VISUAL AND TEXTUAL SEMIOTICS IN GONGBI PAINTING: A STUDY ON AN INNOVATIVE ART TEACHING MODEL BASED ON MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The manuscript is an exploration of the role of a multimodal and semiotic curriculum in facilitating the student interest in Gongbi painting, the traditional Chinese form of art with a rich layer of symbolic and textual significance. The study, grounded on both Social Semiotics and Multimodal Learning Theory, explores ways visual and written content in Gongbi can be used to facilitate interpretive, cultural, and critical thinking processes in art education. The study involved five (5), multicultural secondary school (16-18) students across a six-week unit (visual arts) to obtain a qualitative case study. The method was to collect data via semi-structured interviews and analyse thematically as well as the semiotic understanding of three chosen Gongbi paintings. The results show that students gained symbolic literacy, explored digital tools (ThingLink, Padlet, Canva) to customise and redefine conventional symbols and produced these as a result of a collaborative meaning-making process. Digital audiotext and storytelling contributed to identity expression and critical reflection, particularly among non-Chinese learners. This paper shows that the introduction of digital solutions and the application of semiotic analysis to instruction in conventional art programmes are effective strategies to create a culturally inclusive, reflective, and interactive educational experience in art. It adds to the deficit of literature on the Gongbi pedagogy by bridging the traditional art with modern instruction methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Gongbi painting requires painters to be very accurate and attentive when applying their brushes. According to Guo (2024), gongbi began as a style exclusive to the royalty that predominantly contained images of Chinese landscapes, flowers, birds and humans. Gongbi incorporates Chinese culture messages and meanings into their art. Gongbi artwork is easy to study signs and symbols, the numerous layers of the gongbi make the meaning clear. According to Zhao (2020), the primary approach in art education currently becomes multimodal learning. It is based on social semiotics in that it looks at how meanings begin with objects such as images, text, space and gestures. As Li (2019) mentions, the framework helps readers find out the relationships between various aspects, which allows understanding the culture and message of the painting easier. Adding signs and words that have some artistic touches can make pupils able to review works of art and appreciate their originality. This practise has made teachers to educate students on how to analyse texts applying multiple methods.

According to this model, the students will be capable of imitating different artistic styles and of understanding the meaning of every painting. As an example, the incorporation of a flower in Gongbi art can convey change, goodness or feminine qualities; and a brief poem accompanying the flower can provide more information about what the artist conveys (Hoi-chiu, 2019). The concept of multimodal relationships enables the student to analyse how the visual culture expresses thoughts and ideas using symbols. Overall, by using digital technologies and tools, educators can improve their methods of teaching. Thanks to virtual galleries, digital annotation tools and interactive learning platforms, students can analyse Gongbi paintings in groups by connecting what they see with text, historical facts and the meanings of symbols (Jiang et al., 2006). This approach supports students as they work through the different types of messages often found in modern media. The global spread of education and increased interest in East Asian art add to the reason for updating the teaching framework (Kang & bin Wan Abdullah, 2024). In particular, non-Chinese learners benefit most from a method that links Gongbi to wider cultural symbols, helping them see the cultural roots of the art. Correlating visual with written cues enables students to understand aspects of drama that are missed during activities that involve only theatre techniques.

1.2. Problem Statement

Traditionally, art schools focus on the exact steps of drawing and not on discovering and understanding the true meanings behind works such as Gongbi paintings. Consequently, students may have a hard time connecting the different parts of a painting to its writing in Gongbi art. To support multimodal learning and digital teaching, there must be a teaching model that includes pictures and written words to support student involvement and awareness of other cultures (Jiang et al., 2019). Moreover, there is limited research on how Gongbi can be taught with multimodal approaches. This research is carried out to assess how semiotics and digital technology can assist students in understanding the meaning and value of Gongbi paintings.

1.3. Research Objectives

Following are the objectives of this research;
- To explore the visual and textual semiotic elements inherent in traditional Gongbi painting and their role in conveying cultural and symbolic meanings.
- To assess the effectiveness of the multimodal teaching model in enhancing students' interpretative skills, cultural understanding, and critical thinking in visual art education.
- To investigate the role of digital tools and platforms in facilitating multimodal learning and collaborative analysis of Gongbi paintings in modern educational settings.

1.4. Research Questions

- What is the key visual and textual semiotic elements in traditional Gongbi paintings, and how do they contribute to the communication of cultural and symbolic meanings?
- How does the integration of multimodal analysis into Gongbi art education impact students' interpretative abilities, critical thinking, and understanding of cultural symbolism?
- In what ways do digital platforms and tools support or enhance multimodal learning and collaborative engagement with Gongbi paintings in art education?

1.5. Significance Of the Research

Conventional schools of art typically have students focus on technique and repeated copying with little regard for the rich meanings in Gongbi painting. So, students might discover that it can be

tough to note the relationship between various drawing elements and the texts found in Gongbi paintings. With the rise of multimodal learning and digital teaching, a teaching model that includes visuals and text is necessary to help students become more interested and culturally knowledgeable (Jiang et al., 2019). Still, little research has examined how multimodal approaches can be applied in Gongbi painting in schools. It aims to understand how using semiotics and digital tools in education supports students' ability to read these paintings and discover their cultural value.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Overview

This chapter explains how introducing Gongbi painting's visual and textual aspects in school supports students' cultural education and helps them become more involved, mainly through using group projects and digital resources.

2.2. Semiotic Elements in Gongbi Painting: Cultural and Symbolic Significance

Due to its meticulousness and attractiveness, gongbi painting holds a special place in traditional Chinese art. Consequently, Qi et al. (2023) concluded that it combines detailed images with rich symbolism, using both pictures and words to represent cultural beliefs, insights and history. During the Han dynasty, Gongbi emerged as both art form and a way to pass along ideas and values in the imperial courts. Gongbi painting combines form and meaning when creating art. Luo et al. (2025) state that peonies stand for wealth, butterflies represent joy and cranes symbolise living a long life, all being important cultural signs. These signs are grounded in long-held symbolic traditions from Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist beliefs. By using specific colours, lines and arrangements, the artist guides the viewer through the different messages in the work. In addition to the mosaics, verses and beautiful scripts fill in more of the storey. The texts provide context for the pictures and describe what the artist was experiencing or thinking, as well as the culture or politics at the time.

Gongbi depicts a classical Chinese belief that painting and poetry are not distinct paths, but rather come together as one: "in painting lies poetry, in poetry lies painting." Studying these forms of signs helps people see the deeper cultural meanings found in Gongbi paintings (Sun, 2019). They pay attention to aspects like history, ethics and the culture of each country, in addition to style. In a classroom setting, this approach is ideal as it inspires students to ask questions instead of only telling what a text is about. Gongbi painting provides an advanced way to express messages. Detailed visuals and added text allow the art form to express important cultural messages (Jin, 2025). Exploring these various forms of Chinese art widens our knowledge and explains the rules of traditional visual art.

2.3. Multimodal Teaching for Enhanced Visual Interpretation and Cultural Understanding

Many schools now use multimodal teaching in art classes to help students understand different art pieces and cultures. Schnone et al. (2021) argue that the use of visual, audio, text and interactive elements in the method matches today's theories on learning and the way mind operates. Multimodal teaching can strengthen learning and encourage critical thinking in traditional artistic forms such as Gongbi painting. Classic art education often highlights technical work, how artworks are designed and their background in history. Furthermore, Lu (2019) suggests that, even though helpful, these factors may not engage students fully or reveal the cultural values in traditional art. Furthermore, Feng (2023) affirms that Multimodal teaching meets this need by encouraging students to connect with learning material using different layers of information. For example, students could explore a Gongbi painting, read related poems, listen to an explanation by a recorded artist and contribute their thoughts in the classroom or online. This way of learning encourages people to think critically and understand the messages behind images.

Students are taught to review what artworks represent, to question the artist's reasons for creation and to understand the era when the art was made. Completing activities such as comparing different meanings, creating content using computers or writing in journals improves learning and makes the lessons more suitable for each student. In addition, using multiple approaches helps to include a wide range of learners. Digital learning supports students with different learning methods since it offers a range of materials. Image analysis is a key technique for visual learners, whereas textual analysis is used by verbal learners (Chen, 2018). When students take part in activities like group analysis or creating digital storeys, they combine their thoughts and look for alternative ideas. Experts state that applying diverse teaching methods helps students remember, understand and feel motivated. Gongbi painting allows students to focus on culture, connecting historical events with present-day matters (Mai et al., 2020). Multimodal lessons help students increase

their knowledge of regular art topics. This allows students to spot the delicate implications in Gongbi art and feel the depth of cultures it highlights.

2.4. Digital Platforms as Tools for Collaborative and Multimodal Gongbi Learning

Art students now use technology and online resources to team up and understand more about art. With technology, Gongbi painting helps individuals to explore different suggestions, obtain more information and contact artists from every corner of the globe. They teach art using older techniques as well as incorporating innovative ways of instruction (Zhao, 2020). Online galleries and guided tours help students get to know Gongbi paintings better. The app provides details about artists and different art collections, along with explanations of the featured pieces (Meng et al., 2018). Examining digital images helps show the artist's skill, similarities among paintings and the use of various backgrounds.

Wahidin et al. (2024) argue that learners interacting with digital tools are more active in the classroom. With VoiceThread, Padlet and ThingLink, students are allowed to share their opinions and thoughts regarding any image used in the class. On these platforms, students can join conversations without everyone being online at the same time and receive feedback from teachers and classmates. Participating in discussions with other students helps students gain more digital skills and experience. According to Rosyid et al. (2025), students can use digital storytelling and creative applications such as Canva and Adobe Express to either develop their own versions of Gongbi art or create new storeys inspired by traditional paintings. Activities like this help student link the past and creativity in today's world. Although digital literacy and having equal access can be issues, learning Gongbi with technology offers many benefits. With digital tools, students can learn in various ways, collaborate and enjoy more flexible learning.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The basis of this study lies in two complementary theoretical approaches: Social Semiotics and Multimodal Learning Theory, which prove quite sufficient to examine the Gongbi painting through the lens of an educational discourse.

3.1. Social Semiotics

Social Semiotics concerns itself, as Halliday and Kress dwell on, with how society and culture influence the meaning we discern in signs. This concept enhances the theory of semiotics by encompassing the contextual influence on the meaning of images, texts and symbols. Gongbi paintings can be interpreted through the lenses of how the images (e.g., flowers, birds, human figures) and written texts (e.g., inscriptions, seals) of the paintings (e.g., Confucian, Daoist or Buddhist ideas) are conveyed using social semiotics (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2022). It emphasises that Gongbi combines images and words in making meaning in a text. Through the lens of social semiotics, the students will be able to deconstruct these layers and develop their cultures reading abilities.

3.2. Multimodal Learning Theory

The Multimodal Learning Theory is associated with cognitive and educational psychology, and it posits that the application of more than a single mode of representation such as pictures, texts, audible sounds and even physical activities promote better learning results. This theory is the educational objective of not just teaching strategies but giving students a chance to have any meaningful learning (Lu, 2023). In the Gongbi training through multimodal learning, the students are encouraged to explore and learn different subjects using resources, including annotating the online art and speaking with their classmates. It permits instructors to teach differently, which benefits learners with diverse demands, as well as fosters equality in education.

3.3. Literature Gap

While multimodal and cultural studies are being explored more, studies about integrating visual and textual elements in teaching Gongbi painting are still missing. A majority of research looks at technology or culture by itself, rather than linking them in the teaching material. Still, there is very little research on how current technologies make this form of teaching easier. It explores the benefits of using semiotic and multimodal methods for students to better comprehend and value Gongbi art.

4. METHODOLOGY

The chapter examines how students interpret the symbols and icons present in Gongbi painting while being taught with various methods. It explains the method used, the participants involved, the site where events were investigated, how data gathering worked, its analysis and ethical considerations.

4.1. Research Design

To understand the influence of cultural factors on students learning about Gongbi painting, a

qualitative case study is selected. In doing so, researchers have the ability to consider only students who belong to something of a given learning environment. In this research, a sample of students was taken into account to see how they make sense of symbolic information using various means and approaches. The approach allows people to better convey their ideas and feelings, both through images and words.

4.2. Participants And Teaching Context

The participants of the study were five students of the multicultural secondary school, whose ages ranged between 16 and 18 and were pursuing visual arts. The rationale of the choice was to have a balance of individuals who may have varied cultural experiences and have higher exposure to Chinese art. The traditional Chinese culture had a familiar meaning to some students and a new form of art to others. The students had a six-week art unit taught by their normal teacher, and it covered the learning of how to analyse and interpret Gongbi artworks in terms of their cultural background. The method involved teaching technique and interpretation; the students were requested to investigate recurring motifs such as plum blossoms, cranes and poetic inscriptions by using semiotics.

4.3. Data Collection: Student Interviews

In order to undertake this study, semi-structured interviews were employed where the respondents were students. Each interview lasted approximately between 30 and 45 minutes and was conducted towards the end of the teaching unit, involving only a single participant. The students were invited to share their experiences of Gongbi painting, the meaning they had in the images and writings and how they were involved in the different classroom activities. The questions were intentionally open-ended to lead to honest responses and every session was conducted in a peaceful school setting which enabled the participants to feel comfortable.

4.4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse interview responses. Transcripts were screened to identify similarity in the way students talked about their experiences with the semiotic elements in learning. A little attention was given to the students recognising symbols in art and decomposing any related meanings in the form of poems or seals. Although we did not actually analyse these paintings using semiotics, this method was significant in determining what the students perceived about the paintings. It focuses on how students constructed meaning in relation to various kinds of symbolic knowledge.

4.5. Ethical Considerations

The school granted approval and informed written consent was given by both students and parents. Those who decided to be included were notified that they were free to withdraw at any time and that their names were concealed using pseudonyms. The research was conducted in the spirit of preserving the confidentiality and privacy of the subjects.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter provides a general summary of how students were exposed to gongbi painting through a multimodal and semiotic pedagogical strategy. This discussion can be divided into two parts. Part I involves semiotic analysis to explore how students perceived symbolic aspects in three particular Gongbi paintings. Part II will engage thematic analysis of the interview data, revealing patterns in student description of their learning, interpretation, and creative expression as they proceeded with the unit. These two views collectively illustrate the role of multimodal, semiotics-based approach in promoting critical analysis of traditional Chinese art, where students are taught to read, write, and remix visual and textual images and signs to gain new understandings of inheritances across cultures.

PART I: SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED GONGBI PAINTINGS

Social semiotics (Halliday, 1978; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) and multimodal discourse theory are used to evaluate the students' responses in this section. The focus is on three Gongbi artworks explored in class:

1. Ladies with Flowers in Their Hair
2. Peacock Spreading Its Tail Feathers by Giuseppe Castiglione
3. Old Trees, Level Distance

Each painting served as a semiotic resource for student learning, prompting interpretations based on visual grammar, symbolic conventions, and intermodal connections.

1. Ladies With Flowers in Their Hair – Gendered Symbolism and Cultural Representation

This is a classical Gongbi painting that is attributed to Zhou Fang and depicts the aristocratic women who are finely clothed and adorned with peonies. Its composition carries with it Confucian concepts of beauty, modesty, and harmony with the seasons as depicted in figure 1;

Figure 1: Ladies with Flowers in Their Hair.
Source: (Chinaculture.org, 2025)

Student Interpretations
P1 (Chinese heritage student):

"The peony in her hair was like a symbol, she is not only style-she is graceful, but also, she is not useless in the society. Not merely beauty, but something more."

P4 (non-Chinese background):

"I assumed it was ornamental and reading about the meaning of flowers helped. She is no style of passivity, that is, saying without speaking."

5.1. Semiotic Analysis

The salient positioning of the peony and lowered gaze of the woman has provided, according to the visual grammar of van Leeuwen (2006), an interpersonal meaning of introspection and elegance. Students re-examined such figures as icons of inner strength, cultural pride and symbolic oratory as represented in figure 2, whereas common interpretations would see such figures as passive;
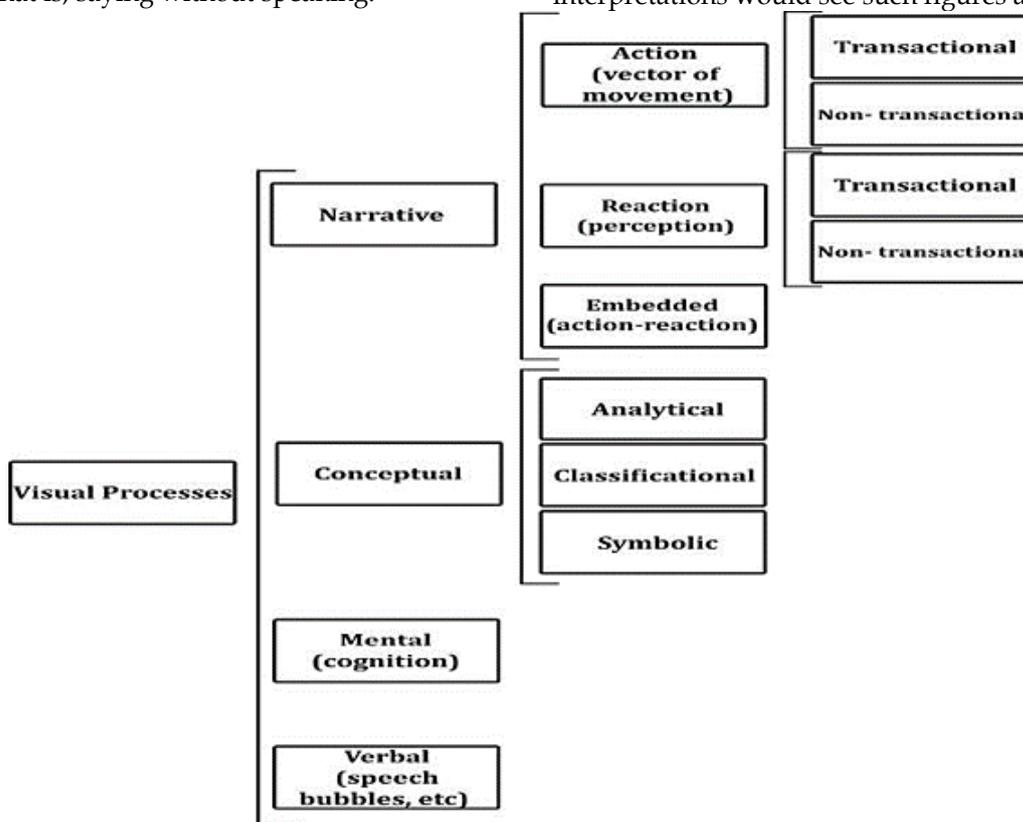

Figure 2: Visual Processes (Adapted from Kress and Van Leeuwen.
Source: (Moya Guijarro and Martínez Mateo, 2022).

The peony is used as a cultural code of womanhood and nobility. The concept of myth suggested by Barthes (1977) applies here; the beauty of the flower is naturalised in the sense that it symbolises the cultural values. The responses displayed by students demonstrate the increasing ability to decode these connotative meanings.

2. Peacock Spreading Its Tail Feathers –

Imperial Display and Cross-Cultural Codes

This painting of a Qing Dynasty artist, Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining), shows a peck with his full fanned tail in a green garden. The European realism employed by Castiglione in the Gongbi style creates an intensely detailed, figuratively-symbolic composition, as shown in figure 3;

Figure 3: Peacock Spreading Its Tail Feathers.
Source: (郎世寧, 2025).

5.2. Student Interpretations

P2 (non-Chinese background):

"The peacock is showing off. It feels royal, but also like it's under pressure—to be perfect all the time."

P5 (Chinese-Malaysian heritage):

"Those feathers look like eyes. It made me think of how people watch you, expecting you to be flawless. It's like the painting is judging you."

Semiotic Analysis

Centrally positioned, its tail feathers provide a point of maximum salience. High visual modality (a sign of importance) is produced by the use of symmetrical composition and intense colour. Students interpreted the peacock not merely as a source of imperial power, but also of social demand and vigilance. The mythic sign by Barthes (1977) is useful again. In this case the peacock becomes not a literal animal, but a metaphor of the performative identity- to be seen becomes a burden, and this motif resonates throughout student introspection. The liberal form adopted by Castiglione also aided in the conversation of cultural mixing. A combination of Chinese symbolism and Western techniques of perspective allowed students to understand intercultural semiotics of visual tradition.

3. Old Trees, Level Distance – Nature, Solitude, And Philosophical Reflection

This landscape in the style of the Song Dynasty, a combination of pine trees and hazy mountains, was intended to introduce students to both Daoist and Confucian aesthetics of harmony, stillness, and reflection as presented in figure 4;

Figure 4: Old Trees, Level Distance.
Source: (Ipaintings.com, 2017).

5.3. Student Interpretations

P3 (Chinese background):

"The tree is old but still standing; it reminds me of my grandfather. There is something peaceful but lonely about it."

P2:

"I felt like the tree was me; quiet, trying to stay rooted while everything else moves around."

Semiotic Analysis

Students read the pine tree as a symbol of survival and isolation, which they could relate to the Chinese philosophy of traditional Chinese philosophy. Hoang (2021) notes that in this instance, the ideational meta function is evident, with the landscape conveying a worldview based on balance, age, and wisdom. Students, notably, superimposed their own meaning onto the tree; semiotic reflexing, where nature is turned to metaphor in the representation of emotional conditions. This corresponds with the idea of interpersonal meaning, by which audiences would negotiate meaning according to identity and context. The lack of human elements in the art work contributes to the contemplative space created, which promotes introspection. Students employed landscape as a means to reflect on self, time, and transition.

6. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF STUDENT LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

According to the interview data of five participants, four significant themes were revealed that explain the impact of the multimodal and semiotic approach to teaching and learning with students.

Theme 1: Initiation into Symbolic Literacy by way of Cultural Art

At the start of the unit, students had little experience with the concept of symbolic meaning in art. At the end, they were capable of reading motifs, colour, composition, and inscriptions as culturally charged signs.

"P3: Initially, I saw crane, and I thought, it was just a bird. Now I think of it as time, or being wise, or the soul of someone."

"P4: When I learned what red and white meant in Chinese art, the paintings came back to me. As, those colours, are not just beautiful; they have messages."

This thematic transformation toward aesthetic appreciation and symbolic interpretation demonstrates that students acquired what Kress (2009) refers to as semiotic awareness; awareness that everything that one sees is a decision taken to make meaning.

Theme 2: Multimodal Learning deepens access and richness of interpretation

The multimodal techniques enabled students to engage in the artworks in a multifaceted way: visual assessment, poetic reading, video commentaries, and digital annotations.

"P1: Now using ThingLink meant clicking on elements of the painting and writing comments, I was able to relate tiny details to large concepts."

"P5: We listened to an audio of a Chinese artist speaking about her lotus painting. It made me reach out. It was no longer a visual alone."

Such learning experiences resonate with

Multimodal Learning Theory (Lu, 2023), which reveals that various types of input can facilitate deeper learning. Image annotation helped visual learners; verbal learners benefitted through poetic analysis; and auditory through spoken reflections. Multimodality facilitated inclusion and promoted critical monitoring, taking students beyond superficial answers.

Theme 3: Imaginative Reenactment and Identity Expression in Symbolic Forms

Gongbi symbols were adopted by many students to form their own narratives, which could be their experiences, feelings, or social identities.

"P2: In one of my digital collages, I folded the tail of the peacock as though it no longer wished to flaunt. I believe this is how I feel sometimes."

"P4: In my digital painting, I placed a flower with a moon behind it, to illustrate loss. It was not in the original painting, but it was right."

These reactions demonstrate how students become semiotic designers (Kress, 2009), recontextualising old imagery in new and personal forms. Their work corresponded to symbolic remixing, where fixed codes are turned into practical means of expression. Instead of receiving cultural knowledge in a passive manner, students both interpreted and re-authored it, linking tradition up to lived experience.

Theme 4: Reflective and Social Interpretation of Digital Platforms in Collaborations

Learners accessed Padlet, Canva, and Google Slides to share interpretations, peer-review, and to build meaning together. These platforms facilitated intersemiotic cooperation, enabling visual and textual thoughts to intersect.

P1:

"When I saw someone interpret the pine tree as a symbol of growth, I hadn't thought about that. I commented back and we both added new meanings."

P3:

"Posting online helped me compare ideas. Seeing others say something different didn't make me wrong; it added to my understanding."

These perspectives highlight that social semiotics shows how meaning is made through conversation. Now, digital platforms support students by allowing them to share ideas, get reviews from others and bring photo and text elements together. Students uncovered that reading artwork is unique to each person and the tradition of Gongbi painting lets it be understood in a wide range of ways.

7. CONCLUSION

This chapter emphasises semiotic theory and multimodal techniques as desirable approaches to teaching Gongbi painting. They were shown to reason how texts and images contain truth about culture and ideology. The possibilities such as digital notes and audio commentaries allowed students to study according to their own requirements. Gongbi symbols were their means of sharing personal thoughts and identities with the artwork. Through cooperative online systems, learners would participate in the exchange of ideas and develop knowledge collectively. On the whole, this method enabled the students to answer Gongbi not merely by beholding it but with their minds and souls, a significant modification of which is still crucial in teaching conventional art today.

8. DISCUSSION

The greatest finding of the analysis was that the students could recognise both images and inscriptions in Gongbi paintings as culturally important signs. This fits the aims of social semiotics, which state the importance of meaning being socially and culturally formed in visual and linguistic means (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2022). By being exposed to classical motifs, e.g. peonies, cranes, or pine tree; the students learned to move beyond the superficial appreciation of these motifs to the ability to recognise how symbolic decisions convey ideologies and cultural values. Students reflected on what Kress (2009) refers to as semiotic awareness, as witnessed in P3 in his reflection on the crane as a symbol of wisdom and spirit and P4 in his interaction with the role of colour as a symbol in red and white. These results are also conducive to the previous studies by Qi et al. (2023), and Luo et al. (2025), who indicated that Gongbi art facilitates the encoding of Confucian and Daoist ideologies. The work also confirms the argument that someone who paints and poems in Chinese tradition are parallel systems of making meanings that students have started decoding using this codex approach.

The other important observation is that multimodal teaching practises like digital annotation and listening to comments by artists, as well as remixing visuals, improved students' interpretive richness and engagement. The experience of P1, connecting image areas with meaning though ThingLink, and P5, being moved by sounding out by the voice of an artist, depict the cognitive differences that multimodal platforms encourage. According to Lu (2023), these results are consistent with the Multimodal Learning Theory which suggests that using both visual, auditory and textual

representational forms improves critical thinking and recall. As summarised by Schnone et al. (2021) and Feng (2023), these strategies help students learn actively as opposed to passively. Chen's (2018) prediction was supported when it was found that multimodal elements catered to and improved each type of learning preference. Students, therefore, grasped both the practical skills in Gongbi and its rich symbolism and history.

The study finds that digital collaboration platforms allowed students to work together, adding new meaning to Gongbi art as they interpreted it. Thanks to Padlet and Google Slides, students expressed their own viewpoints and engaged with various interpretations from others which helped them gain new perspectives. It confirms the view from Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) that understanding depends on dialogue and culture. Like Zhao (2020) claims, web platforms encourage people to embrace both cultural and intersemiotic diversity. Both Rosyid et al. (2025) and Kachak et al. (2023) agree that digital storytelling and picture-based discussion have the ability to improve education. It adds insight to how platforms like these enable students to co-create interpretations of cultural messages instead of simply receiving them.

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study illustrates that a multimodal and semiotic instructional approach can help pupils better engage with the diverse cultural symbols and vocabulary found in Gongbi painting. The qualitative review of participant interviews and classroom approaches revealed that students improved their ability to read symbols, interpret them and understand cultural aspects significantly. Students showed progress in analysing images and writing, starting with liking how things appear and developing cultural awareness. The use of platforms such as ThingLink, Padlet and Google Slides made it easier for students to learn in different ways and work together while developing personal, emotional and symbolic links to the artworks. The conclusion suggests a high level of consistency with the theoretical models behind the research. Using social semiotics, it is explored that how the students interpreted Gongbi's symbolic art, while Multimodal Learning Theory reminded me that mixing various sensory modes in the process helped the students understand better. Through the teacher model, learners learned how to express themselves within the format and communicate with students from other cultures, especially if they were not familiar

with it at first. The research reaffirms that working with digital tools and symbolic analysis is beneficial in visual arts courses, mainly for heritage-associated art forms. When interpretation was included in making and studying art, students took part in making the work meaningful. Through these actions, they explored the parts of identity, empathy and creativity that come from their own lives and cultures. In general, this study suggests that using various communication strategies in art lessons can improve traditional art education by making it more inclusive, reflective and culturally aware. It explains how to incorporate technology, symbolism and culture into art lessons, combining old and new educational approaches.

9.1. Recommendations

Teach Symbolic Literacy in Art Classes: Art educators must explicitly explain that many symbols can be found in art movements such as Gongbi so that students understand more about the culture.

Access Multimodal Education Platforms: ThingLink, Padlet and Canva may allow students to utilise images to create different storeys and transform data into meaning in a variety of ways.

Promote Creative Reinterpretation: With the help of online assignments, teachers may encourage students to create their own versions of renowned symbols, which assists in self-expression and mutual understanding of the cultures of others.

Encourage Peer Learning and Feedback: Provide students with a chance to cooperate and communicate about the topic with the help of digital resources during feedback sessions and online forums.

Support Teacher Training in Semiotics and Technology: Teachers have to be taught to apply semiotics and multimodal approach in order to be able to teach students how to analyse photographs and texts.

9.2. Limitations

The study was based on a small population of five respondents in a single high school, which is difficult to generalise. It was constructed on the premises of data that students presented in an interview, and therefore problems with personal bias and memory issues would be influencing the evidence. Besides, the discussion was probably too narrow since it concentrated on only three Gongbi paintings. Increased number of participants, extended periods of observation and expansion of the variety of artworks would make the teaching model stronger and versatile.

9.3. Future Research Directions

Future research might develop this research by investigating other multimodal-semiotic strategies across other cultural or educational settings, such as primary school or college. The comparison between Gongbi and other classic artistic composition like the Japanese ukiyo-e or Indian miniature painting can provide some information about cross-cultural teaching with symbolism. Also, longitudinal research might examine the effectiveness of multimodal semiotic teaching on the artistic growth, intercultural competence and critical thinking skills of students across the arts and humanities.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

(Final – Verbatim Quotes from Chapter Four Only)

This transcript contains only the exact participant responses that appear verbatim in Chapter Four: Data Analysis. Each quote is presented under the interview question it answered and is attributed to the corresponding participant pseudonym (P1–P5).

Participant 1 (P1)

Q1: What do you think the flower in the woman's hair symbolises in the painting?

"The peony in her hair felt like a symbol; it shows she is elegant, but also that she has value in society. Not just beauty, but something deeper."

Q5: How did tools like ThingLink, Padlet, or Canva help you understand the painting?

"When we used ThingLink to click on parts of the painting and add comments, I could connect small details to bigger ideas."

Q9: Has your way of understanding art changed after studying Gongbi painting?

"When I saw someone interpret the pine tree as a symbol of growth, I hadn't thought about that. I commented back and we both added new meanings."

Participant 2 (P2)

Q2: What did the peacock in the painting represent to you emotionally or symbolically?

"The peacock is showing off. It feels royal, but also like it's under pressure — to be perfect all the time."

Q3: What meaning did you find in the tree and the landscape?

"I felt like the tree was me; quiet, trying to stay rooted while everything else moves around."

Q7: Did you express anything personal in your creative response?

"I made a digital collage where the peacock's tail was folded, like it didn't want to show off anymore. I think that's how I feel sometimes."

Participant 3 (P3)

Q3: What meaning did you find in the tree and the landscape?

"The tree is old but still standing; it reminds me of my grandfather. There is something peaceful but lonely about it."

Q8: How did learning about Chinese symbols change how you see the paintings?

"At first, I saw a crane and thought, 'just a bird.' Now I see it as something about time, or being wise, or even someone's spirit."

Q9: Has your way of understanding art changed after studying Gongbi painting?

"Posting online helped me compare ideas. Seeing others say something different didn't make me wrong; it added to my understanding."

Participant 4 (P4)

Q1: What do you think the flower in the woman's hair symbolises in the painting?

"I thought it was decorative, but learning about flower meanings helped. She's not passive — she's saying something without speaking."

Q7: Did you express anything personal in your creative response?

"I added a moon behind the flower in my digital painting, to show loss. It wasn't in the original painting, but it felt right."

Q8: How did learning about Chinese symbols change how you see the paintings?

"Learning what red and white meant in Chinese art made me rethink the paintings. Like, those colours aren't just for beauty; they carry messages."

Participant 5 (P5)

Q2: What did the peacock in the painting represent to you emotionally or symbolically?

"Those feathers look like eyes. It made me think of how people watch you, expecting you to be flawless. It's like the painting is judging you."

Q4: Did any poems or inscriptions help you understand the painting more deeply?

"The writing wasn't just a label—it felt like a part of the painting's meaning. Like, the artist was telling a story through both brush and words."

Q5: How did tools like ThingLink, Padlet, or Canva help you understand the painting?

"We listened to an audio clip of a Chinese artist describing her lotus painting. It helped me connect emotionally. It wasn't just a visual anymore."