



Exploring Perceptions of Chinese National Tide Visual Style: A Case Study of Indonesian Students at XMUM

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: 8th January 2025

Accepted: 3rd June 2025

Published: 1st July 2025

DOI:

[https://doi.org/](https://doi.org/10.33102/jicicom.vol5no1.120)

10.33102/jicicom.vol5no1.120

ABSTRACT

The Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style has gained popularity among illustrators, designers, and communities, symbolizing aesthetic and cultural values. This research examines how the visual elements in the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) illustration can effectively convey information and influence its audience's perception. This research aims to understand the influence of Indonesian students on their perception of this visual style illustration and investigate factors that might impact their perception of this type of illustration. The study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions of Indonesian students at Xiamen University Malaysia regarding the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration. It aims to examine how this visual style evokes emotional responses and influences their views on preserving local heritage through artwork. Furthermore, the data collection was conducted on face-to-face semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to express their original opinions about this visual illustration. At the same time, the thematic analysis method is employed in this study to help the researcher identify frequent patterns and similar themes expressed by participants during interviews, thereby obtaining and providing a comprehensive and practical understanding. The findings revealed that the participants highly perceived and appreciated this visual style illustration, as they disclosed that this illustration represents Chinese culture with Chinese elements and impressive colour gradations, which can further enhance participants' emotional connection with the artwork. The implications of this study extended to the broader cultural exchange between Indonesia and China, shedding light on the impact of visual art in promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. This statement is further supported by the research's contribution to the discourse on the cultural significance and reception of Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration among Indonesian students, providing valuable implications for art creators and cultural communications.

Keywords: *Chinese National Tide, Visual Style Illustration, Audience Perception, Gen Z, Cultural Heritage*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

In recent years, visual graphics or illustrations have become an essential aspect in conveying information to consumers in a more accurate and attention-grabbing way. Research by Williams (2019) states that the visual narrative aspect can effectively communicate and disseminate information to various audience groups and contexts. Visual graphics can take the form of images, videos, and illustrations that convey information ultimately received and interpreted by the audience. The visual art style of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) illustration, which has gained popularity among young illustrators and designers, will be tested in this study paper's investigation into visual storytelling through visual illustrations (Yelu, 2022). The term Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) originates from the combination of "National" and "Tide". The word "National" refers to Chinese elements or Chinese culture, meanwhile "Tide" refers to movements, trends, or visual style, which means a visual illustration style that implements Chinese elements or Chinese Culture, whether in terms of colour, shape, typography, line arts to the overall aesthetic value of the artwork (Lin et al., 2022).

The term "Chinese National Tide" (*Guochao*) emerged notably during the pandemic in 2020, which pummelled the entire economy of China and other countries (Sharuddin, 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, foreign products have faced obstacles in penetrating the domestic market due to lockdowns aimed at breaking the chain of COVID-19 transmission (Tindall et al., 2023). Thus, local products have become a target for Chinese consumers. Domestic businesses effectively utilize this opportunity by innovating and being creative in competing with foreign products, incorporating local cultural icons into their packaging, advertising, or other aspects to trigger nationalism and patriotism among local consumers, thereby enhancing the appeal of local brands (Liu et al., 2019). This phenomenon also became a new platform for discovering the appeal of Chinese elements as a fresh art concept globally. Even though global brands can now easily access the domestic market and compete with local brands in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, this Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style has become one of the most visually compelling and culturally resonant styles with international appeal (Nesterenko et al., 2023).

However, while existing literature has focused on the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*)'s impact within the Chinese context, particularly in marketing, branding, and consumer identity perspectives, the existing literature lacks audience perception, which leads to a limited study on how this visual style is perceived by international audiences, especially in Southeast Asia. Specifically, there is a lack of scholarly attention on how audiences from different cultural heritage backgrounds and habits interpret and respond to the visual elements and cultural significance of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*). Hence, this study aims to fill that gap by focusing on Indonesian students at Xiamen University Malaysia, a context where cross-cultural exchange is rich

and ongoing. To better understand how the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style is being embraced across national and cultural boundaries, this study aims to contribute to the current conversation on visual and cultural appreciation by examining their reactions to this visual style.

Problem Statement

The Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual illustration style is a form of visual art that celebrates the beauty and heritage of Chinese culture and traditions. It offers a meaningful perspective to global audiences on the value of preserving and revitalizing local culture—not just as something to admire, but as something that can be integrated into daily life (Lu et al., 2023). As creative expression continues to evolve, this visual style invites a re-examination of how traditional Chinese elements can be reinterpreted and presented in fresh, modern ways to reach broader, international audiences (Cao, 2023). As a form of cultural expression, the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual illustration has the potential to keep innovating—moving beyond merely representing traditional motifs to creating emotional connections with viewers across cultures (Y. Lu, 2023).

Much like China, Indonesia is also home to a rich tapestry of cultures and traditions that remain deeply rooted in everyday life (Fatmawati, 2021). Given this cultural resonance, this study seeks to explore how Indonesian students at Xiamen University Malaysia perceive the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style. The goal is to understand how they interpret its cultural significance and how such visuals might serve as a means to express and celebrate both Chinese and Indonesian heritage on a global stage. Ultimately, the findings aim to provide insights that can help artists and designers create more meaningful and impactful works that resonate across cultural boundaries.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the perception of Indonesian students at Xiamen University Malaysia towards Chinese National Tide visual style illustrations. Furthermore, this study also aims to understand how these students interpret and respond to the aesthetic value of Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustrations. Nevertheless, this research correspondingly identifies the factors that may shape the Indonesian students' perception and attitude towards this visual style illustration. By fulfilling the research goals, the study desires to further knowledge of how visual illustration work is received across cultural boundaries and how culture may influence current art trends beyond their country of origin.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual Illustration in Daily Lives

Liu (2019) describes illustration as a form of visual art that helps clarify ideas, align with specific objectives, and conveys specific information to the audience. It is further defined that illustration can be in the form of an example, case, or illustration. Therefore, visual communication, such as the presentation of illustration artwork, can transmit information to the desired target audiences or mass audiences without the need for words (Zhou, 2023). When crafted thoughtfully, visual communication through illustration can make messages clearer and more impactful, especially when addressing diverse audiences. A visual communication illustration is noteworthy if the visualisation delivers or conveys the incidents and events that occurred. Because illustrations are designed with specific messages in mind, they often resonate more accurately and meaningfully with viewers. Heavner (2019) emphasizes that an illustration is most effective when it successfully conveys the essence of an event or idea to its audience. For this reason, illustrators must build their work around the intended message and target viewers, creating artwork that carries emotional or intellectual impact. As Heavner notes, the phrase “His words carry no meaning” illustrates the significance of form and context—an illustration must present a clear context to guide viewers toward understanding its underlying message.

As people are entering the era of digital development and also the influence of computer networks, this indicates that illustration design or artwork has widely gained significant support as illustrators can express their imagination and distribute their work to the public through digital networking, resulting in the form of new and unique visual experiences for the audiences. This evolution has turned digital illustration into one of the most dynamic and trendsetting art forms of the modern era (Liu, 2019). As illustration continues to diversify, it brings with it new layers of aesthetic and symbolic meaning, making it more widely accepted and appreciated by contemporary society (Nesterenko et al., 2023). However, Blaiklock (2023) argues that illustrators must also develop a deeper understanding of the purpose and impact of their work. They need to explore alternative ways to assess how their illustrations affect audiences. As Male (2019b) explains, practical illustration requires alignment between the creator and the viewer—understanding not only the message being delivered but also how the chosen medium may influence its reception.

The Culture Creation of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) Visual Style Illustration

The innovation in culture within the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration is more centred on showcasing artistic creations that contribute to the growth and vitality of cultural identity (Jian et al., 2023). This visual style represents a cultural movement by integrating Chinese elements with contemporary aesthetics (Wang, 2022). Illustrators working in the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) have demonstrated the social ideology of the visual style of illustration from cultural perspectives, which

describes the splendour of culture, the use of cultural elements as a means of enhancing people's resonance, and also colour combinations that highlight local culture. This process demonstrates how the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) style serves as a meaningful context for cultural expression—one that deserves to be preserved and shared. It also offers a model for other illustrators on how to integrate culture into visual art thoughtfully.

The literature featuring a Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual theme portrays magnificence at various levels, reflecting the uniqueness of each existing culture and how the illustrator incorporates it into the work of art (Akhil, 2022). When a culture is represented in fine art or illustration, it becomes a bridge between human imagination and lived tradition, introducing new artistic concepts rooted in heritage. Jian et al. (2023) argue that this fusion produces trendy yet meaningful value output with traditional culture at its core, linking users' emotional identity more profoundly. As a result, it will enable the illustrator to create artwork that resonates with viewers' emotions on a certain level, potentially triggering empathy and nationalism in the users.

The Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) Visual Style Visual Elements

Graphic illustration elements are one of the most influential and straightforward ways of expressing or delivering information in illustration design. Element context within the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration is an elemental illustration that experiences the inheritance and beauty of the Chinese culture, which combines tradition with modernization, customs with technological outcomes, and local culture with existing global trends, which is a configuration based on cultural uniqueness (M. Lu et al., 2023). As previously explored, the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration implements Chinese culture, including characteristic Chinese buildings, which are the most widely used element in this type of illustration (Ying, 2022). In the news report, Ying (2022) also unquestionably discloses that the buildings in this visual illustration provide this type of visual illustration with a more assertive and more prominent local culture, embodying the intent of traditional space as well as contemporary beauty and aesthetics as a symbol of Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration. Apart from the Chinese national building, which serves as the primary identity of this visual style illustration, several elements also possess iconic or strong Chinese characteristics, including auspicious clouds, wallet birds, cranes, and dragons (Jie, 2023). Chinese patterns, such as cloud patterns, waves, and typical Chinese mythical patterns are frequently discovered in these illustrations as supporting elements that can be incorporated with other elements (Sina, 2021). Therefore, the context elements in the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual illustration are minimal and are only blended into local Chinese culture. However, the diversity of existing elements, such as national buildings, wallet birds, cranes, and so on, enables this illustration's limitations to become one of the advantages to entice people because it is more comfortable for them to comprehend the existing culture and context in the illustration (J. Liu, 2022).

Colour is one of the essential elements in an illustration; the presence of colour can give an illustration an unpretentious and lively feeling, allowing the illustrator to express the emotion, mood, and tone of the artwork. In the context of the visual illustration of Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*), it uses brighter colours, highlighting the use of red, yellow, and gold as symbolic colours of Chinese culture, which results in the overall artwork being more prominent, more luminous, and thicker with Chinese culture (Yishe, 2021). An article by Sina (2021) additionally demonstrates that this type of Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) illustration has colours that stand out and attract attention; it is also good at using gradations in the process of doing the artwork, resulting that it looks smoother, more aesthetic and also admirable. Another article by Jie (2023) also supports the colour composition used, which tends to be brighter and lighter. However, using light and bright colours is important because if the colour saturation is solid, coupled with dense elements, it will provide negative value from the audience's perspective because it is complicated for audiences to understand and appreciate the artwork (Jie, 2023). Thus, using colours with bright and light saturation can minimize the negative effect on the audience because the audience can still receive the elements or information the illustrator desires to share, and the artwork also becomes more beautiful, elegant, and durable to scrutinize.

An illustration must have an orderly composition, referring to balance and how each element can unite with other elements and make the artwork more valuable to audiences. In the context of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual illustration, it incorporates cultural elements, gradation in colour usage, and line art. Corso (2022) states that line art is the most crucial element that underlies every production activity of an artwork. In other words, line art is the foundation of every illustration or other artwork and is the most critical component in producing adequate artwork (Corso, 2022). In the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) illustration type, line art is the most common, combining thin and thick strokes, making this illustrative artwork very flexible and unique. Apart from line art in this visual illustration that has strokes with different levels of thickness, the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) illustrator is also requested to use line colours that have high colour saturation, such as gold, or dark solid colours, such as black, brown, navy, or maroon (Bigma, 2021). Having line art with these colours will make it easier for viewers to differentiate each element contained in the artwork and contribute to the overall aesthetic values. Therefore, even though the elements are dense, the use of numerous colour gradations and line art in this illustration will not be a concern because, with this composition, this illustrated visual illustration becomes more attractive to people's attention, showing the natural beauty of Chinese heritage and culture; also shows the world about the aesthetic value and preservation of existing culture through this Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration.

The Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) Visual Style Illustration and Digital Media Use

Illustration is a concept or expansive understanding of work produced by the media, creative, and communications industries, which will be used for commercial/educational purposes and will circulate throughout the world via the internet, social media, advertising, publications, and entertainment (Male, 2019a). In the era of instantaneous development of media and information technology, mediators need a solution that allows them to communicate effectively to global audiences, one of which is through illustrations in various forms because audiences need unique and fresh imagery every day due to developments: technology, media, and cultural preferences (Male, 2019a). The existence of digital media enables the visual representation of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*), which has gained popularity in recent years, to gain recognition and be seen by global societies rapidly. As illustration and graphic design have become essential elements nowadays due to people's intention to see visuals first rather than text, many media users are initiating to integrate graphic design, images, and illustrations into their artwork to capture people's attention (Hutmacher, 2019). The Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration has its uniqueness, consisting of the splendour of Chinese culture and the use of unique and elegant gradation colours, making this illustration widely implemented in the form of packaging design, visual posters, television show covers, and others. A report by Huang (2023) presents data indicating that this visual style is in high demand among consumers and is used by brands as a strategy that yields positive outcomes, with sales of products incorporating elements of Chinese culture increasing drastically and receiving positive responses among consumers.

As is known, Gen Z is one of the "digital citizens" in this era of technological expansion and transformation, as they were born into the development and transformation of the digital phase, driven by the increase in digital and internet users. Gen Z represents a generation with a more open attitude, one that is beginning to place higher importance on aesthetic and cultural values, one that is unconstrained by tradition and accepts heterogeneous identities, and one that has observed many trends in illustration, particularly the growth of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration from the COVID-19 era to its current popularity. Therefore, the target audience analyzed in this research is Gen Z, specifically Indonesian students who also have diverse cultures and races in their country, familiar with digital media, and most susceptible to witnessing, receiving, and being attracted by Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration.

Visual Rhetoric Theory

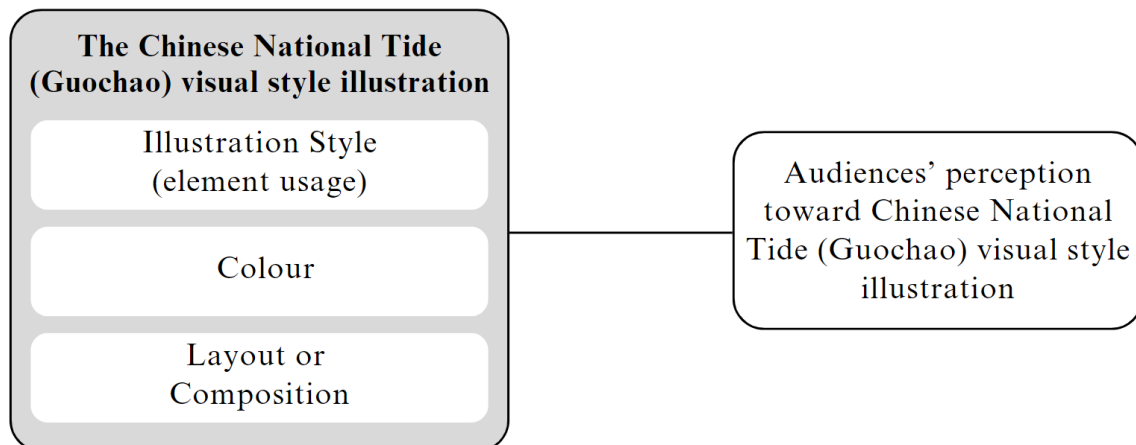
Visual rhetoric is a theory of visual literacy that exemplifies the capability to summarize and understand the meaning in a picture or graphic illustration as a manifestation of visual study in the context of visual thinking rather than verbal reasoning (Zahra, 2021). She also clarified that the central concept of visual rhetoric is understanding the meaning behind each visual illustration, which is formed through rhetorical structures and for academic method purposes (Zahra, 2021). In another sense, visual rhetoric is also

the outcome of creativity, such as painting, photography, advertisement, or building (Alim & Rahim, 2021). Various photos and graphic illustrations that illustrate this theory serve as a communication tool with a persuasive function, boosting aesthetic value and attractiveness (Alim & Rahim, 2021). Thus, the elements encompassed in an illustration or picture, such as line art, shape, and colour usage, are used to convey messages to the audience. Therefore, the elements contained within the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration, such as Chinese cultural elements, colour usage, line art, and composition, will be the predetermined factors to be explored to understand consumers' perception of this Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration. However, the same image or illustration can create different meanings for various target audiences. Hence, every illustrator or art creator should understand the composition and layout of elements to convey the message well to specific target audiences.

In general, visual rhetoric must possess three features: it must be symbolic, have a human presence, and be presented to the audience as a communication tool (Zahra, 2021). Foss stated that this theory is a symbolic system, where an image must be able to transcend its role as a symbol, sign, and image, and be indirectly related to the information being transmitted (García-Sánchez & Araújo-Bernardo, 2019). The second feature of the visual rhetoric theory is human intervention, which involves humans in creating images or illustrations, including colour selection, composition, medium, and form of the artwork (Josephson et al., 2020). Visual rhetoric necessitates human action in creating and interpreting a work of art (García-Sánchez & Araújo-Bernardo, 2019). The third feature, audience presence, suggests that any artwork implementing this theory must convey meaning and purpose to communicate effectively with a specific community (García-Sánchez & Araújo-Bernardo, 2019). Visual rhetoric refers to the clear understanding of how the elements arranged in an illustration can provide a function and share meaning to viewers, both from a semiotic and verbal perspective (Josephson et al., 2020).

Conceptual Framework

The visual rhetoric theory is utilized as a theoretical framework for conceptualizing how visual elements in the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration can influence audiences' perceptions. Based on the research and explanation in this study, several visual elements that affect audiences, which are the illustration theme (elements usage), the colour usage, and the composition of this type of illustration, were chosen as visual elements (factors) that might influence audiences' perception in the background of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Hamilton and Finley (2019) stated that Qualitative Methodology allows the author to assemble in-depth discussions and rich insights about a particular topic. The research further explains that qualitative methodology can provide insights into personal interviews and obtain various opinions on a specific question derived from talk or observation (Laumann, 2020). Therefore, the research methodology is suitable for this study as the researcher could identify various individuals' beliefs, perspectives, and attitudes towards the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration. In other words, qualitative research is a more flexible and open-ended method that allows participants to express their opinions and ideas. Moreover, this study adopted an exploratory approach. Exploratory research is a component of qualitative research methodology that is often regarded as inductive research, frequently employed in studies lacking rigorous research and data accuracy (Casula et al., 2020). This approach involves an initial process of gaining new perspectives and opinions in various fields that people are unfamiliar with, typically applied in social research and human interaction (Jain, 2021). Thus, in this research paper, a qualitative method, a precisely exploratory research approach, will be the most proper approach as every individual, community, or group perceives the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration differently.

Target Population

The target population of this research is concentrated on Generation Z, especially Indonesian students, with participants aged 18-26 years old and studying at Xiamen University Malaysia. The rationale for selecting this demographic lies in Indonesia's rich cultural heritage and diverse ethnic backgrounds, which remain deeply embedded within Indonesian society (Fatmawati, 2021). With Indonesia's diverse ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, it is crucial to explore Indonesian students' perceptions of the

Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration, which incorporates local traditional culture into an artistic form. Indonesia can also apply this approach to cultivate its own culture. Nevertheless, another reason for selecting Generation Z is that they have been connected and acquainted with digital technology from birth, allowing them to adapt to new technology (Giray, 2020) quickly. This phenomenon suggests that the young generation can navigate various technologies effortlessly as they have grown up in the era of rapid technological development. Therefore, this study focuses on individuals who are more likely to engage with digital media and are likely to be exposed to Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration in digital media and have a high possibility of being attracted to Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual imagery.

As the study employs a qualitative research method, the sample size measurement is based on the saturation point. Guest et al. (2020) define *data saturation* as a term where no additional data is being discovered, allowing the researcher to develop further. This data saturation measurement is also a common justification for sample size in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2019). When participants were allowed to express their thoughts about the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration, the interviews were designed to focus on how they received and perceived the value of different elements within that visual style illustration. Qualitative research methods typically employ a small number of interviews, which is claimed to be effective as they can reach saturation and provide a qualitatively representative view of the target population (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This phase of research will therefore analyse the information gathered from interviewees about the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration.

However, the researcher admits that the limited sample size of participants limits the technique. For example, the results may not capture all the viewpoints, which could lead to a limited representation of the facts. Additionally, interviewer effects might exist, such as how the researchers' tone and wording influence the participants' viewpoints. Hence, to minimize these biases, a semi-structured interview guide was employed to ensure consistency, and interview recordings were carefully transcribed and cross-checked, as detailed in the procedure section. Nevertheless, peer debriefing was also conducted throughout the data analysis phase to help validate the coding process and increase reliability.

Data Collection Procedure

The purposive sampling will be implemented in this research. Purposive sampling provides researchers with a deeper understanding and is used to identify participants most likely to provide meaningful insights (Campbell et al., 2020). This purposive sampling is also beneficial for cases or studies that lack existing resources and uses these limited sources effectively (Jodie, 2024). Furthermore, the data will be collected through semi-structured interviews. Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021) suggest that

semi-structured interviews are the most effective method in qualitative research for researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and thoughts, rather than a general overview. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews would be valuable for the researcher to explore more interconnected ideas, questions, or thoughts that may arise during the interviews, which would benefit the overall research study (Mior Kamarulbaid et al., 2022). Before the interview session, the researcher will show the interviewees an illustration of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style. Using illustration prompts in interviews can help the participants to better connect with the topic, recall relevant experiences, and articulate their thoughts more effectively. Moreover, illustrating the references to interviewees may enhance the quality and validity of data collection, leading researchers to investigate new questions and helping participants express new ideas or perceptions.

First, the researcher will begin the interview session by providing a brief introduction to the interview's purpose to the interviewees. In this section, the researcher will also mention that this interview encourages the interviewee to share their perspectives, opinions, and thoughts about the question being asked by the researcher. Second, the researcher and the interviewee have agreed and are willing to be interviewed, and the entire interview process will be recorded for academic purposes. Hence, every interviewee who attends and takes part in the interview is assumed to accept and be willing to be interviewed. Additionally, the information gathered from the interview will be applied to relevant studies. Third, the author will ask general questions about their understanding of this visual style illustration in this section. For instance, their general reception of this Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration and their perspective on this visual style as one way to preserve local heritage. In this section, the author aims to understand the participants' perspectives on this visual style illustration and their receptivity to the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style. Along with the interview, the researcher will show the participants three Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration artworks to help them recall this visual style. The author makes this action to ensure that the audience is aware of this discussion topic. Nevertheless, in this visual style illustration, the author mentioned some predetermined factors based on visual rhetoric theory, such as line art, composition, elements, and colour usage, to help participants restrict the factors that might affect their perception of this Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration.

Data Analysis

The analysis of findings was conducted using thematic analysis. Lochmiller (2021) declares that thematic analysis is a method for determining, examining, and documenting patterns within data. Analysing the textual data will make it easier for the author to understand the actual details of the data. Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019) have further explained that using thematic analysis will produce high-quality qualitative research, as the findings from the thematic analysis will be rich and worthwhile. Nevertheless, the study also states that utilizing thematic analysis will enable researchers to

process and analyse the qualitative data without being constrained by methodological theories (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In other words, this thematic analysis method likewise becomes the best alternative for researchers who know what they want to achieve in a particular study. In the context of Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration research, thematic analysis allows the authors a high level of freedom and flexibility in exploring any information that may be used to achieve their goals. To strengthen the validity of the findings, multiple readings of the transcripts were conducted, themes were refined collaboratively, and codes were reviewed through peer consultation to avoid researcher bias.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics of Interviewees

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Indonesian students at Xiamen University Malaysia, who had acquaintances and provided personal viewpoints about the Chinese National Tide visual style illustration for this study. The researcher issued the criteria requirements regarding interviewees in advance to the audience, and all participants involved in this study were well-qualified and participated voluntarily. There were five 20-year-old participants and three 19-year-old participants, comprising five females and three males. Nevertheless, they also had access to digital media, which exposed them to illustrations. The fulfillment of the requirements by all eight Indonesian students has confirmed the study's validity, which aims to classify them as targets or potential audiences for this type of illustration. All interviewees were interviewed physically and on a face-to-face basis. During the interviews, participants shared and discussed their perceptions, attitudes, perspectives, and opinions regarding the Chinese National Tide visual style illustration.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Digital Media usage that exposes to illustration
Interviewee 1	Female	20	Instagram, Pinterest, and TikTok
Interviewee 2	Female	20	Pinterest
Interviewee 3	Male	20	<i>Xiaohongshu</i>
Interviewee 4	Female	19	Pinterest, TikTok, and YouTube
Interviewee 5	Female	20	Pinterest, Instagram, and <i>Xiaohongshu</i>
Interviewee 6	Female	20	TikTok and Pinterest
Interviewee 7	Male	19	Twitter and Instagram
Interviewee 8	Male	19	<i>DouYin</i> , the China version of TikTok

The digital media platforms most often used by interviewees to discover illustration references are Pinterest, TikTok, and Instagram. Pinterest is a search engine for exploring ideas, including inspiration, cooking recipes, fashion design, and illustrations (Pinterest, n.d.). Thus, the Pinterest application is known to many people, especially those interested in art, as it provides thousands of inspirations by entering related keywords. Nevertheless, a similar pattern in the data will be discussed in the next sub-theme for better understanding.

Indonesian Students' Perception towards Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) Visual Style Illustration

Based on data obtained from interviews, the participants' general attitudes and impressions of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration are related to the visual settings and characteristics of this visual style. As mentioned in the literature reviews, the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration is an artistic representation that combines modern art and Chinese culture (Lin et al., 2022). Therefore, it possesses solid Chinese associations and vibes, which were later perceived with the same feeling by the audiences. The majority of participants perceived the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration as depicting China, characterized by dense elements and eye-catching colors. This context aligns with the literature reviews, which indicate that the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration incorporates aspects of Chinese culture (Ying, 2022), gradient colour usage (Sina, 2021), and dense elements or layout composition (Bigma, 2021).

[...] I can see the Chinese culture in that illustration.

Followed by another respondent with the same perception;

[...] I think they are all unique in drawing style is very similar to China (representing the China country).

Another study of this Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration genre revealed that the concept of this visual style illustration has a highly uniqueness point, which makes this illustration distinguishable from other illustration styles by highlighting the local heritage or local culture to further connect with the audiences' emotional and identity more profoundly (Jian et al., 2023). This statement is supported by the participant's data obtained during interviews, in which the participant states that they can feel the Chinese culture in the artwork and correlate themselves with it on an emotional level, as it can trigger nationalism and patriotism in participants, prompting them to preserve local heritage.

Yes, I am grateful immensely for it. It is highly attractive and rich in Chinese culture, which can be utilised to spread awareness of and preserve the culture among foreign communities.

[...] Chinese National Tide visual style illustration can also be introduced in Indonesia because Indonesia also has a race of Chinese Indonesians like me.

Therefore, this result aligns with and confirms the visual rhetoric theory, whereby every element in this visual style illustration has successfully conveyed the intended messages and feelings to the audience, which is the primary purpose of this theory.

[...] Therefore, in my opinion, works of art have a significant role in preserving the local culture because the art has its uniqueness which will be more appealing and allow the artwork to be inherited.

Yes, I agree because artwork is a powerful visual storyteller. After all, it can capture the unique history and traditions. [...] So, I believe that this artwork can attract attention and interest, contribute to tourism and cultural exchange, and preserve and promote the distinct heritage of the community for future generations.

All participants appreciated this Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration due to its uniqueness and the cultural significance of its central concept, which is seldom encountered in Indonesia. The participants like the cultural values, theme settings, and aesthetic values in this visual style illustration, which further suggests that the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration is unique and attractive from the audience's perspective. This phenomenon can also be concluded that this illustration has growth potential and will be recognized by global societies in the future.

Factors Influencing Indonesian Students' Perception towards Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) Visual Style Illustration

Most interviewees received colour gradients, which are utilized in the Chinese National Tide visual style, as factors influencing their perception or thoughts toward this visual style illustration. As mentioned in the literature reviews, Sina (2021) declared that the colour used in this Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration attracts the audience's attention and makes it stand out (memorable). This visual style illustration is also excellent at using gradation of colours, making the overall artwork smoother, aesthetically pleasing, and admirable from the audience's perspective, which aligns with the audience's response to this question during the interview session.

[...] it also uses gradient colours, this visual illustration is not challenging for the audience to see, but rather gives a different visual feeling and uniqueness.

Another respondent agreed and revealed;

The use of colour in this illustration is what initially drew my attention to it, [...] the colours that were used are very bold and eye-catching, but they do not appear to be very solid. As a result, many colour gradients were produced, which can make me feel at ease and are not too dense. Aside from that, one of the things that I like is that the colours that were selected, such as red, yellow, and gold, also really represent Chinese culture.

One of the interviewees disclosed that using gradient colours in this visual style illustration further gives him a feeling of reassurance and is not too dense. This statement is aligned with the central purpose of using gradation colours in this Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration, which creates more negative space for the audiences to comprehend the elements or messages conveyed in this artwork. As mentioned in the literature reviews, this Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration consists of dense elements. Therefore, using gradation colours can give the audience a feeling of relaxation and avoid being too pressured due to the complex composition in this visual illustration (Jie, 2023). Moreover, the answers disclosed by the participants likewise mentioned that the colour selection in this visual style illustration, such as red, yellow, and gold, really represents the Chinese culture, as these colours are the symbolic colours of Chinese culture or heritage (Yishe, 2021).

Regarding the factors influencing trends, half of the interviewees mentioned that they were affected by trends in their perception of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration. The existence of thousands of visual illustration styles in this digital era might shape and influence audiences' interest in a particular illustration artwork. However, some respondents declared that this Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration might have a positive impact under the influence of these trends.

[...] I think the impact of trends to this Chinese National Tide visual style will only be in a positive way as this visual style illustration can be further implemented and used in the product packaging, advertisement and many more because this visual style illustration is fresh and never be seen by the public before.

[...] The uniqueness of ideas and concepts contain in this style makes it not only distinctive but also highly inspirational for other illustrators to emulate and incorporate into their work.

Based on the respondent's answer, she states that the impact of trends will further contribute to the beneficial sector of this visual style illustration. With the rapid development of technology, visual illustration artwork has been widely adopted in business-

related fields to enhance the aesthetic value, advertising value, and promotional materials of products (Cordova et al., 2020). Therefore, under the influence of trends, producers or advertisers might use this visual style illustration to create advertisements, products, or other related items that can drive sales and increase consumers' desire and intention to make a purchase.

The research findings also provide important new insights into the visual communication between China and Indonesia, particularly in the realm of media aesthetics. Although Chinese traditional cultural symbols and art are the foundation of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style, their acceptance among Indonesian Gen Z students indicates a rising receptivity to cultural hybridization and reinterpretation of foreign cultural aspects. In addition to recognizing the artwork's Chinese ancestry, participants praised its aesthetic qualities and expressive potential; some even suggested that similar visual approaches may be used to preserve and advance Indonesian culture. It is evidence that respect for one another can transcend national borders when historical elements are reimagined through modern visual narratives.

Furthermore, this occurrence is indicative of a more significant trend in media aesthetics wherein hybridized and digitally accessible forms are used to celebrate and preserve regional identities. Young Indonesians who identify with the typical regional values of heritage, tradition, and visual expression are encouraged to engage in creative dialogue through the Chinese National Tide style, which also promotes China's cultural pride. A new Southeast Asian visual identity, rooted in regional culture yet enhanced by reciprocal influences, may emerge from this artistic exchange, establishing media aesthetics as a platform for cross-cultural innovation and understanding. Examples of this include *Batik*, *Wayang Kulit*, and other creative forms.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study has provided information on how Generation Z, specifically Indonesian students at XMUM, perceive the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration and the factors influencing their perception. In this context, it provides preliminary answers to the factors that must be considered when producing illustrations to elicit a positive and endorsed audience response. Moreover, this study has explored the Indonesian students' perception of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration as one way to preserve local culture or heritage. The findings of this study have likewise contributed to knowledge about the factors influencing the audience's perception of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration by focusing on several predetermined factors possessed in the visual rhetoric theory, and also further understanding the visual language (visual element) that is used to communicate and transfer information to audiences.

The Chinese elements contained in the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration play a crucial role in showcasing the cultural and aesthetic values of the artwork itself. Additionally, the colour usage, particularly the gradation of colours in this visual style illustration, has become a primary factor influencing the audience's perception. The visual rhetoric theory applied in this study reveals that any visual elements contained in an illustration, such as colour selection and element usage, must be able to convey the information to the audience (Alim & Rahim, 2021). Hence, this visual rhetoric theory explains the substantial relationship between visual elements and information in generating meaning for audiences and defining how they will receive and interpret the data (Josephson et al., 2020).

Several considerations regarding this study are that the audience's preferences and factors influencing their perception of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration may require more accurate measurement and scientific evidence to ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings. The researcher identified some limitations during the conduct of this study. Firstly, this study focused solely on the perception of Indonesian students at Xiamen University Malaysia, which may not apply to all populations in all situations. Furthermore, as this study utilized a qualitative research approach with a small sample size, it may limit the representativeness of the findings and the ability to make statistical conclusions. To overcome these limitations, the author recommends that prospective research examine the perception of other populations towards the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration, such as various ethnic populations or residents of different countries, to understand each individual's perception of this illustration clearly.

Moreover, a quantitative research approach might be another problem solver to provide more accurate, comprehensive, and measurable findings on the topic. A comparative study involving Indonesian and Malaysian students, or the use of mixed methods for broader generalizability, may be implemented in future studies. Hence, by addressing these limitations through several suggestions, a more comprehensive insight into societies' perceptions of the Chinese National Tide (*Guochao*) visual style illustration will be further explored.

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