

Chinese New Year Illustration and Malaysian Batik Motifs: Innovative cross-cultural artistic fusion

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Abstract

This study explores the theoretical feasibility of fusing Chinese New Year illustrations with Malaysian Batik motifs within a cross-cultural framework. Both art forms exhibit profound symbolic, aesthetic, and functional parallels, including auspicious themes, narrative composition, and high-contrast color systems rooted in their respective socio-cultural contexts. Through comparative analysis of motifs, structure, and cultural semantics, this paper constructs a fusion feasibility matrix, highlighting shared decorative principles and visual harmony. The integration not only enriches intercultural dialogue but also revitalizes traditional arts via contemporary design interpretations. This research addresses a scholarly gap and offers a theoretical foundation for cross-cultural artistic innovation.

Keywords: Cross- Culture, Motifs, Artstic Commonality, Culture Fusion

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1.0 Introduction

Malaysia is a country with a deep integration of diverse cultures, forming a unique art form characterized by cultural fusion. Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous cultures blend, interact, and merge here, forming a mixed cultural identity characterized by the fusion of multi-ethnic cultures, arts, and ethnic customs, and reflected in daily life.

As a significant form of Chinese folk art, New Year illustrations are a traditional painting style with a long history, mainly displayed during the New Year to bring blessings and celebrate new beginnings. These works are usually created through woodblock printing or hand drawing, covering various themes including gods such as door gods, stove gods, and wealth gods, as well as auspicious motifs such as "more than ten years old" and "qilin belts." Through exaggerated forms, vivid colours and rich symbolic meanings, they reflect the hope of the Chinese people for a better life and their belief system. In art, New Year illustrations often emphasize the symbolic use of colors, with red representing joy, gold representing wealth, and green representing vitality. These characteristics make New Year illustration not only decorative art, but also an important carrier of Chinese cultural memory and aesthetic value, showcasing the unique artistic perspective of Chinese folk art.

Meanwhile Malaysian Batik Motifs, a traditional craft with over two thousand years of history, it has a wide variety of wax-printed motifs, including floral motifs such as Melur and Penang geometric designs inspired by Islamic motifs such as stars and crosses, animal

motifs such as birds and butterflies, and abstract shapes. Malaysian Batik Motifs typically features natural and floral motifs with geometric influences (Haron et al., 2014), while Malaysian Chinese motifs printing blends traditional elements such as dragon, phoenix, and cloud motifs. At the same time, peacocks, elephants, and other South Asian cultural symbols also appear in Indian Malaysian batik motifs. These styles collectively highlight Malaysia's diverse and mixed culture. Their displays can be featured on red envelopes, souvenirs, illustrations, and apparel designs. This paper adopts a cross-cultural perspective to analyze the feasibility of integrating New Year illustrations with Malaysian Batik Motifs. It explores how to enhance awareness of traditional Chinese culture within Malaysia's multicultural society and provides theoretical foundations for innovative applications in contemporary design. By examining the cultural connotations, aesthetic characteristics, and craft techniques of both art forms, it offers new insights for the modern transformation of traditional arts and provides practical references for cross-cultural artistic exchange.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The Artistic Expression of Chinese New Year Illustration

As an important aspect of Chinese traditional culture, New Year Illustration has established a relatively comprehensive theoretical framework within academic research. Lili Jiang and Hongfu Wang (2013) conducted a systematic comparison of Nantong blue-printed cloth and Yangjiabu woodblock New Year illustrations across multiple dimensions, including subject matter, color palette, symbolism, craftsmanship, composition, and form. Woodblock New Year illustrations are often used for decoration, showcasing rich colors, diverse themes, and compositions full of regional characteristics. Blue-printed cloth emphasizes practicality and natural motifs, featuring mainly blue and white colors with orderly compositions. Jie Du and Kaiyu Wang (2023) extracted the unique form of auspicious motifs in their study of Fengxiang woodblock New Year illustrations. Thus, creating a motifs and color reference library, which is sufficient to generate design solutions consistent with modern aesthetics. Fengxiang New Year illustrations use traditional color schemes, and the motifs showcase strong regional characteristics. However, the researcher's analysis of different regions reveals the diversity of New Year Illustration art. Therefore, by integrating various cultures, traditional motifs can express new cultural meanings. Weimin Zhang (2023) researched the use of pure-color pigments in Liangping door god New Year Paintings and created a digital color database. This reflects that the presentation of New Year illustrations is related to regional culture. Shan Li and Mingxi Sun (2025) examined how colors from Suzhou Taohuawu woodblock New Year illustrations are applied in designing traditional Chinese zodiac imagery. These illustrations combine regionally distinctive zodiac animal designs with contrasting color palettes. However, researchers have shown that differences in regional cultural backgrounds lead to variations in the colors of New Year illustrations. Therefore, the diversity of color systems is related to regional culture. Xianjun Zhu (2018) analyzed three main factors influencing the development of folk art, using Zhuxian Town woodblock New Year illustrations as an example: folk customs, craft techniques, and regional environment. Yuqing Qin and Yun Mu (2024) researched how to integrate Tianjin Yangliuqing woodblock New Year illustrations with modern hand drawn elements based on local cultural characteristics and apply them to cultural products and clothing. However, researchers have explored methods that integrate regional culture, craftsmanship, and contemporary design. Therefore, the key to fusion lies in the factors of craftsmanship, culture, and technology.

2.2 The Artistic Expression of Malaysia Batik Motifs

Research on Malaysian Batik Motifs has shown a recent shift from simple craft descriptions to more detailed cultural interpretations. Kari et al. (2020) believes that traditional themes are the most important in the floral motifs of traditional block Batik in Malaysia. These motifs are decorative and can also express regional culture. But many new motifs missing cultural depth, which blurs the local identity. Compared to modern Batik Motifs, traditional motifs have more cultural significance. Abdullah and Samin (2020) researched delves into the cultural symbolism and aesthetic significance behind traditional motifs such as peacocks, bamboo, and butterflies. However, modern block Batik often lacks traditional identity in its motifs. Therefore, contemporary interpretations of traditional elements should be promoted. Abdullah and Samin (2020) analyzed the cultural symbolism and aesthetic value of motifs such as peacocks, bamboo, and butterflies. The research shows that today's designs lean towards modern colors and free shapes, which resulted in a loss of traditional motifs and culture in hospitality interiors. Kari et al. (2018) studied the sustainability of traditional animal motifs in Malaysian block batik. The research describes the process, which involves using hot wax with wooden or Sarang tools to create motifs on fabric, followed by dyeing and wax removal. It emphasizes the repetition and symmetry of motifs, especially the symbolic and philosophical importance of animal motifs like fish, birds, and insects. However, understanding of traditional motifs and the absence of established design guidelines. Therefore, need to find out the cultural symbolism. Ismail and Othman (2020) documented Malaysia's traditional color naming system, listing 233 color terms, 49 primary colors, and providing HEX codes for 29 colors like #ff72ac for Merah Mawar. In Malay culture, color names are deeply integrated into daily life. They originate from plants, animals, natural phenomena, and social symbols, like the generously regal yellow called "kuning raja." But these colors are more than just visual indicators; they carry layers of social, healing, and ritual importance. Shamsuddeen and Andriana (2021) explored the colors of Malaysian batik from aesthetic and symbolic perspectives. Heavily influenced by nature and Islamic culture, common colors include red, green, blue, and yellow. The contrast between red and green and the use of geometric shapes highlight the color contrasts in Malay aesthetics, carrying symbolic and social significance. However, these researchers study principles of color aesthetics and symbolism from different viewpoints. Therefore, the colors in traditional Malaysian batik and deep cultural meanings.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Data Collection and Analysis

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing systematic literature review and comparative case analysis to explore the feasibility of artistic integration between Chinese New Year illustrations and Malaysian Batik motifs within a cross-cultural context. Conduct a literature review on New Year illustrations and Malaysian Batik motifs, covering historical background, artistic characteristics, cultural symbolism, and contemporary applications. Through literature analysis, identify the commonalities and differences between the two art forms in terms of themes, composition, color schemes, and symbolic meanings.

By comparing across five dimensions Motif Types, Composition Principles, Color System, Cultural Symbolism, and Technical, we construct a Feasibility Matrix for Fusion to evaluate differences in cultural sensitivity and integration difficulty within Natural Florals, Auspicious Animals, Mythology Belief, and Geometric Abstract Symbols. By examining existing cases of cross-cultural integration between China and Malaysia, this study verifies the feasibility and social acceptance of cross-cultural artistic integration.

3.2 Limitation

The limitations of this study lie in the absence of actual artistic creation or design practice to validate its findings, coupled with insufficient exploration of the underlying spiritual connotations of both art forms. This may lead to cultural misinterpretation or controversy in real-world applications. While the cited examples of successful integration serve as valid evidence, they are limited in number and do not fully correspond to New Year illustrations and Malaysian Batik motifs.

4.0 Feasibility Analysis of Cross-Cultural Art Fusion

4.1 Cultural Fusion

Due to Malaysia's multicultural environment, the development of batik itself tells of how cultures intertwined: originally from Java and influenced heavily there by indigenous Indonesian traditions, it has incorporated elements from ancient China as well as India, Arab-Islamic civilization, Portuguese and Dutch transmissions. The evolution of art practice creates hybridity in art by including different genre and discipline in presenting artwork (Michael et al. 2020). For example, the Peranakan Chinese Style within batik is the result of cultural exchange and a fusion between eastern Chinese immigrants and the local community, with themes painting a picture of China, it is logical for batik to mix with Wall New Year illustration. As a major cultural group, the Chinese community itself presents a potential reservoir for liveners, promoters, and consumers of Wall New Year illustrations mingling with traditional local motifs. In the realm of painting, for example, the successful combination of Hewen Xiao's lacquer painting "Entrusted Homesickness" with Chinese lacquer skills and traditional Malay themes, kite designs was an attempt aimed at promoting cultural exchange between China and Malaysia. This shows that artistic works created by Chinese artists, which blend Chinese and Malaysian cultural elements, can be recognized and resonate locally, laying the groundwork for social acceptance of the fusion between New Year illustration and batik.

Chinese New Year illustrations and Batik Motifs are rich in auspicious symbolism. Although their cultural symbol systems originate from different traditions, they share many common themes that can evoke cross-cultural resonance. Table 1 outlines their shared symbolic themes, typical symbols, and the avenues and potential for cultural fusion.

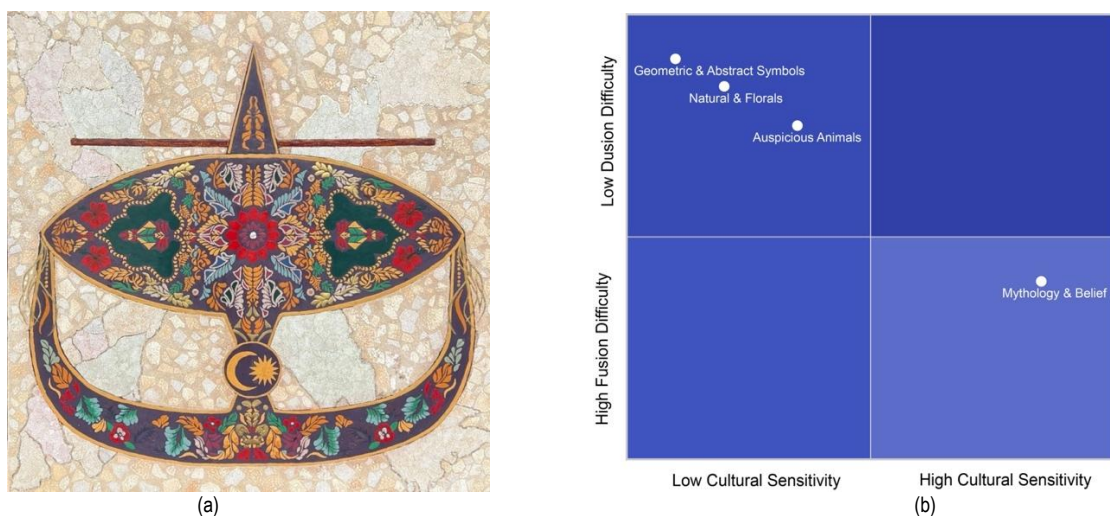


Fig. 1. (a)Entrusted Homesickness; (b) Feasibility Matrix for Fusion
(Source: (a) Huaqiao University, <https://www.hqu.edu.cn/info/1067/677663.htm>)

Table 1. Chinese New Year Illustrations, Malaysian Batik Motifs and Potential for Fusion

Symbolic Theme	Chinese New Year Illustrations	Malaysian Batik Motifs	Potential for Fusion
Natural Florals	Peony: Wealth, prosperity Lotus: Purity, integrity, fertility	Jasmine (Melur): Purity, sanctity, elegance (one of	Very High.

	Pomegranate: Fertility, many offspring Peach: Longevity	Malaysia's national flowers) Hibiscus (Bunga Raya): Vitality, life force (Malaysia's national flower) Betel Nut Flower (Bunga Pinang): Victory, honour	Flowers are neutral and universal symbols of beauty. Designs could juxtapose peonies and jasmine, symbolizing "wealth and purity," or fusion lotus-centric motifs into Batik's geometric motifs, symbolizing "integrity within order."
Auspicious Animals	Carp: Annual abundance, success overcoming adversity (Leaping the Dragon Gate) Dragon/Phoenix: Imperial power, nobility, good fortune, harmonious marriage Bat: Homophone for "fortune" (fu) Deer: Homophone for "prosperity" (lu), symbolizing official rank and wealth	Butterfly (Rama-rama): Love, transformation of the soul (common in Peranakan Batik) Peacock (Merak): Beauty, dignity, nobility	High. Animal symbols are highly relatable. Designs could feature a "Carp Leaping by Penang" motif, combining the carp with Malaysian landmarks, or blend the tail feather motifs of the phoenix and peacock to create a new Sino-Malay mythical creature symbolizing nobility and beauty.
Mythology Belief	Door Gods: Warding off evil, protecting households God of Wealth: Attracting wealth and treasure God of Longevity: Health and long life Eight Immortals: Magical powers, overcoming adversity	Wayang Kulit (Shadow Puppet) Figures: Narrating Indian epics, moral storytelling Crescent and Star: Symbols of Islamic faith	Medium. Requires careful handling of religious symbols. Extracting the core spirit, translating the "protective" nature of Door Gods into more abstract Batik talisman motifs. Adopting narrativity, using the Batik medium to tell snippets of Chinese myths, akin to Wayang storytelling.
Geometric Abstract Symbols	Endless Knot (Panchang) : Eternity, infinity Double Victory (Fangsheng) : Harmony, good fortune Wanzi Kont: Ten thousand blessings, auspiciousness Coin Motifs: Wealth	Spirals: The universe, life, growth Dots: Stars, seeds, origin of life Diamond Motifs: Order, balance Islamic Geometric Motifs: Representing the infinite and unity of the universe	Very High. Abstract symbols transcend language and act as the "grammar" for cultural fusion. The Endless Knot can blend with Batik spirals to form a "eternal growth" motifs; coin motifs can be repetitively arranged within Batik's diamond grids, creating a modern motif symbolizing "order and wealth."

The matrix examines how feasible it is to combine four themes across two dimensions: "cultural sensitivity" and "fusion difficulty." Geometric, abstract symbols are both low in cultural sensitivity and in fusion difficulty, which makes them ideal for intercultural fusion. Since geometric shapes are usually viewed as decorative elements, they rarely provoke cultural or religious controversies, serving as a visual language that facilitates mutual fusion, grafting, and re-creation. Natural floral motifs fall into a high-viability zone. Their neutral and universal qualities make them low in cultural sensitivity and fusion difficulty. Whether realistic or abstract, the floral elements of different cultures can easily coincide visually in the same composition. Rank auspicious animals in the medium to high category of feasibility, as some animals carry particularly unjust meanings with them. For their pose, it is more necessary that with understanding they respect form and style that must be balanced, not exactly an unlimited sort of recipe full of different elements. So moderately culturally sensitive, these creatures are moderately hard to fuse. Too is highly culturally sensitive material the domain of religious myth explained at home. Therefore, improper use of it can easily confuse people, and thus its fusion is more difficult. They must be thoroughly understood in their core meaning and expressed through a more abstract visual language that is acceptable to both sides.

4.2 Aesthetic Commonality

Traditional Chinese New Year illustrations favor bright, high-saturation colors like bright reds, vivid yellows, and greens to create an atmosphere that is at once lively and festive. Similarly, Batik motifs emphasize strong color contrasts and the brilliance of their colors. The bold use of vivid, contrasting colors in both traditions also reduces the likelihood of visual conflict in fusion passages. Whether in classical designs with bright motifs against deep blue backgrounds or modern creations with bold, luminous color combinations, both prioritize expressive color and reduces the risk of visual conflict during fusion. For example, the stark red-and-black contrast in New Year illustrations depicting "Door Gods" shares a common emotional and visual tension with the deep-ground bright floral motifs or vibrant color blocks often seen in Batik Motifs. Regarding compositional principles, New Year illustrations often emphasize fullness, symmetry, and rich storytelling. Batik motifs have always had their good points when it comes to practical procedures, such as arranging geometric motifs through repetition, symmetry, and asymmetry. After the motifs is printed on paper or cloth, it makes an inlaid decoration. So, this common concern with end explains why the decorative elements of both art forms can be easily combined on one surface.

Michael et al. (2020) argue that the fusion of art comes about by incorporating different artistic paradigms into practical artwork. The work of Dutch designer Eliza van Zuylen, who lives in Java, successfully blends European floral motifs such as hanging bells, dahlias, camellias, lilies, and irises with themes like fairy tales, knights, and hot air balloons into batik compositions. This showcases batik's impressive ability to incorporate foreign elements and integrate them into its design framework, serving as a useful reference for adding narrative features like figures and story scenes from New Year illustrations into Batik Motifs. Nyonya Batik represents the harmonious fusion of Chinese and Malay cultures. Its motifs include Chinese symbols of prosperity like the peony, symbols of nobility like the dragon and phoenix, symbols of good luck like the Qilin, and characters for fortune, rank, and longevity (homophone for Fu, Lu, Shou). At the same time, it features natural elements commonly seen in Malay culture, such as tropical Southeast Asian plants like rambutan, cloves, and peacocks. They emphasize a detailed, complex craft, and feature bright, vibrant, high-color contrasts in shades. Not only does this reflect the spirit of the tropics, but it is along with Chinese cultural preferences for festive and lucky colors.

Table 2: Comparison of Chinese New Year Illustrations and Malaysian Batik Motifs			
Feature Dimension	Chinese New Year Illustrations	Malaysian Batik Motifs	Potential for Fusion
Motif Types	Deities, Auspicious Motifs, Narrative Scenes	Floral, Geometric, Fauna Motifs	Innovative combinations of auspicious and floral motifs
Composition Principles	Symmetrical, Full Composition, Clear Layers	Repetitive Rhythms, Organic Flow	Incorporating fluid rhythms into symmetrical structures
Colour System	Five colour system (Red, Yellow, Green, Purple, Black)	Traditional deep blue, brown base with gold, white motifs	Innovative fusion of traditional and modern palettes
Cultural Symbolism	Warding off evil, Invoking blessings, Auspiciousness	Luck, blessings	Creating a symbolic system for cross-cultural understanding
Technical	Woodblock Printing, Hand-painted	Wax-resist Dyeing, Hand-drawn	Experimental combination of printing and dyeing techniques

5.0 Discussion

The feasibility analysis, as systematically laid out in the fusion matrix (Table 1) and the comparative table (Table 2), strongly supports the theoretical viability of integrating Chinese New Year illustrations with Malaysian Batik motifs.

5.1 Integration of Fusion Methods

The comparative analysis reveals that the potential for fusion is not uniform across all artistic elements but exists on a spectrum of feasibility. Geometric and abstract symbols, along with natural floral motifs, emerge as the most approach for initial integration. As illustrated in Table 1, these themes possess low cultural sensitivity and fusion difficulty. The universal language of forms such as blending the Chinese Endless Knot with Batik spirals or incorporating the Wanzi Kont into Batik's repetitive rhythms allows for the creation of new, hybrid decorative grammar that retains symbolic meaning while being visually cohesive. The fusion of auspicious animals resonates deeply, yet its success hinges on creatively reinterpreting both iconic forms with respect for their respective traditions.

Table 2 demonstrates that the preference for vivid, high-contrast color schemes ensures a visually unified festive atmosphere. At the compositional level, the narrative richness and symmetry of New Year illustrations can be integrated into the repetitive rhythmic framework characteristic of Malaysian Batik Motifs, promising to create motifs that are both story-rich and elegantly restrained.

5.2 Limitations and Charting Future Directions

The feasibility matrix and fusion proposals, while logically derived, lack empirical validation through practical artistic creation. The actual process of combining woodblock printing techniques with Batik may present unforeseen technical challenges that theory cannot anticipate. The visual harmony hypothesized in Table 2 needs to be tested through the creation of physical or digital prototypes. The analysis, though acknowledging cultural sensitivity, may underestimate the depth of cultural and religious connotations associated with certain symbols. The success of such fusion depends on a depth of cultural understanding that goes beyond the symbolic parallels identified in this paper.

The study does not address the perspective of the target audience. Social acceptance within Malaysia's multicultural society is crucial for the success of any cross-cultural fusion. The theoretical viability presented here must be followed by reception studies, employing surveys, interviews, or focus groups with both Chinese and Malay communities to gauge genuine acceptance and interpretative responses to the fused artworks.

6.0 Conclusion

Finding the balance between innovation and culture (Yang Yawen, 2025), although they are from different cultural backgrounds, both share great common ground in themes of symbolic expression and the way in which they are thought to operate. The "Nyonya Batik" practice and contemporary artist Hewen Xiao's work strongly support the successful potential and cultural value of such fusion. This study conclusively demonstrates the strong theoretical feasibility of fusing Chinese New Year illustrations with Malaysian Batik motifs,

grounded in their shared symbolic themes, aesthetic principles, and cultural values. This research This study currently lacks practical application and empirical validation. The proposed integration approach requires specific artistic experiments to be conducted, and its social acceptability tested within Malaysia's multicultural context. Future research must bridge the gap between theory and practice, ultimately translating into tangible artworks.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study fills a gap in systematic research on integrating Chinese New Year illustrations with Malaysian Batik Motifs. It demonstrates the feasibility of this fusion from cultural and aesthetic perspectives and offers a clear analytical framework for future scholars.

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