



ENHANCING THE IDENTITY OF GUANGDONG WATERCOLOR PAINTING THROUGH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND CULTURAL DISSEMINATION

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Abstract

This study aims to (1) investigate and analyze the current inheritance status and challenges of Guangdong watercolor painting, identifying factors that affect its regional characteristics; and (2) To formulate development strategies to enhance these regional features through management approaches and cultural dissemination. This research was mixed method research of qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews with 10 experts, including watercolor artists, educators, academic committee members, cultural communication specialists, and curators from art museums. The quantitative component collected 390 valid responses through a questionnaire covering seven dimensions on a five-point Likert scale. Data collection methods included surveys, interviews, and case studies (both domestic and international), while data analysis employed thematic analysis, comparative analysis, trend analysis, and reliability, validity, and factor analysis. **The research finding was found that:** (1) Guangdong watercolor painting faces challenges in market recognition (mean 3.48–3.83), innovative expression (mean 3.60), and communication channels, although audiences highly value its Lingnan cultural

heritage (mean 4.00–4.15). However, diversity of style and brand awareness scored lower; and (2) The management and communication strategy to enhance regional identity has 5 components as follows: 1) identity construction, 2) digital communication transformation, 3) market and public perception barriers, 4) exhibition and management drivers, and 5) policy support with future vision—and proposes targeted strategies to balance tradition and innovation, optimize digital dissemination, address market bottlenecks, strengthen exhibition management, and enhance policy support to achieve sustainable development of Guangdong watercolor painting.

Key words: Guangdong watercolor painting; Management strategy, Cultural Dissemination; Enhancing the identity

Introduction

Guangdong watercolor, a key part of Lingnan culture, combines Chinese and Western techniques with regional aesthetics. Rooted in Qing Dynasty export paintings and developed through the Guangzhou Academy, it reflects historical inheritance, education, and cultural influences. Today, low market recognition, public misconceptions, limited distribution, pressures on young artists, and weak innovation challenge its regional expression and cultural impact.



Figure1 : "Nanshe Ancient Construction Stone Relief · Cuju Map" 27cm×39cm watercolor on paper
Li Shuyi (Guangdong)



Figure2 : "The Spirit of the Craftsman 2" 40cm 40cm watercolor watercolor on paper
Chen Zhiyi (Guangdong)



Figure3 : "Chaoshan Old House" — Island Gate Village Yellow House"46cm×183cm watercolor on paper
Zhang Yunxiao (Guangdong)

Figure 1: Guangdong watercolor, a key part of Lingnan culture.

This study explores strategies to enhance Guangdong watercolor's regional characteristics by examining its inheritance, influencing factors, and development approaches. Using interviews and surveys, it builds a framework addressing cultural identity, communication, market perception, and management. The research offers both theoretical insights and practical strategies to strengthen its cultural value and support the promotion of local arts in China.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the inheritance status and challenges of Guangdong watercolor painting and identify factors affecting its regional characteristics.
2. To formulate development strategies to enhance these regional features through management approaches and cultural dissemination.

Literature Reviews

Art develops through exchange and interaction with foreign cultures. Watercolor, known for its transparency and fluidity, was introduced to China in 1715 by Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione, who served the Qing court from Kangxi to Qianlong. Castiglione brought European techniques, including anatomy and oil painting, and produced numerous court works in watercolor, pioneering a Sino-Western fusion that gradually spread beyond the court and laid the foundation for Chinese watercolor painting.

In the current era of economic globalization, technological integration, and digital interconnectedness, the survival and dissemination of culture and art have transcended national boundaries and temporal constraints. The increasing specific gravity of cultural export and dissemination is a defining feature of global communication in our time. Just as Marshall McLuhan predicted, the world has become a compact "global village," and the age of world culture envisioned by Goethe has arrived.

Research Methodology

This study aims to enhance the identity of Guangdong watercolor painting through management strategies and cultural communication methods. Employing a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative research ensures the comprehensiveness and scientific rigor of the investigation. The

research methodology seeks to achieve its objectives through the selection of research subjects, data collection, data analysis, research framework, and research tools.

Qualitative research subjects: The qualitative research gathered insights from 10 experts, including Guangdong watercolor painters, educators, members of national and provincial watercolor committees, cultural communication specialists, and representatives from the Guangdong Museum of Art.

Quantitative research subjects: A total of 390 valid questionnaires were collected through quantitative research.

Data collection: The study employed structured and open-ended interviews covering current conditions, challenges, communication, management, and future development, with transcriptions ensuring accuracy. Additionally, a questionnaire was designed across seven dimensions using a five-point Likert scale, comprising 30 items, and collected 390 valid responses.

Data analysis: The study utilized Braun and Clark's (2006) six-stage thematic analysis method for qualitative analysis, extracting 33 preliminary codes classified into five themes. For quantitative analysis, SPSS was employed to conduct reliability testing (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.931$), validity assessment (KMO=0.959), factor analysis (explaining 72.50% of variance), and correlation analysis (coefficients ranging from 0.200 to 0.800).

Research Framework: The study constructed an analytical framework covering five core variables to systematically deconstruct the cultural value and development path of Guangdong watercolor painting:

Table 1: Core and sub-variables of comprehensive cultural information of watercolor art in Guangdong

kernel variable	Subvariables	Citation
The essence of art	Historical origin, regional cultural tradition, academic inheritance system, creative language and media, individual characteristics of artists	Xia Aihua, 2018; Zhang Luping & Lei Tao, 2019; Wang Zhaomin, 1983; Zong Huating, 2011; Ding Siyao & Zhao Yuzhuo, 2008; Zhang Tongyu, 2005; Xu Bihui, 2005; Shang Hui, 1995; Geng Jipeng, 2010

Cultural communication power	History of cross-cultural communication, visual narrative expression, media communication forms Cross-border artistic collaboration	[UK] Ivan Williams, 2001; Xia Aihua, 2018; Zhang Luping & Lei Tao, 2019; Zong Huating, 2011; Wang Huiyu, 2017; Wang Qiaoqiao, 2017
Market cognition and preference	Overseas customer preference; contemporary market trend; aesthetic acceptance	Zhang Luoping & Lei Tao, 2019; Zong Huating, 2011; Wang Huiyu, 2017; Shang Hui, 1995; Lu Meilin, 1988
Sense of identity	Public cultural identity; professional identity of practitioners; regional art brand identity	Wang Qiaoqiao, 2017; Zong Huating, 2011; Wang Zhaomin, 1983; Zheng Hongming, 2014; Wang Huiyu, 2017
Manage and promote the effectiveness of strategies	Policy and institutional support; education and talent training; exhibition and award mechanism; cultural promotion path	Zong Huating, 2011; Wang Huiyu, 2017; Xia Aihua, 2018; Wang Qiaoqiao, 2017

Source: Ma Mingyuan, 2025.

With "the essence of art" as the core, this framework connects cultural communication, market feedback, identity and management strategies to form a closed-loop analysis system, providing a theoretical basis for current situation analysis and strategy formulation.

Research tools: Research tools include interview questionnaires and questionnaires, design based on literature review and expert pre-review:

Interview questionnaire: It contains open and semi-structured questions covering the current situation, challenges, communication, management and future development. The question design refers to the cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) and agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Questionnaire: 30 items, using five-point Likert scale, covering seven dimensions. The questionnaire has been pre-tested and validated to ensure reliability and validity.

Results

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining expert interviews and 390 questionnaires to examine the inheritance, regional traits, and enhancement strategies of Guangdong watercolor. Five themes emerge: identity construction, digital communication, market and perception gaps, exhibition and management drivers, and policy support. The analysis addresses three areas—current challenges, influencing factors, and development strategies—using PEST and multi-dimensional frameworks to ensure logical rigor and validation.

Development Status and Challenges of Guangdong Watercolor Painting: As a vital artistic expression of Lingnan culture, Guangdong watercolor painting uniquely blends Chinese and Western techniques with regional aesthetics to create its distinctive water-color fusion style. However, the art form currently faces challenges including limited market recognition, and restricted distribution channels. The following discussion will examine these issues through both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Expert interview insights: Interviews with ten experts offered diverse insights into Guangdong watercolor. Professor Chen Haining highlighted its realistic style rooted in Lingnan's climate and traditions established by pioneers like Wang Zhaomin. Artist Ye Guoqiang noted its early Sino-Western fusion from the Qing export painting era, continued by Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Committee member Lu Xiaohan emphasized the Academy's research-based system that has cultivated generations of artists.



Figure 2: "Bottle flower". watercolor on paper Wang Zhaomin (Guangdong).

Experts agree that Guangdong watercolor faces significant challenges. Chen Kunlun noted its public misinterpretation as mere sketches, while Fang Xiaolong stressed weak market demand and pressures on young artists. Wang Haiying pointed to globalization and digitalization limiting its reach among younger audiences, and Shen Lu highlighted a lack of stylistic innovation. Chen Xilue emphasized underused digital dissemination and weak branding, and Chen Chaosheng concluded that generational gaps and poor marketization remain core bottlenecks needing management and communication breakthroughs.



Figure 3: 2023 Shenzhen Watercolor Biennale Exhibition Site.
Source: Ma Mingyuan, 2025.

Thematic synthesis: Using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis, 33 initial codes were distilled into five core themes. The main challenges include: the tension between cultural identity and the limiting “local school” label; weak market engagement and public perception gaps; reliance on traditional dissemination with little use of digital platforms; conservative styles that deter younger audiences; and insufficient policy support and resources for emerging artists.

Audience Characteristics and Cognitive Status

The survey of 390 respondents reveals audience characteristics and perceptions of Guangdong watercolor. Females account for 59.23%, males 40.77%; ages 46–60 (33.08%), 36–45 (28.21%), 18–35 (24.36%). Art enthusiasts make up 52.05%, general consumers 35.9%, and professional painters 20%, with most spending 500–2000 yuan monthly and 77.69% holding a bachelor’s degree or higher. Cultural identity is strong (mean 4.00–4.15), while market recognition is low (mean 3.48–3.83), with limited awareness of collectible value and high price sensitivity. Innovation scores are lowest (mean 3.60), and social media and virtual galleries show promise (mean 4.06–4.14) despite weak branded communication (mean 3.70).

Table 2: Correlation Analysis Table

	Dimension of cultural identity	Market demand dimension	The Dimensional Relationship Between Social-Media and Art Consumption	The dimensional relationship between education and public engagement	Cultural Uniqueness and Its Market Cognitive Dimensions	Innovative Dimension	Purchase Intention and Price Sensitivity Dimension
Dimension of Cultural identity							
Purchase Intention and Price Sensitivity Dimension	0.480**						
The Dimensional Relationship Between Social Media and Art Consumption	0.350**	0.450**					
The dimensional relationship between education and public engagement	0.650**	0.430**	0.700**				
Cultural Uniqueness and Its Market Cognitive Dimensions	0.720**	0.620**	0.400**	0.580**			
Innovative Dimension	0.400**	0.500**	0.600**	0.450**	0.510**		
Purchase Intention and Price Sensitivity Dimension	0.200**	0.800**	0.350**	0.300**	0.250**	.0.350**	

Source: Ma Mingyuan, 2025.

Correlation analysis: There is a high correlation between cultural identity and market cognition (0.720**) and education and social media (0.700**), indicating that education and communication are the key to enhance cognition (see Table 2).

Inheritance Frequency Analysis

Since 2000, Guangdong watercolor painting has gained visibility, with references in academic literature rising from 0.00040% in the 1990s to 0.00110% in the 2020s, supported by exhibitions, policy backing, and digital platforms like WeChat and TikTok. Initiatives such as the Guangdong Watercolor Exhibition and the 2018 Wang Zhaomin inheritance show highlight its academic and cultural role. Yet, globalization, photography's dominance, and declining youth engagement threaten its distinctiveness and continuity.

Summary of Current Situation

Table 3: PEST analysis of factors affecting the inheritance of watercolor in Guangdong province.

factor	The content matters
politics (P)	Cultural policies and intangible cultural heritage protection measures provide institutional support for inheritance, and international cooperation frameworks promote cultural export.
economy (E)	Globalization and cultural industry growth provide financial support, market competition and cost pressure affect inheritance and development.
society (S)	The popularization of art education promotes the awareness of inheritance, and the multi-cultural communication enhances the acceptance and identity of young groups.
technology (T)	Digital communication and innovation tools promote the inheritance of modernization, expand the scope of communication and inject new vitality.

Source: Ma Mingyuan, 2025.

Guangdong watercolor painting benefits from a rich historical heritage and strong educational systems, with Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts fostering artists like Wang Zhaomin, establishing technical and cultural foundations. Lingnan culture's openness and climate contribute to its unique aesthetic. However, it faces challenges: low market recognition (mean 3.48-3.83), limited dissemination channels (80% traditional exhibitions), insufficient innovation (mean 3.60), and survival pressures for young artists. PEST analysis highlights opportunities in policy support and digital technologies, but threats from global homogenization and economic fluctuations persist (see Table 3).

Factors Affecting the Artistic Characteristics of Guangdong Watercolor Painting

Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, this study identifies three key factors that affect the regional characteristics of watercolor painting in Guangdong: cultural identity and regional characteristics, market and public cognition, and digital communication potential.

Cultural identity and regional characteristics: Guangdong watercolor, rooted in Lingnan culture, fuses Chinese and Western methods to form a distinct aesthetic. Scholars highlight Wang Zhaomin's realism, Pearl River Delta's vivid depictions, and the Guangzhou Academy's role in strengthening regional traits. Yet, concerns remain that the "regional school" label restricts innovation on themes like urbanization and ecology. Factor analysis shows strong cultural identity (mean 4.15, 88.46%) but weaker stylistic diversity (mean 3.60, 55.38%). Drawing on Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, Guangdong watercolor gains institutional and symbolic capital, though its regional framing may also constrain innovation.

Market and Public Perception: Guangdong watercolor faces weak market recognition, with misconceptions reducing its academic and collectible value. Experts note limited promotion, low artist visibility, and young painters turning to other media due to poor returns, while unclear positioning against oil and Chinese painting worsens the issue. Factor analysis shows moderate market perception (loading 0.67–0.85), low collectible value (mean 3.50), high price sensitivity (mean 3.83), and only one-third willing to pay over 2000 yuan. Correlation (0.800**, $p < 0.01$) confirms perception strongly drives purchase intention. Hall's cultural representation theory (1997) explains stereotypes of watercolor as "decorative" or "sketch-like," underscoring the need for education and communication to strengthen its academic and market standing.

Digital Communication Potential: Digital platforms offer new opportunities for Guangdong watercolor, yet branding remains weak. While short videos and virtual galleries attract young and global audiences, their potential is underused. Factor analysis shows strong social media influence (loading 0.72–0.83), with high acceptance of digital formats (means 4.06–4.14) but lower brand clarity (mean 3.70); 66.67% access watercolor via social media, yet only 22.56%



perceive a clear image. Integrating Lingnan narratives and systematic strategies is key, as agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) highlights how repeated digital exposure can reshape public perception and enhance visibility.

Discussions

Development strategies to enhance regional characteristics: Based on thematic analysis and data support, the study refined five core themes and constructed a comprehensive development strategy, aiming to balance traditional inheritance and contemporary innovation, and optimize communication and market-oriented path.

The identity construction of Guangdong watercolor painting: Guangdong watercolor, rooted in Lingnan culture and the Guangzhou Academy's academic legacy, blends tradition with regional vibrancy. While its openness and climate foster lively expression, reliance on regional labels limits engagement with contemporary themes. Experts stress reinforcing Wang Zhaomin's techniques in education, integrating issues like urbanization and ecology, and expanding through cross-border exhibitions to renew value. Guided by Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (1986), balancing tradition with innovation is essential to strengthen competitiveness and sustain dynamic cultural capital.

Digital communication transformation: Digital tools like short videos and virtual exhibitions offer great potential but suffer from weak branding and fragmented strategies. Experts note TikTok and Bilibili attract youth yet lack unified promotion, while virtual halls need better tech-content integration to expand global influence. Strategies include creating a cohesive "Guangdong Watercolor" brand highlighting Lingnan traits, optimizing digital channels with virtual exhibitions and AI courses, and enhancing international presence via festivals and online shows. Agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) emphasizes that systematic digital engagement can boost visibility and cultural impact.

Market and public perception barriers: Limited market awareness and public misconceptions hinder Guangdong watercolor's growth. Experts note stereotypes lowering value, young artists leaving due to weak support, and a less developed collection market. Strategies include correcting biases via festivals, lectures, and public engagement; supporting artists through creation funds and residencies; and offering affordable cultural products linked to tourism. Hall's



cultural representation theory (1997) underscores the need for education, communication, and multi-channel dissemination to reshape perception and boost market appeal.

Exhibition and management drive: Exhibitions and university collaborations have strengthened Guangdong watercolor's influence, but innovation remains limited. Experts note national shows lack thematic diversity, cross-disciplinary experiments are scarce, and resource management is insufficient. Strategies include diversifying exhibition themes, expanding Guangzhou Academy partnerships through residencies and training, and integrating watercolor with installation and video art. Resource-based theory (Barney, 1991) highlights that combining resources and fostering innovation can enhance competitiveness and the art form's impact.

Policy Support and Future Vision: Policy support has created opportunities for Guangdong watercolor, but resource allocation remains limited. Experts recommend special funds for young artists, stronger government integration into public culture, and digital archives to preserve heritage. Strategies include funding creations and exhibitions, embedding watercolor in community projects and festivals, and developing digital archives to enhance academic and cultural value. Institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) shows that policies and funding reinforce cultural embedding and institutionalized inheritance.

Conclusions

Compared with existing studies, this research demonstrates the following innovations: By integrating a mixed methodology combining interviews with 10 experts and 390 questionnaires, it addresses the limitations of single-method approaches; Using Lingnan culture as a starting point, it systematically analyzes the locality and developmental bottlenecks of Guangdong watercolor painting; The five thematic strategies—cultural, dissemination, market, management, and policy—provide comprehensive practical pathways; Emphasizing digital transformation through short videos and virtual exhibition halls, it fills the theoretical gap in digital communication for Guangdong watercolor painting. While most existing studies focus on techniques or history (e.g., Wang Zhaomin's system research), this study reveals the potential of marketization and digital

transformation through multidimensional analysis, offering new perspectives for promoting local art in China.

Practical significance: This study's strategies provide actionable pathways for the sustainable development of Guangdong watercolor painting: Strengthening the cultural foundation of Lingnan through education and contemporary expression; Breaking through cognitive barriers and market limitations via cultural products and public education; Enhancing visibility and global influence through digital tools; Optimizing resource integration efficiency through exhibitions and institutional collaborations; Integrating into the public cultural system via dedicated funds and digital archives. These strategies not only apply to Guangdong watercolor painting but also offer valuable references for promoting other Chinese regional arts, such as Chaoshan paper-cutting and Suzhou embroidery.

Limitations and future directions: While this study offers a comprehensive analysis through a mixed-methods approach, several limitations remain: The questionnaire survey was confined to Guangdong Province, failing to reach national or international audiences; the application of virtual exhibition halls and AI technology remains in exploratory phases requiring further validation; and the effectiveness of the strategy requires long-term tracking evaluation. Future research could expand the sample scope to include international perspectives, explore practical applications of AI and virtual reality in watercolor painting dissemination, and conduct longitudinal studies to assess the actual impact of the strategy.

New Knowledges

Guangdong Watercolor Painting Inheritance, Challenges, Development Strategies

Strategic Framework

Enhance Regional Characteristics
Apply Digital Tools
Integrate Market & Cultural
Strategies Fill Theoretical Gaps
Provide Actionable Paths

Core Themes

Identity Construction Digital
Communication Transformation
Market & Public Perception
Barriers
Exhibition & Management Drive
Policy Support



Research Innovations

Model linking cultural identity &
modern communication
Lingnan aesthetics evolving via
ecology & interdisciplinarity
Pioneering factor analysis for policy
& participation impact
Empirical evidence for regional art
studies

Practical Contributions

Community initiatives
Digital archives
Scalable framework balancing
tradition & global outreach
Revitalization model for local art in
China & beyond

Figure 4: Guangdong Watercolor Painting Inheritance, Challenges,
Development Strategies.

Source: Ma Mingyuan, 2025.

Recommendations

To effectively enhance the regional characteristics and cultural dissemination of Guangdong watercolor painting, the following recommendations are proposed based on the study's findings.

First, institutions like Guangzhou Academy should integrate urban ecology and globalization into courses via workshops, preserving Lingnan traditions while raising public cultural identity from 4.00–4.15 to above 4.5 in three years. Second, use digital platforms with branded short-video series on Douyin and Weibo, influencer collaborations, and VR exhibitions to boost youth engagement by 40% and address low innovation perception (mean 3.60). Third, enhance market mechanisms through dedicated gallery sections, e-commerce, and pricing strategies highlighting cultural value, supported by funds like the "Guangdong Watercolor Youth Creation Fund" to aid young artists. Fourth, host hybrid "Lingnan Watercolor Festival" events combining offline exhibitions and

live streams to increase participation and correct misconceptions such as the “sketch miniature” label.

Finally, establish a "Guangdong Watercolor Development Taskforce" to coordinate resources, create artist databases, and track progress via metrics like participation rates and sales growth, ensuring sustainable inheritance and global recognition of Guangdong watercolor as a vibrant, regionally rooted art form.

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