



Review of the Artistic Characteristics with the Social Value of Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, China

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Abstract

Background and Aims: Boli Peasant Paintings is a significant cultural heritage of Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, China, reflecting rural communities' traditions, values, and daily life. This study aims to review the artistic characteristics and assess the social value of Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, China.

Materials and Methods: It uses qualitative research, including a literature review, semi-structured interviews with local artists, cultural experts, and community members, and data analysis techniques to identify key themes and patterns. The study aims to critically review Boli Peasant Paintings' artistic essence and assess their social value within the cultural context of Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, China.

Results: Demonstrate the unique artistic features of Boli's paintings, characterized by bold exaggeration, vibrant colors, and whimsical portrayals of rural landscapes and activities. These paintings showcase rural life's resilience and creativity and contribute to community identity, cultural pride, and the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge. The study emphasizes the need for cultural conservation efforts, public awareness campaigns, and collaborative initiatives involving stakeholders, policymakers, and cultural organizations to safeguard and revitalize Boli Peasant Paintings.

Conclusion: Boli's paintings play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, fostering community cohesion, and enriching the cultural landscape of Huai'an City and Jiangsu Province.

Keywords: Boli Peasant Paintings; Peasant Paintings; Cultural Heritage; Artistic Characteristics; Social Value

Introduction

The cultural heritage of a region often finds expression in its art forms, reflecting its people's traditions, values, and social fabric (Graham & Howard, 2016; Jokilehto, 2017). One such art form that carries profound significance in Chinese folk art is Boli Peasant Paintings from Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province. These paintings, rooted in the rural life and traditions of the region, showcase unique artistic characteristics and hold considerable social value. This research explores Boli's paintings' essence, exploring their artistic attributes and societal relevance in contemporary times (Meel & Vishwakarma, 2020; Cheng et al., 2022; Xiangdong & Dongxing, 2023).

Boli Peasant Paintings, also known as Boli Peasant Paintings, have a rich history dating back to the rural communities of Huai'an City in Jiangsu Province, China. These paintings emerged as a form of expression for the local farmers, reflecting their daily lives, cultural beliefs, and aspirations. The artistic style of Boli's paintings is distinct, characterized by bold exaggeration, vibrant colors, and a whimsical portrayal of rural landscapes, people, and activities. Over the years, Boli's paintings have gained recognition as art and a cultural symbol representing rural life's resilience, simplicity, and creativity (Hewison, 2015; Kagan & Kirchberg, 2016; Stewart, 2017).

Despite their significance, Boli's paintings face challenges in the modern era. The rapid urbanization and changing socio-economic dynamics have led to a gradual decline in the practice and appreciation of this traditional art form (Kanungo et al., 2021). As younger generations migrate to urban areas and embrace modern lifestyles, there is a risk of losing the cultural heritage embedded in Boli's paintings. Therefore, it becomes imperative to conduct a comprehensive review and assessment of Boli's paintings' artistic characteristics and social value to understand their significance and potential for preservation and promotion (Kenter et al., 2015; Gordon, 2018).



The primary challenge addressed in this research is the preservation and promotion of Boli Peasant Paintings amidst the evolving cultural landscape of Huai'an City. The diminishing interest and awareness regarding traditional art forms among younger generations threaten Boli's paintings' continuity. Additionally, factors such as limited exposure, lack of institutional support, and changing societal values contribute to the marginalization of Boli's paintings in the contemporary art scene. Thus, the research aims to identify the critical artistic characteristics that define Boli's paintings and evaluate their social value in the context of cultural heritage and community identity (Bhutwanakul et al., 2022; Shun & Boonsrianun, 2023; Yang & Theerapan, 2024).

The significance of this study lies in its potential to shed light on the intrinsic value of Boli Peasant Paintings and their role in preserving cultural heritage. By conducting a comprehensive review of the artistic elements such as composition, symbolism, and stylistic features of Boli's paintings, this research seeks to highlight their artistic merit and cultural significance. Furthermore, assessing social value will provide insights into how Boli's paintings contribute to community identity, cultural pride, and intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge (Tam, 2015; Calvet-Mir et al., 2016).

Understanding the social value of Boli's paintings can also have practical implications for cultural conservation efforts and artistic revitalization initiatives. By recognizing the importance of Boli Peasant Paintings in the cultural ecosystem of Huai'an City, stakeholders, policymakers, and cultural organizations can devise strategies to safeguard and promote this unique art form. Moreover, the research findings can enhance public awareness, appreciation, and a renewed interest in Napoli paintings among diverse audiences, including scholars, artists, collectors, and the general public.

Objective

To review the artistic characteristics and assess the social value of Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, China.

Literature review

The literature review explores key concepts and research theories relevant to the study objective of reviewing the artistic characteristics and assessing the social value of Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, China.

1. Cultural Identity Theory: The cultural identity theory emphasizes how individuals affirm their cultural identity and sense of belonging (Smith, 2015). It involves emotional and psychological convergence with a specific cultural group, leading to self-reflection about one's unity with that group and recognition of differences with others (Lei, 2018). In the context of Boli Peasant Paintings, this theory underpins the study's focus on the tendency toward and recognition of Huai'an culture within the artistic expressions of the local community.

2. Anthropology of Fine Arts: The anthropology of fine arts represents an interdisciplinary approach that integrates insights from fine arts and anthropology (Bourdieu, 1984). This emerging discipline utilizes fieldwork to gather firsthand raw materials for research, employing dual perspectives of "insiders" and "outsiders" to conduct in-depth investigations (Yu, 2023). In the case of Napoli's paintings, this approach is essential for examining their history, development, and artistic-cultural significance within Huai'an culture and local characteristics.

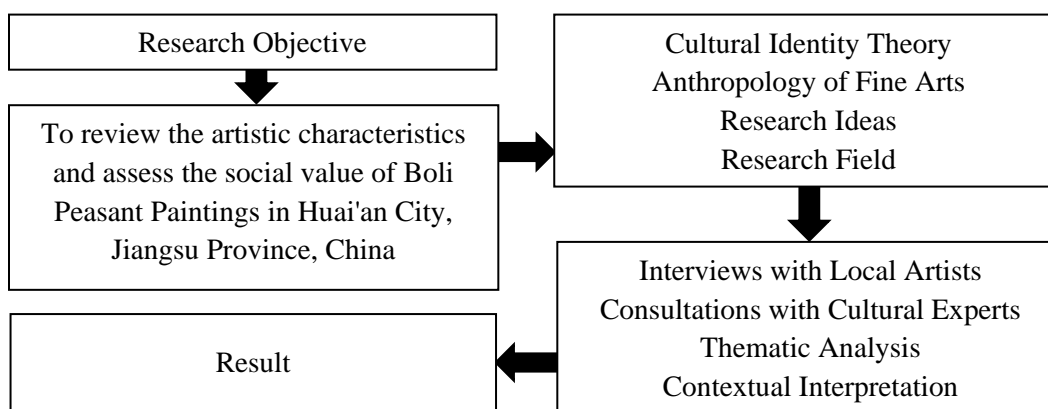
3. Research Ideas: The research ideas encompass a comprehensive exploration of Boli Peasant Paintings, starting with analyzing Boli farmers' prints as early forms of farmers' paintings (Smith, 2015). The study examines the inheritance and development of Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an, encompassing historical origins, circulation development, aesthetic characteristics, and cultural connotations (Lei, 2018). This research also delves into the inheritance path of artists, analyzes improvements in craft materials and artistic language, and explores the contemporary research and development value of Boli Peasant Paintings.

4. Research Field: The research field falls under anthropology in the fine arts domain, focusing on studying human fine arts phenomena from cultural anthropology perspectives (Bourdieu, 1984). It aims to understand Boli's paintings within the context of different periods, nationalities, regions, and social strata,

recognizing them within societal networks and specific life scenarios (Yu, 2023). This research approach emphasizes cultural relativism, integration of cultural pluralism, and respect for local knowledge, contributing to a reassessment of art values and establishing a global localized regional poetics.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for reviewing the artistic characteristics and social value of Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, China, encompasses several vital dimensions: historical context, artistic characteristics, social value, theoretical perspectives, and research significance. This framework provides a structured approach to understanding and analyzing Boli's paintings within their cultural and societal contexts.



Methodology

The methodology for this research involves a comprehensive review and analysis of Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, China, focusing on understanding their artistic characteristics and assessing their social value within the cultural context. The methodology comprises several vital steps, including literature review, data collection, data analysis, and synthesis of findings, to achieve the research objective of critically reviewing Boli Peasant Paintings artistic attributes and societal significance. as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Methodology Steps for Reviewing Boli Peasant Paintings

Step	Description
Literature Review	Conduct an extensive review of existing literature, academic articles, and cultural documents on Boli Peasant Paintings, focusing on their historical background, artistic features, and social importance.
Data Collection	Collect primary data through interviews and discussions with local artists, cultural experts, and community members knowledgeable about Boli Peasant Paintings to gather insights into their creation process, themes, and cultural significance.
Data Analysis	Analyze the collected data, including artistic techniques, thematic content, cultural symbolism, and social context of Boli Peasant Paintings, using qualitative methods such as thematic analysis and content analysis.
Synthesis of Findings	Synthesize the literature review and data analysis findings to critically review the artistic characteristics and assess the social value of Boli's paintings, identifying key themes, patterns, and implications.
Interpretation of Results	Interpret the results to conclude the artistic merit, cultural significance, and societal impact of Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, China, aligning with the research objective.



Step	Description
Recommendations	Provide recommendations based on the findings to inform cultural policy, heritage conservation efforts, and community development initiatives related to Boli Peasant Paintings and Chinese folk art.

Results

This study explores the artistic characteristics and social value of Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an City, China. Boli Peasant Paintings are a unique art form that combines creative expression and social identity. The study aims to understand their historical origins, thematic evolution, and societal impact. It also examines the social value of Boli Peasant Paintings, their role in preserving local traditions, and their effects on social cohesion and cultural heritage. The research provides valuable insights into Boli's paintings' enduring artistic legacy and socio-cultural significance.

1. Overview of Peasant Paintings

1.1 Historical Origins of Chinese Peasant Paintings:

The roots of Chinese peasant paintings delve deep into the annals of ancient folk art, tracing their origins to various artistic expressions like cliff paintings, sculptures, and intricate ceramic patterns. This artistic tradition, which can be dated back to ancient times, represents a unique blend of cultural heritage and artistic innovation. The term "peasant painting" emerged around the 1950s, signifying a deliberate art form fostered and encouraged by cultural institutions across China. Initially conceived as tools for propaganda, these paintings were intricately woven with political narratives and societal themes, offering a glimpse into rural life and the aspirations of the populace during times of significant societal change.

The emergence of peasant paintings as a distinct art form marked a pivotal moment in the cultural landscape of China, highlighting the intersection of art, politics, and social commentary. Through these paintings, artists sought to capture the essence of rural existence, portraying everyday life, agricultural activities, and rural communities' collective dreams and aspirations. The evolution of peasant paintings mirrored the shifts in Chinese society, reflecting the rural populace's ideals, struggles, and aspirations amid periods of rapid transformation.

As propaganda tools aligned with political campaigns, peasant paintings played a dual role – they served as vehicles for ideological messaging while preserving traditional folk art and cultural heritage elements. This duality infused peasant paintings with a unique charm, blending contemporary themes with age-old artistic techniques and cultural motifs.

The historical origins of Chinese peasant paintings represent a fascinating journey through the intertwined realms of art, culture, and societal dynamics. These paintings reflect the changing tides of Chinese society and serve as enduring testaments to the creativity, resilience, and cultural richness of rural communities across the country.

1.2 Development History and Current Situation of Chinese Peasant Paintings

The evolution of Chinese peasant paintings encapsulates a dynamic journey that reflects the changing socio-political landscape and artistic expressions over time. During significant political movements, peasant paintings emerged as a tool for conveying political messages and ideologies. These paintings served as a means of propaganda, depicting scenes aligned with the narratives promoted by the ruling authorities.

However, peasant paintings radically transformed as societal dynamics shifted and the cultural environment evolved. They transcended their role as mere propaganda tools and evolved into expressions of modern folk art deeply rooted in rural life. This transition marked a significant turning point in the history of peasant paintings as they began to explore themes and subjects that resonated with the everyday experiences of rural communities.

Notable regions such as Huxian in Shaanxi Province and Boli in Jiangsu Province played pivotal roles in shaping the trajectory of peasant paintings as modern folk art forms. These regions were recognized

for their artistic contributions and celebrated as modern folk painting hometowns, symbolizing rural China's cultural richness and diversity.

Huxian, with its rugged landscapes and rustic charm, inspired peasant painters to capture the essence of rural life through earthy tones and evocative imagery. Scenes depicting agricultural activities, traditional festivals, and communal gatherings became prominent themes in Huxian peasant paintings, showcasing the region's deep-rooted traditions and cultural heritage. Similarly, Boli in Jiangsu Province offered a vibrant and lively perspective on rural life through its distinctive artistic styles. The paintings from Boli depicted bustling market scenes, pastoral landscapes, and vibrant community celebrations, reflecting rural communities' lively and colorful atmosphere.

Today, these modern folk painting hometowns serve as cultural hubs, preserving traditional artistic techniques and narratives while embracing contemporary influences. Peasant paintings from these regions have garnered international recognition, attracting art enthusiasts and scholars keen on exploring the rich tapestry of rural life and cultural expressions embedded in these artworks.

The 1970s marked a resurgence in peasant painting activities with the reform and opening-up policies, leading to numerous painting hometowns and exhibitions nationwide (Lu Linhan, Jinshan Peasant Paintings Exhibition, 2024). These initiatives aimed to promote peasant paintings' cultural significance and artistic vitality, aligning with local traditions and expressions, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 The 1970s Jinshan Peasant Paintings Ruan Sidi, "Flower and Chicken"
Source: Lu Linhan, Jinshan Peasant Paintings Exhibition (2024)

In the 21st century, the attention on peasant paintings grew, with art festivals, exhibitions, and forums discussing their artistic nature and development challenges. Peasant paintings began to merge with tourism and cultural industries, presenting economic opportunities and artistic challenges in maintaining authenticity amidst commercialization pressures, as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.



Figure 2 The 21st Century Contemporary Countryside



Figure 3 The 21st Century Contemporary Serving the Three Peasants Supply

2. Assessing the Artistic Characteristics and Social Value

The study delved into the artistic characteristics and social significance of Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, China, aiming to provide a comprehensive review and assessment. The research findings highlight the diverse themes, rich content, and varied techniques employed in Huai'an Boli Peasant Paintings. Being an agriculturally developed region, China's rural environment and living conditions are significant inspirations for these paintings, depicting labor scenes, peasants' attire, aspirations, and genuine emotions.

Boli's paintings convey farmers' positive expectations for a better life and their profound appreciation for life, embodying the optimistic outlook of a prosperous society with considerable artistic value. Each region's farmers' paintings bear distinct characteristics influenced by their unique regional culture, soil composition, and local customs, contributing to the rich tapestry of Chinese peasant art.

The subject matter of Huai'an Boli Peasant Paintings primarily revolves around the daily life of farmers, portraying farm activities and rural settings that resonate with authenticity. These paintings evoke a sense of simplicity and reality, immersing viewers in the rural realm and capturing the essence of countryside living. They seamlessly integrate human figures with natural elements like trees, birds, and poultry, reflecting a harmonious coexistence with nature and evoking a sense of wholeness and comfort.

Moreover, Boli's paintings often feature natural landscapes as backgrounds, utilizing unique artistic expressions to depict the sky, earth, mountains, waters, sun, moon, and stars. These paintings' portrayal of

heaven and earth imagery reflects the artists' understanding of nature and their vision of a vibrant and colorful world. For instance, the sky and earth are often depicted in unconventional colors, adorned with birds, butterflies, celestial bodies, and agricultural harvest scenes, symbolizing reverence for nature and the expectation of a fruitful existence.

The soil composition, particularly the distinctive land complex of northern Jiangsu, adds a regional identity to these paintings. Scenes like the iconic land of Huai'an showcased in works such as "Red Sorghum" capture the joy and happiness of rural life, celebrating the abundance of harvests and the farmers' connection to their land. The unique regional characteristics contribute to the diversity and richness of Boli Peasant Paintings, making them valuable cultural artifacts that reflect the essence of rural life in Huai'an and Jiangsu Province, as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Pan Yu, Boli, Jiangsu Province, Red Sorghum
Source: Pan Yu Boli Peasant Paintings Album (2023)

One prominent feature of Boli's paintings is their portrayal of the four seasons and the corresponding weather patterns, integral to their narrative. Scenes depicting children joyfully returning home with lotus leaves on a rainy day or individuals navigating carefully during snowy weather provide vivid insights into the daily life experiences in Boli. The artists often employ white paint to delicately scatter snowflakes across the canvas, conveying snow imagery and infusing the scenes with a sense of joy and celebration of nature, as shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5 Wei Zhilan, Boli, Jiangsu Province, Snowy Night
Source: Pan Yu Boli Peasant Paintings Album (2023)

3. Folk Festivals and Regional Characteristics

Unlike other folk art forms, peasant paintings uniquely express folk customs, not merely adapting to folklore but consciously reflecting it as their core mission. These paintings serve as invaluable repositories of social and cultural history, preserving the fine tradition of folk art while providing insights into rural life's joys, hardships, and subtle changes. Through lifelike depictions, peasant paintings capture the practicality and charm of folk art, embodying the sentiments and realities of rural existence.

The historical and cultural value of Boli Peasant Paintings is significant, given their deep-rooted connection with folk culture. Moving forward, efforts should be directed towards promoting this traditional art form, involving Boli farmers in preserving and celebrating folklore, festivals, and local customs to accentuate regional uniqueness. Moreover, cultivating talents in farmers' painting and fostering innovation and development in painting skills are crucial for revitalizing this art form in the contemporary era.

In modern times, the development of peasant painting not only upholds the legacy of traditional culture but also plays a pivotal role in promoting rural revitalization. Collaborative efforts are needed to ensure the flourishing of peasant painting in the new era, contributing to the preservation of folk culture, showcasing regional characteristics, and driving rural rejuvenation. It is imperative to recognize the intrinsic value of peasant paintings, continuously exploring their potential in folk culture research, artistic innovation, and rural revitalization, thereby enriching the cultural landscape of the new era, as shown in Figure 6.

In the painting "Wedding Room Customs," a vivid portrayal of traditional Chinese wedding customs unfolds, offering a glimpse into the rich cultural heritage associated with marriage celebrations. The composition of the painting reveals several symbolic elements deeply rooted in Chinese tradition:

At the center, a prominent character symbolizes joy and festivity, flanked by two phoenixes with spread wings, representing good luck and happiness in Chinese culture. This arrangement reflects the auspiciousness and celebratory nature of weddings in Chinese society. On the bed, two dolls adorned in traditional attire suggest a playful and joyful atmosphere, symbolizing the blissful union and happiness of the newlyweds. This imagery conveys the sentiment of a harmonious and fulfilling marital life. Red envelopes, firecrackers, and various decorations are scattered across the floor, all emblematic of wealth, prosperity, and festivity in Chinese wedding customs. These elements add vibrancy to the scene and signify auspicious blessings for the couple's future. A red chair and a coffee table with tea sets further enhance the

domestic setting, indicating a serene and harmonious environment where the newlyweds can enjoy peaceful moments together. In the bottom right corner, a plate filled with dim sum and snacks, customary foods at weddings, symbolizes abundance, prosperity, and sharing blessings among family and friends, as shown in Figure 7.



Figure 6 Dragon New Year, Boli, Jiangsu, China
Source: Pan Yu Boli Peasant Paintings Album (2023)



Figure 7 Boli, Jiangsu Province, Wedding House Customs
Source: Pan Yu Boli Peasant Paintings Album (2023)

Overall, "Wedding Room Customs" encapsulates the essence of traditional Chinese weddings, exuding an intense festive atmosphere and conveying heartfelt wishes for the newly married couple's



happiness, prosperity, and longevity. Through such intricate depictions, Boli Peasant Paintings preserve cultural traditions and serve as a visual narrative of societal values and aspirations, contributing to the social fabric and heritage of Huai'an City and Jiangsu Province.

Discussion

The exploration of Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an City, China, encompassed a comprehensive review of their artistic characteristics and social value. The research methodology employed a combination of literature review, data collection through interviews and discussions, data analysis using qualitative methods, and synthesis of findings. The research aimed to understand the historical origins, thematic evolution, societal impact, and cultural significance of Boli Peasant Paintings, aligning with theoretical principles such as cultural identity theory, anthropology of fine arts, and research ideas related to folk art heritage.

The results of the study revealed several key insights into Boli's paintings. Firstly, the historical origins of Chinese peasant paintings were traced back to ancient folk art traditions, highlighting their evolution into distinct art forms during significant socio-political movements. The development history of peasant paintings, mainly focusing on regions like Huxian and Boli, showcased the transition from propaganda tools to expressions of modern folk art deeply rooted in rural life. These findings were consistent with existing literature on Chinese folk art and cultural heritage (Bourdieu, 1984; Jokilehto, 2017).

Furthermore, assessing artistic characteristics and social value revealed the thematic diversity, rich content, and varied techniques employed in Boli's paintings. The paintings portrayed daily activities, natural landscapes, seasonal variations, and folk festivals, reflecting a deep connection with rural traditions and cultural heritage. The study also emphasized the social value of Boli Peasant Paintings in preserving local traditions, promoting rural revitalization, and contributing to the cultural identity of Huai'an City and Jiangsu Province (Calvet-Mir et al., 2016; Gordon, 2018).

The discussion also touched upon the challenges faced by Napoli paintings in the modern era, including the risk of losing cultural heritage due to urbanization and changing socio-economic dynamics. Efforts were suggested to promote traditional art forms, involve local communities in preserving folklore, and foster artistic innovation while maintaining authenticity. These recommendations align with the research objective of identifying strategies for safeguarding and promoting Boli Peasant Paintings amidst evolving cultural landscapes (Kenter et al., 2015; Shun & Boonsrianun, 2023).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study provided valuable insights into the enduring artistic legacy and socio-cultural significance of Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, China. The research findings were consistent with theoretical principles and existing literature on folk art heritage, cultural identity, and artistic expressions. Boli's paintings were recognized for their unique artistic characteristics, thematic richness, and contribution to preserving local traditions and community identity.

The study highlighted the importance of promoting and preserving Boli Peasant Paintings as valuable cultural artifacts. Recommendations were made to engage local communities, cultural organizations, and policymakers in initiatives to revitalize traditional art forms, foster artistic talents, and integrate cultural heritage into contemporary contexts. By recognizing the intrinsic value of Boli Peasant Paintings and understanding their role in cultural conservation and community identity, stakeholders can work together to ensure the continued appreciation and transmission of this unique art form for future generations.

Overall, the research contributed to the discourse on folk art heritage, cultural communication, and the intersection of art with societal values and identity. It provided a foundation for further studies on Boli Peasant Paintings and similar cultural expressions, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding and preserving cultural heritage.



Recommendation

1. Encourage Collaborative Initiatives for Artistic Revitalization: The study underscores the importance of collaborative efforts involving local communities, cultural organizations, and policymakers to revitalize Boli Peasant Paintings and similar traditional art forms. It is recommended that platforms be established for artists, artisans, and community members to collaborate on projects that showcase the artistic richness of Boli's paintings while integrating contemporary influences. By fostering partnerships and providing resources for artistic innovation, these initiatives can ensure the continued relevance and appreciation of Boli's paintings among diverse audiences.

2. Promote Cultural Education and Awareness Programs: Another crucial recommendation is to develop and implement cultural education and awareness programs focused on Boli Peasant Paintings in schools, museums, and community centers. These programs should aim to educate students, residents, and visitors about Boli's paintings' historical significance, artistic techniques, and social value. Additionally, interactive workshops, exhibitions, and cultural events can be organized to engage the public and enhance their understanding and appreciation of this unique art form. By promoting cultural literacy and fostering a sense of pride in local heritage, these programs can contribute significantly to preserving and promoting Boli Peasant Paintings in Huai'an City and beyond.

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