

# Study of Artworks from the Sukhothai Period in Thailand and the Yuan and Song Periods in China to Create Visual Artworks

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## Abstract

Thailand is located in the center of Indochina Peninsula and is a key Buddhist country in Southeast Asia. The Sukhothai Dynasty is the first in Thai history, and its Buddhist art flourished for 200 years. During this period, Thailand created Buddha sculpture, and its unique style influenced Buddhist art in neighboring countries. Chinese painting has a long history and reached its peak in Tang and Song Dynasties. Buddhist art in Yuan and Song Dynasties shows the diversity and richness of the times. Zen has become the mainstream sect. The ruling class abolished the noble imperial examination system and promoted the pluralism of Buddhist art. Tibetan Buddhism was established as the state religion in Yuan Dynasty. In Song Dynasty, people adhered to customs, and Buddhist art constantly innovated in various forms. Thai-Chinese Cultural Exchange Travel: the ideological life of overseas Chinese in Thailand has a greater impact on local people. The concept of Chinese civilization has been integrated into the daily life of Thai people. The researcher hopes that this study will help the public to have a deeper understanding of Buddhism and its characteristics in China and Thailand.

The purpose of this study is to deeply explore the cultural connotation of Yuan Dynasty, Song Dynasty and Sukhothai period, and to study the influence of artists and emotional expression culture of various countries on artistic creation. This study focuses on the characteristics of art and its perfection, aiming at protecting and preserving the works of art in these two periods, promoting the inheritance of cultural heritage, stimulating the discussion of academic research and providing inspiration and elements for future creation.

**Keywords:** Sukhothai Period Buddhist; Song and Yuan Period Buddhist; Cultural Influence

## Introduction

Anciently known as Siam, Thailand is located in the central part of the Central South Peninsula and is an essential Buddhist country in Southeast Asia. The Sukhothai dynasty (Sukhothai region, 1238 to 1349 A.D.) began in the 13th century A.D. The dynasty emerged in the Lower Chao Phraya region after the Angkor Empire and was the first dynasty in Thailand's history (Piyabhani, 2016). Under the Sukhothai states' policy of reverence and support for Buddhism, the Sukhothai fine arts were going to their peak within nearly two hundred years. This period of statue-making, which continued the Dvaravati tradition and perfectly demonstrated the legacy of Gupta art in India, has been described as Thailand's

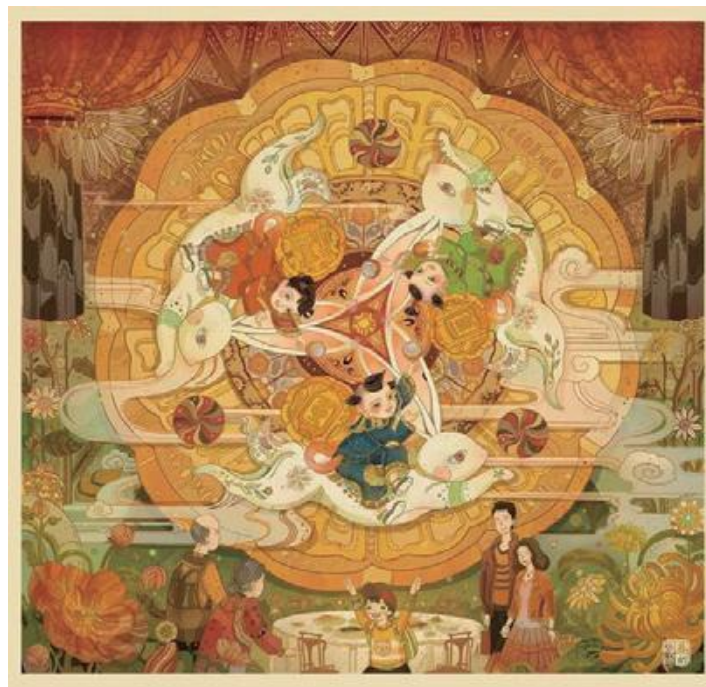
"classicism period" (Sawitree, 2013). At the same time, Thailand began to produce Buddha statues after the 5th century AD, and during the Sukhothai period, there were more creations, represented by the Walking Buddha, which not only has standardized proportions, elegant posture, and transcendent temperament but also has specific symbolic meanings, as the center of gravity of the Walking Buddha statues often rests on one foot and the other heel raised as if it were walking, and the statues are so-called (Dawn, 2018). In contrast to the previous uniform two-legged upright statues, the Walking Buddha is a new creation of Buddhist statues in Sukhothai (Anne, 2017). In Thailand, the Walking Buddha statues are widely distributed and numerous and have a profound influence on neighboring regions such as Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and China beyond Thailand's domain (Elizabeth, 2011).



**Fig.1 Buddhist art from the Sukhothai period (source: Jinghai, (2002))**

Chinese traditional painting has a long history of brilliant achievements. It peaked during the Tang and Song dynasties when it not only tended to mature and perfect in theory but also reached the highest level in technique. After the Song Dynasty, due to the political, economic, and cultural influence, the creation of Chinese painting also entered into a self-enclosed state. However, this period also appeared in the Yuan and Song Dynasty landscapes, Ming Dynasty birds and flowers, and some of the literati sentiment of the literati painting, but these works are very similar. However, the Buddhist paintings of the Yuan and Song dynasties show diversity and richness in this period and are often integrated with traditional culture. Zen Buddhism became the central Buddhist school during this period, emphasizing meditation and intuitive realization, and many Zen masters were highly esteemed. In addition, Buddhist literature, art, and philosophy were widely disseminated and studied, and temple construction flourished as a centers of culture and art. However, there were also stark contextual differences in the Buddhist art of the Yuan and Song periods in China. During the Yuan dynasty, the ruling

class abolished the imperial examination system, and scholars returned to seclusion, a context that combined with a more accessible creative environment to diversify Buddhist art (Zhao, 2023). At the same time, the ruling class honored Tibetan Buddhism as the state religion. The apathetic seclusion of the scholarly class from Buddhism was intertwined with the people's reverence for secularism (Li et al., 2022). By the Song Dynasty, Buddhist art was extensively developed and innovated, with advances in sculpture, painting, architecture, and calligraphy; for example, the art of Buddhist cave sculpture, which originated in India, merged with Chinese culture to form a unique art form with Chinese characteristics (Kyung, 2022). Overall, Chinese Buddhist culture and artistic achievements during the Yuan and Song dynasties were the result of a combination of cultural, religious, and social factors that shaped the culture (Wang, 2018) and had a significant impact on artistic creation and cultural development during this period.



**Fig.2 China's Yuan and Song Dynasties Representative works of Buddhist art – murals**  
(source: Jingyi, 2014)

In this study, the literature review, image and painting creation are integrated to deeply discuss the artistic creation in Yuan, Song and Sukhothai periods Literature review covers a wide range but needs to deepen specific fields Images are very important to artistic style, theme and symbol, and more technical means and expert opinions can be introduced Painting creation has innovative value and needs to respect history and culture Generally speaking, this study provides valuable reference for related fields, but there is still room for further research

With the gradual deepening of Thai-Chinese exchanges, the thoughts and lifestyles of overseas Chinese in Thailand are slowly influencing the lives of the locals, especially the influence of Chinese religious forms and cultural thoughts on the Thais. Nowadays, Chinese culture and thought have been closely integrated with the life of Thai locals. The author hopes that readers can deepen their understanding of the development and characteristics of Buddhism in China and Thailand through the research and creation of this thesis, and through the inheritance of Buddhist culture and the fusion of multi-distant cultures, the Buddhist culture will show more samples. This study explores the cultural connotations of the Yuan-Song period in China and the Sukhothai period in Thailand through a literature search and review in order

to understand from a scholarly perspective how artists and peoples expressed their inner feelings through visual artworks and the impact of these cultures on the development of artistic creation, with a particular focus on their qualities in terms of their continuous evolution and maturation. The research aims to preserve and protect the cultural works of these two periods, promote the transmission of cultural heritage and in-depth academic research, and provide inspiration and elements for the creation of new works.

### **Research Objectives**

The research objectives are as follows.

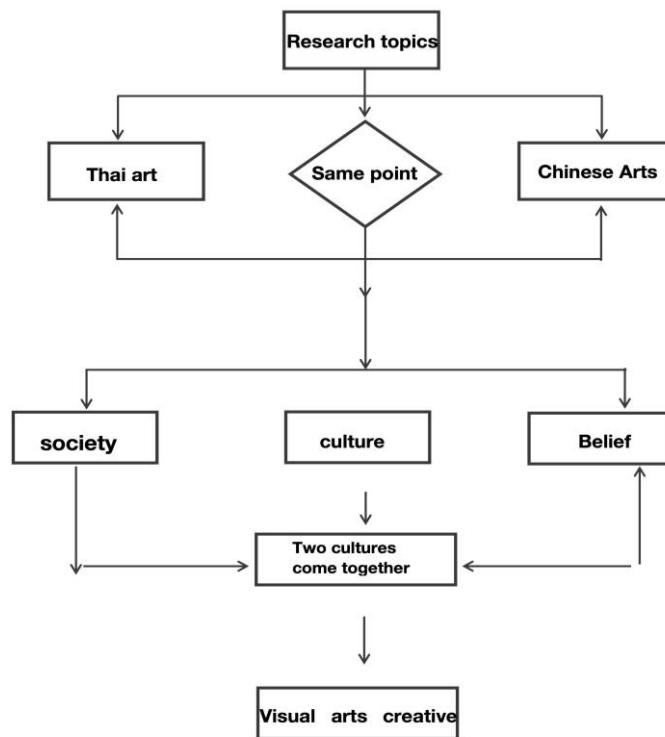
1. Examine the similarities in painting between the Sukhothai and Yuan-Song periods and how their cultural exchanges and influences are materialized in works of art.
2. Discuss Thailand and China in terms of their societies, cultures, lives, and paintings from the perspective of cross-cultural fusion, exploring how these shaped the unique cultural identities of the two countries and examining the possible interactions and influences that may have existed between them.
3. Provide inspiration and cultural elements for future works by extracting elements of paintings from the Sukhothai period and the Yuan-Song period in China. Create four visual artworks in the form of illustrations.

### **Literature Review**

In the study of Chinese and Thai art works, we will focus on the artistic exploration of Song Dynasty and Yuan Dynasty respectively. These two periods are the peak of visual art in China. In Thailand, the visual arts are based on Sukhothai Dynasty. The connection between these two times is manifested in the field of visual arts. Through the medium of painting, researchers explore the inheritance and evolution between the past and present visual arts, so as to create interesting and deep works. The works of art selected in the study are all outstanding representatives and symbols of Chinese and Thai visual arts, aiming at penetrating the information and data contained in them. The core topic of this paper is to explore the far-reaching influence of visual arts on China and Thailand, which involves the interaction and exchange between the two countries in many aspects such as economy, culture and history of visual arts.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The purpose of this study is to explore the commonalities between the painting art of the Yuan-Song period in China and the painting art of the Sukhothai period in Thailand in order to create visual artworks that are in line with the themes of society, culture, and different art forms and values. The researcher has developed the following research framework in order to define this research objective clearly:



**Fig.3 Conceptual Framework**

## Research methodology

### Research design:

This research will utilize a literature review, image analysis, and case study methodology through a variety of research methods in order to delve deeper into the relationship between the culture and art of the Yuan-Song period in China and the Sukhothai period in Thailand in order to achieve the research objectives and to produce useful research findings.

### Research Instrument:

This study will use a literature review, image analysis, and case study method through a variety of research methods in order to deeply explore the relationship between the culture and art of the Yuan-Song period in China and the Sukhothai period in Thailand in order to achieve the research objectives and to produce beneficial research results. The main research methods will be used in this study: 1. Literature review: First of all, there will be an extensive literature review, including historical literature, art history literature, archaeological studies, and related cultural studies, which will help to establish a theoretical background on the culture and art of the two periods and provide basic information about the field of study.

2. Image analysis: The study will focus on artworks from the Yuan-Song period in China and the Sukhothai period in Thailand. Through detailed image analysis, we will examine the artworks' stylistic, technical, thematic, and symbolic aspects to reveal their similarities and differences.

3. Case studies: Gain a deeper understanding of the culture and art of the two periods. This study will select some representative artworks or events for case studies, allowing us to analyze them in greater detail, including their historical backgrounds, production processes, cultural connotations, and connections with other works.

## Research Processes

The study starts from the perspective of integration and innovation of Chinese and Thai culture and art, thus continuing the intersection of cultural heritage to creative culture in order to experience and explore the cultural values therein; the specific steps of the research process are as follows:

Step 1: Literature Synthesis Study. A systematic study of books, journals, and relevant literature on the Internet was used to learn as much as possible about the cultural context of Chinese and Thai culture with local characteristics. This step aims to build a deep understanding of Chinese and Thai culture.

Step 2: Researching Chinese and Thai Cultural Arts. Based on the information obtained in Step 1, researching Chinese and Thai cultural arts lays the foundation for planning and defining the scope of the creation of visual arts in Chinese and Thai culture, which includes examining the historical development, characteristics and interactions of Chinese and Thai cultural arts.

Step 3: Define the scope of creation. Based on the existing research and framework, clearly define the artistic style and cultural elements to be presented for further analysis and creation. Ensure that this data is used to build a visual system to pass on the fusion of Chinese and Thai cultures.

Step 4: Creation of Visual Artwork. Based on Step 4, create a creative visual artwork in Chinese and Thai culture and art. The documentation and framework will create the artwork to ensure that the artwork accurately conveys the theme of cultural integration.

## Research Results

### Objective 1. Jinshan Buddha Ink

The design content of Jinshan Buddha Ink is based on the theme of Buddhist beliefs, blending the golden Buddha image with the magnificent mountain landscape. The whole picture aims to express the pursuit of harmony, calmness, and spiritual introspection while presenting a profound fusion of religion and nature. (illustrations as shown)



**Fig.4 Jinshan Buddha Ink**



The Jinshan Buddha Ink Illustration presents profound meanings and themes based on Buddhist beliefs, combining a golden Buddha statue with a majestic mountain landscape. The core meanings of the illustration include the following:

**Harmony of religion and nature:** The illustration conveys the deep integration of religion and nature by blending the golden Buddha statue with the natural mountains, emphasizing the harmonious symbiosis between faith and nature and reinforcing the intrinsic connection between religious beliefs and the natural world.

**Inner peace and tranquility:** The presence of the golden Buddha symbolizes inner peace and tranquility. The illustration expresses the desire to realize inner peace through faith and spiritual quests and the importance of the spiritual revelation represented by the Buddha.

**Sacredness and wisdom of religion:** The golden statue of Buddha represents the sacredness and wisdom of religious faith. It echoes the believer's worship of the power of divinity and the reverence for the teachings of the Buddha.

#### Objective 2. Harmonious coexistence

This nature-themed artwork showcases the symbiotic relationship between natural plants and the underwater environment while celebrating the beauty and preciousness of life. The illustration presents a harmonious natural scene, intertwining plants, and the underwater world to create a visual story full of life (Illustrations as shown).



**Fig.5 Harmonious coexistence**

Objective3. The core meanings of this illustration include:

**Praise of life:** The illustration celebrates life by representing natural plants, underwater environments, and light. It evokes in the viewer a deep appreciation for the preciousness and diversity of life.

Harmonious coexistence : By showing the symbiotic relationship between plants and underwater organisms, the illustration conveys the harmonious coexistence in nature, emphasizing the interdependence and balance between different organisms in the ecosystem.

Understanding of the beauty of nature: The illustration allows the viewer to feel a deep understanding of the beauty of nature through fine drawing techniques and emotional expression. It is a reminder to appreciate the magnificent and mysterious beauty of nature.

Respect for the ecosystem: The illustration echoes the respect and protection of the ecosystem. It reminds the viewer of the importance of ecological balance and the coexistence of humans and the natural world.

#### Objective 4. Ceramic Buddha Statue

The ceramic Buddha illustration features a figure that combines terracotta warriors and sculptures from the Sukhothai period, showing the mutual integration and respect for history and culture. The illustration creates a visual narrative full of historical and cultural connotations by incorporating terracotta army, Buddha, and sculpture elements into the same image. This illustration conveys respect for history and culture and reflection on art, culture, and history through carefully designed artistic elements and calls for the viewer's appreciation and reflection:

Terracotta Army Buddha: The Terracotta Warriors and Horses Buddha in the illustration represents the respect and inheritance of history and culture. They symbolize ancient civilization and history, presenting a magnificent historical landscape.

Sculpture elements: Sculpture elements are skillfully integrated into the illustration, enriching the level of art. These sculptures represent the expression of human creativity, highlighting the close connection between history, culture, and art.

Cultural Integration: The illustration conveys the exchange and communion of history and culture by blending the Terracotta Warriors and Buddha with sculptural elements. This fusion highlights the complementary nature of different eras and cultures.

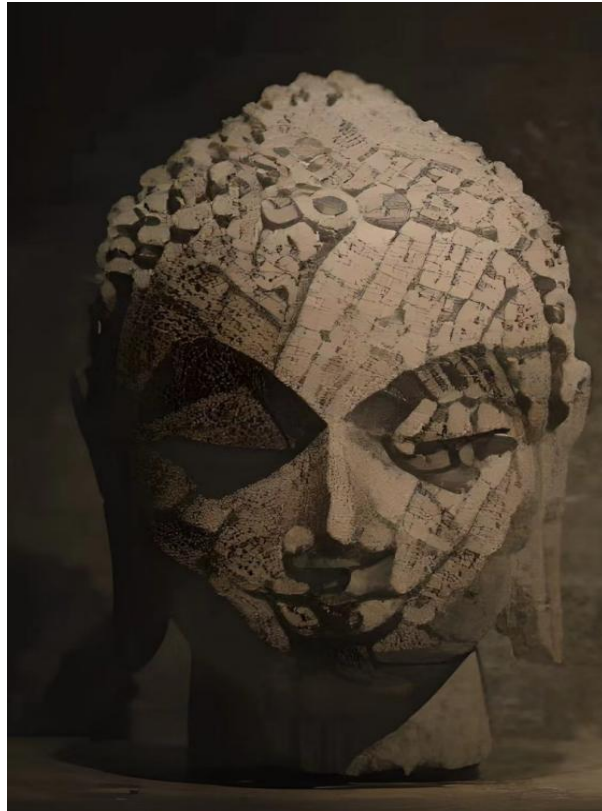
Yuan and Song Culture: The cultural heritage of the Yuan and Song dynasties, such as the "Ceramic Buddha," adds historical depth to the illustration, reflecting the intertwining of cultural elements from different periods.

The beauty of integration: The illustrations emphasize the beauty of the harmonious integration between history and modernity, culture and art. Each element echoes the other, creating a unique and visceral visual experience.

Call of History: The Terracotta Army Buddha statue in the illustration calls the audience to trace the past years, feel the precipitation and legend of history, and inspire the thinking of history.

(Illustrations as shown)





**Fig.6 Ceramic Buddha Statue**

Respect and inheritance of history and culture: The illustration emphasizes the respect and inheritance of history and culture through the Terracotta Army Buddha statue and sculpture elements. It gives viewers a deep sense of ancient civilization's splendor and history's inheritance.

Reflection on art, culture, and history: The illustration encourages viewers to think deeply about art, culture, and history. It calls people to appreciate and explore the connections between historical periods and cultural elements.

Cultural integration and complementarity: The illustrations emphasize the harmonious integration of different times and cultures by showing cultural integration and complementarity. This integration makes the viewer reflect on the diversity and richness of cultures.

#### **Objective5. Lanshan Shui Meet the Buddha**

This illustration features an architectural theme that skillfully blends Sukhothai-era Buddha statues with royal temples, conveying a rich cultural connotation. Artistic elements of this illustration incorporate several vital elements to create a stunning visual world:

**Solemn Buddha:** The Buddha is one of the central elements of the illustration, representing the sanctity of religious beliefs. Its solemn face and peaceful expression express the inner spiritual power and attract the viewer's attention.

**Magnificent Royal Temple:** The design elements of the royal temple reflect its magnificence and honor. The illustration's ornate architectural structures, majestic towers, and exquisite details emphasize the temple's grandeur and add color to the whole picture.

**Integration of Yuan and Song cultures:** This element conveys a harmonious symbiosis with nature, incorporating the cultural concepts of the Yuan and Song periods into the

illustrations. Viewers can appreciate the art while contemplating the beauty of cultural heritage and integration.

**Embodiment of Multiple Diversity:** The illustration emphasizes the intersection of multiple cultural elements, stressing the importance of cultural diversity and inclusiveness. Elements from different cultural backgrounds coexist harmoniously on the same canvas, showing viewers the diversity of cultures.

**Excellent artistic expression:** The artist blends all the design elements into a visual marvel through his superb painting skills. Every detail is filled with a deep understanding of architecture, Buddha statues, and culture, infusing the work with artistic charm.

**Communion of history and culture:** The illustration emphasizes the communion of history and culture, blending ancient cultural elements with modern artistic expression. This element represents the respect and inheritance of the past and present.

(Illustrations as shown)



**Fig.7 Lanshan Shui Meet the Buddha**

Objective 6. The deeper meanings of this illustration include the following:

**Cultural inheritance and integration:** The illustration emphasizes the value of cultural inheritance and integration, blending cultural elements from different historical periods, echoing the mutual influence and exchange between different cultures.

**Harmonious coexistence:** The elements in the illustration convey a harmonious coexistence with nature, emphasizing the close relationship between culture and nature through the fusion of Yuan and Song cultures.

**Religion and faith:** The solemn Buddha statues represent the inner strength and spiritual revelation of religious beliefs, echoing the importance of faith in culture.

**Multiculturalism and inclusiveness:** The illustrations convey multicultural elements and inclusiveness of different cultural backgrounds, encouraging viewers to appreciate diversity and seek common ground.

Historical heritage and contemporary dialogue: Through the communion of history and culture, the illustrations call on the viewer to understand the past and blend the values of the past with contemporary culture, emphasizing the importance of historical heritage.

Magnificent and grandiose architecture: The architectural elements represent the importance of architecture in culture and history while emphasizing the beauty of grandeur and magnificence. The table below shows the elements. (Table1)

Table 1 Combine all elements of Buddhist art works in Sukhothai period and Yuan and Song Dynasties in China

Architecture	The Sukhothai buildings were large and beautifully decorated Use gold and bright colors It embodies the combination of Buddhist teachings and Thai cultural elements
Sculpture	Sculptures showing Buddha and other gods in Buddhism Have excellent carving skills A blend of awe-inspiring facial expressions and graceful postures
Artwork	Focuses primarily on Buddhist themes. Conveys Buddhist stories teachings and symbols using unique colors to convey sanctity.
Painting	There are great and subtle techniques and details, bright colors, small details. It reflects the meaning of Buddhism
Painting style	Influenced by Indian and Chinese art Later, it gradually became a Thai style
The use of color	Bright colors such as gold, red, green, and blue.
religious expression	It conveys the principles and teachings of Buddhism. Practice Buddhism or find inspiration.

## Discussions

### 1. Integration of content and form

The four works created here have a Buddhist theme, skillfully blending Sukhothai-period Buddha statues with Yuan and Song-period ink landscape paintings, reflecting the core concept of pursuing harmony and tranquility. In terms of content, the illustration shows the Buddha seated on a lotus flower with a calm demeanor and sealed hands, presenting the inherent strength and wisdom of the Buddhist faith. Immediately afterward, the ink and water landscape painting presents towering peaks, cloudy skies, and clear streams, reflecting the ethereal depth of Yuan and Song period art. These two different artistic styles intermingle to create a unique and visceral image.

### 2. Technological and computational innovation

During the creative process, the artist employs digital painting technology and computer software to give the illustrations more freedom and creativity by simulating different rhythms, colors, light, and shadow effects. This technology provides better detailing and layering and creates warm and elegant tones, creating a clean and calm atmosphere. Through the skillful use of light and shadow, the illustration presents a three-dimensional dynamic relationship between the Buddha and the landscape, making the work more vivid and attractive.

### 3. Embodiment of multiple values

This work has aesthetic and educational functions. The aesthetic function allows viewers to enjoy beauty while stimulating their imagination and creativity. The educational function conveys the ideas and values of the Buddha and guides viewers to think deeply and broadly about life and the world. From a professional point of view, this illustration has a

unique artistic value, reflecting the artist's respect for and development of original art while passing on the excellent cultural heritage of the Chinese nation. It also has cultural and social value, promoting social harmony and progress and enhancing people's moral knowledge and spirituality by promoting Buddhism and demonstrating the harmonious coexistence of multiple cultures.

During the creation of the work, various artistic techniques were used to convey profound themes and emotions. First, the author integrated the Buddha statues of the Sukhothai period with the ink landscape paintings of the Yuan Dynasty, carefully drawing each element through digital painting tools, maintaining their original characteristics. This technique enables the Buddha statue and the landscape painting to coexist harmoniously in the same image, presenting a sense of visual unity.

Second, to emphasize the solemnity and sacredness of the Buddha statue, the artist used gold tones and shadow effects to enhance the three-dimensionality and expressiveness of the statue. In contrast, the landscape painting uses dark and vibrant colors to highlight its layering and vividness. The application of these techniques makes the images more visually appealing and deep.

The significance and value of this work lie in the fact that it conveys the beauty of the intersection of history, culture, and art through the integration of elements from different cultures and artistic periods. It emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of multiple cultures and the complementary relationship between different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, this work presents the artist's deep love and respect for history, culture, and nature, which inspires viewers to think about history and cultural heritage, providing aesthetic and spiritual enjoyment. It also embodies the value of art, which can inspire people to think and feel beyond pure visual entertainment.

## Conclusion

This study aims to demonstrate the unique artistic style of illustration and a deep understanding and appreciation of these cultures through the fusion of Buddhist art from the Sukhothai period in Thailand and Chinese ink landscape paintings from the Yuan and Song periods. Buddhist art of the Sukhothai period emphasizes the solemnity and sanctity of religious beliefs through the vivid display of the elements of the Buddha. Meanwhile, the ink and landscape paintings of the Yuan and Song dynasties add color to the illustrations, presenting natural and emotional expressions. The integration of these two styles represents the harmonious coexistence of multiple cultures, emphasizing the complementarity and intermingling between different eras and cultures. Through this integration of cultures, the illustrations provide viewers with a profound cultural experience, inspiring them to think about history and cultural heritage. The results of this study highlight the artistic and cultural value of Buddhist art from the Sukhothai period and ink landscape paintings from the Yuan and Song periods. This fusion represents a deep understanding and appreciation of different cultural and artistic periods, blending the essence of different eras and further enriching the diversity of art.

At the same time, the innovative work has the potential to educate and inspire viewers. It conveys the core values and historical legacy of Buddhist culture. It helps viewers gain a deeper understanding of the solemnity and sanctity of Buddhism, as well as the nature and emotion emphasized in landscape paintings of the Yuan and Song dynasties. Through art, it makes a unique contribution to cultural heritage and development, further emphasizing the diversity and richness of culture. This educational function helps improve the audience's cultural and artistic knowledge while stimulating them to think deeply about history and culture.

By discussing cross-cultural integration from the perspective of cross-cultural fusion, this integration is not only a meeting of two cultures but also a kind of innovation and cultural inheritance. By integrating elements of art from the Sukhothai period in Thailand and the Yuan and Song periods in China, this innovation helps to promote progress in the field of art and arouse more interest in different cultures on a global scale. In addition, cross-cultural integration helps to break down cultural barriers and promote peace and cooperation among different countries and regions.

Discussing the artistic elements of the two periods, we can realize that these differences are cultural and reflect the aesthetic and social needs of different times. The Sukhothai period in Thailand emphasized religious beliefs and spiritual connotations, reflecting society's importance on pursuing spirituality at that time. On the other hand, the art of the Yuan and Song dynasties in China emphasized the expression of materials and forms, reflecting the society's pursuit of aesthetics and technology. These differences reflect the characteristics of different cultures and societies and provide more elements and possibilities for cross-cultural integration.

In addition, cross-cultural integration needs to be explored and practiced. This study is just a preliminary attempt, and more research and experiments are needed to explore ways of integrating different cultures, which may involve more collaborative projects, interactions between artists and cultural researchers, and broader cultural exchanges. Cross-cultural integration is a complex and challenging field, but it is also full of potential to bring new vitality and innovation to culture and the arts.

### Suggestions

Based on the results of this study, this paper makes the following recommendations for future research on artworks from the Sukhothai period in Thailand and the Yuan-Song period in China to create visual artworks.

Exploration and practice: Future research could delve deeper into how elements of different cultures merge, including elements from a broader range of cultures and artistic periods. More possibilities for cross-cultural integration could be explored through broader collaborations and practical projects.

Education and awareness-raising: To better promote intercultural integration, relevant education and awareness-raising activities could be considered, including organizing cultural exchange activities, art exhibitions, and cultural festivals to enhance public awareness and appreciation of different cultures.

Cultural policy support: Governments and cultural organizations can formulate policies and support cross-cultural integration in arts projects, including providing financial support for artists and cultural workers and encouraging cultural exchanges and cooperation.

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