

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cross-Cultural aesthetic cognition: Chinese interpretations of Malaysian Batik through social psychology

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the limitation of Western-centric frameworks in Malaysian Batik scholarship by applying Chinese aesthetic principles to examine cross-cultural aesthetic cognition. Despite Batik's economic significance (contributing RM1.2 billion annually to Malaysia) and artistic evolution, existing research remains predominantly descriptive, lacking systematic exploration of aesthetic cognition across diverse social groups. This qualitative investigation employed visual analysis and semi-structured interviews with 45 participants: 20 Malaysian Batik artists, 10 Chinese art scholars, and 15 art students to examine how three core Chinese aesthetic concepts illuminate Batik interpretation: Yijing (artistic conception), qiyun shengdong (vitality of spirit), and tianren heyi (harmony between nature and humanity). The study analyzed canonical works by Chuah Thean Teng and contemporary Batik paintings through the proposed Chinese Aesthetic Transcultural Framework (CATF). Findings revealed Yijing as the most frequently recognized principle (93 coded references), followed by qiyun shengdong (66) and tianren heyi (55). Results demonstrate that aesthetic cognition is socially embedded, varying significantly across stakeholder groups based on cultural positioning and professional experience. The present study contributes theoretically in that Chinese aesthetic principles are operationalized as analytical tools for the study of non-Chinese visual cultures, challenging the methodological monocentrism that dominates the field of art criticism. From a practical perspective, the CATF offers museum curators, politicians, and educators complex interpretative frameworks that promote a more thorough transcultural understanding in contemporary global art studies by replacing craft-based judgments with philosophical insights.

Keywords: Chinese aesthetics; Batik painting; transcultural framework; Malaysian art; visual interpretation; aesthetic translation

1. Introduction

Batik painting in Malaysia has evolved into a sophisticated fine art form in recent decades, expanding beyond its textile roots and drawing influences from both modern and traditional techniques. Because of its characteristic symbolic narratives, diverse motifs, and experimental pieces, modern batik has come to symbolize modernity. Refer to references ^[1,2] for further information on this matters. Reimagining traditional

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themes in a modern environment is what gives rise to neo-traditional batik. the following Abdullah noted that the variety of designs available in batik has expanded greatly, and he also said that younger painters are breathing fresh life into the language. ^[4]. Batik is also important economic wise: as stated in the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC), the Batik industry in Malaysia brings the country about RM1.2 billion every year, which highlights how Batik is both a heritage and a creative industry ^[5].

Even with this development, there is little academic account of Batik. Available literature tends to be descriptive and ethnographic, focusing on the development of style, identity, or technique in craft ^[12]. Although Western paradigms, including formalism, semiotics, and postcolonial critique were used, they hardly ever explain other systems of aesthetics. Consequently, the visual and symbolic aspects of Batik have not been sufficiently addressed using non-Western theoretical frameworks ^[14,33]. Another issue is the unavailability of the research on aesthetic cognition, i.e., the way Batik is regarded, perceived, and experienced, in terms of its perception, processing, and emotional impact on various social groups. The social psychology shows that aesthetic judgments are culturally created, conditioned by cultural heritage, artistic education and the context of interpretation ^[38], ^[39], ^[40]. But the scholarship of Batik has not methodically addressed these psychological aspects, and there is a vacuum in knowledge of how aesthetic categories are negotiated among audiences.

This paper overcomes these shortcomings by using three key concepts of Chinese aesthetics (Yijing (artistic conception), qiyun shengdong (vitality of spirit) and tianren heyi (harmony between nature and humankind)) on a set of Malaysian Batik paintings, along with the reactions of 45 respondents (20 Batik artists, 10 Chinese art scholars and 15 university art students). Through visual interpretation, as well as interview information, the study contextualizes the Batik interpretation between philosophical and socially based aesthetic cognition. The aim is to create a cross-cultural aesthetic cognition model that enhances interpretive understanding of Batik as well as add to the pluralization of the global art criticism outside the Western paradigms.

2. Literature review

2.1. Cross-cultural aesthetics and social psychology

The field of cross-cultural aesthetics investigates how cultural context shapes the perception, interpretation, and evaluation of art. Studies in this domain demonstrate that aesthetic preferences and judgments are not universal but are mediated by cognitive schemas, emotional memory, and socio-cultural identity. For example, research on the cultural-match effect in adolescent populations shows that individuals exhibit greater appreciation for artworks that align with their cultural backgrounds ^[30]. Syntheses of empirical aesthetics also affirm both general preferences (such as symmetry and balance) and culturally specific responses, but such findings remain disproportionately based on Western samples ^[31]. Portrait studies have further highlighted enduring East–West differences in background complexity, offering insights into culturally embedded modes of visual attention ^[32]. Theoretical contributions to this area argue for the need to decentralize Euro-American paradigms and incorporate alternative aesthetic systems into global curricula ^[33,34].

From a psychological perspective, aesthetic experience is increasingly understood as a dynamic interplay of perception, memory, expertise, and cultural background. The Vienna Integrated Model of Art Perception by Pelowski et al. ^[38] exemplifies this approach by integrating top-down and bottom-up processes, while studies by Brielmann and Pelli ^[39] emphasize the reflective nature of beauty judgments. More recent research has explored the effects of expertise and cultural conditioning on art appreciation, demonstrating

that experience modulates both perception and emotional engagement ^[40,41]. Concepts such as the “aesthetic aha” ^[42] and the Distancing–Embracing model ^[43] show how aesthetic pleasure can be rooted in emotional tension, narrative insight, or even negative emotions. Nevertheless, these frameworks still lack sufficient testing with non-Western stimuli, and very few studies extend this research to applied traditional artforms such as textile-based visual media like Batik.

These three concepts have individually featured in modern aesthetic discourse—Yijing in literary hermeneutics, Qiyun Shengdong in ink-brush and animation analysis, and Tianren Heyi in ecological aesthetics. However, their collective application to contemporary cross-cultural textile design remains largely unexplored. The present study leverages their combined analytical potential to offer a holistic interpretation of Batik symbolism.

2.2. Chinese aesthetic traditions: Philosophical roots and analytical potential

Chinese aesthetic theory offers an indigenous, non-Western perspective that emphasizes harmony, vitality, and emotional resonance rather than mimesis or formal abstraction. Central concepts such as Yijing (artistic conception), Qiyun Shengdong (vitality of spirit), and Tianren Heyi (harmony between nature and humanity) represent deeply rooted philosophical frameworks derived from Confucianism, Daoism, and Chan Buddhism. These principles prioritize an embodied engagement with the world, where the viewer, artist, and environment are interconnected in a holistic aesthetic experience ^[21,22]. Experimental research has supported the validity of these frameworks: for instance, neural imaging studies comparing Eastern and Western landscape art reveal distinct holistic and analytical processing tendencies, aligned with cultural schema theory ^[23]. Behavioral tests show that Chinese participants prefer compositional balance and rhythmic forms, which further confirms the internal logic of traditional Chinese visual preferences ^[24].

Other studies have extended these concepts into transcultural contexts. Machine-learning models of aesthetic judgment have shown that symbolism and spiritual resonance are culture-specific, supporting the theoretical flexibility of Chinese constructs ^[25]. Comparative aesthetics involving Chinese and African sculpture ^[27] and Chinese–Thai totemic design ^[29] show the adaptability of these categories to non-Chinese forms, although these applications remain under-theorized and lack procedural formalization. This highlights the need for a systematic and transferable framework that can apply Chinese aesthetic categories as analytical—not merely descriptive—tools across cultural boundaries.

The selection of Yijing (artistic conception), Qiyun Shengdong (vitality of spirit), and Tianren Heyi (harmony between nature and humanity) is grounded in their central role in classical Chinese aesthetics. These concepts represent a cohesive interpretive system: Yijing emphasizes emotional and poetic atmosphere, Qiyun Shengdong reflects dynamic energy and rhythm in form, and Tianren Heyi embodies the integration of human experience with natural cycles. Together, they cover expressive, formal, and philosophical dimensions of visual interpretation. Their long-standing use in painting theory and recent applications in ecological and transcultural aesthetics make them well-suited for analyzing Batik's symbolic complexity, rhythmic patterns, and nature-infused themes. Their synergy allows for a structured, culturally embedded framework that extends beyond decorative analysis toward deeper aesthetic cognition.

2.3. Visual methodologies and transcultural interpretive frameworks

Visual studies methodology has gained momentum as a legitimate and rigorous approach in qualitative research, particularly in the context of culturally situated art forms. Techniques such as thematic visual coding, cross-case analysis, and audience triangulation have enabled researchers to capture symbolic, emotional, and formal dimensions of visual expression ^{[16], [36]}. However, few frameworks offer the operational clarity to apply these techniques in cross-cultural research involving non-Western aesthetics. The

increasing recognition of visual interpretation as a cognitive and cultural process calls for integrated models that bring together aesthetic theory, social psychology, and systematic methodology.

Within this context, there is a significant opportunity to develop an applied framework based on Chinese aesthetics. Such a framework would not only enrich the interpretation of visual works like Batik but also contribute to decolonizing aesthetic methodology by advancing non-Western philosophies as viable analytical systems. This paper proposes the Chinese Aesthetic Transcultural Framework (CATF) as a response to this need, aiming to bridge methodological gaps in both theory and application.

2.4. Studies on Malaysian Batik: Historical, stylistic, and cultural dimensions

Research on Malaysian Batik painting has largely focused on historical evolution, craft innovation, and artist-centered analysis. Fauzi and Ghazali ^[11] traced the stylistic trajectory of Batik from 1950 to 2010, highlighting its national and cultural symbolism. Geng, Daud, and Tahir ^[12] examined multiculturalism in Batik, especially in the works of Chuah Thean Teng, while Geng, Andriana, and Tahir ^[13] analyzed how Malaysian Chinese painters adapted Batik styles in the post-National Cultural Congress era. Lee ^[15] explored the visual memory embedded in Nyonya sarongs, and Meskardi and Safri ^[16] addressed the broader visual culture of Batik as a uniquely Malaysian form of expression. These works affirm Batik's hybridity and innovation, positioning it as both a cultural artifact and a modern visual medium.

Recent studies have also ventured into comparative analysis. Mortu, Stejskal, and Windsor ^[17] introduced the idea of "remote art" to explain cross-cultural resonance in Batik, while Pan et al. ^[18] compared Chinese and Malaysian symbolic systems. Paramitha and Wei ^[19] explored Batik's role in cultural transformation within Indonesia–China relations. Notably, Pizzolante et al. ^[20] emphasized the transformative potential of aesthetic experiences, though without integrating specific theoretical frameworks. Qi and Ryan ^[21], and Qi ^[22], offered preliminary ideas for applying Yijing and other Chinese categories to Batik, but these remained largely conceptual.

Despite this growing interest, there is still a lack of empirical studies that systematically apply Chinese aesthetic theory to Malaysian Batik, especially in a way that also incorporates audience interpretation and cognitive engagement.

2.5. Identified gap and rationale for the present study

While Malaysian Batik scholarship has richly addressed its historical and stylistic dimensions, it continues to lack an integrated interpretive framework that bridges aesthetic philosophy with empirical analysis. No previous study has explicitly operationalized the Chinese aesthetic concepts of Yijing, Qiyun Shengdong, and Tianren Heyi to decode Batik's symbolic and compositional strategies. Nor have these concepts been applied in conjunction with social psychological approaches to aesthetic reception. Terms such as the gongbi-xieyi dialectic—which encapsulates the tension between meticulousness and expressive spontaneity in Chinese painting—are absent from the analytical vocabulary of Batik interpretation.

The current study addresses this gap by proposing the Chinese Aesthetic Transcultural Framework (CATF), which integrates traditional Chinese aesthetic categories with a qualitative, socially grounded visual methodology. By doing so, the study contributes to a broader effort to pluralize global art criticism and aesthetic scholarship, and offers a replicable model for interpreting non-Western visual traditions through non-Western philosophical systems. This approach not only enhances the analytical depth of Batik studies but also affirms the global applicability of Chinese aesthetics beyond its native cultural domain.

The integration of social psychology into aesthetic inquiry emphasizes that art appreciation is not merely a formal or philosophical act, but a socially and cognitively situated process shaped by memory,

cultural norms, personal expertise, and emotional engagement. While existing models like the Vienna Integrated Model and aesthetic "aha" theories offer important insights, they largely remain Eurocentric and rarely extend to traditional, craft-based visual arts such as Malaysian Batik. Furthermore, these psychological theories often operate independently from non-Western aesthetic philosophies, leaving a critical void in understanding how traditional Asian frameworks—such as Chinese aesthetics—can be operationalized in empirical, cognitive, and socially embedded art interpretation. This disjuncture calls for a new model that can bridge philosophical theory and cognitive psychology to decode aesthetic meaning as both an embodied and culturally embedded experience. It is within this context that the present study identifies its central research gap and proposes an integrated framework that aligns traditional Chinese aesthetic constructs with contemporary empirical analysis.

2.6. Research gap and conceptual framework: Toward a Chinese aesthetic–cognitive approach

The suggested framework is not an exogenous imposition. The art history of Malaysia and Chinese-diasporic cultural formation Scholarship on the art history of Malaysia and Chinese-diasporic cultural formation records long-standing Sino-Malaysian entanglements that are visible in Straits Chinese/Peranakan visual taste to the Nanyang imaginaries that influenced Malaysian Chinese art. The examination of the aesthetics of Peranakan/Nyonya batik reveals how Chinese visual values such as motifs, color schemes and applications were bargained in the Malay-world textile practices in the past thus reflecting an extended zone of cultural compatibility. The emerging Chinese-Malay visual discourses in Malaysian modern and contemporary art worlds have also been confirmed by the recent research on Malaysian Chinese art and re-evaluation of so-called Neo-Nanyang currents.

Past research of the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia insisting on the point that such interactions produce hybrid aesthetic regimes as opposed to unidirectional borrowings, supports the argument that Chinese aesthetic regimes are co-constituted with the local traditions.

Three major gaps that have been identified in the literature review include: (i) the absence of a systematic aesthetic framework to analyze Batik; (ii) the weak usage of the Chinese aesthetic theory outside of its home environment; and (iii) the weak usage of social-psychological aspects of visual arts studies. These gaps inform the research questions of the study aiming at: (1) explaining how Chinese aesthetics interprets Batik; (2) evaluating how this interpretation is different compared to the current local or Western treatments; and (3) determining whether an integrated aesthetic-cognitive paradigm can be developed to be used in a wider cross-cultural context. The identified categories are supposed to be used as an interpretative tool and not just a descriptive tool in the Malaysian settings.

2.7. Research Questions

The interrelated three research questions guide the present study to address the gaps in the literature in terms of theoretical and empirical gaps. These questions shift out of the particular study of the Malaysian Batik painting in terms of Chinese aesthetics, to comparative approaches, and ultimately to the development of a cross-cultural generalizable model where the social-psychological aspects of aesthetic cognition are incorporated.

RQ1. How can Chinese aesthetic principles illuminate the symbolic and visual features of Malaysian Batik painting as perceived by artists, scholars, and students?

Batik studies have largely focused on stylistic evolution, craft practice and cultural identity, but have not addressed aesthetic and cognitive aspects of Batik perception and experience in depth ^[12,15]. Aesthetic

principles of Chinese culture, including Yijing (artistic conception), qiyun shengdong (vitality of spirit) and tianren heyi (harmony between nature and humanity) offer the means of discovering the poetic mood, rhythm, and human-nature thematics of Batik ^[21,22]. Using the views of practicing artists, academic specialists and students, this paper analyzes not only the artworks, but also the ways aesthetic meanings are constructed socially by interpretation.

RQ2. In what ways does a Chinese aesthetic interpretation differ cognitively from conventional (Western or local) approaches to Batik analysis?

Research Traditional methods of Batik are inclined to be either rooted in western paradigms (such as formalism or postcolonial semiotics) or to be rooted in local conceptions that position Batik as craft and identity signifier ^[18,33]. These techniques, important as they are, anticipate socio-historical/cultural-symbolic analysis at the cost of aesthetic cognition. In contrast, Chinese aesthetics is concerned with experiential, affective and philosophical experience of visual form ^[23,24]. The comparison of these interpretive traditions also indicates the singular knowledge that the Chinese frameworks offer and how some of them can be applied to supplement the existing paradigms to transgress to transcultural art criticism that will not become methodologically monocentric.

RQ3. Can a Chinese aesthetic–social psychology framework (CATF + cognition) be operationalized to interpret non-Chinese visual arts?

In the event that Chinese aesthetic categories can be used to uncover new dimensions of meaning in Batik, the next step would be to find out whether they can be formalized and made into a transferable model that combines the cognitive and social-psychological approaches. The framework operationalizes three Chinese aesthetic concepts: Yijing, qiyun shengdong, and tianren heyi. These are used as interpretive tools in Batik analysis, grounded in cross-cultural cognition and aesthetic processing ^[38,40]. Such a framework is a response to the demand that non-Western epistemologies be framed as analytical tools in global art studies ^[33,51], adding cross-cultural and socially situated lenses to aesthetic studies.

These three research questions form a rational sequence: application of Chinese aesthetics to Batik (RQ1), comparative interpretation traditions (RQ2), and, lastly, the construction of a cross-cultural system that can be transferred (RQ3). Their treatment will not only generate empirical data concerning the Batik art, but also broader contributions to the information in transcultural aesthetics and aesthetic cognition.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Research design

The research design is qualitative which follows the principles of the visual analysis and interpretive aesthetics to investigate the ways in which Chinese aesthetic principles can shed some light on Malaysian Batik painting. Visual research methodologies have been acknowledged as rigorous methods of research in qualitative paradigms, the only method with the ability of inquiring artistic mediums as sources of meaning-making and cultural expression ^[31,36]. This tendency is in line with our purpose of decentralising the elusive aesthetic content of climate, life, and the integrity of nature and man -elements that are generally overlooked in quantitative or purely descriptive approaches.

Framework Limitations:

Despite the fact that the Chinese Aesthetic Translation Framework (CATF) offers a powerful analytical tool to understand culturally based and symbolically rich designs, including the Malaysian batik, it seems to be limited with regard to abstract or non-representational art forms with little or no symbolic motifs and

aesthetic intentionality. The framework assumes some narrative or cultural contextualization of the visual material and makes it less efficient in decoding artworks in which form, as opposed to meaning, is foregrounded.

3.2. Data sources

The statistical data provided in this paper is explained both graphically and in a textual form. The main corpus is made up of canonical Batik works by Chuah Thean Teng whose initial experiments led to the establishment of Batik as a fine art medium in Malaysia and some modern Batik paintings that indicate later experimentation with motifs, colour schemes, and composition. These art pieces are enriched with archival museum records, exhibition brochures and published academic literature to provide a full historical and contextual background.

To ensure transparency and representativeness, the study sample is describe in Table 1. It includes 20 Malaysian Batik artists and 15 university students from creative disciplines. The artists were selected based on their professional engagement in Batik painting, while the students were purposively sampled for their basic familiarity with art aesthetics and cultural symbolism.

Table 1. Participant demographics

Group	N	Age Range	Gender (M/F)	Avg. Experience	Notes
Batik Artists	20	30–65	9 / 11	18.4 years	Practicing artists from 3 states
University Students	15	20–25	6 / 9	N/A	Visual arts and cultural studies majors

3.2.1. Coding manual and reliability strategy

To ensure consistency in interpreting visual elements across batik samples, a coding manual was developed to define and operationalize key categories:

- Symbolic Patterns: Recurring motifs with cultural, religious, or mythological meanings, e.g., phoenix (longevity), peony (wealth), or cloud swirls (spirituality).
- Motif Transfer: Instances where a visual element from one cultural system (e.g., Chinese) is integrated into Malaysian batik with stylistic or semantic modification.
- Atmospheric Composition: Spatial arrangement that creates mood or yijing, often involving gradients, layered depth, or brushlike abstraction.
- Expressive Contrast: Use of line boldness, texture variation, or tonal shifts to capture emotion or qiyun (spirit resonance).

To ensure methodological transparency, a detailed codebook was developed defining each aesthetic code:

- Yijing was operationalized as visual metaphors conveying mood, stillness, or philosophical abstraction.
- Qiyun Shengdong was marked by dynamic brush-like lines, rhythmic symmetry, or expressive movement.
- Tianren Heyi referred to motifs fusing natural elements (e.g., clouds, flora) with human-centered symbols.

Two trained coders independently applied the codebook to 35 visual samples. Inter-coder agreement was calculated using Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0.82$). Ambiguities—such as motifs fitting both Yijing and Tianren

Heyi—were resolved via consensus meetings, prioritizing contextual intent and visual dominance. A conflict log was maintained and reviewed weekly to refine definitions where needed.

3.3. Analytical framework

The analytical framework combined methods from visual studies, Chinese aesthetic theory, and social psychology. At the first stage, a systematic coding of visual features was conducted to identify recurrent motifs, symbolic patterns, chromatic contrasts, and compositional strategies in the selected Batik paintings. The features were then explained in the three fundamental categories of Chinese aesthetics: Yijing (境界, artistic conception), qiyun shengdong (气韵生动, vitality of spirit), and tianren heyi (天人合一, harmony between nature and humanity). Additionally, the gongbi-xieyi dialectic was taken into account as a precursor to the compromise between detail oriented and free expression. The *gongbi-xieyi* dialectic refers to the interplay between meticulous realism (*gongbi*, or "precise brush") and expressive abstraction (*xieyi*, or writing the idea) in traditional Chinese painting, representing a balance between technical detail and spiritual expression.

This study aimed to understand the perceptions of Batik among Chinese artists, students, and philosophers in regards to traditional Chinese aesthetic principles through the use of semi-structured interviews. Topics that emerged from the thematic analysis of the transcripts included life, the environment, and the human experience. Additional evidence regarding the impact of multicultural circumstances on aesthetic cognition has been provided by visual coding and triangulation. The Chinese Aesthetic-Social Psychology steered and validated the research by offering a structure for readings across cultures.

Using tianren heyi, Yijing, and qiyun shengdong, among others, this method was able to accomplish its aims of cross-verification and decreased interpretive bias.

Second, the code became more trustworthy as a result of using iterative coding methodologies. The visual characteristics and interview transcripts were subjected to an initial round of open coding to uncover developing themes. Ultimately, these codes led to the derivation of analytical categories that were congruent with the aesthetic values of China. To ensure reliability, two research assistants versed in Chinese aesthetics and Batik independently coded some of the interview transcripts. Intercode agreement was calculated, and discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. This process not only increased reliability but also helped mitigate the researcher's interpretive subjectivity.

Third, methodological reflexivity was adopted as an additional safeguard. The researcher maintained analytic memos throughout the coding process to document decision-making and to reflect on potential cultural and disciplinary biases. This reflexive practice was especially important given the study's transcultural orientation, which involved applying Chinese aesthetic frameworks to a Malaysian art form.

Finally, limitations of sampling were acknowledged. Although the purposive sample of 45 participants (20 Batik artists, 10 Chinese art scholars, and 15 art/design students) provided diverse perspectives, it was not statistically representative of all possible stakeholders in Batik or Chinese aesthetic scholarship. The relatively small sample size, coupled with its concentration on Malaysian and Chinese respondents, limits the generalizability of findings to broader or global audiences. Nevertheless, the objective of this study was not statistical generalization but analytical transferability that is, to generate a conceptual framework (the Chinese Aesthetic Transcultural Framework) that can be adapted and tested in other contexts.

By combining triangulation, intercode checks, and reflexive validation, the study established methodological rigor appropriate to a qualitative and cross-cultural inquiry. These procedures ensured that the findings are both credible in their internal consistency and transferable to wider discussions in aesthetic theory, art criticism, and social psychology.

Chinese Aesthetic Transcultural Framework (CATF)

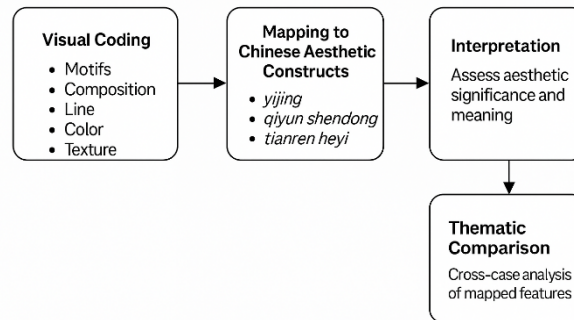


Figure 1. Flowchart of the Cultural Aesthetic Transfer Framework (CATF) Process

The Cultural Aesthetic Transfer Framework (CATF) to be used in the current study is shown in figure 1. This flowchart illustrates the analytical process step-by-step, i.e., visual coding of Batik patterns, mapping them to Chinese aesthetic categories (Yijing, Qiyun, and Tianren Heyi) and then thematic comparison across the groups of participants, and a final interpretation.

3.4. Theoretical contribution and innovation

This research contributes to a distinctly theoretically motivated visual cultural analysis by suggesting the Chinese Aesthetic Transcultural Framework (CATF) a systematic, portably applicable model that transforms three classical Chinese aesthetic constructs (Yijing, qiyun shengdong, tianren heyi) into analytic, not descriptive, instruments. Based on recent elucidations of Chinese aesthetics methodology, including the systematization of the Confucian-Daoist-Buddhist aesthetic techniques by Qi ^[22] and its applicability to the present research, and on well-established protocols of visual research in working with images as data ^{[16], [36]}, CATF combines conceptual optics with actionable procedures of coding, interpretation and comparative reading. Thus, it transforms philosophical categories into sensitizing concepts that lead to the qualitative inference and pattern recognition in visual materials ^[50].

Although cross-cultural art criticism has long been dominated by Western paradigms of formalism, semiotics or postcolonial criticism, recent art criticism scholarship in remote art has placed greater emphasis on paradigms that interpret the art of other cultures in a responsible way that do not diminish the difference ^[17]. CATF answers that call by analyzing the Chinese aesthetic categories as analytically generative formations, specifying the role of Yijing in forming narrative ambiance and symbolic affordances, specifying how tianren heyi governs human-nature relatedness in iconography and composition. It is one step beyond the generic references to Eastern aesthetics to a literal tracing of concept and appearance.

The CATF theory-directed reading is combined with the visual encoding of the theory, motives, composition, line, color and texture, that is, each family of codes is matched with the Chinese aesthetic constructs. The framework structures information reduction and cross-case analysis ^{[16], [36]} and applies Chinese constructs as heuristic sensitizing concepts that orient analysis but does not predetermined emerging meanings ^[50]. This two-fold anchoring promotes analytic transparency and reproducibility in contrast to unsystematic models of cross-cultural interpretation that rely on inspiration.

Despite the fact that scholars have started to apply Chinese aesthetic concepts to the modern media (e.g., the Daoist tianren heyi of film aesthetics), these applications have generally been medium-specific or programmatic. CATF adds a generalizable protocol, validated here on Malaysian Batik painting that can be

generalized to other non-Chinese visual traditions in which natural symbolism, rhythmic line, and atmospheric narration are relevant. It unites a Chinese-grounded, cross-cultural decoding model that does not supplant the Western methods but adds to the comparative aesthetics to plural theoretical grammars. As far as we can tell, no previous peer-reviewed study has described a procedurally explicit paradigm where Yijing -qiyun -tianren heyi is applied to Malaysian Batik painting with a full chain of codebook design, to comparative interpretation. The study thereby designates Malaysian Batik as a field-specific original, and accepts theoretical resources in the antecedent Chinese aesthetics ^[22] and visual methodology ^[16,36]. With its specifications of constructs, indicators and decision rules, CATF shows how Chinese aesthetics may be productively used as methodological infrastructure to analyse world art.

3.5. Expected contribution

At the empirical level, this study provides fresh insights into how the visual features of Batik painting—such as motif composition, rhythmic patterns, and natural symbolism—can be interpreted through Chinese aesthetic categories. Previous Batik scholarship has largely examined historical development, craft processes, and cultural symbolism ^[46,47], but has rarely engaged in systematic aesthetic analysis. By employing concepts such as Yijing, qiyun shengdong, and tianren heyi, the study uncovers aesthetic dimensions that conventional Western or ethnographic approaches often overlook. This empirical re-reading enriches understanding of Batik painting not only as material culture but also as a vehicle of philosophical and artistic resonance.

Theoretically, the study advances the field of transcultural aesthetics by proposing the Chinese Aesthetic Transcultural Framework (CATF). While comparative aesthetics has often emphasized differences between East and West ^[49], there remains a lack of operationalized frameworks that systematically apply non-Western categories to global art forms. By formalizing Chinese aesthetic principles into an interpretive methodology, this research demonstrates their applicability beyond Chinese visual traditions, positioning them as analytical resources rather than cultural artifacts. Thus, the study expands the toolkit of global art studies and questions the hegemony of Western-centric paradigms in interpreting art across cultures. Aesthetic philosophy also benefits from its inclusion.

Art teachers, museum curators, and cultural regulators can benefit from a new perspective on Batik artworks according to the results. Instead of limiting themselves to preserving history and appreciating craftspeople, we hope that the proposed framework would spark a new movement toward more nuanced aesthetic practices that are based on interpretation. A profound understanding of abstract philosophical and creative concepts is our hope. Art instructors use it to connect Southeast Asian visual traditions with Asian ideals, legislators use it to promote cultural projects that foster cross-cultural understanding, and curators use it to educate how to construct an exhibit around Batik and explain its symbolic intricacy. Lastly, the research will help increase intellectual and cultural capital, which will enhance art discourses on a national and international level.

4. Findings

4.1. Aesthetic Features of Batik under Chinese Interpretation

4.1.1. Yijing

In batik wax-resist dyeing, visual motifs serve as both decorative elements and agents of narrative depth and expressive complexity, evoking a sensibility typical of Chinese painting. Yiking, literally "the creative notion," is a common term for the aesthetic theory that has developed to define Chinese art. Two of the major principles of this ideology are Yi-jing sheng-qing and Yi-xing shen-zhi, which mean "the spirit in the form" and "the conveyance of emotion in the scene or landscape," respectively. Both the method of creating a

meditative or lyrical setting and the formal arrangement of items are important to this school of thinking. Looking at batik via these lenses reveals some visual language rich with spiritual overtones and philosophical inquiries. Evidently, this was the most important part of the batik to these students. They spoke highly of the art form's expressiveness and aesthetics. An intelligent student has pointed out that the works do a wonderful job of utilizing the Yijing idea by providing a very significant feeling of ordinary calm. Similarly, artists reported that the whole process of making batik induces a meditative atmosphere characterized by quiet, patience, and contemplation. At *The Jetty*, by Chuah Thean Teng, is a good illustration of this: the woman's body is in the bottom left corner, and the vertical shapes and muted tones serve to counteract it. The muted chromatic palette and strategic use of blank space create a quiet, meditative atmosphere. From a Chinese aesthetic standpoint, the juxtaposition of harmony and emotional ambiguity gestures toward the Yijing principle that “life is poetry” that painting is not a literal reproduction of the world, but a vehicle for entering an internal poetic state. The work thereby resonates with the classical Chinese concept of *shi zhong you hua*, *hua zhong you shi* (poetry within painting, painting within poetry), shifting the viewer's attention from external representation to spiritual engagement.



At The Jetty

<https://www.christies.com/lot/>

Similarly, in *Penang Village Scene*, the interaction of architectural elements, cultivated land, and village dwellers subtly invokes a coexistent temporality. The cracked textures of wax and cloth surface create visual patina, evoking the passage of time. Symbolic representations such as the fluid postures of animals and stylised clouds encircling the sun function not only as narrative cues but as atmospheric signs of memory, change, and rhythm. Participants, particularly students and artists, highlighted the “serene balance” of this imagery, suggesting that it transported them “beyond the image into feeling.” From the viewpoint of Yijing, these aesthetic decisions construct a spiritual world that dissolves the boundaries between the external and internal, form and essence, sensation and meaning.



Penang Village Scene

<https://www.mutualart.com/Artw>

Therefore, Batik painting holds high potential of yinking oriented analysis. It is no longer bound to its traditional classification as ethnic craft or folk art, but rather it is involved in a transcultural aesthetic paradigm in which emotional appeal, narrative nuances, and poetic insinuations are expected. The interplay between Chinese aesthetics and Malaysian batik demonstrates how yiking may serve as a theoretical basis and analytical tool for discussing art from all around the globe.

4.1.2. Qiyun Shengdong

The idea of qiyun shengdong, which translates to "life-motion" or "vigor" in English, is fundamental to classical Chinese aesthetics. The Six Painting Principles of Xie He, or Liu fa, are the basis of classical Chinese painting. Spiritual resonance (shen) and internal vigor (qi) are more important to them than external decorum. This view holds that technical skill and likeness are less important than an artwork's ability to evoke emotion through its form, gesture, and rhythm of composition. Fundamental to the qiyun shengdong practice of the classical Chinese literati was the discipline of "breathing of brush and ink" the cultivation of expressive intuition via the improvement of technical abilities. Batik is a media created by the interaction of wax, dye, cloth, and hand motion; applying this principle to its study and practice has far-reaching repercussions.

The experience of qi, the vitality imparted via art, is prioritized in Chinese aesthetics, in contrast to Western formalism and postcolonial paradigms, which center on problems such as symbolic content, socio-historical context, structural balance and harmony, and the immediate experience of art. Qiyun in Batik is the interplay between the portrayed shapes and the negative space, the crackling of the dyed surface, and the free-flowing movement of the wax-resist lines. These can be utilized to create an impression of vitality and energy rather than merely serving as decorations. The information gained through the interview aspect of the research supports this interpretation. Scholars of Chinese art were always eager to testify to the vibrant rhythm of Batik artworks, and frequently made analogies between it and Chinese calligraphy and the xieyi (freehand) painting. Only one of the respondents pointed out that the movement of lines in Batik is similar to the brushwork of semi-abstract ink painting in which vibrancy is not created by accuracy but by the energy of gesture. According to some of the participants, the stochastic textures created through the use of wax-resist techniques support the perception of visual spontaneity and improvisation, which is correlated to the classical principles of artistic vitality. According to one respondent, the maker's hand moved in response to the fabric instead of following a set pattern. This fits with the way that master Batik artists describe the

process of making the fabric: as an intuitive and body-based method. When asked to describe important Batik pieces, students echoed these sentiments, describing them as lively, vibrant, and akin to energy moving over the fabric.



Bonhams

<https://www.mutualart.com/Artw>

The work of Chuah Thean Teng, *Bonhams*, demonstrates this. Within a compositionally dense area, human bodies execute a variety of positional movements, such as leaning, striding, and gestures. With several movement lines that intersect and split, the figure schemes are polyrhythmic and not symmetrical. In this case, the wax-resist process is responsible for making flaws such as color bleeding, variations in line pressure, and broken surfaces appear to be signs of movement rather than defects. Visually, the image flows better and has more room to breathe when there is a little misalignment of position and spatial distance. Qiyun Shengdong claims that this cycle of tension and relaxation makes the listener feel physically present yet emotionally detached from the action. The spatial stratification suggests a prevalent theme among Chinese artists: the idea of energy being in a state of motionlessness or of movement occurring within a state of stillness. Also, color is an active participant in the expression of the visual rhythm of the work. The strong color areas of cloth contrast with neutral or earthy colors, thus directing the eye movement through the canvas in a vibrant rhythmic pattern. Instead of the observer being drawn to a single focal point, the observer is invited to move throughout the composition, a visual reflection on the conceptualization of *qi* as running through the body and the cosmos in Chinese philosophical thought. In this respect, the painting by Teng goes beyond motion as it is represented and becomes realized through the aesthetic architecture. A second model, the Tarian Payung (Umbrella Dance) again emphasizes this kinaesthetic quality even more explicitly. In the canvas, two dancers are seen in the middle of a performance, their body parts stretched and twisted in accordance with the rhythm, and the umbrellas around and through them are moved in a circle through the suggestion of motion. A drummer takes up the lower foreground, which adds excitement to the scene with his arms raised in motion, thus making the scene complete as an integrated and dynamic composition. In this case, *qiyun* is applied in the principle of compositional design-circularity of form, repeated line, and directional flow which together act as anchors of rhythm. The broken surface texture resembles a sonic reverberation as though the drumbeat was the one that left its mark on the fabric itself. The contrast between curved arcs of umbrellas and the angular limb extensions provide contrast, thus adding to the rhythm of the picture. The motion is not material but inverted: motionless objects give rise to motion indicating. Languages used to describe this work by students who were interviewed often referred to it as auditory or musical with one of the respondents stating that you could hear the movement within the silence of the fabric. Theorists

have observed that it is related to the traditional Chinese opera and folk performance presentation where rhythm is rendered not in realism, but through compositional timing and space tension. Many Chinese artists have looked to the interaction between dancers and drummers as a symbol of the cyclical relationship between energy and restraint.

A common theme that emerged from the readings was the belief that Batik artworks, especially those that feature performance or movement, have a rhythmic quality. This first impression demonstrates how intrinsically social aesthetic cognition is. Instead of functioning solely at the level of visual form, the qiyun shengdong principle is co-produced in the region of interpretation between artwork and audience. The study's findings show that qiyun is more than just an old aesthetic ideal; it's also a dynamic perceptual schema that influences how energy and motion are perceived and valued in Chinese culture.

Overall, qiyun shengdong's application to Batik painting shows that it is more than just a symbolic medium; it is a performance art form. Central to Chinese art is the xing shen he yi aesthetic ideal, which is exemplified by the harmonious interaction of shape, color, line, and texture. As a result of the meeting point of visual culture in Malaysia and aesthetic philosophy in China, batik arose as a product of a shared grammar of life and movement, making it a powerful vehicle for transcultural aesthetic resonance. The use of rhythm is integral to these compositions, rather than an afterthought.'



Tarian Payung (Umbrella Dance)

<https://www.mutualart.com/Art>

4.1.3. Tianren Heyi

'The aesthetic concept of Tianren Heyi, or "harmony between nature and humanity," represents one of the most profound and foundational ideas in Chinese aesthetic philosophy. Rooted in classical Daoist and Confucian thought, this principle posits that human life and the natural world are not distinct realms but co-constitutive forces that form a continuous, symbiotic whole. In artistic terms, Tianren Heyi does not promote passive imitation of nature; rather, it advocates for a visual and conceptual synthesis whereby human emotion, social meaning, and natural form are fused into a single harmonious order. The artist, in this framework, becomes a conduit through which qi the vital energy of the universe flows into imagery, uniting the cosmos, self, and society.

This philosophical orientation finds resonant expression in Malaysian Batik painting, particularly in works that emphasize daily life within natural environments. The very medium of Batik, characterized by the

organic diffusion of dye and the spontaneous emergence of wax crackling, embodies a processual engagement with the natural elements heat, fluidity, resistance that mirrors the Daoist ideal of “following the way of nature.” In this regard, Batik is not merely a textile craft but a methodological analogue to Chinese ink painting, where control and spontaneity are dynamically balanced.

Interview data from this study underscores this alignment. Artists spoke frequently of their efforts to “live with the materials” rather than impose upon them, describing the Batik process as “responding to nature’s flow.” One artist explained, “You never fully control wax or dye; you guide them. They return something unexpected something alive.” Students noted that scenes of village life “felt peaceful, not posed,” and that such works “merged people and place into one feeling.” Tianren Heyi, the concept that human free will is intrinsically linked to the natural rhythms of the universe, is demonstrated by this union of hearts, as per the experts. Within the realm of social psychology referred to as “situated perception,” scholars investigate the ways in which factors such as personal history, cultural norms, and contextual associations influence our views of physical attractiveness.

For a great example of how Tianren Heyi may serve as a theoretical foundation and an aesthetic standard, one may read *Mother and Child with Origami Birds* by Chuah Thean Teng. Beyond the literal depiction of a woman holding her baby amidst a timid assortment of houseplants and birds, the composition delves beyond deeper philosophical themes. The birds take refuge in a sloping cage that encircles the main characters, enhancing the maternal gesture through an audio echo. The curved enclosure, which is rhythmically asymmetrical, both encapsulates and conjures the vitality of motion. There is the interpretation that sees a domestic setting and the interpretation that sees an allegory of the interconnection of the universe. Following the Confucian idea of life's perpetuation (*sheng sheng bu xi*), the act of nursing takes on the symbolic meaning of nature's creative activity.

This thematic content is also supported by the use of batik technique. The soft radial spreading of dye on the wings of the birds imitates patterning on feathers and, at the same time, establishes perceived energy fields, and the roughness of the surface of the waxed crack creates a lived time that goes beyond the smooth surface aesthetics. The lines between figure and ground are blurred by the use of visual lines that connect the crevices of the clothing that the mother wears with the foliage that is seen to be surrounding her; the color used, warm colors typical of human skin, feathers and leaves, are used to homogenize the hierarchical differences that exist between man and nature. The widely-appreciated *xiang sheng* aesthetic ideal in China aligns with this formlessness since it emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things instead of their individuality. Thus, this batik portrays a cosmology of feeling cared for in harmony with nature via its interconnected relationships with family, plants, and the sky.

A second representative work, *a Moonlit Village Waterscape*, shows Tianren Heyi using a wider ecological and spatial vocabulary. The painting is located at the meeting point between the sea and the sky in the twilight, and there is a lack of narrative description of the ships that are floating on the shallow waters. Still, the complex relationship between form, line, and emotion results in a high level of aesthetic refinement. Instead of a static line, the horizon is portrayed as a dynamic area where warm and cool hues progressively merge together, creating an atmosphere reminiscent of the first light at dawn as it meets the fading wave. The ever-changing landscape serves as a spiritual threshold, bridging the gap between the celestial and terrestrial realms.

The compositional form of the painting reflects this liminality. There also are human figures, fishing nets, and boat masts that promote directional flows, which intersect with the natural undulations of the sea. The consequenceant interaction of the linear (anthropogenic) and curvilinear (natural) produces a sense of

balance between exertion and submission, between deliberation and adjustment. The large amount of negative space, which is deliberately left unoccupied in the middle ground, pulls the viewer into a meditative rhythm, thus in line with the Chinese aesthetic principle of leaving white (*liubai*), which allows *qi* to flow freely and invisibly. The viewer's gaze oscillates gently between anchored boats and moving tides, not unlike the meditative experience of watching calligraphy unfold. Interview responses regarding this painting reinforced its aesthetic potency. One student noted that it “felt like breathing—like inhaling morning light.” Another described the image as “not about fishing, but about being present with the sea.” A scholar observed that the painting “reflects a worldview where people do not conquer nature but live in its cycles,” directly connecting the visual structure to Daoist cosmology. Such comments underscore the interpretive richness of *Tianren Heyi* as both a visual and philosophical framework, one that foregrounds embeddedness, resonance, and mutuality.



Mother and Child with Origami Birds

<https://baskl.com.my/chuah-the>

In both of these works, Teng's Batik practice exemplifies *Tianren Heyi* not only as an abstract concept but as an experiential aesthetic system. Through wax, dye, fabric, and form, his paintings manifest the Chinese philosophical commitment to unity between human affect and natural rhythm. This unity is not expressed through overt symbolism or didactic narrative but through the slow accumulation of visual cues—diffused light, shared color systems, rhythmic lines—that collectively evoke a sense of cosmological attunement. The application of *Tianren Heyi* to Malaysian Batik reveals that aesthetic cognition is not merely an intellectual process but a socially and culturally situated form of resonance. Through form, material, and mood, Batik paintings encode and elicit sensibilities of ecological balance and relational ethics. These meanings are not imposed but emerge through socially embedded interpretation—whether in the reflective stance of artists, the analytical precision of scholars, or the affective responses of students. As such, *Tianren Heyi* operates as both an analytic category and a shared aesthetic experience, advancing the broader goal of this study: to establish Chinese aesthetics as a viable and insightful cross-cultural framework for interpreting non-Chinese visual traditions.



Moonlit Village Waterscape

<https://www.mutualart.com/Artw>

Summary

This study has demonstrated how Chuah Thean Teng's Batik paintings, when viewed through the lens of traditional Chinese aesthetics Yijing (artistic conception), Qiyun Shengdong (vitality and rhythm), and Tianren Heyi (harmony between humanity and nature) offer a compelling site for cross-cultural aesthetic interpretation. In the dimension of Yijing, the research revealed that wax-resist motifs are not merely ornamental but encode narrative depth and emotional atmosphere. Everyday themes such as familial intimacy or pastoral life are elevated to poetic realms, resonating with the Chinese principle that "painting is the silent expression of poetry." By fusing emotional, symbolic, and spatial components, these artworks mirror the viewer's perceptive sense. Regarding Qiyun Shengdong, the dynamic compositions of Teng make the surface alive by moving the lines, asymmetrical balance, and modulated chromatic rhythm. The force that is expressed in the pictures goes beyond action, it is the rhythm of experience, it is a life that is vital, and is felt by the spectators regardless of their demographic classification. The paintings satisfy the Chinese aesthetic need of infusing inner spirit (shen) with outer form (xing) through the use of posture, movement and visual breath. This idea is also developed in the category of Tianren Heyi, where materiality of batik is emphasized in the aspect of fissures, diffusion of dye and chromatic modulations as an ecological sensibility whereby the human subject does not stand alone in the environment but rather exists in its rhythms. Teng imagines the Daoist concept of mutual generation between heaven, earth and humanity in the application of spatial considerations, especially negative space and atmospheric gradation. The paintings therefore have a cosmological sensibility that is aesthetically systematised and a responsive experience. Using a compilation of these observations, the current paper outlines three interdependent processes that make up the Chinese Aesthetic Transcultural Framework (CATF). First, ontological unity of humans and nature is operationalised by the compositional strategies-interpenetrating forms and balanced asymmetries- to dissolve subject and environment dichotomy. Second, the rhythmic expression realized by use of line, color, and spatial pacing provides aesthetic resonance in various cultural contexts so that the viewers can think and feel about the pictures. Third, intertextual symbolic associations- between human gesture, animal movement and environmental particularity- trigger interpretive connections between individual memory and shared cosmology. This paper is based on an intensive visual examination and a triangulated framework of perception of the participants, thus going beyond the traditional comparative aesthetics and offering a methodologically sound method of interpreting the non-Chinese visual culture through the prism of the Chinese philosophical categories. Thus, the results are in line with the versatility and analytical effectiveness of Chinese aesthetics within a transnational environment; they are not limited to the cultural roots, but these

concepts show the theoretical flexibility and indicate a possible direction of art studies in the world. In line with this, the CATF is argued to be not only a decoding model of Malaysian Batik, but also a replicable model of cross-cultural aesthetic enquiry, on a wider scale.

While visual analysis formed the structural basis of interpretation, the interview data played a crucial role in deepening and validating thematic insights. Participants' reflections—especially those of artists and scholars—provided firsthand explanations of symbolic intent, aesthetic experience, and interpretive nuance. For example, students often described Batik artworks in affective terms aligned with Yijing, such as “calm,” “poetic,” or “meditative,” reinforcing visual readings of emotional atmosphere. Similarly, scholars drew direct parallels between *Qiyun Shengdong* and rhythmic brush-like textures, referring to Batik's motion and spirit. Artists' descriptions of process, intuition, and material flow echoed the principle of *Tianren Heyi*, confirming that nature–human unity was not only observed but also embodied in technique. These interview findings ensured that interpretations were not imposed solely by theory but grounded in lived, culturally situated perspectives—supporting the triangulation of data and enhancing the internal validity of the CATF model.

4.2. Thematic insights from interviews

Thematic analysis of 30 interview transcripts revealed patterns in aesthetic cognition across participant groups:

Artists emphasized embodied meaning and intuitive design choices, often referencing “flow” (*Qiyun*) and “balance” (*Tianren Heyi*).

Students displayed fragmented understanding, often fixating on surface patterns rather than symbolic meaning.

Scholars aligned most closely with the CATF dimensions, frequently invoking philosophical themes related to Yijing.

These qualitative divergences affirm RQ1 and RQ2, showing that aesthetic interpretation is mediated by training, cultural familiarity, and symbolic literacy. Interviews thus deepen the understanding of visual-cognitive differences beyond what artwork alone reveals.

4.3. Discussion

The current research explores the perception and interpretation of the aesthetic constructs inherent in the Yijing, *Qiyun Shengdong* and *Tianren Heyi* as perceived by the different audiences who include students, artists and scholars in the context of Batik art. The results are that cognition of Chinese aesthetic categories is multidimensional mediated by cognitive schemas, experience familiarity and socio-cultural background. An example is that Yijing created an emotional response in the students who said that it created a poetic sensitivity and artists experienced a reflective state of mind that was created in the process. On the same lines, *Qiyun Shengdong* was considered by academicians as consistent with its classical readings, rhythmic and full of life, thus confirming its belonging to the traditional Chinese aesthetics philosophy.

On the other hand, students were more likely to learn *Qiyun Shengdong* intuitively and sensually.

Artists recognized the principle of the harmony between human and nature (*Tianren Heyi*) and resorted to their rural environment to emphasize the importance of a holistic bond between nature and art. On the contrary, students considered this phenomenon to be the embodiment of peace and emotional balance. Put collectively, these results support the fact that aesthetic thinking is culturally based and differs in terms of professional identities and cultural orientations.

Comparison with Literature and Explanation of Results

The current results are in line with the earlier studies that have stressed on experiential learning and cultural embeddedness of aesthetic perception. In classical Chinese aesthetic theory, as has been defined by theorists like those listed in references ^[7-11], the univocal emphasis on emotional response (qing) and moral cultivation (dao) becomes central in the making of aesthetic experience. We apply this framework to the applied arts education and show that these categories are not foisted on us by philosophical literature as we had thought, but are negotiated by various social classes.

Opposite to the universalist assertion of aesthetic formalism that dominated Western thought, the Chinese aesthetic model below is a dialogical process, with symbolic immersion and lived interaction as its informants. This is in line with the experiential theory of aesthetics by Dewey ^[5], which is the conceptualisation of aesthetic judgment as an action process in certain environmental and contextual situations. This point of view is backed by empirical data: students read *Yijing* and *Tianren Heyi* in the prism of emotion and life in general, and scholars and artists were more open to the canonical definitions.

As a surprise factor, the aspect of previous training and exposure came out as a salient finding. Even though it was expected that the aesthetic sensitivity of artists would improve, the observed inter-student variations suggest that even the slight exposure to the Chinese aesthetic theory prepares people to deal with the artistic language in a more contemplative than before. These findings support the results of Geng et al. ^[7], who state that aesthetic literacy is a curriculum intervention and participatory observation which can be developed.

The possible consequences of these results are applied to the psychological and sociological aspects of aesthetic reception. Chinese aesthetic categories are not only passively identified but their reception is mediated through the cognitive schema of the subject, identity formation and through the socio-cultural capital. As an example, the fact that the students tend to interpret the *Yijing* by means of emotional resonance indicates that their aesthetic experience is more strongly based on the affective identification rather than on the philosophical analysis.

It is this deviation that supports the importance of conceptualizing Chinese aesthetics as a system of ideas and a practice that is distributed socially. Although classical categories offer a constant and consistent philosophical language, its practical implementation relies on the cultural background of an interpreter, his/her cognitive training, and the emotional state. Furthermore, the way in which the audience responds might be viewed as an ever-changing dance between the established norms and the realities of contemporary experience. Such insights contribute to the evolving discourse on the localization and globalization of aesthetics by positioning Chinese aesthetic theory as both culturally situated and adaptable across contexts. They open new avenues for integrating classical thought into modern pedagogical models that account for variability in cognitive and cultural reception.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, while the study adopts a qualitative multi-case approach, its sample size and scope limited to Batik practitioners and learners restrict broader generalization. Second, the reliance on interpretive coding and thematic extraction may introduce a degree of researcher subjectivity, despite triangulation efforts. A more extensive mixed-methods framework integrating eye-tracking, physiological response, or experimental priming could offer more robust quantification of aesthetic perception. Third, linguistic and semantic variation in the translation of aesthetic terms may affect respondents' interpretations, especially among younger participants unfamiliar with classical Chinese idioms. One limitation is the exclusion of a general public sample, which constrains insights into how non-experts engage with symbolic content. Future studies should include lay audiences to enhance ecological validity.

Despite these limitations, the findings possess theoretical and practical transferability. The study confirms that classical Chinese aesthetic principles remain meaningful within contemporary art education, provided they are contextualized within learners' experiential frameworks. These insights may inform not only curriculum development in Chinese arts education but also international programs exploring intercultural aesthetic understanding. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to track the evolution of aesthetic cognition over time or cross-cultural comparisons to assess the universality of these findings.

Practical Applications:

The CATF framework has specific utility across domains. A curator could apply the Yijing principle to design a contemplative gallery layout, grouping Batik works by emotional tone. Educators might incorporate the Qiyun Shengdong dimension into visual literacy workshops, comparing Batik's dynamic forms with calligraphic rhythm. Designers could use Tianren Heyi to explore ecological symbolism in sustainable textile creation. Cultural policymakers might employ the framework in grant criteria for heritage preservation that emphasizes intercultural symbolism.

5. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the complex aspects of aesthetic thinking and how artistic language can be translated using the traditional Batik art practice in Chinese cultural settings. Based on the three-level aesthetic model-Yijing (artistic conception), Qiyun Shengdong (spiritual resonance and rhythmic vitality), and Tianren Heyi (harmony between man and nature), the study has found that these categories are perceived by various stakeholder groups such as the students, artists, and scholars in terms of socially embedded perspectives. The thoughts of the respondents in the Yiking category were always emotional and poetic in nature. Students focused on personal feeling and reflective studies, and artists described a first-hand experience based on the everyday Batik activities. In the case of Qiyun Shengdong, rhythm and vitality were also very important and resonated with scholars who pointed out that it was in line with classical Chinese aesthetics theory. Lastly, the Tianren Heyi dimension was particularly acute in the description of harmonious rural images by artists and in the identification of the peaceful nature-related setting by students - indicating the ubiquity of ecological aesthetics in the traditional art education. The results confirm that there is no single aesthetic cognition but it is different in roles, experiences and cultural positioning. According to these interpretations, there is a dialogue between the tradition and personal making of meaning. Although this research makes an important contribution to the study of the cultural specificity of aesthetic interpretation in the field of art education, it does not deny the fact that this study was limited by the nature of its qualitative methodology of the method used, the use of a small culturally homogenous sample, which can limit generalizability in the context of a larger educational area or cross-cultural situations. As highlighted in this paper, the traditional arts have long-term pedagogical value in developing aesthetic literacy, cultural identity, and environmental awareness. Furthermore, it outlines new prospects of revising or reforming these structures in the world paradigm of art education.

Although this exploration provides substantive information about the cognitive-aesthetic analysis of Malaysian Batik in terms of a Chinese theoretical perspective, the findings can be largely relevant to groups with a background of aesthetic cognition, i.e. art students, trained viewers or culturally conscious interpreters. The purposive sampling and limited demographic diversity of participants constrain broad generalizability. Additionally, cultural familiarity and interpretive competence likely influenced participants' responses. As such, external validity may be bounded to populations with similar cultural exposure or aesthetic training. Future studies should include more heterogeneous samples across different cultural and educational backgrounds to test the robustness and scalability of the CATF framework.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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