

THE ACCULTURATION OF CHINESE CULTURAL VALUES IN BALINESE PAINTING: HISTORICAL AND AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The interaction between Chinese cultural values and Balinese traditions significantly influences Balinese painting, resulting in a unique artistic identity that merges visual forms and aesthetic ideas. This article examines how Chinese cultural values influence the evolution of traditional Balinese painting, with a focus on the processes of cultural adaptation and transformation. The aim is to identify and analyze how Chinese elements integrate into Balinese visual art while preserving local traditions. A qualitative research method is employed, combining a historical approach with a visual analysis of selected artworks. The research highlights various Chinese cultural influences, including the Yin-Yang philosophy, cosmological concepts, and visual motifs such as dragons, Barong Landung, Barong Ket, Chinese coins, Nekara Pejeng, Karang Sae, and Chinese-inspired patra decorations. It also examines coloring techniques, tools, and art materials that originate from or are inspired by Chinese practices. The findings indicate that Balinese artists creatively incorporate these elements through acculturation, blending them with local forms, colors, and symbols. Rather than being a passive adoption, this process results in a dynamic transformation that enriches the aesthetic and symbolic language of Balinese painting. The originality of the research lies in its systematic analysis of Chinese contributions to the visual and technical aspects of Balinese art, which are often overlooked in existing literature. The research enhances the understanding of cultural hybridity in Southeast Asian art and provides a valuable framework for studying cross-cultural influences in traditional artistic practices.

Keywords: Balinese painting, Chinese cultural value, acculturation, aesthetics

INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies highlight the historical ties between Chinese and Balinese cultures through trade, migration, and the circulation of artifacts such as ceramics and coins, as well as through the exchange of ideas and motifs in rituals, architecture, and art. However, research on Chinese influence in Balinese painting remains limited. This area of study is particularly important because painting not only reflects beauty but also embodies cultural values and worldviews. It demonstrates how Balinese art continuously absorbs, adapts, and transforms external influences while maintaining its distinct local character.

Balinese painting is renowned for its rich symbolic meaning and intricate visual designs, the result of a unique fusion of internal and external cultural influences. Among these influences, the long-standing historical connection between Bali and China is particularly significant. This relationship can be traced back to the first millennium, as evidenced by archaeological artifacts such as the bronze drum at Pura Penataran Sasih Pejeng and drum mold plates discovered at Pura Puseh in Desa Manuaba Village, Tegalalang, Gianyar (Brata et al., 2022; Budiasih, 2023; Suwintari et al., 2023).

Over time, Bali has been shaped by various external influences, including those from India and China, often arriving via Java. The Majapahit tradition

also significantly enriches Balinese art, contributing to Bali's cultural identity as a "miniature Majapahit," particularly evident in traditional art and religious rituals. The development of Balinese painting is thus a dynamic process, incorporating elements from these various external cultures. The fusion of Chinese and Balinese cultural values appears across many facets of life, including education, the social economy, and community activities, observed in locations such as Pura Negara Gambur Anglayang in Kubutambahan Village, Pura Pabean Pulaki, Besakih Temple, Puri Karangasem, and various socio-ethnic relationships throughout Bali (Li, 2023, 2025; Dinata et al., 2025; Sudiana et al., 2022; Gede, 2021; Purawati et al., 2020; Aryana, 2017; Astajaya & Ria, 2021; Wijaya, 2022). However, while the influences of Indian and Western cultures are extensively studied, the Chinese contributions to Balinese painting remain largely underexplored.

Although the historical and cultural relationship between China and Bali is well-documented, the specific influence of Chinese values on Balinese painting has not been thoroughly examined. Most studies focus on the impacts of Indian and Western cultures, leaving the contributions of Chinese philosophy, symbolism, and technical innovations relatively uninvestigated. The research aims to address three main questions: First, how do Chinese philosophical concepts, such as Yin-Yang and natural cosmology, influence Balinese painting? Second, what impact do Chinese cultural artifacts have on the aesthetics and techniques of Balinese painting? Lastly, how are Chinese symbols and motifs incorporated into the visual and symbolic expressions of Balinese painting?

A previous study titled "The Influence of Chinese Cultural Values in Balinese Painting" reveals the presence of Chinese elements in Balinese art (Karja, 2024). Other journal-based studies also highlight the role of Chinese cosmology, symbols, and cultural artifacts in Southeast Asian and Balinese art. These findings indicate that Chinese influences are not merely adopted but become part of an ongoing cultural dialogue. Building on this foundation, the present research focuses on the process of acculturation, demonstrating how Chinese values are reinterpreted within Balinese painting to create new forms and meanings. By employing a historical and aesthetic approach, this research underscores the essential role of Balinese artists in integrating Chinese influences with local traditions, thereby providing a deeper understanding of cultural integration in visual art, philosophy, and cosmology (Weifen, 2023; Karja, 2023).

The research focuses on three key areas that respond to the central questions of the study. It first examines how Chinese philosophical concepts, such as Yin-Yang and natural cosmology, influence Balinese painting through compositional harmony, balance, and symbolic alignment. It then explores the impact of Chinese cultural artifacts on the aesthetics and painting techniques practiced in Bali, including

materials, tools, and stylistic adaptations. Finally, it analyzes how Chinese symbols and motifs are adapted into Balinese visual and symbolic expressions, resulting in artworks that reflect both Chinese and local spiritual values.

Grounded in theories of acculturation and cross-cultural interaction, the research aims to understand how Chinese culture blends with local Balinese traditions through trade and migration. Acculturation theory refers to the process by which two or more cultures influence one another and integrate foreign elements into local traditions (Titzmann & Jugert, 2024). This theory is essential for analyzing the cultural blending that occurs between China and Bali. Chinese philosophical concepts such as Yin-Yang and cosmology emphasize balance and harmony in the universe, which may influence composition, color schemes, and spatial arrangements in Balinese paintings, aligning closely with local beliefs in cosmic balance.

The research employs acculturation theory and cross-cultural aesthetic theory as the primary analytical frameworks. According to Berry et al. (2023), acculturation refers to the process by which individuals adopt a new culture by internalizing its values, attitudes, and practices. As Yan (2020) explains, acculturation involves adapting to a new culture. Kim (2020) notes that this process occurs when immigrants, after undergoing socialization, begin to interact with a culture that is still foreign to them. Acculturation involves physical and psychological changes as individuals adapt to function well within a new cultural context. This theory helps explain how Chinese culture integrates into Balinese painting and clarifies the processes of adaptation, acceptance, and modification of Chinese cultural elements in Bali, as well as how these elements adjust to align with local values and aesthetics.

Cross-cultural aesthetic theory aligns with the concept of transculturality, suggesting that aesthetics are not confined to a specific culture but can transcend cultural boundaries. This aesthetic approach draws insights from disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, and art studies. It explores how aesthetics from two cultures—China and Bali—interact to produce artistic forms with distinct Balinese characteristics. This theory helps explain how principles of Chinese aesthetics, such as the philosophy of nature and symbolism, are translated into the context of Balinese painting and how the outcomes of this interaction contribute to the evolution of traditional Balinese aesthetics.

The research employs several theoretical perspectives to analyze the influence of Chinese cultural values on Balinese painting, including acculturation theory, symbolism, visual aesthetics, and material culture. The dynamics of acculturation change (Titzmann & Jugert, 2024) examine how different cultures come into contact and influence one another while maintaining their unique identities. This framework clarifies how Chinese elements,

such as motifs, compositions, and artistic techniques, are seamlessly integrated into Balinese art without diminishing its distinctive style. It also emphasizes the creative agency of Balinese artists, who reinterpret external influences through local aesthetic logic, thereby transforming cultural borrowing into a unique form of artistic innovation.

The concept of Yin-Yang from Chinese philosophy also applies to understanding how Balinese artists adopt the idea of balance and harmony in their compositions, reflecting cosmological beliefs that align with Balinese spiritual values. This principle of duality—emphasizing equilibrium between opposing forces such as light and dark, male and female, or active and passive—can be seen in the spatial arrangement, color balance, and symbolic representation in Balinese paintings. Through this lens, artists reinterpret harmony not only as a visual ideal but also as a reflection of moral and spiritual order consistent with local cosmology.

The theories of symbolism and visual aesthetics are crucial for analyzing the transformation of Chinese motifs, such as dragons and lotus flowers, in Balinese art. These symbols, which originally hold deep cultural and spiritual significance in Chinese culture, are adapted within the Balinese artistic context, taking on new meanings while retaining their visual appeal. This adaptation process highlights the flexibility of Balinese artists in merging foreign elements with local traditions.

Furthermore, the research examines material culture theory, which focuses on how Chinese artifacts, such as bronze drums (*nekara*) and coins (*uang kepeng*), influence the techniques, materials, and tools used in Balinese painting. By analyzing these various theoretical perspectives, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how Chinese cultural values contribute to the development and enrichment of Balinese visual art, demonstrating the dynamic exchange between the two cultures.

METHODS

The research employs a qualitative, chronological design to examine how Chinese cultural values influence the development of Balinese painting over time. The chronological method allows for the analysis of cultural shifts, adaptations, and continuities across different historical periods. To establish a strong foundation, the research begins with an extensive literature review of previous studies, historical records, and academic articles related to Chinese-Balinese interactions in art, culture, and philosophy. This review helps identify gaps in the existing literature and guides the formulation of research questions.

Research data are collected through a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary data include in-depth interviews with Balinese artists, art historians, and cultural practitioners, as well as field observations at temples, museums, and

art studios where traditional paintings are preserved or produced. A visual analysis of selected Balinese paintings—specifically, *Kamasan* classical style, painting on porcelain ceramic (in the classical style by an academician), Ubud style (Kang Cing Wi), and Batuan style (*Barong Landung*)—is also conducted to identify Chinese-inspired motifs, symbols, and stylistic techniques. Secondary data consist of published scholarly articles, historical texts, and archival documents that contextualize the historical and cultural links between Bali and China.

The research process follows several clear steps: defining the research topic, conducting a literature review, formulating research questions, selecting data sources, developing instruments for interviews and observations, collecting qualitative data through interviews, observations, and visual documentation, and organizing and coding the data for analysis. The data are then analyzed thematically to identify patterns of cultural influence, focusing on visual motifs, philosophical integration, and changes in painting techniques and materials. Findings are interpreted within the broader framework of acculturation and cross-cultural aesthetics. This systematic approach ensures transparency, clarity, and replicability in investigating the influence of Chinese culture on Balinese painting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research explores the influence of Chinese philosophical concepts throughout history. It highlights that China is one of the primary cultures that significantly impacts the development of culture, science, art, and religion across Asia. Through trade, migration, and the spread of religion, China continuously enriches local cultures and helps shape the collective identity of Asian civilization. The ancient civilization along the Yellow River contributes greatly to technological advancement, artistic innovation, and philosophical thought, forming a foundation that inspires surrounding regions. Furthermore, through the Silk Road and sustained diplomatic relations with neighboring countries, Chinese culture spreads across East and Central Asia, influencing art, politics, and social life in distant regions, including Bali (see Figure 1). This historical and cultural diffusion demonstrates how Chinese values serve as both a source of inspiration and a catalyst for creative transformation within local traditions.

Chinese philosophy and artistic knowledge merge with local experiences to create a balance between nature and humanity. This connection is visually expressed through Balinese painting. Color, one of the essential elements of art, plays a vital role in bridging the relationships among humans, nature, and beliefs about the origins of life (Padet & Krishna, 2020; Mahendra & Kartika, 2021). While this concept is universal, it gives rise to local interpretations that foster distinct cultural values. In China, this idea is

represented by the Yin-Yang symbol (see Figure 2), whereas in Bali it is known as *Rwabhineda* (see Figure 3). Although the two concepts are not identical, they share similar foundational views of the world, life, and human existence. Moreover, Bali, a small island in the archipelago, is influenced by Chinese culture, which shapes Balinese life in various ways. Painting serves as a reflection of this cultural interplay, capturing and revealing the phenomenon of acculturation through traditional artwork.

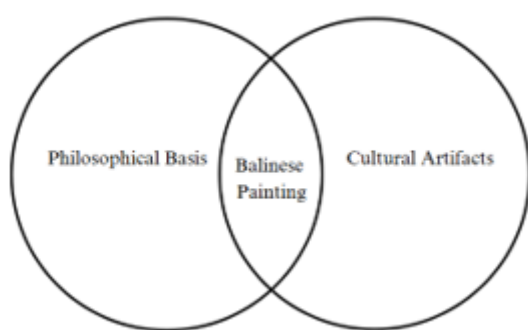


Figure 1 Influence of Chinese Cultural Values (Philosophical Basis and Cultural Artifacts) on Balinese painting (Karja, 2024)

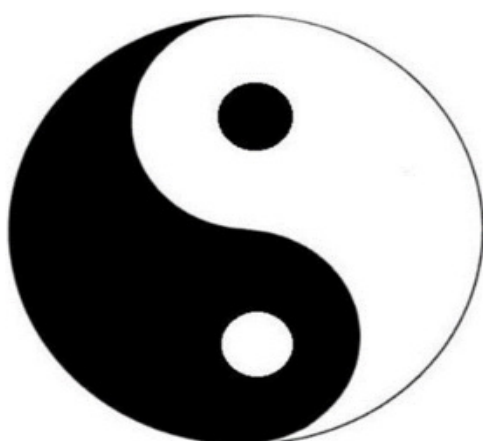


Figure 2 Yin and Yang

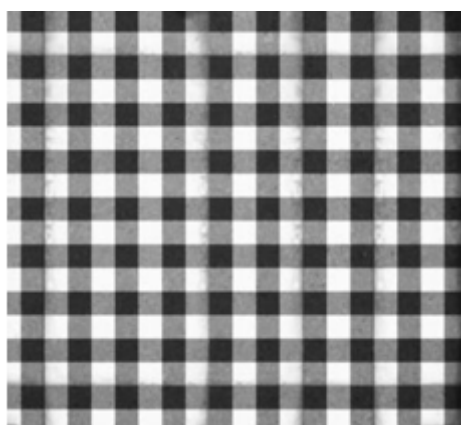


Figure 3 Black and White Checker Cloth (Symbol of Dualism)

The philosophy of Yin-Yang is a fundamental concept in Chinese thought that describes duality and balance in the universe. Yin and Yang represent two opposing yet complementary principles. Yin embodies darker, passive, feminine, and cold aspects, while Yang symbolizes brighter, active, masculine, and warm qualities. These elements are inseparable and continuously interact to create balance and harmony in all things. This philosophy asserts that everything in the universe consists of a blend of Yin and Yang; nothing is entirely one or the other. When the balance between these forces is disrupted, disharmony emerges in both the human body and the universe. Therefore, the Yin-Yang philosophy underscores the importance of maintaining equilibrium in every aspect of life, a concept evident in the Tantric tradition (Karja & Feldman, 2024).

Both the Yin-Yang philosophy in Taoism and the concept of *Rwabhineda* in Balinese tradition emphasize the balance of duality in life. Yin-Yang illustrates the interaction between opposing forces—dark and light—that continuously work together to create harmony within Chinese cosmology. Similarly, *Rwabhineda* in Balinese culture depicts dualities such as light and dark, good and evil, which complement one another to sustain the balance of the universe. Chinese cosmology views nature as a realm filled with extraordinary powers, categorizing it into five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Each element corresponds to a specific color and direction: green/blue (wood – east), red (fire – south), yellow (earth – center), white (metal – west), and black (water – north). These elements not only reflect the seasons and directions but also influence art, culture, feng shui, and traditional Chinese medicine, illustrating how the balance of nature is intricately linked to daily life.

Balinese cosmology elaborates on the concept of *Nawa Sangga*, which connects nine main directions with specific colors, elements, and associated deities. The east (white) is linked to the air element and the god Iswara. The south (red) corresponds to the fire element and the god Brahma. The west (yellow) is associated with the earth element and the god Mahadewa. The north (black) relates to the water element and the god Vishnu. The center (blue/mixed) symbolizes balance and is connected to god Shiva, who unites all elements. This cosmology reflects the harmony between nature, humanity, and spirituality, which plays a crucial role in shaping art, culture, and daily life in Balinese society (Karja, 2020).

The similarities between Yin-Yang and *Rwabhineda*, as well as the alignment of colors and elements in Chinese and Balinese cosmology, demonstrate that respect for universal balance is fundamental to the spiritual and cultural understanding in both traditions. Both systems share a worldview that prioritizes equilibrium and interdependence among all aspects of existence. Whether expressed through the five elements in Chinese cosmology or the *Nawa Sangga* in Balinese cosmology, both philosophies emphasize the continuous interaction between the

physical and spiritual realms. This shared perspective reinforces the idea that maintaining harmony between humanity, nature, and divine forces is essential for sustaining order and beauty in life and art.

Nekara Pejeng is an important bronze artifact from Bali, dating back to the early Common Era. This piece features a complex design, with geometric motifs and mythological creatures. *Nekara Pejeng* is used in religious ceremonies, providing insight into the culture and rituals of ancient Balinese society. It reflects the cosmopolitan nature of ancient Bali, which embraced influences from Chinese art. As a ritual object, the *Nekara* is utilized in fertility ceremonies and serves as a symbol of power. Its intricate design and spiritual significance suggest that *Nekara Pejeng* is not merely an artwork but also a representation of the ancient Balinese people's technical knowledge and spiritual beliefs.

The use of *uang kepeng* or *pis bolong* (see Figure 4), began in Bali around the 9th to 10th centuries CE, coinciding with the rise of trade between China and the Indonesian archipelago. These ancient coins, characterized by their round shape with a central square hole, initially served as a medium of exchange but eventually became deeply integrated into Balinese culture. In both China and Bali, these coins held dual economic and spiritual significance. In China, they were believed to protect against evil spirits and attract good fortune, while in Bali, they became sacred symbols used in religious ceremonies, representing wealth and protection.



Figure 4 The Chinese Coins, *Uang Kepeng* or *Jinah/Pis Bolong*, a Medium for Religious Ceremonies in Bali (Source: Bali Cultural Heritage Preservation Center)

Over time, the coins play a significant role in Balinese religious practices, being used in offerings, rituals, and temple architecture, as well as being crafted into traditional jewelry and artistic decorations. Once a form of currency, these coins also influenced Bali's social and economic systems (see Figure 4). Their transformation from economic tools to cultural symbols illustrates Balinese culture's adaptability in assimilating foreign influences while enriching local traditions. The design of the coins, with their circular shape symbolizing the heavens and the square hole representing the earth, carries symbolic meaning in both Chinese and Balinese contexts. In contemporary Bali, Chinese coins continue to be utilized in offerings to the gods, incorporated into sacred objects, and used as ritual items to seek blessings, reflecting the enduring influence of Chinese culture on the island (Raka et al., 2020).

In Balinese tradition, *Barong Sae* is akin to the "Fu Lion" in Chinese culture, serving as a spiritual guardian that protects from evil spirits. *Barong Sae* features distinctive slit eyes, sharp fangs, and clenched hands, and it is decorated with Chinese-inspired patterns and feathers. This similarity reflects the ongoing cultural exchange between Bali and China, particularly visible in the incorporation of decorative motifs, stylistic adaptations, and symbolic meanings that merge elements from both traditions.

Barong Sae and *Bhoma* in Bali serve as symbols of spiritual protection, positioned above temple entrances. *Bhoma* is placed above the front door, while *Barong Sae* is located above the back door. Both figures are designed to ward off negative energy and maintain harmony within sacred spaces. Their placement reflects the Balinese understanding of spatial balance and spiritual safeguarding, where every architectural element carries ritual and symbolic meaning. These figures not only function as protectors but also embody the integration of mythological and aesthetic traditions within Balinese art.



Figure 5 *Karang Sae* (Doc. I Wayan Karja, 1985)

Patra Cina is a vital aspect of traditional Balinese ornamentation, carrying philosophical significance that reflects the Balinese worldview, which is deeply intertwined with religion and belief (see Figure 6). These ornaments commonly appear in Balinese traditional architecture and paintings as decorative elements. They are classified into several categories, including flora, fauna, nature, and belief, all of which illustrate the beauty of nature and human life. Ornaments based on animals are called *kekarangan*, while those inspired by plants are called *pepatraan* (Suparta et al., 2023). In addition to native Balinese *pepatraan*, there are also designs influenced by other cultures, such as *Patra Cina*, believed to have originated in China, and to draw inspiration from archipelagic patterns, particularly the shape of the Chinese *Bunga Sepatu*, or Hibiscus Flower (Maharlika, 2018).

The carvings of *Patra Cina* typically depict plant tendrils, elongated tree branches, round flower petals with three lobes, and new buds at the centers of the branches (see Figure 6). According to Sulistyawati (2008) in her work *Chinese Cultural Integration into Balinese Culture*, Puri Amlapura was built in the

early 20th century as a symbol of the cultural blending between Chinese and Balinese influences. This point is corroborated by Professor Putra Agung, a historian and descendant of the Karangasem Palace, who notes that a Chinese artist named Cik A Tuang designed the palace's Chinese ornaments, which are now known as *Patra Cina*. These designs represent a fusion of Chinese and Balinese artistic styles (Weifen, 2023; Laba et al., 2023).

Interestingly, despite its name referring to Egypt, *Patra Mesir* is a carving technique that originates in China, named by Cik A Tuang to distinguish it from *Patra Cina*. *Patra Cina* focuses on floral and stem motifs characterized by distinct nail-tip designs, incorporating traditional elements from the archipelago, such as the hibiscus flower. It uses a sunken carving technique that accentuates layered details. In Balinese ornamentation, *Patra Cina* symbolizes cultural acculturation, blending Chinese elements with local Balinese motifs. This integration is exemplified in the architecture of Puri Amlapura, where Chinese influences are seamlessly woven into Balinese designs, highlighting cultural adaptation and synthesis. *Patra Cina* stands as a significant testament to the interaction between China and Bali, enriching Balinese artistic traditions by expanding their aesthetic and philosophical dimensions through the incorporation of foreign elements into the local context.



Figure 6 *Patra Cina* (Suparta et al., 2023)

The dragon in Balinese art and architecture clearly reflects Chinese influence through several key aspects. In Chinese culture, the dragon symbolizes power and protection, a meaning that Balinese culture also embraces, where it functions as a guardian figure (see Figure 7). The artistic designs of dragons on Balinese gates and fences bear strong similarities to Chinese dragon motifs, underscoring this visual influence. Furthermore, dragons appear in Balinese ceremonies in alignment with their traditional Chinese symbolism, representing strength and protection. Cultural contact and trade between China and Bali introduced various Chinese elements, including dragon imagery, into Balinese art and architecture, demonstrating the integration of foreign symbolism within local traditions.

For the Balinese people, expressing devotion to God and ancestors is often manifested through art, particularly in the form of traditional paintings that feature ancient scripts and illustrations known as *rerajahan* (Karja, 2020; Liu, 2022). This form highlights the significant influence of Chinese artifacts

on Balinese paintings. Balinese painting occupies a unique position by integrating customs, religion, and beliefs into daily life. These artworks are not merely aesthetic expressions; they also function as spiritual offerings in various Hindu ceremonies. Traditional paintings frequently adorn temples, depicting stories from Hindu epics such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, as well as other mythological tales. This art form is deeply intertwined with customary rituals and religion, reflecting the spiritual connection of the Balinese people with their gods and ancestors.

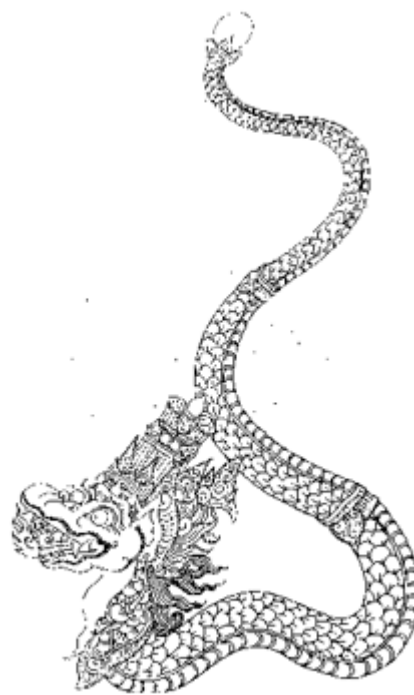


Figure 7 *Naga* (Doc. I Wayan Karja, 1985)

The Balinese remain open to external influences from traditions such as Majapahit, India, China, and Europe, which they absorb and adapt into their painting while retaining a distinct Balinese identity. This process of acculturation enriches the Balinese painting tradition while preserving its local characteristics. Although many traditional Balinese artists create their works anonymously and often without formal training, their dedication to producing art that carries both spiritual and aesthetic value remains admirable. Today, Balinese painting continues to thrive as an integral part of the classical Hindu artistic heritage.

The influence of Chinese culture on Balinese painting is often evident in themes that explore the balance between the macrocosm (the universe) and the microcosm (the human world) within the Yin–Yang cosmological framework. In Balinese tradition, a similar concept is known as *Rwabhineda* (Ruta & Karja, 2023). There is also a strong appreciation for natural elements such as fire, water, earth, sky, and creative energy (*taksu*). The Chinese artistic approach, which celebrates nature by depicting vast landscapes

where human figures appear small, resonates with this Balinese worldview. Stories from Balinese history, such as that of King Jayapangus and the Chinese merchant's daughter Kang Cing Wi, serve as compelling subjects for painting. These narratives symbolize cultural fusion and the harmony of duality through contrasting visual imagery that emphasizes difference while transcending mere dualism (Huang, 2020).

Moreover, visual representations such as *Barong Ket*, the revered deity residing at Pura Dalem Pacekan in Penestanan, Ubud (see Figure 8), and *Barong Landung* (Ria, 2020), together with motifs like *Patra Cina* and *Karang Sae*, as well as Chinese coins, illustrate how the concept of cosmic balance from the Yin–Yang philosophy influences the aesthetics and symbolism in Balinese art. This integration blends local values with external influences in a way that maintains harmony and cultural authenticity. The interplay of symbolism with imaginative visuals strengthens meaning, for example, the contrast between the male *Barong Landung*, depicted with deep black skin and fangs, and the Chinese princess, portrayed with soft white tones. Additionally, ideas for painting the *Geguritan Sam Pik Ing Tay*, a Balinese performance combining song and narrative, provide further artistic inspiration, though this representation is rarely seen in paintings.



Figure 8 Ratu Mas Alit (Original Photo Taken by Jro Mangku Dalem I Putu Adnyana Putra, 2024)

The use of painting materials, such as paper, has a long-standing tradition in China that spreads

to various regions of Asia, including the Archipelago and Bali. *Kertas ulantaga*, a type of paper, is used by the Balinese community in religious ceremonies and in traditional painting or ritual drawing, which is considered sacred. In China, this paper continues to be produced and utilized for traditional painting. *Kertas ulantaga*, also known as *daluwang*, is made from the bark of the *Broussonetia papyrifera* Vent tree. In Bangkalan, Madura, it is referred to as *Dalubhang* or cotton paper. In Sundanese, this tree is called *pohon sae*; in Javanese, it is known as *dluwang* or *dlacang*; and in Balinese, it is called *ulantaga*. The term *daluwang* appears as early as the 9th century in the *Kakawin Ramayana* and the *Kakawin Sumanasantaka* (12th century), where it refers to clothing made from tree bark worn by ascetics (Rohmah, 2018).

The black ink sticks (*mangsi*) used by Balinese painters are local products made from soot or charcoal, some of which are locally manufactured, while others originate in China. This indicates continuous cultural and trade influences on the use of traditional art materials between Bali and China. Red lipstick (*gincu*) also originates in China and influences traditional art in Bali, particularly by accentuating ornaments and decorations inspired by Chinese culture. In Chinese culture, bright red symbolizes luck, happiness, and prosperity, while in classical Balinese shadow puppet (*wayang*) painting, the same color represents vitality and divine energy. The strong Hindu influences, including Vedantic philosophy, often associate red more closely with Brahma, the Creator God, showing how Chinese and Indian symbolisms merge harmoniously within Balinese artistic expression.

Golden yellow also symbolizes the influence of Chinese culture on Bali, particularly in traditional painting and religious rituals. In China, this color represents prosperity and magnificence, while in Bali, it symbolizes spirituality and grandeur. It frequently appears in ceremonial decorations that honor and celebrate divine energy and sacred occasions. The shared appreciation of yellow and gold across both cultures demonstrates how color functions as a bridge between artistic symbolism and spiritual meaning. This cultural exchange enriches the visual language of Balinese art and traditions, emerging from centuries of trade and interaction with China that continue to shape local aesthetics today.

The influence of traditional Chinese painting on *Kamasan wayang* painting appears in several visual and technical aspects, though often subtly. Chinese paintings, especially those from the Ming and Qing dynasties, emphasize fine details, soft color gradations, and balanced compositions, features that may have inspired *Kamasan* painters. The fine lines and symmetrical patterns typical of Chinese painting are visible in the meticulous details of *Kamasan wayang* artworks. This stylistic resemblance demonstrates how visual harmony and technical precision in Chinese art have been selectively absorbed into Balinese aesthetics.

However, despite these external influences,

local traditions remain dominant in *Kamasan wayang* painting. The adaptations of Chinese art are fully integrated into the strong Balinese cultural framework, ensuring that local elements such as *wayang* characters, stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and distinct Balinese color schemes prevail in these works. This demonstrates that while *Kamasan* painting absorbs Chinese influences, it maintains a firm cultural identity that preserves the uniqueness and continuity of this Balinese art tradition. The *sigarmangsi* technique (gray tone) or *sungging/sigar* color method involves applying layered colors, beginning with lighter shades and gradually transitioning to darker ones. The gradation levels typically follow odd numbers—3, 5, and 7—with a maximum of 7, signifying precision and symbolic balance in the painting process.



Figure 9 Traditional Kamasan Wayang Painting by Mangku Mura, Klungkung, Bali (Photograph Bali Art Festival XIX)

Ni Made Rai Sunarini, a Balinese woman artist and lecturer at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Denpasar, creates *Kamasan wayang* paintings on ceramics of various sizes, particularly on plates (see Figure 9). These artworks, featuring *Kamasan wayang* imagery, are displayed on walls, with a notable example located at Pura Petitenget. Pura Petitenget is a Balinese sea temple in Kerobokan, Badung Regency, known for its ceremonies honoring sea spirits and protecting the island from harm. Sunarini continues to expand her creative practice by producing several remarkable works, including a porcelain portrait of Dewi Saraswati (see Figure 10). Her ability to adapt traditional motifs into new media demonstrates how Balinese art evolves while preserving its spiritual and cultural depth.

In situating her work, Sunarini incorporates the concept of *tri angga*, which represents the three parts of the body, head, body, and feet, as a special philosophical study. Her artwork blends Chinese ceramic art with traditional *wayang* painting, resulting in an innovative cross-cultural expression that merges two visual traditions. While porcelain ceramics were initially created solely for decorative purposes, the addition of *wayang* imagery transforms

them into spiritually meaningful objects that embody both artistic and ritual significance. This fusion showcases the dynamic interaction between Chinese and Balinese cultural values, highlighting how local artists reinterpret foreign influences to emphasize the enduring prominence and creativity of Balinese tradition.



Figure 10 Artwork of Ni Made Rai Sunarini, Dewi Saraswati on Porcelain (Doc. Ni Made Rai Sunarini, 2024)

The research highlights the adaptation of Chinese symbols and motifs in Balinese paintings. The lion-like creature in Balinese mythology (*Barong Ket*), reflects Chinese influence in both its design and cultural roots (see Figure 8). This influence can be traced to the Chinese lion dance, which features similar motifs such as the lion's face, expressive eyes, and elaborate fur. Over time, these Chinese elements merge with local Balinese beliefs, transforming the *Barong Ket* into a symbolic protector against evil spirits in traditional Balinese performances. This adaptation not only enriches the visual language of Balinese art but also demonstrates how cultural exchange fosters new spiritual and artistic meanings.

Barong Landung is a three-dimensional representation of the *Barong*, standing approximately three meters tall and regarded as a sacred object of worship. It is sanctified through religious rituals and paraded around the village on specific ceremonial days to invoke protection and harmony. Ancient Balinese history mentions Jayapangus as the King of Bali in the 12th century. During his reign, a Chinese trading ship arrives in Bali carrying the merchant's daughter, Kang Cing Wi (see Figure 11). Their union symbolizes the fusion of Balinese and Chinese

cultures, which continues to influence Balinese art, mythology, and communal identity. This historical and cultural connection finds visual expression in paintings and performances that celebrate harmony between differing traditions.



Figure 11 Putu Adi, 2016, Kang Cing Wi (Photograph: Richard Horstman, Asian Art News, 2019)

Barong Landung represents King Jayapangus and his wife, Kang Cing Wi. The influence of China on ancient Bali is documented in the *Babad Bali*, and Pura Balingkang is closely associated with their marriage. Jayapangus ruled from 1181 to 1269 CE, a period marked by significant cultural exchange and integration. The Balinese people continue to preserve the legend of the royal marriage between King Jayapangus and Dewi Kang Cing Wi, which becomes the foundation of the *Barong Landung* tradition. This story symbolizes the harmony between two cultures and reflects the enduring spiritual and artistic legacy of Chinese influence in Bali.

Babad Bali is a traditional chronicle that records the history, genealogy, and mythology of Balinese royal families and important events. It blends historical facts with myths and moral teachings, serving not only as a historical record but also as a source of cultural values. These chronicles are essential for understanding Balinese culture, traditions, and religious practices, as they reveal how history, spirituality, and art are deeply intertwined in Balinese life.



Figure 12 Ida Bagus Made Wija, 1990, *Barong Landung* (Photograph: Museum Rudana, 1995)

Barong Landung also reflects the importance of maintaining balance and harmony in cultural diversity. Shaped like a giant human figure, it symbolizes King Jayapangus and his consort, Dewi Kang Cing Wi. The painting's title refers to the legend of an intercultural marriage between a Balinese king and a Chinese princess, a union that reflects mutual respect between two civilizations. The existence of *Barong Landung* not only serves as a historical representation of the relationship between Bali and China but also underscores the importance of maintaining balance between two different yet complementary forces, akin to the concepts of Yin and Yang in Chinese culture and *Rwabhineda* in Bali.

The meaning of *Barong Landung* lies in its symbolism as a representation of harmony between Balinese and Chinese cultures. This *barong* depicts King Jayapangus of Bali and his wife, Kang Cing Wi, a Chinese woman he marries, who becomes a symbol of true love and cultural assimilation. Through *Barong Landung*, this blending of two cultures is honored and remembered, emphasizing that Balinese culture remains central in the process of assimilation. The continued celebration of this art form demonstrates how traditional values can coexist with external influences while maintaining cultural authenticity.

For example, the *Barong Landung* in Abiantuwung Traditional Village, Kediri, Tabanan, differs from the typical *Barong Landung* found elsewhere in Bali. In this village, *Barong Landung* embodies the Creator, the Supreme Being, and is historically created by the artist and spiritual leader (*undagi*) according to the cultural context of the time, particularly during the flourishing period of intercultural marriages between the Chinese and Balinese. The allure of this dance is typically experienced only during special occasions, such as religious holidays in Bali known as *Piodalan*, held at specific temples. However, the *Barong Landung* in Abiantuwung Traditional Village is performed only on certain days, such as during particular lunar months, when it parades at night without lights, creating a sacred and mystical atmosphere (Budiana et al., 2024).

The visual aesthetics of Balinese painting, influenced by Chinese cultural values, reflect a rich blend of elements from both cultures, resulting in unique and complex artworks. Chinese painting often employs bright colors such as red, blue, and gold, which are also prominent in traditional Balinese art, creating a striking and majestic visual effect. Cloud motifs, dragons, and lotus flowers from Chinese art frequently merge with Balinese designs, producing intricate and layered ornaments that enrich the visual language of Balinese painting.

Chinese painting techniques, including the use of fine brushes and dynamic depictions, blend with the detailed and symbolic style of traditional Balinese art, producing a hybrid form that is both colorful and layered. The composition of this art integrates Chinese symbols such as dragons and phoenixes with typical Balinese elements, including deities and mythological

motifs, to create visual harmony. This synthesis not only enhances aesthetic appeal but also deepens the cultural narrative, reflecting the interconnectedness between two civilizations through art.

The technique of making *kertas ulantaga* in Bali is inspired by Chinese papermaking methods and adds a unique textural quality to Balinese art. Additionally, the use of strong contour lines, typical of Chinese art, emphasizes details and provides visual clarity to the elements within the paintings. This aesthetic reflects an ongoing dialogue between Chinese and Balinese cultures, resulting in artwork that is not only visually stunning but also rich in meaning and symbolism. Both traditions share a stylistic preference for flatness and clarity, as traditional Chinese art does not display shadows, and similarly, Balinese painting techniques also avoid them to preserve symbolic purity and compositional harmony.

The symbolic values of acculturation in Balinese painting, influenced by Chinese cultural elements, reflect the integration and harmonization of two distinct cultural traditions. This demonstrates how cultures can continuously influence and enrich one another. The incorporation of aesthetic elements and symbols of strength and fortune from China, such as dragons and phoenixes, alongside local Balinese motifs, creates new visual expressions that showcase the synergy between these two cultures. The colors gold and red, as well as the use of strong contour lines, possess not only aesthetic value but also spiritual significance, symbolizing purity, vitality, and strength. This art exemplifies the process of cultural adaptation, preserving local Balinese identity while integrating external influences, and it shows how artistic expression functions as a mirror of social and cultural change.

This acculturation also illustrates an ongoing dialogue between Chinese and Balinese cultures, resulting in artworks that convey new and profound meanings through cross-cultural interaction. Balinese painting, often reflecting an imaginative reality, creates a rich and magical visual world that transcends the physical realm. Through the depiction of mythical creatures, spiritual symbols, and fantastical forms, Balinese paintings present not only visual beauty but also convey deep meanings and cultural beliefs. This enables art enthusiasts to perceive, experience, and appreciate the spiritual and cosmological dimensions that exist beyond the tangible world.

Numerous temples and buildings in Bali are adorned with Chinese plates mounted on their walls, such as those found in the temple at Batur, located in Balingkang, Bangli Regency. Recent research also reveals that plates used as decorations in *Pura Petitenget* Kerobokan, Badung, feature motifs from traditional Kamasan puppet painting, arranged according to the local *tri angga* hierarchical layout (Rai et al., 2024). These decorative elements demonstrate how aesthetic and spiritual exchange continues to manifest in Balinese sacred architecture, symbolizing the long-standing relationship between

local and Chinese cultural traditions.

The influence of the Goddess Kwan Yin is also evident in themes of salvation and virtue, which appear in certain Balinese paintings. This figure adds a profound spiritual dimension to the visual narrative of Bali, merging Buddhist elements with Hindu-Balinese beliefs and traditions. The presence of the Goddess Kwan Yin enriches the spectrum of Chinese cultural influences on Balinese heritage, highlighting how cross-cultural spirituality fosters new forms of harmony and moral reflection. The fundamental meaning of Yin and Yang lies in balance, as both elements coexist and continuously influence one another. Achieving harmony in life requires maintaining equilibrium between Yin and Yang, both within oneself and in the universe as a whole.

In Bali, the influence of Chinese culture appears across various aspects of life, including architecture, art, religion, and customary ceremonies. These influences are visible in the decorative use of Chinese porcelain ornaments in Balinese temples, the legendary marriage of King Jayapangus to Dewi Kang Cing Wi, and symbols in religious ceremonies inspired by Chinese beliefs. Furthermore, Chinese calligraphy and motifs are often integrated into temple decorations, reflecting a continuous exchange of artistic inspiration. Conversely, the Chinese community, which forms a minority in Bali, also adopts elements of Balinese culture in their daily lives, demonstrating a mutual process of cultural adaptation and respect (Brata, 2019; Wiwin et al., 2024).

The author's personal experience serves as a case study in research-based art, inspired explicitly by Pura Segara Danau Batur. The primary focus is to visualize the silence and awe of nature, expressed through Balinese paintings. The references include traditional Chinese painting techniques, employing *mangsi* ink sticks and Chinese brushes, with the canvas sourced from Kamasan Klungkung in Bali. These tools and materials reflect a blend of Chinese and Balinese craftsmanship.

The meaning of the painting process centers on honoring nature, equated with honoring oneself, in line with macro-micro cosmology and the principle of "we are nature" (*tat twam asi*). By applying and analyzing classical techniques, such as the use of large-scale spatial composition, this research demonstrates that landscape painting transcends mere visual representation. It becomes a medium for emotional and spiritual exploration rooted in Taoist and Buddhist philosophies, bridging aesthetic expression and inner contemplation.

In Chinese painting, the use of space emphasizes the strength and beauty of natural elements, inviting viewers to imagine and grasp the depth of unspoken or unseen meanings. This deliberate use of emptiness, known as negative space, reflects a philosophical approach that values silence and contemplation as integral parts of visual expression. It stimulates the observer's imagination, encouraging personal interpretation that varies according to one's level of

appreciation and experience. By doing so, it fosters a sense of peace and harmony, allowing the audience to feel a spiritual presence that transcends nature itself.

The painting titled *Mount Batur: The Sound of Silence* (Figures 13 and 14) goes beyond simply depicting nature, transporting the viewer into an eternal imaginative realm. This artwork embodies the symbiotic relationship between the fundamental forces of nature, tranquil water, solid earth, whispering wind, dancing fire, and vast space, each infused with its unique energy. Through soft ash-toned strokes, the canvas becomes a portal that invites observers to explore their inner landscapes. The tranquility of Mount Batur, with the serene Pura Segara temple on its shore, exemplifies the profound interaction between the silent external world and the depths of human consciousness.

Through this visual representation, the author hopes that art lovers resonate with a similar vibration and experience a deep sense of reverence for nature. This work is exhibited at the Shanghai Art Collection Museum. It will also be showcased at *The Tour Exhibition of the International Exhibition of Traditional Fine Arts*, held at the Shanghai Pudong New Area Culture & Arts from August 15 to 26, 2024.



Figure 13 I Wayan Karja, 2024. Mount Batur: The Sound of Silence. Chinese Ink on Kamasan Klungkung Canvas.
Size: 175 x 76 cm (Collection: Shanghai Museum)



Figure 14 Mount Batur: The Sound of Silence (Detail)
(Photo Repro: Karja, 2024)

CONCLUSIONS

The research builds on earlier studies of Chinese cultural influences in Balinese painting by examining how these values are adapted through acculturation. Using symbolism, visual aesthetics, and material culture as its framework, the study demonstrates that Chinese motifs, philosophies, and artifacts are reinterpreted to enrich Balinese art while preserving its distinct identity. This approach addresses three key research questions regarding influence, adaptation, and meaning.

Chinese philosophical ideas, such as Yin-Yang and natural cosmology, significantly influence Balinese painting by reinforcing the importance of balance, harmony, and interconnectedness among humans, nature, and the cosmos. These concepts align closely with Balinese Hindu perspectives, inspiring artists to express them through symmetrical compositions, contrasting yet complementary colors, and symbolic arrangements that illustrate unity within duality. This blending of ideas helps shape a visual language in which paintings serve not only decorative purposes but also convey deeper meanings about balance in life and the universe from a Balinese perspective.

Chinese artifacts also strongly influence the appearance and techniques used in Balinese painting. Items such as Patra Cina, porcelain, goldwork, and uang kepeng introduce new decorative patterns, intricate details, and symbolic elements that Balinese artists later adapt into their works. For instance, the *gincu*, *kertas ulantaga*, Chinese ink, and ceramics inspire a richer use of pigments and more refined brushwork. Additionally, motifs from textiles and coins add new layers of meaning to religious and cultural scenes, illustrating both reverence and prosperity. These artifacts not only expand the visual vocabulary of Balinese painting but also encourage technical innovation, resulting in artworks that are more varied, expressive, and culturally resonant.

The process of adapting Chinese symbols and motifs in Balinese paintings is highly acculturated, with neither culture dominating the other. Balinese artists internalize aspects of Chinese culture, transforming them into creations that remain characteristically Balinese. The influence of China is evident in the intricate ornamental decorations, which blend harmoniously with local aesthetics to produce a distinct visual identity that reflects mutual respect and artistic synthesis.

The research highlights that Chinese cultural elements in Balinese painting are reinterpreted within a local framework, emphasizing the agency of Balinese artists in shaping their tradition. Cross-cultural influence is viewed as a process of negotiation and adaptation rather than domination. This offers a valuable model for understanding cultural interactions in Southeast Asia.

However, the research has limitations due to its broad temporal scope, which does not specify a particular period. Bali features various traditional painting styles, making the study potentially too extensive if it focuses solely on specific styles or regions. Furthermore, the term “Chinese cultural values” is somewhat abstract and requires a more precise definition, including visual objects or artifacts that explicitly demonstrate aesthetic or visual influences. Additionally, the cause-and-effect relationships mentioned are complex, as other cultural influences and local factors may also play a role. Consequently, the research paves the way for similar or further studies in the future.

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