

Analysis of the relationship between works and artworks: a case study of traditional Chinese painting

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Abstract: This article aims to analyze the relationship between works and artworks, using traditional Chinese painting as a case study to delve into their connotations and transformations. By examining the historical background, creative process, aesthetic characteristics, and role in cultural inheritance of traditional Chinese painting, this paper points out that works are the primary form of artworks, while artworks represent the advanced form of works after aesthetic selection, cultural accumulation, and social recognition over time. The study finds that the key to traditional Chinese painting works evolving into artworks lies in their unique artistic value, profound cultural significance, and extensive social influence. This article seeks to provide a new perspective on understanding the relationship between works and artworks and to offer a reevaluation of the artistic value of traditional Chinese painting.

Keywords: work; art; traditional Chinese painting; artistic value; cultural inheritance

1. Introduction

In the field of art history and aesthetics, the relationship between works and artworks has always one of the core issues^[1-3]. This relationship not only concerns the definition and essence of art but also involves multiple dimensions of artistic creation, reception, and evaluation^[4]. Especially in the context of traditional Chinese painting, the distinction and connection between works and artworks are particularly complex and profound. As an important component of Chinese culture, traditional Chinese painting carries rich historical, philosophical, and aesthetic connotations^[5-7]. Its creative process and final presentation often transcend mere visual expression, becoming a cultural symbol and spiritual anchor^[8-10]. Therefore, analyzing the relationship between works and artworks not only deepens the understanding of traditional Chinese painting but also provides new perspectives and insights for contemporary art theory^[11].

This study takes traditional Chinese painting as an example aiming to explore the essential differences and intrinsic connections between works and artworks^[12]. The basic assumption of the study is: a work is the material carrier created by the artist while an artwork is the meaning and value attributed to the work within specific cultural historical and aesthetic contexts^[13]. In other words a work is the material foundation of an artwork while an artwork is the elevation and reconstitution of the work in culture and society^[14]. This hypothesis stems from a re-examination of traditional aesthetic concepts such as "form" and "spirit" "skill" and "principle" in Chinese traditional painting^[15]. Through this analysis we hope to reveal the uniqueness of the relationship between works and artworks in traditional Chinese painting and further explore the implications of this relationship for contemporary art creation and criticism^[16-17].

The structure of the paper is as follows:

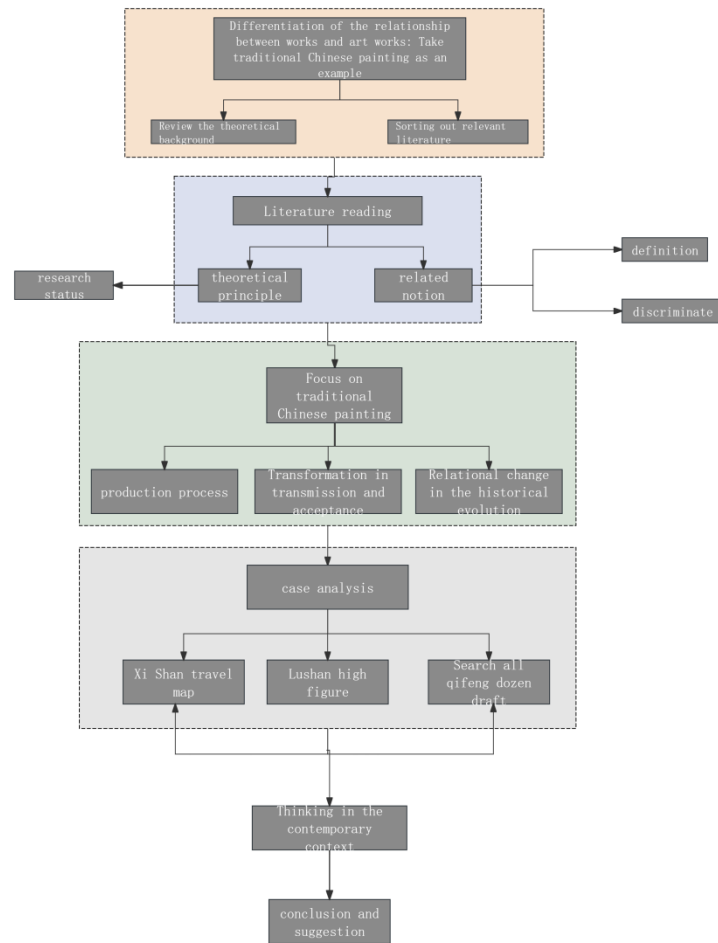


Figure 1 Technical roadmap of the paper

2. Overview of existing research

In recent years, research on the relationship between works and artworks has gradually gained attention in the fields of art philosophy, aesthetics, and cultural studies. As an important representative of Eastern art, traditional Chinese painting offers rich material for discussion on this topic due to its unique creative concepts, aesthetic standards, and historical background. Existing research mainly focuses on the following aspects:

2.1 Definition and distinction of works and artworks

Scholars generally agree that "work" is a broader concept referring to any form of product created by an artist, while "artwork" emphasizes its aesthetic value and cultural significance. For example, Li Zehou (2010) points out in "The Journey of Beauty" that traditional Chinese painting is not only a form of visual expression but also a cultural symbol, with its artistry manifested in a profound understanding of nature and humanity^[18-19]. However, regarding how to specifically distinguish between "work" and "artwork," especially concerning the uniqueness of traditional Chinese painting, existing research still lacks a systematic theoretical framework.

2.2 Artistic characteristics of traditional Chinese painting

Many scholars have explored the artistry of traditional Chinese painting from perspectives such as technique, subject matter, and philosophical background. For example, Ezra Vogel (2014) emphasizes in "A History of Chinese Painting" that traditional Chinese painting values "vivid energy and rhythm" and "mood," which elevate it beyond mere visual presentation, making it an artwork with profound cultural significance^[20-22]. Additionally, Zhu Liangzhi (2018) proposes in "Fifteen Lectures on Chinese

Aesthetics" that the "freehand brushwork" style of traditional Chinese painting reflects artists unique understanding of nature and life, further reinforcing its artistic value^[23-24]. However, these studies often focus primarily on the artistry itself and rarely address its connection to the concept of "work."

2.3 Social and cultural functions of art

Some studies have explored the functions of artworks from sociological and cultural research perspectives. For example, Wu Hong (2015) points out in "Making the Most of Objects: Things and Meaning in Chinese Art" that traditional Chinese painting is not only an expression of personal emotions but also a carrier of social power and cultural identity. This perspective provides important insights into understanding the social significance of artworks, however, the discussion on its relationship with "works" remains insufficient.

2.4 Definition of works and artworks

A work is the basic unit of artistic creation, it is the product of an artist expressing thoughts, emotions, or ideas through specific media and techniques. It possesses characteristics such as originality, uniqueness, and perceptibility, serving as the direct outcome of the artistic creation process. The concept of a work encompasses the entire creative process from initial conception to final presentation, forming the foundation of artistic expression.

In contrast, artworks are the products of artistic processing and market recognition based on the original work. They not only encompass the originality and artistry of the work but also emphasize its status and value in the art market. Artworks typically possess higher aesthetic value and market recognition, being the result of the combination of artistic creation and market operations. The concept of artworks also involves aspects such as collection, exhibition, and trading, making it a crucial component of the art ecosystem.

2.5 The difference and connection between them

Works and artworks, although closely related in essence, have distinct differences and connections: works are the direct products of the artists' creative activities, encompassing a broad range from initial drafts to mature pieces, while artworks are the refined parts selected from works with high artistic value, historical significance, and aesthetic standards; the connection lies in the fact that artworks are the sublimation of works, all artworks originate as works, but not all works can reach the realm of artworks, they interdependently coexist within the continuum of artistic creation, collectively forming the rich connotations of the art world.

3. The relationship between works and artworks in traditional Chinese painting

3.1 Relationships in the creative process

In the creative process, the relationship between works and artworks manifests as a dynamic connection of progression and transformation. From the spark of inspiration to the refinement of techniques, the artist first creates a series of works, which are the initial outcomes of the artists' exploration, experimentation, and self-expression. As the creation deepens, some works stand out due to their unique artistic qualities, intellectual depth, or technical maturity, gradually gaining social recognition and the test of time, thus ascending to the status of artworks. Therefore, every step in the creative process is essential preparation for the transformation of works into artworks, while the birth of an artwork represents the pinnacle of artistic exploration and value realization during the creation process.

3.2 Transformation in communication and reception

In the process of dissemination and reception, the transformation of the relationship between works and artworks is reflected in public interaction and evaluation. When a work first appears, it may merely be an expression of the artists' personal emotions or a demonstration of their skills, but as it spreads among the public and gradually gains recognition and praise, the work begins to transform into an artwork. This process involves emotional resonance, aesthetic recognition, and cultural interpretation from the audience, which is a crucial link in elevating the value of the work and establishing its social

significance.

3.3 Changes in relationships over time

In the course of historical evolution, the changing relationship between works and artworks reflects the transformations in social and cultural contexts as well as aesthetic perceptions. Over time, some artistic creations that were originally regarded as ordinary works may be re-evaluated under new historical circumstances and thus elevated to the status of artworks. Conversely, some works that were once considered artworks may lose their original artistic status due to the passage of time. This dynamic change in relationships not only demonstrates the fluidity of artistic value but also mirrors the cultural characteristics and social mindsets of different historical periods.

4. Case analysis

Taking Fan Kuans "Travelers by Streams and Mountains" from the Song Dynasty as an example, this work is not only a landscape painting but also Fan Kuans profound understanding and unique expression of the beauty of nature. The mountains, rivers, streams, and travelers in the painting are all manifestations of the seed growing in Fan Kuans heart. Over time, this painting gradually became an artwork, not only celebrated by later generations but also leaving a significant mark in the history of art.

Taking Shen Zhous "High Mount Lu" as an example, this work demonstrates Shen Zhous profound mastery and unique style in landscape painting. In the creative process, Shen Zhou not only employed traditional brushwork techniques but also integrated his own unique insights into nature and life. This painting is like a meticulously crafted masterpiece by Shen Zhou, a craftsman, showcasing his artistic talent and leaving an indelible mark in the history of art.

Taking Qing dynasty painter Shitao's "Searching Through Wonders to Draft" as an example, this work not only demonstrates Shitao's unique insights and innovative spirit in landscape painting but also embodies his profound reflections on nature and life. In the creative process, Shitao not only drew on the experiences and techniques of his predecessors but also integrated his own unique understanding of nature and life. This painting is like a story that Shitao tells, showcasing not only his artistic talent but also leaving a lasting impact on the history of art.

In summary, the relationship between works and artworks is profoundly embodied in traditional Chinese painting. Their relationship is akin to that between seeds and trees, craftsmen and artworks, stories and legends. Each work is the sprout of a seed in the artists heart; each piece of art is a masterpiece crafted by artisans with great care; every story is a testament to history and a carrier of culture. It is this relationship that has left a significant mark in the history of art, making traditional Chinese painting an integral part of Chinese culture.

5. Thinking in the contemporary context

5.1 The integration of tradition and modernity

In contemporary times, the creation of traditional Chinese painting works and the evaluation of their artistic value are undergoing a fusion of tradition and modernity. On one hand, traditional painting techniques and themes continue to be valued, with many works innovating while inheriting tradition, aiming to find points of convergence with modern aesthetics. On the other hand, the introduction of modern artistic concepts has made the evaluation criteria for traditional Chinese paintings more diverse and open. In this integration, the relationship between works and artworks has become more complex, allowing traditional artworks to gain new vitality and expressiveness in modern society.

5.2 Interaction between market and art

Under the influence of the market economy, the commercial value of traditional Chinese painting works has become increasingly prominent, with the market becoming a crucial factor in promoting the transformation of works into artworks. Artists and collectors are no longer limited to focusing solely on the art itself but also on its performance in the market. In this context, some works may quickly become so-called "artworks" due to market hype, while others with genuine artistic value may be overlooked by

the market. Therefore, in the contemporary context, the analysis of the relationship between works and artworks requires greater objectivity and caution.

5.3 Challenges of digital media

The rapid development of digital technology has provided a new platform for the dissemination of traditional paintings and the spread of their value. Digital replication and the widespread use of the Internet have enabled Chinese traditional paintings to be appreciated and disseminated more widely, but they have also posed challenges to the authenticity and uniqueness of artworks. Against this backdrop, the relationship between works and artworks is being tested by digital media, and how to maintain the uniqueness and authority of artworks has become a question that needs to be addressed in the contemporary art world.

5.4 Reconstruction of cultural confidence

In contemporary China the reconstruction of cultural confidence provides new support for the status of traditional paintings as works of art. The emphasis placed by the state and society on traditional culture has led to greater recognition and support for Chinese traditional paintings in terms of their classification as artworks. Against this backdrop the analysis of the relationship between works and artworks is not only a discussion within the art community but also an important issue concerning the inheritance and development of national culture.

In short, in the context of contemporary times, the analysis of the relationship between works and artworks requires us to think deeply from multiple perspectives, both respecting tradition and facing modern challenges, so as to achieve a correct understanding and effective inheritance of the value of traditional painting art.

6. Conclusion

Through an in-depth analysis of the relationship between works and artworks in traditional Chinese painting, this paper draws the following conclusions: Firstly, the relationship between works and artworks is a dynamic construction process influenced by multiple factors such as history, culture, and society. Secondly, works in traditional Chinese painting often carry profound cultural connotations, and their recognition as artworks requires a comprehensive consideration of artistic value, historical status, and cultural impact. Lastly, re-examining the relationship between works and artworks in the contemporary context is of great significance for promoting the inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese painting.

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