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KEYNOTE SPEAKER

## THE INFLUENCE OF CHINESE CULTURAL VALUES ON BALINESE TRADITIONAL PAINTING

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### ABSTRACT

This research examines the influence of Chinese cultural values on the development of Balinese painting, focusing on how cultural interactions have enriched its artistic identity. Using qualitative methods with a historical approach and visual analysis, the study identifies Chinese cultural elements such as Yin-Yang philosophy, cosmology, motifs like Nekara Pejeng, Chinese coins, dragons, and decorative techniques integrated into Balinese art. The findings reveal that these influences are most evident in the styles of Kamasan painting, where forms, colors, and decorative motifs reflect a process of acculturation. Balinese artists have successfully incorporated these Chinese elements into their works while preserving their cultural identity. This research highlights the importance of cultural exchange as a driving force in the evolution of Balinese painting, offering both academic and practical contributions to the understanding of how cross-cultural interactions can enhance artistic traditions.

### KEYWORDS

influence of Chinese culture, Balinese painting, cultural acculturation, philosophy of nature

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### Introduction

Balinese painting is renowned for its intricate symbolism and detailed visual designs, shaped by both internal and external cultural influences [1] [2]. Among these, the relationship between Bali and China has been significant, dating back to the first millennium, as evidenced by artifacts like the bronze drum at Pura Penataran Sasih Pejeng and drum mold plates in Manuaba Village, Tegalalang [3] [4] [5]. While influences from

India and the West have been extensively studied [6] the contribution of Chinese cultural values, symbols, and techniques remains underexplored. This research investigates how Chinese philosophical concepts, such as Yin-Yang and cosmology [7] [8], alongside cultural artifacts like bronze drums and Chinese coins, have enriched Balinese painting [9]. It also examines the adaptation of Chinese motifs, dragons, lions, and lotus flowers, and their integration into Balinese visual and symbolic expressions [10]. Using acculturation theory, symbolism, and cross-cultural aesthetic theories [11], this study reveals how Balinese artists preserved local identity while incorporating Chinese influences into styles like Kamasan. The novelty lies in its focus on the underappreciated Chinese contribution to Balinese painting, providing fresh insights into the dynamic cross-cultural interactions that shaped Bali's artistic heritage [12]. This work expands on previous research by highlighting the nuanced processes of adaptation and integration, enriching the understanding of Balinese painting's evolution.

## Method

This research adopts a chronological approach to trace the influence of Chinese cultural values on Balinese painting, focusing on the integration of symbols, techniques, and philosophical concepts over time. Using qualitative methods with a historical approach and visual analysis [13] [14] [15], the study examines primary data collected through interviews with local artists, and cultural experts, as well as field observations at cultural sites and temples. Secondary data, including scholarly articles and historical documents, provide contextual insights. Data collection tools include structured interviews, field notes, and visual analysis templates. The analysis involves organizing and coding qualitative data to identify recurring themes, tracing the adaptation of Chinese motifs and stylistic elements, and interpreting historical records for deeper context. This structured methodology highlights the chronological integration of Chinese cultural influences into Balinese painting, offering a comprehensive understanding of their enduring impact on Balinese art.

## Discussion

The research results demonstrate that both Yin-Yang and *rwabhineda*, along with the alignment of colors and elements in Chinese and Balinese cosmology, emphasize the universal need for balance. The shared understanding of maintaining harmony between humanity, nature, and the spiritual forces that govern life reflects the profound philosophical connection between these two cultures. The findings highlight how Chinese cultural principles have shaped Balinese artistic expressions, providing new insights into the cross-cultural influences that continue to shape the development of acculturation in both cultures. The implications of this research underscore the importance of balance and harmony in both traditions, reinforcing their cultural and spiritual significance

in the context of artistic creation and daily life. The discussion highlights specific instances where Chinese philosophical values were adapted to deepen the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of Balinese art. Chinese cultural values, shaped by Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, emphasize "filial piety," respect for elders, harmony, and "collectivism over individualism." Rituals honor ancestors and celebrate life's milestones, reflecting acculturation a deep connection to nature, and balance the duality. These principles and structures have influenced Balinese art, with Chinese symbols and the color-enriching traditional paintings with themes of prosperity and harmony.

Balinese traditional painting reflects the island's cultural and spiritual heritage, depicting mythological stories, daily life, and nature with symbolic motifs. Originally crafted on palm leaf, cloth, or bark with natural pigments, the style follows established conventions while embracing influences from Indian mythologies, Chinese, and European art. It remains a vibrant expression of Balinese identity and devotion.

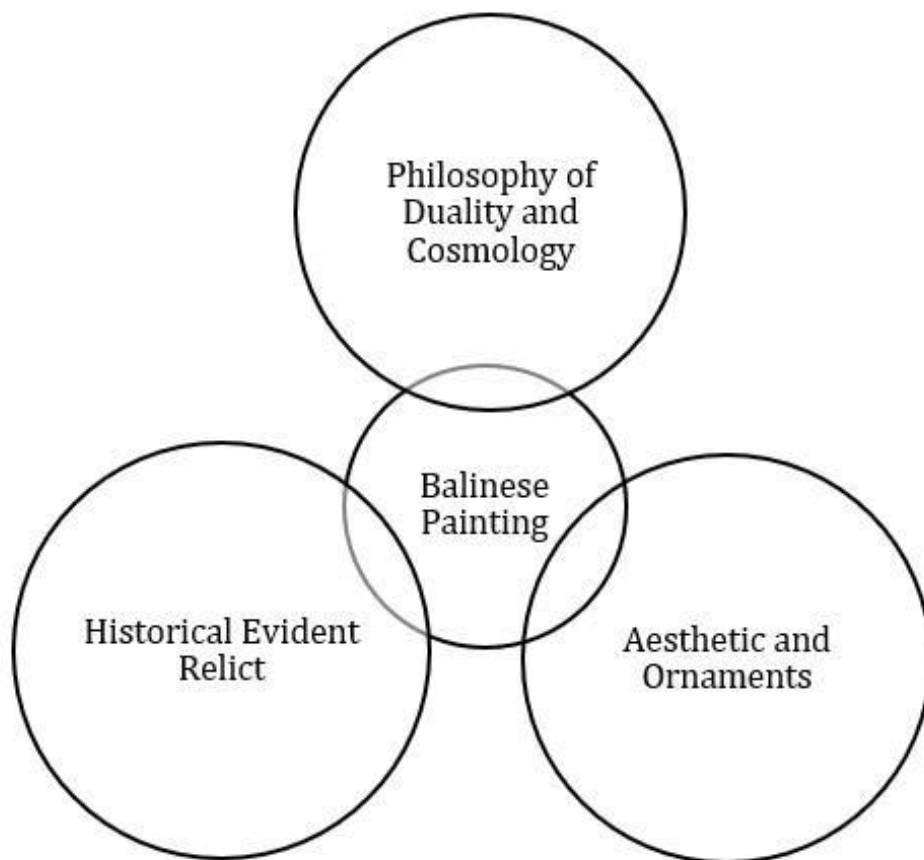


Figure 1. Influence of Chinese Cultural Values on Balinese Painting  
[Source: I Wayan Karja, 2024]

Chinese philosophy and its integration with local experiences emphasize the balance between nature and humanity, a concept visually reflected in Balinese painting. Color, as a key element of art, plays a crucial role in bridging human connections to nature and spiritual beliefs. This universal concept takes on distinct local expressions that shape cultural values. In China, the principle is embodied by the *Yin* and *Yang* symbol, while in Bali, it is represented by the concept of *rwabhineda*. Although not identical, both philosophies share foundational ideas about the world, life, and human existence. Bali, influenced by its geographical proximity and historical interactions, is not exempt from Chinese cultural influences. These influences are evident in the daily life of the Balinese people and are captured through art, especially traditional painting, which serves as a reflection of the process of cultural acculturation [16]. The *Yin* and *Yang* philosophy highlights the duality and balance that govern the universe, with *Yin* symbolizing the passive and feminine, and *Yang* representing the active and masculine. These opposing forces are interconnected, working together to create harmony in nature and life. Maintaining their balance is essential, as disturbances can lead to disharmony within individuals and the world around them.

Similarly, the Balinese concept of *rwabhineda* reflects dualities such as light and dark, good and evil, that complement each other to maintain cosmic balance. While *Yin* and *Yang* describe the interplay of opposites in Chinese cosmology, dualities in Balinese tradition emphasize the balance of opposing forces in daily life [17]. Chinese cosmology, which divides nature into five elements, wood, fire, earth, metal, and water—links each element to specific colors and directions: green/blue (wood - east), red (fire - south), yellow (earth - center), white (metal - west), and black (water - north). These elements not only represent seasons and directions but also influence art, culture, feng shui, and traditional Chinese medicine, underscoring the connection between the balance of nature and human life [18]. Balinese painting is a fusion of art, religion, and philosophy [19]. Balinese cosmology, illustrated through the concept of *Nawa Sangga*, associates the nine primary directions with colors, elements, and deities: East (white) with air and God Iswara, South (red) with fire and God Brahma, West (yellow) with earth and God Mahadewa, North (black) with water and God Vishnu, and Center (mixed colored) as a symbol of balance, linked to God Shiva, who unites all elements. This cosmology reflects the balance between nature, humanity, and spirituality, which is fundamental to the development of Balinese art, culture, and daily life [20] [21].

Balinese artists created works that reflect a sophisticated blend of local and foreign artistic traditions. Through the Silk Road and diplomatic ties, China's contributions to technology, art, and philosophy have profoundly shaped Asian civilizations, including Bali, blending traditions and fostering cultural exchange. The *Nekara Pejeng* is a significant bronze artifact from Bali, dating back to around the early Common Era. Featuring

complex geometric designs and mythological creatures, this artifact was used in religious ceremonies, offering insights into the culture and rituals of ancient Balinese society. As a ritual object, it symbolized power and was particularly used in fertility ceremonies [22]. The intricate design and spiritual significance of *Nekara Pejeng* demonstrate the technical expertise of ancient Balinese craftsmen and the deep spiritual beliefs of the time. The cultural assimilation between China and Bali was profoundly shaped by Ming Dynasty *uang kepeng*, Chinese-inspired shrine motifs, the *Baris Cina* dance, and bronze and ceramic ceremonial objects, particularly following Sri Jaya Pangus' marriage to Kan Cing Wei [23].

This influence can also be seen in Balinese painting, where mask forms and decorations reflect Chinese artistic styles, blending local and Chinese elements. The use of Chinese coins, known as *uang kepeng*, coincided with the rise of trade between China and the Indonesian archipelago [24]. Initially used as a medium of exchange, these ancient coins, characterized by their round shape with a central square hole, eventually became integrated into Balinese culture, holding both economic and spiritual significance. In China, the coins were believed to protect against evil spirits and bring good fortune, while in Bali, they transformed into sacred symbols used in religious ceremonies. Representing wealth and protection, they were employed in offerings, rituals, and temple architecture, and were also crafted into traditional jewelry, art, and painting. Over time, their transformation from a currency tool to a cultural symbol highlights Bali's ability to assimilate foreign influences and enrich its local traditions. The coin's circular shape represents the heavens, while the square hole symbolizes the earth, carrying symbolic meaning in both Chinese and Balinese contexts. In Bali, Chinese coins continue to be used in offerings, sacred objects, and rituals, reflecting the lasting impact of Chinese culture on the island. This influence is also shown in Balinese traditional painting, where motifs of Chinese coins often appear as decorative elements, symbolizing prosperity, harmony, and a connection between the spiritual and material realms.

*Karang Sae* is a symbol of spiritual protection, typically placed above temple entrances. Similarly, *Bhoma* is positioned above the front door, while *Sae* is placed above the back door. Both figures are believed to ward off negative energy and maintain balance. *Barong Sae* features slit eyes, fangs, clenched hands, and is decorated with Chinese patterns and ornaments. *Patra Cina* is a significant element of traditional Balinese ornaments that holds symbolizes the intertwined relationship between the Balinese worldview, religion, and beliefs. These ornaments, commonly found in Balinese traditional paintings, serve as decorative elements that reflect the beauty of nature. In Balinese decorative tradition, animal-based decorations are called *kekarangan*, while plant-based ones are known as *pepatraan* [25]. The *Patra Cina* design, believed to originate from China, is inspired by patterns from the archipelago, particularly the shape of the Chinese Hibiscus Flower [26]. The carvings of *Patra Cina* show how Chinese and

Balinese cultures blend through art. Featuring floral motifs like hibiscus and detailed designs, these carvings highlight the influence of Chinese styles. This fusion is especially evident in Puri Amlapura, where Chinese artist Cik A Tuang incorporated these designs into the palace's architecture, creating a unique style that symbolizes cultural acculturation [27]. The name *Patra Mesir*, also designed by Cik A Tuang, further illustrates this creative exchange, as it differentiates another floral carving style inspired by Chinese art. Through these ornaments, *Patra Cina* enriches Balinese art, offering layered details and new aesthetic possibilities while preserving local identity. The dragon in Balinese art and architecture reflects Chinese influence through several key aspects. The Chinese dragon, symbolizing power and protection, has been integrated into Balinese culture, where it is also regarded as a guardian. The artistic design of dragons on Balinese gates and fences mirrors Chinese dragon motifs, indicating a distinct visual influence. Balinese ceremonies often use cultural elements and decorations with meanings similar to traditional Chinese symbolism, such as strength and protection. This blending shows how foreign influences, like those seen in Chinese temples located near Balinese temples, have shaped Balinese art and traditions. It highlights the harmony between Chinese and Balinese cultures [28] [29] [30].

The discussion also considers the enduring impact of this synthesis on the development of traditional and contemporary Balinese art, showcasing its relevance in today's globalized artistic landscape. For the Balinese people, art, especially traditional painting, is a powerful way to express devotion to God and ancestors. Balinese painting occupies a central role in the cultural landscape, integrating customs, religion, and beliefs into everyday life. These artworks go beyond aesthetics; they are vital components of spiritual offerings in Hindu ceremonies. These influences have been seamlessly absorbed and adapted into Balinese painting without compromising its core identity. This acculturation process has enriched Balinese painting, enabling it to maintain its local characteristics while integrating diverse artistic traditions. Despite many traditional Balinese artists working in an anonymous and amateur fashion, their commitment to producing art holds both spiritual and aesthetic values. This concept highlights the harmony between opposites, such as fire, water, earth, sky, and the creative energy known as *taksu*. Chinese artists often glorified nature by portraying the grandness of the natural world, where human figures appear diminutive in comparison. This approach can be seen in Balinese art, where the landscape and the elements are elevated as significant symbols of balance and energy from the local perspective [31] [32]. One notable favorite example in Balinese painting is the story of King Jaya Pangus marrying the Chinese merchant's daughter, Kang Cing Wei. This historical narrative serves as an excellent subject for Balinese painting, symbolizing cultural fusion and the harmony of duality. The contrast between opposing visual elements, such as the male *Barong Landung* depicted with deep black skin and fangs, and the Chinese princess portrayed with soft white tones, exemplifies this balance of opposites [33] [34]. Symbols such as *Barong*



*Ket* and *Rangda* along with motifs like *Patra Cina*, underscore the continued influence of Chinese symbolism on Balinese painting. These figures represent cosmic balance, with their design elements mirroring the concepts of duality, *Yin* and *Yang*, or *rwabhineda*.

The use of materials in Balinese painting also reflects Chinese influence. For instance, *ulantaga* paper (or *daluang*), a type of paper used for religious and ritualistic painting, has its origins in China. This paper is made from the bark of the *Broussonetia papyrifera* tree, or paper mulberry, which is a fast-growing, versatile species native to East Asia, valued for its use in traditional papermaking and textiles. The term *daluwang* has been documented since the 9th century, referring to clothing made from tree bark, worn by ascetics in ancient texts like the *Kakawin Ramayana* [35]. In Bali, this paper is used for sacred drawings in religious ceremonies and traditional painting, aligning with practices in China where similar paper is still used for traditional art. The use of black ink, or *mangsi*, in Balinese painting also traces its roots to China. Made from soot or charcoal, some of these ink sticks are produced locally, while others are imported from China, highlighting the continued cultural and trade exchanges between Bali and China. This influence is evident in the material culture of traditional Balinese art, where local practices are enriched through the introduction of foreign art supplies. Before 1910, Balinese art used natural dye, but the Ethical Policy introduced durable Chinese red powder, altering Kamasan's palette [36]. The vibrant use of red in Balinese art also reflects Chinese influence. In Chinese culture, red is associated with luck, happiness, and prosperity, and its bright red hue is commonly seen in traditional cosmetics, such as lipstick. In Balinese art, the use of this color in ornaments and decorations, especially during religious ceremonies, reinforces its symbolic meanings. Red is also connected to the Hindu philosophy of Vedanta, often representing Brahma, the Creator God. Golden yellow, another color strongly associated with Chinese culture, has similarly influenced Balinese art. In China, this color symbolizes prosperity and magnificence, and its use in Bali extends to ceremonial decorations and religious art, where it represents spirituality. This color is often employed in Balinese religious rituals, signifying divine presence and reverence. Over time, the continued cultural exchange between China and Bali has enriched the symbolism of these colors in Balinese artistic traditions. The *damar kurung* lantern, with its Chinese influence, embodies Balinese art's spiritual fusion, particularly in cremation ceremonies [37].

The influence of Chinese cultural values is present in Balinese painting, especially within the Kamasan tradition, it is the resilience of local culture that ultimately defines its strength. The incorporation of Chinese artistic elements, from compositional techniques to the depiction of natural elements and color gradients, highlights the resourcefulness and innovation of Balinese artists. However, these external influences never overshadow the dominant presence of local traditions. Balinese art continues to thrive,

rooted in its rich cultural identity, with local motifs, colors, and narratives, such as those from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, remaining central. This enduring synthesis of influences underscores the unyielding power of Balinese culture, ensuring its art remains a vivid and distinctive reflection of its heritage.



Figures 2 and 3 are examples of Chinese art (source: Christie's, 2024), while Figures 4 and 5 are paintings from Kamasan, Klungkung [Doc. Sri Wedari Lely, 2024]

## Conclusion

The conclusion of this research on the acculturation of Chinese cultural values in Balinese painting reveals how the integration of Chinese and Balinese elements has



enriched traditional artworks, imbuing them with profound symbolism and meaning. The fusion of Chinese motifs with local Balinese traditions, alongside the use of vibrant colors like yellow-ochre, red, and blue, accented with gold, creates works that embody cultural synergy and spiritual depth. In particular, Kamasan paintings illustrate the lasting influence of Chinese values, which are characterized by intricate ornamentation and the use of gold to emphasize divine or significant figures, enhancing the artwork's sacred and majestic qualities. The distinct ornamentation style reflects this influence, alongside the adoption of Chinese-inspired art materials, and technique in ritualistic art forms. Through these combined influences, Balinese painting has evolved into a more sophisticated, multifaceted tradition, blending Chinese aesthetics with local cultural expressions to create rich, symbolic artworks that continue to resonate with both visual and spiritual significance. This acculturation has not only diversified the artistic landscape of Bali but has also deepened the spiritual and cultural resonance of its traditional paintings, reflecting the dynamic, evolving nature of Balinese art.

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