Chinese art trend, the cultural connotation of the theme, and the art ontology and language elaborated in the thesis. These results will be fed back to the authorities of the cultural industry and the relevant practitioners of cultural quality education, providing reference and enlightenment for their art creation and innovation work.

2. Research Objects and Samples

The scope of this study will cover the current status of creation, history of development, representative artists, excellent prints, and other contents related to printmaking art of the ethnic minorities in Sichuan. To conduct a better investigation, the researcher will select five famous printmaking artists in Sichuan Province, seven ethnic minorities, and 300 random art viewers. Through literature research and in-depth interviews, the researcher studies and understands the current situation and development history of the creation of prints on the subject of ethnic minorities in Sichuan and reveals the internal logic in the creation of prints by ethnic minorities in Sichuan, to provide insights and inspirations for the creation and innovation of contemporary printmaking art in China. This research fulfills the need for a systematic study of Sichuan minority subject matter prints, aiming to protect national cultural heritage, stimulate artistic innovation, and promote cultural dissemination and education.

3. Research tools

The research tools include interview forms and questionnaires. (1) Interview Form: In July 2024, famous printmaking artists and representatives of ethnic minorities in Sichuan Province were contacted and interviewed according to the pre-established interview outline. The experts expressed their views on the creative practice of ethnic printmaking and agreed on the need for a systematic study of printmaking on ethnic minority subjects in Sichuan, aiming to protect the ethnic cultural heritage, stimulate artistic innovation, and promote cultural dissemination and education. (2) Questionnaires: From November 2024 to February 2025, the researcher distributed 300 questionnaires to the art audience, all of which were collected, with a recovery rate of 100%. These samples were chosen to understand the audience's satisfaction with the creation of ethnic prints from the art audience's point of view.

4. Data collection

Through in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and creative practices, the researchers learned that the study emphasized the importance of ethnic minority-themed printmaking in promoting cultural awareness and understanding. Exhibitions and educational programs based on this research help to bridge the cultural divide and promote greater understanding of the diversity of ethnic communities in Sichuan. By focusing on the rich artistic traditions of Sichuan's ethnic minorities, this research contributes to a more inclusive presentation of traditional Chinese culture both nationally and internationally.

5. Data analysis

Qualitative analysis: content analysis was used to provide an in-depth summary and analysis of the basic information of the respondents, the motivation of ethnic printmaking by experienced people, the inheritance and promotion of ethnic printmaking, the understanding of ethnic culture, and art and culture. Quantitative analysis: data were analyzed using statistical tools to explore the satisfaction of art audiences with the creative practice of ethnic printmaking.

6. Research framework



By constructing a conceptual framework for the creative practice of ethnic printmaking, the key variables of the study and their relationships have been clarified, providing a clear theoretical foundation and guidance for the subsequent research design, data collection, and analysis. This framework not only helps to reveal the internal logic of the creation of prints on ethnic minority subjects in Sichuan, but also promotes the further development and application of the field.

Results

1. Selection of plate type

Prints are categorized into four different types: concave, convex, flat, and omitted, and common media include copper plate, woodblock, lithograph, and silk screen (Zhang, 2023). In the creation of ethnic prints, the author chose black-and-white woodcut as the mode of expression, mainly based on the following two considerations: firstly, the author hopes to highlight the characteristics of the characters through the high-purity black-and-white contrast, and therefore prefers black-and-white woodcuts in the choice of plate types to achieve the ideal visual effect. Secondly, compared to other types of plates, black and white woodcuts are more capable of showing definite artistic effects. As it is a secondary painting, the final effect of each printing can only be revealed when the paper is uncovered. At the same time, changes in climatic conditions, such as fluctuations in temperature and humidity, will have a certain impact on the picture and bring about unexpected visual changes. Whether it is the use of knife skills or the adjustment of color and texture on the paper, it may create surprising artistic effects, making the creative process full of expectations. Therefore, the author finally decided to use black and white woodcut to present the work to fully utilize its unique expressive power.

2. Creative Conceptualization

The work created by an artist is like a mirror, which can reflect his/her deep inner world, and also express and convey it to their admirers. As Lev Tolstoy said, “Art is a link of emotions”. It connects the author and his recipient uniquely and specially. The creation of this national printmaking is based on the author's nostalgia, centered on the theme of national characters. I want to show the characters happy and beautiful, serene and peaceful picture to create. In terms of the size of the work, I choose to present the work in the form of a single frame, making it more thematic, intuitive, and expressive. In terms of the content of the work, it is presented through the heads of two ethnic minorities to present an overall picture.

3. The Language of Art

Herbert claimed that “Art” is a kind of ambiguous thing formed by people in the process of searching for life (Herbert, 2021). Moreover, people usually pursue a state of harmony or a balanced form, which makes a certain order necessarily exist in artworks (Qi, 1997). When we create art and appreciate art, the subject itself will produce certain associations, and it is only a reflection of the illusory harmony of man himself. It can be seen that works of art should follow a certain order. Through the study of the creations of artists such as Li Shaoyan, Li Huanmin, and Xu Kuang and the excavation of my own emotions, the author has gained deep insights, and he has continued to explore new visual fields in his creations, searching for his artistic language (Li, 2017).

4. Creativity Production Procedures

The production procedure of ethnic prints has strong operability; only by mastering the standardized operation steps and accurately applying the production techniques can we lay a solid foundation in the creation of woodcut prints.

Table 1 Example of a printmaking program

No.	Step
1	Prepare the board
2	Conceptualizing and organizing sketches
3	Color and wax the prints
4	Sketch on the board

No.	Step
5	Engraving the layout
6	Mixing, rolling, and inking
7	Laying out the paper
8	Grinding and polishing the picture
9	Printing the finished work
10	Drying and restoring the picture

Source: Author

4.1 Conceptualizing and organizing sketches

Conceptualize, organize, and process the sketch or collected creative materials to form a black-and-white sketch of the picture you want to express. Focus on the composition of the picture, picture division, image, black and white composition, and other major relationships, and then focus on the point, line, and the local relationship of the knife. When drawing sketches, try to consider a little more thoughtfully, draw specific, detailed, and well-prepared sketches; otherwise, it will leave a lot of problems for the following drawings.

4.2 Preparing the board

The board will be used to cut into the size of the drawing or slightly larger than the drawing of the plate, after a certain processing, sanding can be coated with a layer of colored ink on the board to facilitate the observation of the carving place, and then coated with a layer of white candles, baked on the stove or ironed with an iron, so that the wax oil seepage into the wooden board, and so on after the cooler, the wooden board brittle and hard and easy to carve.

4.3 Sketch on the board

If the draft is relatively small, you can directly use a pencil to sketch out the general outline, the basic graphics, and then use a pen and ink to finalize the draft, directly let go of the carving. If the draft is relatively large, the use of sulfuric acid paper masks the draft sketches' outline, and then use copy paper to copy the draft for the production of a good board.



Figure 2 Steps in the creation of “Little Drolma”. (Source: Author, 2025)



Figure 3 “Little Drolma” 60×45cm Woodcut (Source: Author, 2025)

4.4 Carving

Carving process is the key to the success or failure of a piece of work, before using the knife must be to achieve a comprehensive view of the overall situation, have a clear idea, not only to grasp the overall

black and white and gray composition of the relationship between the majority of the knife to carry out a certain organizational design. And give full play to their creativity, to avoid careful copying of sketches, maximum performance of the knife, and knife organization of the artistic charm, so that the carving stage has become a passionate, flamboyant art of the knife enjoyment process. Carving steps generally follow the following principles: first carve the outer edge of the part, follow the first edge after the middle, after the first secondary main, carve white and leave black carving principles. Carve the large blank and secondary parts first, and finally carve the main and fine parts. Knife performance should be precise, accurate, and familiar. The knife should be sharp and clear, the knife marks should be sure and strong, not hesitant, not drag the mud and ambiguous, should fully reflect the artistic charm of the knife and the beauty of the force (Figure 2).

In the engraving process, the layout will leave many small burrs, making the printing plate not smooth, which will also puncture the paper, affecting the effect of printing effect. The need to use a cotton cloth is to polish off the small burrs polished off. Polishing should not leave small burrs, but also should not use too much force to destroy the knife. At the same time, the entire engraved plate undergoes a comprehensive inspection, whether there are any leaks or wrong engraving problems, and targeted repair engraving. In addition, the large blank part of the engraved off with a flat knife to patiently shovel flat, not uneven phenomenon, to avoid printing a dirty picture (Figure 4).

4.5 Hand Printing

Ink mixing, ink spatula will repeatedly mix the ink, and then use the rubber roller to continuously absorb ink, and ink milling on the ink mixing table, so that the rubber roller in the ink rolling back and forth, to be the glass plate and the rubber roller on the ink is like a thin layer of fine sand, before the ink roller to the printing plate. Then use the rubber roller repeatedly rolling mill printing plate, until the printing plate has uniform ink coverage and moderate thickness. Generally, in the printing plate rolled full of ink, with the rubber roller horizontally and vertically each roll again, and then rolled along the four sides of the printing plate, the ink and to avoid the phenomenon of “dry edge”. This process should not be in a hurry; to save time, rollers absorb too much ink, making the printing plate too thick and sticky, resulting in the screen printing paste phenomenon. Check whether the ink on the uniform is to see the ink surface reflection on the printing plate. If the ink surface, like the water surface, presents a layer of uniform reflection, that is, to prove that the ink has been on good, you can lay the paper printing.

Black and white woodblock prints on paper generally use leather paper, oil absorption, and good toughness. Because of the oil-absorbent leather paper's hairy surface, it is not reflective, so the general will use the leather paper's hairy surface to paint the picture. With the fur side of the leather paper rolled outward into a cylinder, leaving 5-10 centimeters as the edge of the painting, laid on the printing plate. Hands quickly from the center of the upper and lower, left and right outward smoothing of the paper, so that the ink fully absorb the paper, and then use the wooden mushroom in the back of the paper to do a circular rotation, the force should be moderate, even, to avoid excessive force, too fierce, damage to the paper. To grind a few times, so that the ink on the printing plate is fully transferred to the paper, because the ink will become thinner after grinding pressure, making it easier to be absorbed by the paper. This top grinding process must be careful and patient, so as not to miss grinding, to avoid uneven top grinding. When the back of the paper is clear and uniform, it proves that the top grinding is complete. Uncover the paper, must be slow, be patient, do not be anxious to damage the paper damage and give up. To unveil the painting while carefully watching and checking the quality of the picture. If there is a leakage, the paper should be gently put back to the original position, and re-top grinding in the “problem area”. If the ink is low, you can make up a little ink in the area, until the picture is no problem (Figures 3 and 5).



Figure 4 Steps in the creation of “Auspicious Mother”.
(Source: Author, 2025)

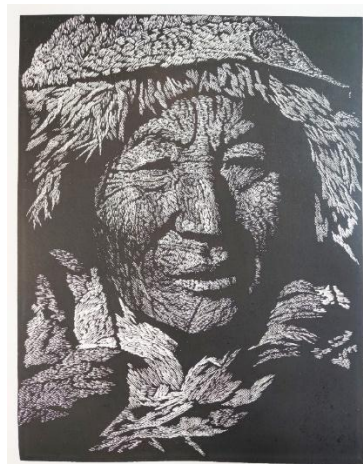


Figure 5 “Auspicious Mother” 60×45cm Woodcut
(Source: Author, 2025)

4.6 Drying and partial repair of the picture

The picture uncovered needs to be placed in a suitable place to dry, to avoid overlap, so that the picture is pasted together and damage to the picture is avoided. If the printing plate has local damage and makes the picture defective, use rubber, cardboard, and other pieces of ink that will be rubbed on the patch. This method is limited to a small area of local repair; for a larger area, a way should be used to make up the plate.

5. Role in promoting cultural dissemination and art education

By portraying the life scenes, folk customs, and religious beliefs of Tibetans, Qiangs, Yi, and other nationalities, Sichuan minority prints enable the audience to visualize the cultural charms of different nationalities. This visual presentation can stimulate national pride, enhance cultural identity, and promote national unity. Many minority subjects' prints are used in art museum exhibitions, cultural festivals, public space decoration, and other forms, and even go to international exhibitions to show the uniqueness of Sichuan's multi-ethnic culture to the world. This kind of cross-cultural communication makes Sichuan ethnic art more widely known and recognized in the context of globalization.



In art education, Sichuan ethnic minority printmaking, as a specialty course, enables students to learn about printmaking techniques (such as woodcut and black-and-white engraving), ethnic aesthetics, and cultural symbols. This practical art form helps to enhance students' artistic perception and creativity. The art of printmaking requires techniques such as engraving, printing, and composition, and demands a high level of skill from its creators. By offering printmaking workshops and art practice courses, we can not only cultivate a new generation of printmaking art talents but also stimulate young people's interest in national art, so that traditional skills can be inherited and innovated in the modern education system. Printmaking is not only a visual art; it can also be combined with history, folklore, literature, and other disciplines to help students understand ethnic culture in an interdisciplinary context. For example, by studying the “Bimo culture” of the Yi people or the “Thangka art” of the Tibetan people, students can understand the cultural connotation of printmaking works more deeply and realize the deep integration of art and culture.

Discussion

1. The visual aesthetics of black and white woodcut prints

Black-and-white woodcut prints provide a unique visual language for the expression of Sichuan's ethnic minorities with their high contrast and expressive lines. The sharp contrast between light and shadow not only enhances the dramatic effect but also evokes a sense of historical depth, which is in line with the traditional woodcut printmaking heritage of the ethnic areas of Sichuan.

1.1 The Role of Line and Texture in Ethnic Representation

Studies have found that contemporary Sichuan printmakers often use complex engraving techniques to depict distinctive costumes, facial features, and landscapes associated with Tibetan, Qiang, and Yi cultures. Unlike colorful ethnic-themed paintings that rely on vibrant hues to symbolize cultural identity, black-and-white woodcuts emphasize texture and form. This stylistic choice highlights the handmade quality of traditional crafts (e.g., Qiang embroidery and Tibetan thangka motifs) and allows the viewer to access the tactile dimension of ethnic representation.

1.2 Symbolic Contrast and Cultural Narrative

The absence of color in these prints shifts the focus to symbolic contrasts, such as the interplay between light and dark, which is often intended to dramatize cultural narratives. Many artists use this dualistic dynamic to symbolize the coexistence of tradition and modernity in minority communities. For example, in a black-and-white woodcut depicting the Yi torch festival, the artist's use of pure black figures contrasted with an intricate white background reinforces the idea of cultural continuity in an ever-changing world. The deliberately abstracted facial features further suggest that national identity is not about individual portraits, but rather about shared customs and collective memory.

2. Negotiating tradition and modernity in ethnic expression

2.1 Tension between cultural originality and artistic innovation

One of the main findings of this study is that woodcut prints of ethnic subjects in Sichuan do not merely reproduce traditional motifs but reinterpret them through contemporary artistic strategies. While early 20th-century prints often emphasized ethnographic accuracy, contemporary artists tend to experiment with abstraction, distortion, and modern compositional techniques.

2.2 Influence of domestic and foreign art movements

Many contemporary Sichuan printmakers draw inspiration from traditional Chinese ink painting and international printmaking styles. The use of exaggerated proportions and emotive engraving techniques in some of the works is influenced by German Expressionism. At the same time, elements of traditional Chinese literati painting—such as asymmetry and negative space—are incorporated to create a unique hybrid aesthetic. This blend of influences raises questions about the authenticity of national expression. Should these prints be judged on their fidelity to traditional ethnic styles, or should the hybridity of the art be seen as an inevitable and valuable aspect of contemporary ethnic art? The study suggests that rather than viewing Western technology as a form of cultural dilution, it should be reinterpreted as a tool for expanding the expressive potential of Sichuan's ethnically themed prints.



3. Audience acceptance and interpretive challenges

3.1 Different Perspectives: Ethnic Minority and Non-ethnic Minority Audiences

Interviews and surveys with ethnic minority and Han Chinese audiences reveal that they have different understandings of woodblock prints with ethnic themes. Many non-minority viewers appreciated the exotic visual appeal of these works, while some minority viewers criticized the works for romanticizing or oversimplifying their life experiences. For example, a recurring theme in viewer feedback was a concern that black-and-white woodcut prints often depict ethnic minorities in a nostalgic, timeless manner, reinforcing the stereotype that these communities exist outside of modernity. In contrast, the artists argued that they intended to capture the timeless spirit of these cultures rather than to document contemporary socio-economic realities.

3.2 The politics of representation in contemporary printmaking

This study also highlights a broader discussion in the art world about the responsibility of printmakers when representing ethnic minorities. Some artists advocate a more documentary approach to ensure that their work reflects the current situation of minority communities in Sichuan. Other artists have adopted a more symbolic or imaginative approach to representation, arguing that art should evoke the essence of culture rather than act as a sociological record. This debate reflects a broader discussion in ethnographic art studies about the fine line between appreciation and appropriation. While woodcut prints provide a powerful medium for expressing national identity, their interpretation is inevitably influenced by cultural biases, market demands, and national narratives of national harmony.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that black and white woodcut prints offer a distinct artistic language for representing Sichuan's ethnic minorities, one that relies on texture, contrast, and abstraction rather than color and realism. However, the study also reveals ongoing tensions between tradition and modernity, local and global artistic influences, and the expectations of different audiences.

Moving forward, future research should explore how digital technologies, interdisciplinary collaborations, and interactive art forms might further evolve the representation of Sichuan's ethnic cultures in printmaking. Additionally, greater engagement with ethnic minority artists and communities can provide more nuanced insights into how they wish to see themselves represented in contemporary visual culture.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the artistic, cultural, and academic engagement with Sichuan's ethnic-themed black and white woodcut prints. These suggestions aim to encourage a more dynamic and inclusive approach to ethnic representation while ensuring that this art form remains relevant in contemporary society.

1. Expanding Artistic Approaches to Ethnic Representation

1.1 Integrating Contemporary Printmaking Techniques

While traditional woodcut techniques emphasize bold contrasts and intricate carving, artists should explore hybrid approaches that incorporate digital printmaking, mixed-media applications, and experimental printing processes. These innovations can help bridge historical craftsmanship with modern aesthetics, allowing for a broader range of artistic expression. For example, the combination of hand-carved woodcuts with digital layering techniques could introduce nuanced textures and depth, preserving the raw expressiveness of traditional prints while adding new visual dimensions. Additionally, incorporating techniques such as reduction printing or photomechanical transfers could create more complex and layered representations of ethnic cultures.

1.2 Encouraging Ethnic Minority Artists' Involvement

To ensure authentic representation, greater effort should be made to involve ethnic minority artists in the creation and conceptualization of Sichuan-themed woodcut prints. Many current depictions rely on external observations rather than firsthand experiences, leading to potential cultural misinterpretations.



Establishing artist residency programs and cross-cultural collaborations between Han and ethnic minority printmakers can foster more nuanced and self-representative works. Additionally, art institutions and printmaking collectives should offer training programs that empower ethnic minority artists to master both traditional and modern printmaking techniques, providing them with the tools to reinterpret their cultural narratives.

2. Enhancing Theoretical Frameworks in Ethnic Art Research

2.1 Developing a Contextualized Ethnic Aesthetics Framework

Current discussions on ethnic art often oscillate between essentialist preservation and modernist reinterpretation. To move beyond this dichotomy, scholars should develop a theoretical framework that considers ethnic art as a fluid and evolving entity. Such a framework should analyze:

- Symbolism and Abstraction: How do ethnic-themed prints balance detailed realism with symbolic abstraction to represent cultural identity?
- Intercultural Influences: How have global printmaking traditions influenced the visual language of Sichuan's ethnic-themed woodcuts?
- Reception and Interpretation: How do different audiences (local, national, and international) perceive and respond to these works?

By embedding Sichuan's ethnic printmaking traditions within a broader theoretical discourse, researchers can elevate the field beyond regional studies and connect it to global debates on indigenous art and visual culture.

2.2 Bridging Ethnic Studies and Contemporary Art Discourses

Although significant research exists on ethnic minority representation in painting and sculpture, printmaking remains an underexplored area in contemporary art discourse. Future studies should integrate printmaking into interdisciplinary discussions on ethnicity, visual semiotics, and cultural identity. For instance, comparative studies between Sichuan's woodcut prints and indigenous printmaking traditions from Latin America or Africa could reveal shared themes of resilience, cultural memory, and artistic resistance. This approach would position Sichuan's ethnic printmaking within a global artistic conversation, challenging the tendency to view it solely within a Chinese national context.

3. Strengthening Public Engagement and Cultural Education

3.1 Promoting Interactive and Community-Based Art Initiatives

One of the challenges identified in this study is the gap between ethnic minority communities and the urban art institutions that exhibit Sichuan-themed prints. To address this, cultural organizations should facilitate interactive art initiatives, such as:

- Community Printmaking Workshops: Encouraging local ethnic communities to participate in the creation of prints that reflect their lived experiences.
- Traveling Exhibitions: Bringing woodcut print exhibitions to ethnic minority regions, fostering direct dialogue between artists and communities.
- Public Art Projects: Integrating woodcut prints into urban and rural public spaces through murals, installations, and augmented reality experiences.

These initiatives can shift the perception of printmaking from an elite, museum-based practice to an accessible and community-driven medium.

3.2 Digital Archiving and Online Exhibitions

To reach a wider audience and preserve artistic heritage, a comprehensive digital archive of Sichuan's ethnic-themed woodcut prints should be developed. This archive could include:

- High-resolution scans of prints, allowing detailed study of carving techniques.
- Artist interviews and commentary, providing insights into the creative process.
- Interactive storytelling features that contextualize the cultural significance of different works.

By leveraging digital platforms, printmakers can expand their reach beyond regional and national borders, connecting with global audiences interested in ethnic art and printmaking.



These recommendations emphasize the need for artistic innovation, academic engagement, and public participation in the development of Sichuan's ethnic-themed woodcut prints. By embracing new techniques, fostering collaboration with ethnic artists, advancing theoretical discourse, and promoting public engagement, the representation of Sichuan's ethnic minorities in printmaking can evolve in ways that remain both culturally authentic and globally relevant. Future research should focus on the intersection of printmaking with digital media, explore the impact of commercialization on ethnic representation, and investigate how younger generations of printmakers are redefining the artistic language of black and white woodcut prints.

References

- Coetzee, M. H., & Fighting, Z. S. (2002). A Socio-Historical Overview'. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives*, Sept. https://johnnyclegg.lima-city.de/artikel/zulu_sticking_fingers.htm
- Fei, X. (2017). The formation and development of the Chinese nation with multi-ethnic groups. *International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology*, 1, 1-31.
- Gan, T. (2009). *Ethnic-Themed Printmaking Creation*. Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House.
- Herbert, R. (2021). *The Meaning of Art*. Beijing Normal University Press.
- Li, M. (2015). Flavor and Form--Reading Gan Tingjian's Minority Subjects Prints. *Fine Arts*, 8, 87-91
- Li, Y. (2017). *History of Modern Chinese Printmaking*. Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House
- Lin, C., & Ling, Y. (1992). *History of emerging printmaking in Sichuan*. Sichuan Fine Arts Press.
- Long, Y. (2022). Translation as representation: Western imagination of China from the eighteenth century to the present. *Transcultural: A Journal of Translation and Cultural Studies*, 14(1), 21-36.
- Lü, P. (2012). The History and Language of New Painting. *Arts and Letters Research*, 4, 109-120
- Qi, F. (1997). The Contextual Transformation of Chinese Printmaking in the Twentieth Century. *Literature and Art Research*, 6, 16-32
- Song, S. (2007). *Inheritance and Transcendence: The Road of Contemporary National Art*. People's Publishing House.
- Wang, Q. (1998). *Winds and Clouds of the Artistic Sea - Memoirs of Wang Qi*. People's Fine Arts Publishing House.
- Zhang, Y. (2023). *Printmaking Technique Tutorial-Woodblock*. China National Culture Publishing House.
- Zhenchao, L., & Fauzi, T. A. (2024). A study on the features of minority-themed paintings in the 13th national art exhibition of China. *Jurnal Gendang Alam (GA)*, 14(S), 56-71.

