

The Positioning and Development of Reproductions of Ancient Chinese Calligraphy and Painting in the Cultural Market

Tianfeng Wang^{1,a,*}

¹The Palace Museum, No. 4 Jingshan Front Street, Dongcheng District, Beijing, China

a. 512733242@qq.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: The materials used in ancient calligraphy and painting, such as silk and paper, are susceptible to damage and aging. The practice of creating copies through meticulous imitation has been employed by ancient individuals to extend the lifespan of precious cultural artifacts. Reproductions continue to serve as an effective means of dissemination in museums, imparting functions such as appreciation and educational value to society. The replication of cultural artifacts extends beyond calligraphy and painting to include items like bronze ware, lacquerware, and ceramics, giving rise to activities such as collecting, buying, and selling replicas. As ancient calligraphy and painting reproductions proliferate in a rapidly evolving society, they have become favored by enthusiasts and cater to the needs of the wider public. This paper aims to explore the positioning and development of reproductions of ancient Chinese calligraphy and painting in the context of social development.

Keywords: Reproductions, General Public, Positioning, Development

1. Introduction

The practice of imitating calligraphy and painting dates back to the third century AD, with the earliest recorded instance being the replication of the "Herding Horses in the Countryside" under the decree of Emperor Wu of Jin. The earliest detailed documentation can be found in "Lun Hua," which elaborates on the preparatory thoughts, considerations during imitation, and the preparation of tools and materials. This work provides a systematic and comprehensive theoretical basis for the art of imitation. It is evident that Gu Kaizhi held a high regard for the practice of imitation, as gleaned from his experiences in practical reproduction. Yu He of the Liang Dynasty, in his work "Lun Shu Biao," also remarked: "...newly wealthy marquises, who favor refinement, display golden treasures for purchase without considering loyalty or lowliness. Meanwhile, the frivolous individuals, eager to imitate, with leaky thatched roofs and dripping moisture, stain the paper and undergo hardships, creating imitations of old books where truth and falsehood are blended, making it impossible to distinguish between them." These records indicate that not only was the imitation of calligraphy and painting practiced at the time, but the skill had already reached a high level. Additionally, it suggests that even at that time, there were instances of forgery in calligraphy and painting.

The development of reproductions of ancient calligraphy and painting has matured to meet the demands of society, both in terms of resources and technology. However, during this rapid

development, the quality of reproductions has declined, leading to an oversupply in the market economy. Similar to the Ming and Qing dynasties, high-quality reproductions gradually transitioned to inexpensive imitations and counterfeits, distorting the true appearance and historical significance of cultural artifacts for the general public.

2. The Developmental History of Reproductions in Ancient Chinese Calligraphy and Painting

According to the records in "Fashu Yaolu," during the time of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Emperor Mu Di commissioned Zhang Yi to copy a document, and after completion, Zhang Yi answered questions about it. At that moment, Zhang Yi did not discern the copied work for a while, eventually remarking, "The young one nearly caused confusion between the genuine and the imitation." This account illustrates that Zhang Yi's skillful imitation of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy was so convincing that even Wang Xizhi himself failed to notice it at first. Gu Kaizhi, a painter from the Eastern Jin Dynasty, produced many renowned paintings and also wrote articles on the theory of imitation.

In the 5th century AD, during the Southern Dynasties period, the painter Liu Shaozu was a skilled imitator known for his proficiency in "transcribing paintings." This term aptly describes the depth of his imitation skills, creating an artistic effect so authentic that it resembled the original work being relocated.

In the 6th century AD, Xie He, a scholar from the Southern Qi Dynasty, presented six important techniques for painting in his work "Gu Hua Pinlu," and one of these, the "transcription and transfer" technique, outlined the step-by-step process of imitation from simple to complex. This was another summary of the skill of imitating calligraphy and painting since the Jin Dynasty.

During the early Tang Dynasty, the royal establishment of the "Jixian Academy," tasked with managing secretarial documents and books, conducted extensive research on calligraphy and painting. Notable individuals involved in this work included Zhao Mo, Han Daozheng, Zhuge Zhen, Feng Chengsu, and others. Feng Chengsu's meticulous imitation of "Shenlongben Lanting Xu" demonstrated exceptional skill, vividly reproducing the elegance and fluidity of the original.

The Song Dynasty marked the flourishing of painting. During the reign of Emperor Huizong, the establishment of the Xuanhe Painting Academy represented the pinnacle of court painting. Zhao Ji gathered painters in the court, leading to the extensive imitation of ancient paintings. Besides his own creations, Zhao Ji also imitated many outstanding works of predecessors, such as "Pounding Clothes" and "Guoguofofen Youchuntu."

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the trend of imitating calligraphy and painting intensified, becoming more widespread as documented literature continued to evolve. Simultaneously, with the development of the social economy, artworks in calligraphy and painting entered the economic sphere, becoming a unique commodity. Driven by financial incentives, people engaged in forgery, utilizing imitations or low-quality replicas to deceive and gain monetary benefits. This phenomenon, known as "forgery," gradually gave rise to concentrated areas of counterfeit production, such as Suzhou, Henan, Changsha, and Homen. With the prevalence of forgery, the protective role and significance of imitation in preserving cultural relics gradually diminished.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Palace Museum took the lead in promoting the practice of imitation. It recruited talents from the southern regions, with Mr. Jin Zhongyu as the main person in charge. Subsequently, they established a studio for imitating paintings, recruiting individuals like Zheng Zhuyou, Feng Zhonglian from Rong Baozhai, and Chen Linzhai. During this period, systematic imitation and reproduction were carried out on first-tier cultural relics held by the museum. Feng Zhonglian's ten-year imitation of "Along the River During the Qingming Festival" left an enduring legacy, contributing significantly to the transmission and inheritance of the art of calligraphy and painting. By the 21st century, museums rapidly embraced technological

advancements, with digital technology extending its reach. The distinctive features of digital technology accelerated the production speed of reproductions. Companies such as Yachang, Rong Baozhai, and Sheng Caihong dominate the market for reproductions in cultural and artistic institutions. Ancient masterpieces in calligraphy and painting have transitioned from museum exhibition halls to the daily lives of the general public. The concept of "reproduction" has transcended traditional boundaries, becoming a "commodity" and generating economic benefits. Before the advent of the world's first computer, no one could have envisioned the multifaceted functions of modern museums, encompassing collection, preservation, research, exhibition, education, and growing social responsibilities [1].

3. Reproduction of Ancient Chinese Calligraphy and Painting and Its Relationship with Social Development

A market economy refers to an economic form that allocates social resources through market mechanisms. From a micro perspective, reproductions of ancient Chinese calligraphy and painting constitute a category within the market economy, where the public serves as the participants in transactional activities, forming relationships between buyers and sellers [2]. The market for reproductions of ancient Chinese calligraphy and painting is interrelated and constrained by three main entities: the public (consumers), creators (authors), and suppliers (enterprises, manufacturers, museums). This paper suggests the following recommendations for the development of high-quality cultural products that ensure the stability and orderly progression of the cultural market:

3.1. Embracing Specialized Reproduction Paths

From a global perspective, the reproduction of ancient Chinese calligraphy and painting has become the mainstream trend in cultural market development. Seagull, an American company, rapidly expanded by producing replicas of works by the renowned Chinese painter Ding Shaoguang. Nigensha in Japan is a leader in the reproduction industry, having collaborated with the Taipei Palace Museum to replicate ancient Chinese paintings and calligraphy throughout different dynasties. Notably, their work "Selected Masterpieces of Song, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties" remains an exemplary reproduction. An exhibition of meticulously crafted works by Nigensha, sourced from the Taipei Palace Museum, was held on August 1, 2023, at the Shaanxi Art Museum. Nigensha's reproduction of "Kuaixueshiqingtie" faithfully replicated the appearance of the original in terms of paper quality, color, and mounting, earning praise from Mr. Qi Baishi as "on par with the original." Both Nigensha and Seagull have pursued distinctive paths. However, reflecting on China's historical journey of reproduction, the pursuit of diverse replication techniques has, for the sake of rapid production and profit, abandoned distinctive technical routes.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China seventy years ago, the cultural market has kept pace with the times. Rong Baozhai, an established brand in the stationery and four treasures of the study, is renowned for its "woodblock watermark" technique, recognized as a national-level intangible cultural heritage. In the cultural market, Rong Baozhai not only safeguards traditional craftsmanship through exhibition and demonstration techniques but also commercially sells woodblock watermarked works by famous artists from the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, such as "The Night Revels of Han Xizai", "Guoguofofuren Youchuntu", "Zanhuashinvtu", "Lantingxiuqitu", as well as modern and contemporary artists. (See Figures 1 and 2) The economic benefits derived from the works reproduced through this technique turn them into commodities, representing not only a replicated piece but also the inheritance of craftsmanship.

Established in 1993, the Yachang Cultural Group Limited has its own distinctive features in the field of reproduction. Yachang incorporates works by numerous domestic calligraphers and painters,

organizing auctions and focusing on the main business direction of offset color printing. Figure 3 depicts a reproduced version of "Ink Crab" by the modern painter Qi Baishi, while Figure 4 showcases a reproduction of "Verdant Leaves in Crimson Microcosm" by the modern painter Yu Fei'an. Yachang Group is committed to continuous improvement in the replication of works by modern and contemporary artists, providing small-scale, customized services for collectors and presenting detailed aspects of the collected works. This approach holds a certain collection value in the market.

Currently, reproduction studios within museums are indispensable and serve as a significant function in museum calligraphy and painting reproduction – replacing original artifacts. Museum replicas are the closest versions to the original artifacts. Reproduction studio personnel analyze aspects such as brushwork, ink artistic conception, paper age, etc., to create flawless "replicas." For example, the Shanghai Museum's intangible heritage technique, Keluo block printing, is a unique method for replicating ancient Chinese calligraphy and painting. Figure 5 displays the Keluo block reproduction process of Dong Qichang's work "Eight Views of Autumn Excursion," showcasing meticulous research into Dong Qichang's brushwork techniques. The resulting reproduction possesses triple value—artistic, cultural, and aesthetic. Additionally, the Palace Museum's technique for imitating ancient Chinese calligraphy and painting has been recognized as a national intangible traditional skill. The primary purpose of calligraphy and painting imitation in museums is to protect cultural relics. By creating a copy for each significant artifact, it serves as both an homage to authenticity and a means of preservation. Figure 6 displays a manually imitated reproduction of "Sixteen Luohan Figures" from the Palace Museum.



Figure 1: Detail of woodblock watermark "Zanhuashinvtu"



Figure 2: Detail of woodblock watermark "Zanhuashinvtu"



Figure 3: Reproduction of "Ink Crab"



Figure 4: Reproduction of "Cuiweihongyetu"

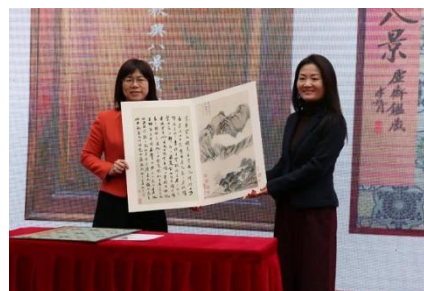


Figure 5: Keluo block reproduction of "Eight Views of Autumn Excursion"



Figure 6: Manually imitated reproduction of "Sixteen Luohan Figures"



Figure 7: Digital reproduction

3.2. Rational Utilization of Cultural Relics Resources

Promoting traditional culture requires the historical connotations and values of cultural relics to support it. Using replicas of cultural relics to drive the market economy means that cultural relics should step out of exhibition halls and storerooms in a different way, bringing enduring artistic charm to the public. To transform cultural relic resources into economic value, it is necessary to judiciously utilize the resources within museums. In 2018, the Shanghai Museum, using Dong Qichang's calligraphy and painting as a case study, replicated Dong Qichang's "Eight Views of Autumn Excursion" using the Keluo block printing technique for an exhibition. Additionally, a professional team produced a limited edition of 100 sets of this artifact. This limited production avoided mass production assembly lines, leveraging Dong Qichang's fame and intangible cultural heritage techniques to boost the museum's economic benefits. The Palace Museum, through its craft store, primarily sells replicas of calligraphy and painting. Figure 7 shows digitally reproduced calligraphy and painting replicas available in the craft store, meeting the aesthetic needs of the public while simultaneously driving economic benefits with ensured quality. However, in 2017, responding to political demands for foreign heads of state visiting China, the Palace Museum produced replicas of calligraphy and painting as national gifts. The content included four sets of pages from Yu Zhi's Flower and Bird Album and Dong Qichang's Landscape Album. These replicas were intended to promote traditional excellent culture and carry political significance. To meet the purchasing demands of the public, the market saw an influx of numerous inferior imitations. These imitations had deviated from the color connotations and clarity of the original artifacts, as depicted in Figure 8 and Figure 9, leading to a loss of competitiveness in the market. Museums achieve a balance between supply and demand through market regulation, a crucial feature of the market economy. Therefore, museums should limit the reproduction of some artifacts for market transactions, giving the replicas an identity

and collecting value.



Figure 8: Imitation (Photo by the author)



Figure 9: Reproduction (Photo by the author)

Museums encompass millions of cultural relics and resources, most of which remain dormant. The improvement of public aesthetic and cultural levels directly reflects on the content, form, and quality of replicas of ancient Chinese calligraphy and painting. However, currently, Chinese museums lack a macroscopic control over the market. Grasping consumers' psychological needs is taking the initiative in the market. Many museums, particularly in the field of ancient Chinese calligraphy and painting, focus on attracting the public through exhibitions but fail to actively produce high-end cultural products that align with the contemporary market economy to dominate the market. The function of museums includes exhibitions, which can attract the public's attention and allow them to immerse themselves in the cultural relics. The success of these exhibitions relies on the intrinsic value of cultural relics, making replicas crucial after exhibition visits. Replicas serve as an extension of exhibitions, stimulating public consumption and driving the healthy development of the cultural market. For instance, the Palace Museum's exhibitions such as "Tea Culture Special Exhibition" and "Joint Exhibition of the Palace Museum and Tibetan Artifacts" allow visitors to take away photographs of cultural relics and the memories they experienced. However, subsequent market services are lacking, and the most common practice is the use of exhibition catalogues for academic research and appreciation.

An example worth emulating is the "Yan Zhenqing Special Exhibition" held by the Tokyo National Museum in Japan. Due to the first appearance of the cultural relic "Five Horses," renowned scholars flocked to the exhibition (Figure 10). Subsequently, Professor Kiyonori Maekura of the University of Tokyo's Institute of Oriental Culture published the "Li Gonglin Five Horses" collector's edition reproduction, officially released as a printed product closely resembling the original work, "not inferior to the genuine article." Artwork is no longer elevated above, only for admiration; it is positioned on an equal footing with the audience, reflecting the transition of "collection" to "exhibition" [3].



Figure 10: Collector's edition reproduction of "Li Gonglin Five Horses"

3.3. Expanding the Value of Artists' Paintings

In the utilization of resource allocation, the labor of artists constitutes a significant portion of the art market. The economic operation of the art market often revolves around the auction of paintings and calligraphy by artists. However, replicas, in the public's perception, seem to lack utility. Investors, guided by the concept of authenticity, collect works of various artists. In Western countries, the auction format for replicas is relatively well-established. In 2005, Poly Auction auctioned two replicas by Chen Yifei, titled "Venice Bridge" and "Female Violinist," each authorized and signed by the artist, fetching a transaction price of up to 58,000 RMB. Original works by artist Wu Guanzhong have been auctioned for amounts reaching billions of RMB. To allow collectors and enthusiasts to have a closer connection with Wu Guanzhong's works, replicas are produced with the authorization and limited edition printing by the artist or collector. These replicas, with a unified numbering system, are generally limited to no more than a hundred copies for sale. As a result, they possess favorable aesthetic and appreciation value, offering substantial potential for appreciation. This phenomenon represents an extension of the value of the original work. While the market is intangible, commodities are tangible, and replicas of an artist's work similarly harbor untapped potential.

4. Establishing Regulatory Mechanisms

The replication of ancient paintings and calligraphy represents a distinctive mode of production that cannot be solely measured in monetary terms. The generation of these commodities is rooted in cultural relics and the works of artists. Given the simplicity of document propagation and the involvement of a range of issues, such as intellectual property, its production requires unified management by the cultural administrative authorities. During the rise of printing in Western Europe, it was subject to control by authoritarian governments. Examining the content of regulations in China, such as the "Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics," "Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage," and the "People's Republic of China Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics," it becomes evident that there is a relative lack of coverage regarding replicas. Therefore, establishing forward-looking regulations for the replication of ancient paintings and calligraphy is crucial to adapt to the cultural and economic environment.

Departments related to the production of cultural relic replicas by museums and enterprises entering the market should standardize the workflow of cultural relic replicas. Specific regulations and norms must be proposed for the evaluation of replicas to ensure their quality. The "Management Measures for Replication and Rubbing of Cultural Relics" stipulates that cultural relic replication involves adhering to historical information such as the volume, form, texture, decoration, text, and patterns of cultural relics. It should primarily employ the original techniques and workflow, using defined measures to assess the quality of replicas. [5]

5. Conclusion

Firstly, through the analysis of museums and enterprises above, each has its own distinctive development route for replicas. The techniques themselves represent a cultural heritage and form the advantage and characteristics within the market economy. Based on distinctive replication paths, they discard cheap forms like imitations and counterfeits in the cultural market. The rapid development of the market economy contrasts with the time required for traditional handicrafts to produce replicas with collectible and appreciable value.

Secondly, with the increasing influence of cultural relics, the market is flooded with more negative news. Replicas are found in coffee shops, hotel lobbies, and various places, but the quality of these replicas is extremely low. They face the risk of over-exploitation and predatory use, which is detrimental to the development of the market economy. Replication teams need to produce high-

quality replicas, while the general public needs to enhance their aesthetic ability and the ability to discern the quality of replicas.

Furthermore, for the positive and stable development of ancient painting and calligraphy replicas in the market economy, three aspects, namely, "correct path selection," "reasonable resource allocation," and "exploration of artistic potential," are crucial. To meet societal demands, the production of ancient painting and calligraphy replicas should be done well, spreading the culture of excellent painting and calligraphy.

Lastly, while ensuring quality standards, it is essential to control the quantity of replicas in the cultural market. Macro-control by relevant departments is not meant to replace the operation and regulation of the market but to strengthen the utility of market mechanisms. Establishing a sound legal system for ancient painting and calligraphy replicas is crucial for maintaining the sustained development of the cultural market and promoting economic stability.

References

- [1] Miao, L. (2022). *Museum Display and New Media Technology*. Fudan University Press.
- [2] Zheng, J. Z. (2010). *Microeconomics*. Zhejiang University Press.
- [3] Zhao, J. X. (2021). *Research on Visual Field Museum Communication*. People's Publishing House.
- [4] Schramm, W., & Bittner, W. (2010). *Introduction to Communication Studies*. Renmin University of China Press.
- [5] Li, F. (2016). *Legal Considerations on the Industry of Replication and Imitation of Cultural Relics*. *Cultural Relics Identification and Appreciation*, 2016(07).