

4th International Conference on Education, Environment, Arts and Social Science (EEAS 2026)

Article

Aesthetic Autonomy under Constraint in Wilde Whistler and the Wuming Art Group

Xinyi Song^{1,*}

¹ St. Michaels University School, Victoria, Canada

* Correspondence: Xinyi Song, St. Michaels University School, Victoria, Canada

Abstract: "Art for art's sake" appears to separate aesthetic value from social purpose, yet its historical force depends on who can make art, judge it, and encounter it. This article compares Oscar Wilde and James McNeill Whistler with Beijing's Wuming, or No Name, painting group through historical interpretation, close reading, and visual analysis. It distinguishes three dimensions of autonomy: authority over artistic ends, the practical conditions of production and circulation, and the consequences of artistic activity for personal and communal life. Readings of Whistler's criticism and Wilde's dialogues are placed alongside Whistler's *Falling Rocket*, Li Shan's *Snow Scene*, Zhang Wei's *Fusuijing Building*, and the inscribed verso of Zhao Wenliang's *August 18*. The comparison reveals disagreement within Victorian aestheticism and shows how Wuming's ordinary subjects could sustain forms of association outside prescribed political representation. Selective engagement with Western reproductions and Chinese aesthetics complicates any account of either complete isolation or direct inheritance from Wilde and Whistler. The article argues for situated autonomy: agency in determining artistic purposes that remains materially dependent and historically consequential. This approach preserves the specificity of artistic form without treating every landscape as a coded statement or every claim of aesthetic self-determination as withdrawal from history, thereby offering a nuanced framework for understanding cross-cultural artistic development.

Keywords: aesthetics; victorian art; chinese painting; visual analysis; comparative studies

1. Introduction

The phrase "art for art's sake" poses a historical problem as well as an aesthetic proposition. A claim that paintings need not serve moral instruction can affirm a distinctive way of seeing. Under different conditions, a similar emphasis may safeguard the time, relationships, and personal judgment essential to artistic practice. The phrase therefore cannot define a fixed social stance merely by invoking a shared appreciation for beauty [1]. Historical aesthetic movements encompassed diverse practices and viewpoints, while the informal painting activities associated with the Beijing-based Wuming group emerged within a distinct cultural context. Comparative analysis proves valuable when it clarifies such contextual distinctions rather than eliding them.

This article examines resonances between Oscar Wilde and James McNeill Whistler and the Beijing painters who adopted the name Wuming, or No Name, in 1979. It addresses three interrelated questions: Who holds authority to define an artwork's purposes? Through what frameworks is that authority enacted? What follows when art invites attention not directed toward a predetermined message? These questions link critical inquiry to artistic practice without presuming that late nineteenth-century British discourse provided a ready template for Chinese painters active in the 1960s and 1970s.

Received: 31 July 2026

Revised: 18 September 2026

Accepted: 28 September 2026

Published: 02 October 2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

The central argument is that artistic independence concerns the capacity to shape the aims and conditions of creative work. It does not entail detachment from personal significance, social engagement, or broader implications. Whistler's advocacy for painterly judgment, Wilde's exploration of interpretive creativity, and Wuming's cultivation of spaces for sustained artistic activity are thus meaningfully comparable yet contextually distinct. They reflect differing distributions of agency among artist, viewer, and community. They also operate within divergent frameworks: one shaped by public discourse and institutional structures, the other by evolving modes of cultural participation and collective orientation. Neither context admits a reductive characterization of the artist as isolated or society as uniformly resistant [2].

Drawing on established scholarship regarding Wuming's historical role, this article distinguishes aspects of artistic independence that the phrase "art for art's sake" often conflates. Four visual works—examined alongside contemporary writings and later reflections—demonstrate why subject matter alone cannot determine an artwork's societal resonance [3]. Their comparative study situates Wuming within a broader art-historical continuum without positioning European aesthetic traditions as a universal benchmark.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Aestheticism as an Argument over Interpretation

Scholarship situates Victorian aestheticism within both painterly practice and literary formulation. This broad orientation is essential because "art for art's sake" carries distinct implications when articulated by painters defending formal arrangements and by critics articulating imaginative responses to visual works. Recent work clarifies these distinctions: one study shows that a prominent painter's emphasis on non-narrative qualities did not preclude the use of poetic language to describe pictorial achievement, where 'poetry' refers to an intrinsic visual quality rather than an external story [4]. Another analysis highlights the dynamic interplay between critical interpretation and individual response.

These perspectives move beyond reductive contrasts between formal purity and thematic enrichment [5]. The central question concerns the scope and legitimacy of interpretive engagement: how extensively may viewers' interpretations diverge from the artist's stated intentions? Does such engagement prioritize verbal description over visual perception, or does it generate new forms of creative response? Furthermore, rhetorical assertions about artistic autonomy must not be conflated with historical detachment. Research examining representations of women in a painter's Chelsea and Thames imagery underscores the enduring value of contextually grounded analysis. Thus, formal structure and social dimension can be examined in tandem.

2.2. Wuming Beyond Propaganda and Overt Dissent

Historical reconstruction recovers the private associations preceding Wuming's public exhibitions. Later analysis distinguishes an aesthetic approach that operates independently of both political propaganda and direct dissent [6]. In this context, 'non-political' refers to forms of private experience and subjectivity that resist classification within those two frameworks; it does not imply detachment from lived historical reality. A broader model of Chinese modernity resists a rigid separation between formal artistic concerns and social engagement. A museum essay further cautions against inferring an artwork's political meaning—or its external influences—solely from visual similarity.

This body of scholarship redirects attention from decoding concealed political messages toward understanding the distinctive significance of artistic practice itself. The comparative framework developed here examines how such a shift reshapes interpretations of artistic independence across differing historical contexts [7].

The evidentiary record carries its own temporal layering. Research on visual memory and public history treats retrospective recovery as a substantive methodological concern. A published roundtable featuring Li Shan, Ma Kelu, and Zhang Wei documents divergent

artistic positions and evolving personal trajectories, rather than a fixed, unified stance. Consequently, later recollections are treated as situated perspectives: their closeness to lived experience renders them essential, yet they do not guarantee chronological precision or ensure that present-day interpretations align with the original moment of creation.

2.3. The Comparative Problem

The two scholarly traditions enable comparative analysis while constraining its scope. Victorian sources consist largely of formal public polemics; in contrast, the historical record for Wuming is pieced together from minor works, oral recollections, and retrospective accounts. A textual manifesto and a domestic painting represent fundamentally different kinds of artifacts. This study examines the distinct sets of questions each type of source enables, while preserving their differences in form and historical transmission [8]. The analytical concept of contextual agency refers to the capacity to define artistic aims within specific material conditions and social frameworks. It is not applied uniformly across all historical actors, nor does it presuppose a single, invariant model.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus and Case Selection

The study employs comparative historical interpretation, close reading, and formal visual analysis [9]. The textual corpus centers on key aestheticist writings—including Whistler's *Ten O'Clock* and *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, Wilde's *Intentions*, *The Soul of Man*, and the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—alongside scholarly analyses and published artist testimony. These materials were selected for their direct relevance to artistic purpose, interpretive frameworks, and the material conditions of artistic production. This constitutes a purposive corpus, not a systematic survey of all aestheticist literature or all works associated with the Wuming group.

The visual corpus comprises Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold*, the *Falling Rocket* (1875), Li Shan's *Snow Scene* (1970s), Zhang Wei's *Fusuijing Building* (1975), and the verso of Zhao Wenliang's *August 18*, whose painted work is dated 18 August 1966. Each object serves a distinct analytical function: testing pictorial value independent of narrative explanation, representing painting as an ordinary activity, examining the relationship between domestic viewpoint and exterior space, and distinguishing painted surface from historical inscription. Selection prioritizes analytical contrast and documented provenance over presumed representativeness [10].

3.2. Reading Procedure and Standards of Inference

Analysis proceeds in three stages [11]. First, each text is located in its genre and publication setting, and each object's available title, date, medium, and reproduction are checked. Second, description is separated from interpretation: visible framing, brushwork, spatial relations, and writing are recorded before broader meanings are proposed. Third, the interpretation is tested against contextual evidence and at least one plausible alternative. For example, a dark interior margin does not by itself indicate apprehension, and a painter depicted outdoors does not by itself indicate nonconformity.

Table 1 specifies the analytical distinctions. They organize the interpretation of published evidence. The study draws on existing interviews and records rather than new fieldwork or direct examination of the original artworks. Digital reproductions permit compositional analysis but cannot establish exact color, surface condition, or the full physical history of an object [12]. Chinese-language testimony is rendered in English; published translations are verified where phrasing could affect the argument.

Table 1. Analytical Dimensions and the Evidence Needed to Distinguish Them.

Dimension	Guiding question	Evidence and limit
Artistic authority	Who determines what counts as the work's purpose and value?	Critical texts, artistic choices, and attributed statements; a polemic is not proof of actual independence.
Practical conditions	What permits making, studying, storing, and showing art?	Accounts of books, homes, exhibitions, and material access; restricted circulation is not complete isolation.
Historical consequences	What experiences or relationships does the activity make possible?	Objects read with testimony and reception; consequences do not automatically establish intended protest.

3.3. *Chronology, Testimony, and Comparison*

The gallery identifies Li Shan as a Wuming painter and dates *Snow Scene* to the 1970s. Recollections of the first private showing vary, with some placing it around 1974–75. Dates of production, inscription, and later recollection are treated separately [6]. The reproductions of Wuming works were retained from the supplied manuscript and verified against published records.

The comparison does not assume direct influence from Wilde or Whistler on Wuming. Published interviews document Ma Kelu's engagement with Western reproductions and his active exploration of parallels between Chinese and European painting. This supports selective reception, but does not confirm a specific interpretation of Wilde or Whistler [13]. Similarities identified below are therefore analytical correspondences unless independently verified by historical evidence. This distinction ensures comparative analysis remains grounded rather than constructing speculative lineages.

4. Comparative Analysis

4.1. *Whistler and Wilde Distribute Aesthetic Authority Differently*

Whistler's *Ten O'Clock*, delivered in 1885 and published separately in 1888, emphasizes selection and arrangement as central to artistic achievement. Nature supplies raw materials but does not determine the final composition [6]. This perspective locates artistic authority in the painter's transformative act rather than in the inherent significance of the subject depicted. A related statement from 1878—later collected under the title 'The Red Rag' in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*—similarly prioritizes pictorial arrangement over narrative or moral content. The collected writings reflect multiple polemical contexts, highlighting how authority is negotiated between creator and interpreter across different occasions.

Falling Rocket makes this principle visually evident (Figure 1). Much of the panel consists of a dark green field punctuated by scattered gold marks and faint, undulating passages. Small forms along the lower edge provide minimal narrative information; instead, they establish spatial scale, guiding the viewer's gaze upward through a field of marks whose spacing and density vary deliberately. Visual activity arises partly from this deliberate unevenness: concentrated sparks interrupt broad areas of darkness, while subtle tonal shifts draw attention across the lower center. Identifying the depicted fireworks does not fully account for the work's compositional logic. The museum situates the scene at Cremorne Gardens and notes the painting's role in a legal proceeding involving John Ruskin [7]. Historical context clarifies the circumstances of its creation but does not substitute for the direct experience of viewing.

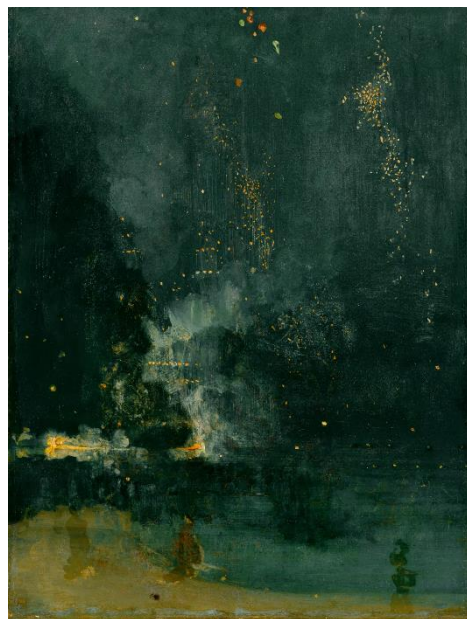


Figure 1. James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold, the Falling Rocket*, 1875, Oil on Panel, 60.3 × 46.7 Cm. Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of Dexter M. Ferry, Jr., 46.309. Image: Detroit Institute of Arts.

The painting thus supports a focused claim: its value cannot be reduced to the prominence of its subject or to any recoverable anecdote. It does not suggest that painting operates outside cultural frameworks [7, 11]. Even the invitation to attend to form without requiring a story rests on a contested understanding of informed perception. Whistler's defense presumes an audience capable of accepting, rejecting, or misinterpreting that invitation. His continued use of poetic language further indicates that he does not eliminate imaginative associations outright.

A clear distinction emerges when Whistler's lecture is considered alongside Wilde's *The Critic as Artist* [6]. Whistler objects to writers transforming visual works into autonomous literary productions. In contrast, Wilde's fictional character Gilbert commends Pater's response to Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* precisely because it yields a new creation extending beyond the painter's original intention. What one framework treats as appropriation, the other treats as generative extension. The difference lies not in whether paintings stimulate verbal thought, but in whether the resulting commentary must remain aligned with the painter's aims. Wilde's dialogue presents criticism as a dynamic practice shaped by exchange and rhetorical nuance, rather than as adherence to fixed interpretive principles. A comparable fluid relationship between critical and creative acts has been observed in subsequent analyses.

Wilde's conception of the creative critic differs significantly from that of an unguided observer free to impose arbitrary meanings. *The Soul of Man* encourages viewers to set aside inherited assumptions and approach artworks with openness. Such openness challenges simplistic models of interpretation as unconstrained projection. Similarly, the preface to *Dorian Gray* distinguishes aesthetic judgment from moral evaluation while acknowledging the subjective dimension of criticism. By 1891, Wilde explicitly linked artistic engagement with personal growth and autonomy from externally imposed purposes. This comparison reveals a conceptual distinction within aesthetic theory: Whistler safeguards the integrity of pictorial judgment against literary reinterpretation, whereas Wilde investigates how open, attentive engagement may itself become a mode of independent artistic expression [2].

4.2. Wuming's Autonomy Depended on Association and Selective Learning

Wuming's history makes the practical dimension of artistic self-direction unusually visible. Older collaborators were painting together by 1962; a younger circle gathered

during the early 1970s. A private showing around 1974–75 preceded the public exhibition opening at Beijing's Beihai Park on 7 July 1979, when the group adopted its name. This chronology locates the paintings across changing conditions of cultural participation. It also distinguishes a history of sustained association from a single founding declaration: painting, learning, and viewing together preceded public recognition.

An interview conducted in 2009 supplies a specific account of access rather than an abstract story of cultural limitation. It recalls studying art books available through Tan Yunsen in 1968–69, including a history of Impressionism; monochrome reproductions required imagining colors. It also describes comparing Huang Binhong with Cézanne and exploring possibilities associated with *xieyi*, or expressive, idea-oriented painting. Later recollections mention collective study of reproductions at Zhang Wei's home [5, 7]. These accounts establish neither uniform access across the group nor a direct link to Western aesthetic theory. They do establish mediation, selection, and active comparison.

The distinction between borrowing and copying is crucial. A reproduction gives access to an image without conveying its original physical scale and surface, and sometimes without reproducing its color. Learning from it can therefore involve reconstruction rather than faithful transfer [6, 9]. More importantly, the meaning of the encounter depends on the conversation and artistic problems through which it is approached. The pairing of Chinese and French examples describes a comparative activity already undertaken by the painters themselves. Wuming need not be measured as either an authentic separation from European traditions or an incomplete imitation of them.

The domestic setting also modifies the familiar figure of the solitary artist. Access to another person's books, company, or room does not compromise the capacity to make independent choices about subject matter and technique. It may be what makes such choices practicable [5]. Documentation highlights the importance of private viewing and mutual support. Engagement within a supportive community and freedom from externally imposed themes can coexist. Artistic self-direction here is exercised through relationships whose purposes the participants can partly shape, even where they cannot control broader social circumstances.

4.3. Li Shan and Zhang Wei Make Attention Itself Visible

Li Shan's *Snow Scene* places a small, back-turned painter beside an easel in the lower-left portion of the image (Figure 2a). The figure is neither a commanding protagonist nor an incidental detail that can be omitted from interpretation. Dark clothing establishes a compact vertical mass, while the easel, railing, and nearby branches position painting among the ordinary structures of the scene. The branching tree near the center interrupts an easy view across the water [2, 13]. White strokes accumulate along branches and ground, producing a repeated alternation between pale surfaces and dark intervals. The painting draws attention to the activity of finding a view from within an obstructed, inhabited environment.

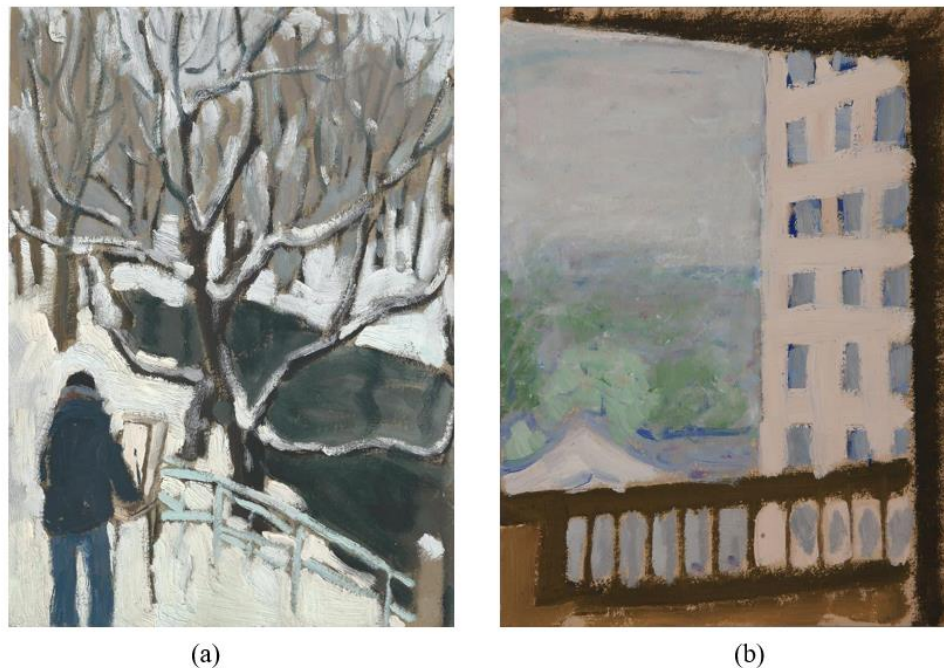


Figure 2. (A) Li Shan, *Snow Scene*, 1970S, Oil on Paper, 28.4 × 20.2 Cm; Exhibited in the 1979 Wuming Exhibition. Reproduction Matches the James Cohan Exhibition Image. (B) Zhang Wei, *Fusuijing Building*, 1975, Oil on Paper, Sheet (Sight) 25.1 × 18.6 Cm, Object 2012.45. M+ Sigg Collection, Hong Kong, China © Zhang Wei. Reproductions Retained from Song (Figs. 8–9); M+ Verifies the Object Record for Panel (B).

The work is dated to the 1970s and was included in a notable exhibition held in 1979; a more precise year remains undetermined. Its depicted painter cannot securely be identified from the reproduction. These limitations still leave a substantial visual argument. Representing someone painting gives the ordinary act of looking a place within what deserves representation. That choice differs from using an individual figure to exemplify a general social role or deliver an explicit lesson. It does not follow that the picture declares a political program [8]. The claim is narrower: painting is presented as a situated human activity with its own visual interest.

Zhang Wei's *Fusuijing Building* constructs a different position for looking (Figure 2b). A dark band across the top and right, together with a railing below, encloses the lighter view. Repeated blue-gray windows articulate the tall building at the right; the more loosely differentiated area at the left opens the composition toward trees, roofs, and sky [5]. The frame does not erase the exterior. It makes the location from which that exterior becomes visible difficult to overlook. The viewer encounters a relationship between a nearby boundary and a world beyond it.

In a later interview, Zhang described an intention to distinguish the atmosphere of home from broader societal conditions. He also recalled the apartment as a place of conversation and mutual support. This testimony adds historical meaning without supplying a simple color code. Visually, the interior frame is dark and the exterior light; darkness cannot automatically signify danger, or brightness safety. The relation between image and testimony is therefore more interesting than straightforward illustration. The painting establishes a viewpoint, while the testimony explains why maintaining a sphere of viewing and conversation mattered to the artist. The spatial distinction is visible; its remembered emotional stakes require another source.

Read together, these works make artistic independence less abstract. Li places an act of painting inside the landscape; Zhang makes the boundary of a place for looking structurally prominent. Neither eliminates the surrounding world. Both can be read as organizing a particular relation to it [12]. Their specificity also resists the temptation to turn "Wuming landscape" into a generic symbol of escape. A represented painter and a

framed domestic view present different ways of inhabiting a scene, and they demand different kinds of contextual evidence.

4.4. Zhao Wenliang's Verso Separates Making from Historical Remembrance

The verso of Zhao Wenliang's August 18 offers another evidentiary structure (Figure 3). Handwriting occupies an irregular, marked surface rather than a formal caption panel. Its vertical columns make the object carry a verbal account in addition to its painted face. A museum essay transcribes a recollection of events from August 1966, a forty-five-day interruption of painting, and a return to painting on 2 October. The reference to nearly ten years of storage is especially consequential: the painting's date cannot be treated as the date of the whole inscription. The object joins a dated act of making to a later act of remembering.

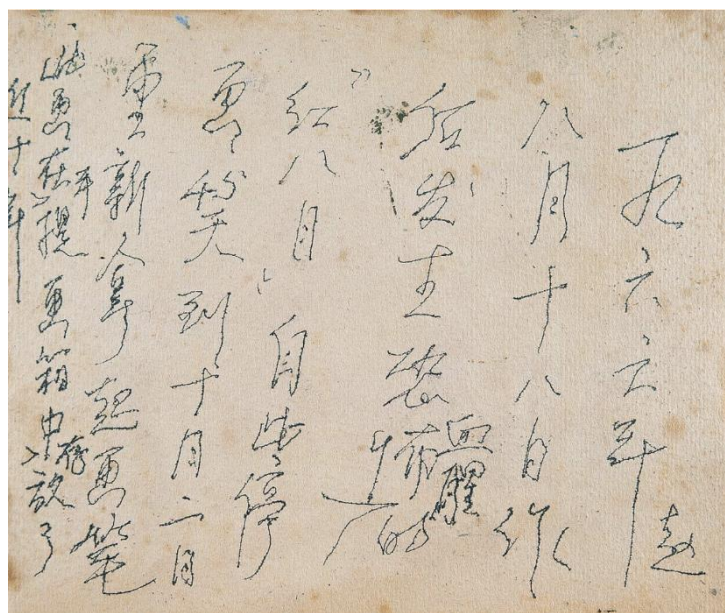


Figure 3. Zhao Wenliang, Verso of August 18 (Also Titled 8-18), Painting Dated 18 August 1966; Inscription Date Undetermined. The Verso Records an Interruption of Forty-Five Days. Reproduction from Song's Unpublished Manuscript (Fig. 5, P. 17); Original Photographer Unrecorded. Transcription Checked Against Gao [4].

This distinction changes what the image can demonstrate. The verso is evidence that historical interruption was attached to the preserved object; it is not sufficient evidence that the inscription was available to its first viewers or that the recto encoded a particular political statement. Nor does a retrospective account become worthless because it is retrospective. Its temporal distance is part of its meaning: the work becomes a material site through which an earlier experience is recalled and retained.

The case also limits an easy narrative of artistic resilience. A pause in painting documents an interruption, not uninterrupted aesthetic freedom. Resuming work may be significant without implying psychological recovery or suggesting that external constraints enhanced artistic quality. The analytically defensible point is that creative practice could be suspended, sustained in altered form, and subsequently narrated. This is a history of contingent activity, not an assertion that aesthetic value transcends historical circumstance.

4.5. Comparison without Equating Circumstances

Wilde's imprisonment offers a limited point of comparison regarding material access. A book request from Reading Gaol, dated 15 October 1896, illustrates the practical dependence on external provision of reading materials, standing in contrast to the self-directed intellectual engagement expressed in earlier writings. Intellectual activity remained contingent upon resources allocated by institutional authorities. The focus of

comparison lies in this condition of dependence; differences in legal frameworks, social status, and historical contexts necessitate distinct analysis [12].

Table 2 summarizes the different configurations identified through the analysis. Its rows indicate thematic emphases present in the selected corpus rather than defining features exclusive to each case. Wuming participants engaged interpretive discussion; Wilde's practice relied on interpersonal connections; Whistler's painting conveyed individual expression [5]. What varies is which dimension of self-determination emerges most clearly from the available evidence and the specific scholarly questions addressed here.

Table 2. Comparative Findings Across the Selected Texts and Objects.

Case	Principal claim to authority	What the evidence adds	Interpretation to avoid
Whistler	Painterly selection and judgment exceed narrative explanation.	Pictorial organization is defended through public argument.	A painting without an obligatory story exists outside history.
Wilde	Creative interpretation and individual development resist prescribed ends.	Artist and critic need not hold identical interpretive authority.	Every spectator may disregard the work and impose an arbitrary meaning.
Wuming	Chosen subjects and shared practices sustain scope for artistic activity.	Books, homes, friendship, and later testimony make its supports visible.	Every ordinary subject is deliberate protest or a copy of European doctrine.

5. Discussion

5.1. Political Significance Is Not the Same as a Political Message

The comparative findings require a distinction between what a work depicts, what an artist intends, and what an artistic practice enables. A landscape can lack an explicit political message while its production sustains relationships or judgments that are not organized around official cultural purposes. Equally, the historical significance of those relationships does not entitle the interpreter to discover a secret political allegory in every tree or window.

The article's three dimensions clarify how this space can be investigated. Artistic authority concerns the right to choose and judge; practical conditions concern its exercise; historical consequences concern what follows. One dimension does not guarantee the others. An artist may assert autonomy in creative decision-making while relying on institutional support, or develop a limited private practice without reaching a broad public. Keeping those differences visible makes the claim more precise and less celebratory. It also allows aesthetic failure, interruption, disagreement, and restricted access to remain part of the account.

5.2. Autonomy Is Relational without Becoming Purely Instrumental

Shared learning practices challenge the assumption that dependence inherently undermines individual agency. A friend's room or book can facilitate self-directed activity, even though neither the artist nor the artwork achieves full social independence. This points to a relational understanding of practical freedom: the central question concerns how a given relationship enables or constrains the formulation of artistic aims. The same question reveals a conceptual complexity within Victorian aestheticism. Public assertions of painterly authority and the role of the creative critic both presuppose interaction with others, even when resisting external expectations.

However, justifying all art solely by its communal or existential benefits risks reintroducing prescriptive function through historical interpretation. Such an approach would obscure the distinct formal qualities demanding attention: Snow Scene for its branching compositional structures and depicted painter; Fusuijing Building for its

carefully framed vista; Falling Rocket for its distribution of marks and tonal contrasts. Their historical significance does not erase these formal distinctions. A situated account therefore clarifies the conditions and outcomes of aesthetic experience while preserving space for the experience itself to transcend any assigned functional role.

5.3. What the Comparison Changes and Where It Stops

Reading the cases together shifts the focus toward how artistic authority is established and exercised. In the Victorian context, emphasis lies on who may assess and interpret an artwork. Wuming's selected objects and testimony clarify the material and institutional conditions enabling such assessment. Neither perspective overrides the other. Collectively, they indicate that a historical account of artistic authority should trace the interplay between assertions of creative agency and the practical frameworks—such as private studio spaces, accessible reproductions, preserved works, and public critical discourse—that make such agency operative.

The analysis remains confined to the selected materials. Four objects do not encompass two broad artistic traditions, and digital access cannot substitute for direct examination of original surfaces [1]. Evidence of direct engagement by Wuming with figures such as Wilde or Whistler would require verifiable documentation—including identifiable editions, reading records, or contemporaneous accounts. Retrospective narratives remain valuable but cannot fully reconstruct early encounters or resolve discrepancies in recollected timelines. Future work could examine the proposed analytical distinctions using additional artworks and contemporary responses, particularly instances where an artist's stated creative agency diverged from observable production or reception conditions.

6. Conclusion

"Art for art's sake" does not denote a uniform withdrawal from society. Across the cases examined here, it signals contested understandings of art's purpose. One figure emphasizes painterly judgment; another expands the creative role of interpretation and links art to individual expression; a third group's selected works and documented practices highlight the significance of subject choice, collaborative learning, and designated spaces for making and viewing. These distinctions constitute key findings of the comparison, not inconsistencies to be resolved.

The visual evidence also requires careful interpretation. A depicted painter establishes an activity of looking, a domestic frame situates a particular viewpoint, and an inscription anchors a remembered relation to an event. Their broader implications arise through contextual analysis—not from subject matter in isolation. Contextual specificity describes this interplay of aesthetic particularity, social embeddedness, and historical resonance. It sustains the significance of rejecting externally imposed artistic aims without recasting that rejection as either generalized opposition or an ahistorical ideal.

References

1. F. McGhee, "Whistler and the 'Poetry' of Pictures," *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 76, no. 1, pp. 35–57, 2026.
2. J. P. Brown, *Cosmopolitan Criticism: Oscar Wilde's Philosophy of Art*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1997.
3. P. de Montfort, "Women in Whistler's Images of Chelsea and the Thames," *British Art Studies*, no. 22, 2022.
4. M. Gao, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011.
5. J. M. Whistler, "Ten O'Clock," *A Lecture*. Portland, ME: Thomas Bird Mosher, 1916.
6. J. M. Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. Mineola, NY: Courier Corporation, 2012.
7. V. G. Morwitz and K. P. Munz, "Intentions," *Consumer Psychology Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 26–41, 2021.
8. O. Wilde and E. Haldeman-Julius, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," in *Appeal to Reason*, 1970, pp. 1079–1104.
9. E. Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting*. New Haven, CT: Paul Mellon Centre, 2007.
10. E. Pudney, "Paradox and the Preface to 'Dorian Gray'," *The Wildean*, no. 41, pp. 118–123, 2012.
11. J. Siewert, "Suspended Spectacle: Whistler's 'Falling Rocket' and the Nocturnal Subject," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts*, vol. 69, no. 12, pp. 36–48, 1995.

12. A. Wang, "Apolitical art, private experience, and alternative subjectivity in China's Cultural Revolution," *China Perspectives*, vol. 2014, no. 2014/4, pp. 27–36, 2014.
13. R. Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of Publisher and/or the editor(s). Publisher and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.