

Masereel, Lu, and the Development of the Woodcut Picture Book (連環畫) in China

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**Tie Xiao,**

**"Masereel, Lu, and the Development of the Woodcut Picture Book (連環畫) in China"**

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**Ed. I-Chun Wang and Guo Li**

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**Abstract:** In his article "Masereel, Lu, and the Development of the Woodcut Picture Book (連環畫) in China" Tie Xiao situates Chinese "continuous pictorial narratives" (*lianxu tuhua*) by radical woodcut artists in the 1930s within a global exchange of the visual. Further, Xiao examines woodcut artists' efforts to develop an expressive form of mass-oriented art through creative engagement with the Japanese creative print (*hanga*) movement and the "woodcut novels" by the Belgian graphic artist Frans Masereel. Xiao argues that central to self-produced woodcut pictorial narratives is the dilemma between the intimate and private impulse of self-expression and the desired immediacy and accessibility of form.

**Tie Xiao**

### **Masereel, Lu, and the Development of the Woodcut Picture Book (連環畫) in China**

Scholars of modern Chinese picture books have examined 連環畫 (*lianhuanhua*: picture book) as a form of urban commercial art and attributed its flourishing to the development of reproductive techniques and publishing industry that catered to the popular market. While the history of *lianhuanhua* in China could be traced back to the wall carvings of the Han Dynasty, it did not become an independent art form until the 1910s. The prototype of modern *lianhuanhua* was established when in 1916 the newspaper *Caobao* 潮報 (Wave) bound single-piece pictorials and sold them in the format of an individual album, a format that became popular for middle and lower class readers. In the 1920s and 1930s *lianhuanhua* became well-developed with a successful domestic production and distribution system and international markets (see Huang; Mao; Shen). Around the same time as *lianhuanhua*, by commissioned professionals, was developed as a popular form of commercial art that attracted urban middle and lower-class consumers, a series of self-produced 連續圖畫 (*lianxu tuhua*: continuous pictorial narratives) with noticeably European expressionist accents by amateur woodcut artists appeared in book format between 1933 and 1935. Unlike commercial *lianhuanhua* — most of which were traditional style illustrations of popular Peking operas or knightly stories — many of these "continuous pictorial narratives" were "woodcut novels" of artists' own creation rather than adaptations. These creative works not only reveal a radical, although not commercially successful and often overlooked, dimension of picture book production in the 1930s China, but also suggest a transnational flow of visual forms and images.

Throughout the 1920s, most *lianhuanhua* were based on popular historical stories, operas, or contemporary popular films, and were considered "feudalistic" and "poisonous" by leftwing intellectuals. However, in the early 1930s *lianhuanhua* began to be recognized as an authentic form of "proletarian art." In this period, leftwing intellectuals began to question the accessibility of May Fourth new culture to the masses, whom the new culture was supposed to reach and enlighten. Facing a mass of illiterates, many critics turned away from the "Europeanized" forms of May Fourth literature and art and focused their attention on oral performance and popular visual forms neither of which depend on functional knowledge of the written language. In the hope of winning immediate acceptance by the popular audience, radical intellectuals advocated traditional popular genres such as folk songs and opera, as well as *lianhuanhua* to counteract the elitism that had kept the masses away. In 1932, leading leftwing intellectuals such as Qiubai Qu advocated new *lianhuanhua* with revolutionary content as one important component of "proletarian literature and art for the masses" (305).

In the article at hand I examine the appearance of "continuous pictorial narratives" by a group of leftwing woodcut artists in mid-1930s China. Behind these works are the travels of the concept of "creative print" and an art form, "woodcut novel," from Japan and Europe to Shanghai. Central to the development of woodcut as an expressive and creative form of modern art in twentieth-century China was the circulation of the notion of "creative print," a notion first championed by modern Japanese printmakers. The beginning of the Japanese creative print movement 創作版画 (*sosaku-hanga*: creative prints) is usually dated as 1904 when Kanae Yamamoto (山本鼎) (1882-1946) returned from a vacation with a sketch of a fisherman which he converted into a woodcut (see Brown; Merritt, *Twentieth-century*). Hakutei Ishii (石井柏亭) published this print in an art journal 明星 (The Daystar) and praised Yamamoto for "using his woodblock as a painter's canvas and using his knife as a brush" (Ishii qtd. in Shibuya 22; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). However, neither the word 版画 (*hanga*: printed word) nor *sosaku-hanga* was used yet. According to Helen Merritt, the word *hanga* — which eventually became the general term for prints — was first used in the magazine 平旦 (Heitan) in November 1905, a small magazine founded by Yamamoto and Ishii. At the beginning, writers of Heitan used the word 刀画 (*touga*: blade picture), but in the third issue of the magazine they introduced a new term, *hanga*, to refer to creative prints for which artists carved blocks from their own designs (Merritt, *Modern Japanese* 113). In 1909 Ishii introduced formally the notion of *hanga* and differentiated it from 複製版画 (*fukusei-hanga*: reproductive prints) in which the printmaker reproduced drawings or designs by other artists. The central idea *hanga* is captured in its slogan "self-

drawing, self-carving, self-printing" (Kawakita and Takashina 191). In China prints had been called with general names, such as 图 (*tu*: image), 画 (*hua*: picture), or 繡像 (*xiuxiang*: brocade image) until the early republican era. 版畫 (*banhua*: print) as the name of a category did not become widely accepted until the late 1910s and early 1920s. The important writer Xun Lu 魯迅 (pen name of Shuren Zhou 1881-1936) introduced in the late 1920s the notion of 創作板畫 (*chuangzuo banhua*: creative print) to young Chinese woodcut artists: "the so-called creative prints are neither imitations nor reproductions. Creators [of creative prints] hold the knife to the woodblock and directly carve it down ... Above all, the knife-holding and direct carving are absolutely necessities for creative woodcuts ... They are different from painting in that artists use knife as brush and woodblock as paper or canvas" (Lu qtd. in Zhang 292).

While it is difficult to identify the sources that inspired Lu, it is possible that he was first influenced by Yoshio Nagase (永瀬義郎) (1891-1978). A successful *hanga* artist, Nagase made expressionistic woodblocks for the literary magazine 仮面 (The Mask) in 1913. After the demise of Kamen, Nagase with two other Kamen artists Shintaru Hiroshima 広島新太郎 and Kiyoshi Hasegawa 長谷川清 formed the "Japanese Creative Print Club" and in 1922 Nagase published the how-to book 版画お作る人へ (To Those Who Make Prints), one of the first Japanese books of instruction in carving and printing (see Brown 285). This how-to book was bought by Lu in 1927 from the famous bookstore 内山書店 (Uchiyama's Bookstore) and it is the beginning of Lu's continuous collection of Japanese prints and related books (see Li 375; Uchiyama 9). Nagase is also the first Japanese *hanga* artist who had his works introduced to China. Lu reprinted one of Nagase's woodcuts and recommended Nagase's work and Lu also bought the *sosaku-hanga* enthusiast and printmaker Masahide Asahi's 旭正秀 創作版画の作り方 (Techniques of Creative Prints) (see Ota 139).

Like Ishii, Lu promoted "creative woodcuts" against "reproductive woodcuts": this distinction was in 1929 and then further developed in another preface written in 1933 for 木刻創作法 (Methods of Creating Woodcuts), one of the first how-to books published during the "Chinese New Woodcut Movement." Lu explained that for "prints used for reproduction ... drawers only draw, carvers only carve, and printers only print," but for "creative prints," the artist does everything and "creative prints are artists' direct creations, not mediated by carvers or printers" (Lu qtd. in Zhang 346-47; see also Lu). Lu rephrased Japanese *sosaku-hanga* artists' slogan "self-drawing, self-carving, self-printing" and stressed the artist's control of creation and self-production. The distinction between reproductive prints and creative prints was soon accepted widely by young Chinese printmakers in order to distinguish themselves as avant-garde artists from commissioned professionals. After Lu's reprint of Nagase's print in 1929, works by Japanese *sosaku-hanga* woodcut artists, such as Senpan Maekawa (前川千帆), Chomei Ryoji (料治朝鳴), Sumio Kawakami (川上澄生), and Yasunori Taninaka (谷中安規) were introduced to Chinese readers through such art journals as 現代板畫 (Modern Prints). Modern Prints also formed a relationship with one Japanese woodcut group, 白と黒 (White and Black) Society, probably through personal connections of the editor Hua Li (李樺) who studied woodcuts in Tokyo in the early 1930s. In January and February 1936, "White and Black Society" published in its own magazine 版芸術 (Print Art) two special issues of Chinese woodcut prints (see Ono 111-13).

The championing of "creative print" became a strategic reorientation for young Chinese woodcut artists such as Qingzhen Luo (羅清楨) and Shaoqi Lai (賴少麟) to keep a critical distance from the existing order of commercial art and establish their own space in visual production. By distinguishing "creative prints" from "reproductive prints" young artists called for a modern expressive visual form and positioned themselves as part of a global print revival movement. Lu was convinced that the physical creation of the finished work is critical to self-expression and later receiving the first issue of Modern Prints newly printed by machines, Lu wrote to the editor that "although creative prints are prints, they must be manually printed by artists themselves so that all the fineness [of woodcuts] can be preserved" (Lu qtd. in Zhang 486-87). In an age of mechanical reproduction, Lu extolled a primal form of artistic creation and valorized an aesthetic of direct, intimate, and vigorous engagement as essential for self-expression. Lu's powerful phrase "holding the knife to the woodblock and directly carving it down" was visualized in the head page of the first issue of Modern Prints.

If the concept of "creative print" inspired Chinese woodcut artists and enthusiasts to see woodcut as a legitimate medium of self-expression distanced from the "reproductive" form of commercial art, a

series of "woodcut novels" by Frans Masereel (1889-1972), the Flemish graphic artist, provided them an invigorating model of pictorial narrative that linked the expressive possibilities of creative woodcut with the social-democratic politics. In September 1933 Liangyou Press reprinted several of Masereel's narratives including *25 Images de la passion d'un homme* (1918). The reprints not only reflected Chinese intellectuals' fascination with Masereel's distinct graphic art, but was also inseparable from their changing perceptions of *lianhuanhua* as an effective visual art form. Masereel combined the narrative and expressive qualities of the woodcut and invented the twentieth-century graphic art form "novel in woodcuts," a narrative series of woodcut pictures arranged in book form. For art historians such as Martin Cohen, Masereel's invention of "block-book" changed the life of woodcut from being merely decorative to an independent form of art. Masereel's woodcut novels combined "allegory and satire into narratives critical of society with an immediate emotional impact" (Willett 118). Masereel created "images of stark simplicity that isolate in a single moment (as in painting) bold gestures and incidents (as in drama) that follow one another in successive frames (as in film)," another commentator remarks, "to create a slow, powerful, strobic effect of declamatory images" (Donahue 23). Masereel was introduced to Chinese readers not just as another Western artists, but as one of the European masters of mass-oriented public art. Chinese artists recognized immediately the affinity between Masereel's "woodcut novel" and Chinese *lianhuanhua*. Members of the Wooden Bell Woodcut Research Society from Hangzhou argued that "the German serial woodblock prints are just like our *lianhuan tuhua* that can be found from the small book stalls in our marketplace. Unlike oil paintings that are monopolized by the upper class, they can be enjoyed by the commoners from the lower social strata" (Lu 4, 1145). Thomas Mann wrote that "you may be a worker ... without any gift for languages, and yet be intellectually curious enough, close enough to the spirit of democracy, to know Frans Masereel," because his art "is so genuinely human" and has "such simplicity that you do not even have to know how to read or write to see it" (13). The issue of intelligibility that was central to Mann's praise was also emphasized by Chinese intellectuals. Lu championed Masereel's works, especially the form of the pictorial narrative itself, but remained characteristically cautious about the specific visual idiom used: for Lu to make woodcut narratives accessible to the Chinese public "the traditional line-based drawing were preferable to the tonal masses and chiaroscuro effects of Western-style woodblock prints" (Lu qtd. in Tang 147). Other critics shared Mann's enthusiasm for "the spirit of democracy" in Masereel's works. For Dafu Yu (郁達夫) and Jiabi Zhao (趙家璧), Masereel's works are powerful and effective because they "plead for the proletariat, and are read by the illiterate" (Yu and Zhao qtd. in Tang 146). Reprinting Masereel's pictorial narratives was significant because they represented a form of public art that China lacked.

For his Chinese admirers Masereel's pictorial narratives exemplified a modern visual language that both valorized and went beyond the conceptual appeal of "creative print": accessibility of the form of woodcut narrative and its compact yet powerful message of socio-political critique were refreshing and invigorating. It is worth noticing that around the same time that Lu introduced Masereel, he also became dissatisfied with contemporary Japanese "creative prints." In a letter to Hua Li in 1935, Lu wrote that "the 'White and Black Society' of Japan [an important *sosaku-hanga* group] is much more drowsy and silent than before. They have already regressed to depict landscape and still life. Even the spirit of the old Ukiyo-e has been lost" (Lu qtd. in Zhang 493). The impact of reprinting Masereel was immediately felt. Before his works appeared in China, most woodcuts by leftwing avant-gardes were individual prints, but shortly after the publication of Masereel's "image novels" in 1933, woodcut artists in Shanghai began developing "continuous pictorial narratives" (*lianxu tuhua*) published in book format with bound pages. Exemplary works include Tiegeng Chen's 陳鐵耕 *法網* (The Meshes of the Law, 1933), Xian Liu's (劉峴 *血債*) (Blood Debt, 1934), Xinbo Huang's (黃新波 *平凡的故事*) (An Ordinary Story, 1935), and Yefu Zheng's (野夫 *買鹽*) (Selling Salt, 1935). Not only was the artistic form of *lianhuahua* exemplified by Masereel's works and adopted by his Chinese followers, but the themes of Masereel's narratives including the allure and danger of the city, the misery of social inequality, and the suffering and sacrifice of masses were also used throughout the career of this visual form in 1930s Shanghai. The most accomplished artist of this genre is Tao Wen (溫濤) (1907-1950) whose pictorial narratives not only bear complex relations to Masereel's prints but also reveal the dilemmas inherent



in *lianhuanhua* in early twentieth-century China and Wen's original appropriation of Masereel's work, which involves direct borrowings and subtle visual transformations, deserves particular attention.

Born into a poor peasant family in Canton Province Wen was sold by his parents to a local salt merchant as a servant when he was a child. In 1922, after years of humiliation and abuse in the merchant family, Wen fled and joined the Canton National Revolutionary Army serving as a cook. In 1925, during a battle with local bandits, he was captured and forced to join the bandits for two months. He managed to escape and got to know a businessman with whom he began his five-year sojourn in southeast Asia. During his travels in Singapore, Malacca, and Java, Wen made a living by working as a carpenter, lapidary, cook, dentist, shoemaker, and waiter. It was during this time that Wen became a self-taught painter and musician. In 1930 he finally saved enough money and moved to Shanghai to study oil painting with the famous painter Liang Guang 關良 (1900-1986) at the Shanghai Art Institute. The Japanese invasion in 1931 shocked Wen deeply. According to Wen's friends' recollection, he decided to go to the Northeast to join the "Righteous and Brave Army" but could not make it since he could not afford the 15-yuan army dress uniform (see Li and Ma 182-85). In October 1931 with financial help from his friends he bought a steamer ticket back to Canton and became a village school teacher. Later he went to Hong Kong and taught painting and music in a middle school. Unable to afford oil paint, Wen gave up oil painting and discovered woodcut inspired by Masereel's works. His long pictorial narratives "incorporate motifs, scenes, techniques, and narrative viewpoints that bear a clear relation to Masereel's prints" (Tang 148). In 1935, he organized the 深刻木刻社 (Deep-Cut Woodcut Society) together with Yinlang Dai (戴隱郎) and started his one-year-long communication with Lu. In 1935 Lu received from Wen a copy of *她的覺醒* (Her Awakening) in the first edition of hand-made rubbings. Later that year, with Jiang Feng (江豐) (1910-1982), Wozha Cheng (程沃渣) (1905-1974), and Yefu Zheng (鄭野夫) (1909-1973) Wen started the 鐵馬版畫社 (Steel Horse Woodcut Society) (1935-1936) in Shanghai and published three issues of the journal Steel Horse Woodcut in 1936. Two images from the series Her Awakening were published in the second issue (see Li and Ma 182-85). In 1935 after he completed Her Awakening, Wen went to Yan'an and took up the post of director in the art school of 中国人民抗日劇社 (Chinese People's Resistance-against-Japan Troupe). Aside from teaching, he also engaged himself in acting for the troupe, designing choreography for the group, and directing the children's acting troupe of the art school. He continued to make woodcut prints, the most famous of which is an allegedly first woodcut portrait of Chairman Mao published as the cover of book of war documentary *抗戰中的陝北* (Shanbei in Resistance). In the summer of 1938, Wen brought his family from Yan'an to Wuhan and then to Hunan Province and taught in Changsha. After that, he edited the communist-controlled magazine *新階段* (New Phase) and the newspaper *開明日報* (Enlightenment Daily). In the 1940s he devoted himself to reforming the traditional puppet show in support of resistance against Japan and at the same time continued to make woodcuts. In 1949, he returned to his hometown and passed away in 1950.

In Her Awakening, Wen projected his own experience of suffering and awakening into a visual narrative and transformed his unrealized dream to join the masses into an artistic celebration of the resistant crowd. The pictorial story starts with the death of the female protagonist's father: to bury her father properly, her mother borrows money from a local merchant. As a payment of the debt, the girl, not unlike Wen himself, is sold to the merchant's family where she is beaten by the hostess and exploited sexually by the master. After the master's wife finds out their relationship, she is thrown out onto the street and becomes a prostitute. The indebtedness of Wen's Her Awakening to Masereel's *25 Images* is present on both narrative and visual levels. *25 Images* tells the life and death of a poor boy who grows up into a labor activist battling with capitalists in a European industrial city. This 25-image pictorial narrative (first published in 1918) was created shortly after Masereel's inspiring meeting with Romain Rolland and Stefan Zweig. Masereel recalled that the idea for *25 Images* sprang from his reading of Flemish translations of the works of Karl Marx and aristocrat turned revolutionary Peter Kropotkin and that social issues were his real concern (see Cohen). At the heart of Masereel's art is the spirit of protest and revolt against injustice and social strife. Like his left-wing colleagues, Wen saw the great potential of Masereel's "woodcut interlinked picture" for reaching and enlightening the working masses. What attracted Wen to Masereel was as much the alleged mass intelligibility of the form as its empowering expressive potential for social criticism and political protests. Masereel's plot

basically remains unchanged in Wen's work. Both protagonists lose their parents and are mistreated in their childhood and both join a mass movement either against oppressive capitalists or foreign invaders and die a heroic death. In terms of the visual aspects, Masereel's influence is evident in that Wen not only employed the form of "woodcut novel" that Masereel mastered, but also appropriated visual compositions of Masereel's work for his own narrative sequence. The fourth image of *Her Awakening*, for instance, has a similar visual structure as Masereel's second image: both divide diagonally the images into two parts with the child in the right front and buildings in the rear left. While in Masereel's picture the mother and new-born child are expelled from their home, in Wen's composition the rich merchant is taking the crying child away.

The first half of the series recounts a constant relocation of the woman protagonist. She is driven from her home, forced into another oppressive space, and finally thrown out onto the street. It is only when she loses her sense of belonging completely and has nowhere to go that she encounters the masses. A story of individual suffering and fragmentation in the first half is transformed into one of collective awakening and unification in the second half where the exterior space is no longer occupied by sex exploiters and pitiful sufferers, but is enlivened by progressive collectivity. This change transforms the woman's figure from the passive object of oppression to an awakened one of the many. It is in the second half of *Her Awakening* that Wen's transformative effort of appropriating Masereel's original compositions becomes most creative and at the same time elusive.

The sixteenth image of *Her Awakening* is the starting point of Wen's experimentation. Compared with other images of the series — which more or less bear some resemblance to Masereel's work — the sixteenth picture is startling especially because of the use of futuristic stylization and composition in the depiction of the masses. In this image, the expanding crowd erupts suddenly into the composition and multiplies endlessly into the back, stably and aggressively. While *25 Images de la passion d'un homme* is a one-man story throughout, the "her" in *Her Awakening* no longer refers to a female individual but to the collectivity of resistance. As if Wen was not satisfied with the image — which only depicts the progressive masses from behind — he provided a front view of the masses that shout in unison in the next image. In both images the teeming masses fighting against the Japanese invaders coalesces to form uniformity. No individual is identifiable: the un-differentiable unity of the resisting people, rather than any individual, is the real subject of representation.

The eighteenth image is the climax of Wen's encounter with Masereel where Wen almost copied the entire composition of the twentieth image from *25 Images*. Both images depict one individual, bigger and higher than anyone else, standing on the right and disseminating progressive messages to the crowd. Wen changed the dominating figure and most of the listeners (all are men in Masereel's image) into women. And yet, besides this obvious difference, Wen changed something more crucial in his reworking of Masereel's work: while the dominating figure on the right Masereel's image is the male protagonist appearing in every picture of the series identifiable for his signature hairdo and clothes, the speaking figure in Wen's image is not the female protagonist. The original textual explanations of this image and the next one demonstrate that the female protagonist is not the one who gives the talk, but rather one among the audience. In the crowd, the female prostitute is rendered indistinguishable from others. The text ends with the following sentence: "Everyone unites and goes to Zhaibei [the front]!" That is the voice of millions with one heart." After more than a dozen of visual representation of lonely sufferings, this is a scene of the massing moment when the distinction between "I" and "they" — between the self and society, between partiality and universality — is transcended by a higher form of collectivity. It is the site of becoming where the female protagonist's estrangement and alienation is salvaged by the newly found sense of collective feeling. With his deliberate imitation and productive manipulation of Masereel's image, Wen transformed Masereel's image from a presentation of one man who called on the masses to struggle against capitalists into a visualization of the progressive masses which awakened one suffering individual. By doing so, Wen distinguishes his own artistic individuality from Masereel's original work. The relation between the original and "imitation" is not hierarchical but complementary: two similar compositions become two sides (individual and masses) of one coin (the progressive force of history). The meaning and significance of Wen's series lie no longer in its own narrative plot or visual continuity, but in the very act of referring to and transcending Masereel's earlier series.

Wen's transformation of the subject of representation from an individual's suffering to collective resistance continues throughout the rest of the series. While the male protagonist in *25 images de la passion d'un homme* remains the visual center during his struggle with capitalists, the female protagonist of the first half of *Her Awakening*, in time, if ironically, loses her visibility upon her "awakening." The nineteenth image depicts women signing up to join the relief corps. The text tells that "she" is among the applicants, but visually she is unidentifiable. The last images depict women of the ambulance corps going to the front and relieving the injured. Similarly, the textual explanation claims that "she" is in the picture but the viewer cannot identify her. In the second half, what we see (the masses) is more important than what we are told to see by the textual explanation (the individual). That "she" is unidentifiable visually implies that it is no longer necessary to represent the individual when the real subject of presentation is united collectivity against foreign invasion. The prostitute regains her representational centrality and identifiability only after her heroic death. In the last image of the series, her body lies on the ground diagonally, glorified by the rising sun in the back. If in the first half of *Her Awakening* Wen's effort of absorbing visual elements and narrative inspiration from the foreign source-text is imitative, his effort is transformative in the second half. Wen adapted narrative lines, reproduced scenes, transplanted visual compositions — yet each discursive practice serves the function of appropriating the foreign text in order to address hierarchical social relations and historical crises and at the same time conform to the contemporary leftwing cultural pursuit in 1930s Shanghai. The visual referentiality of Wen's second half to Masereel's second half reveals both Wen's indebtedness to his older master and his dissatisfaction with Masereel's individualist orientation.

In conclusion, Wen's works demonstrate the emergence of *lianhuanhua* and constitutes an important part of dynamic visual productions in 1930s China characterized by a new stage of extensive global exchange of the visual. However, unlike Masereel whose works were widely reprinted and popular — Masereel's picture books sold by the 1930s more than 100,000 copies in Europe (Willett 116) — Wen's pictorial narratives never enjoyed a wider circulation beyond the circle of his friends and colleagues. The close parallel between Wen's lived experience and the imagined life of his female protagonist suggests an intimate sphere of this pictorial narrative created to "educate and transform the masses" (Lu 2, 455). His imagination of the awakening of a suffering woman is marked by the phantom presence of the artist himself. The story not only visualizes many of his childhood traumatic experiences, but also alludes to his own process of awakening. To bound isolated moments and incidents into successive frames, as Wen did in his woodcut *lianhuanhua*, became for him a way of "narrating" the fate of his own, a way of piecing together what otherwise might have been seen as fragmentary and unbearable. A statement by another woodcut artist, written around the same time as *Her Awakening* was printed, probably best captured Wen Tao's aesthetics of creative woodcut *lianhuanhua*: "I was just like other people, enduring the social sufferings, putting with the attacks and oppressions from evil forces. I am too weak ... But I don't want to be weak anymore. I don't want to cry and swallow my own tears anymore. I don't want to be negative anymore. I want to advance and struggle. Not suicide. Woodblock is my enemy on whom I will try my knife; woodblock itself is the ugly and evil society, so I will dismember its body and create something out of it" (Lu 3, 974). Physical engagement with woodblock, which was central to the idea of creative prints, became part and parcel of political resistance against injustice and social disease. The original analogue between block/carving knife and canvas/brush, suggested by both Ishii and Lu, was transcended by likening woodblock with evil society and knife with weapon. This is still a theory of "creative prints." However, in the highly polemic form of creative woodcut *lianhuanhua*, what emerged from carving woodblock is no longer merely an artistic expression, but also an activist, oppositional stance.

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