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Learning Calligraphy Through Nusantara Visual Culture: A Comparative Study of Creative Processes and Visual Identity Formation in Visual Communication Design Students

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examined how two Calligraphy Branding student projects translated contrasting Nusantara cultural references into contemporary calligraphic identity systems.
Methods: A qualitative comparative case study analyzed documented visual artifacts from Group 2, which used the Yogyakarta Monument, and Group 5, which used Betawi kembang goyang. Cultural reference boards, conceptual maps, sketches, digital alternatives, selected marks, and branding mock-ups were examined through descriptive visual, semiotic, and cross-case analysis.
Findings: Both projects moved from cultural selection to formal abstraction, calligraphic exploration, and branded application, but followed different compositional strategies. Group 2 fused Arabic lettering with a vertical architectural silhouette, whereas Group 5 incorporated Diwani-inspired curves into a six-petal radial emblem. The documented systems maintained recognizable formal and chromatic cues across their proposed media.
Implications: Artifact-based comparison clarifies how culturally anchored design assignments can organize visual experimentation and identity construction; it does not establish individual learning gains, consumer response, or commercial effectiveness.
Originality: The study identifies two contrasting translation strategies and offers an evidence-bounded analytical sequence linking cultural references to calligraphic branding outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

Calligraphy in visual communication design education involves more than the technical reproduction of letterforms. Students must negotiate the formal properties of writing, the cultural associations of signs, and the communicative needs of designed artifacts. This relationship becomes especially consequential when the point of departure is a culturally specific object rather than an established commercial brief. Studies of culturally responsive design education argue that students' histories and locally situated knowledge can be treated as resources for graphic inquiry instead of supplementary decoration (St John & Suhendra, 2024; Mensah Bonsu et al., 2025; Garcia-Lazo et al., 2024; Williams et al., 2026). Research on design pedagogy also associates generative creative work with structured opportunities for dialogue, experimentation, and critical reflection (Chen, 2024; McInerney, 2023; Meyer & Norman, 2020; Sutianah & Sobandi, 2022; Ifrianti et al., 2025). The issue addressed here is therefore not whether heritage motifs appear in the final image, but how their features are selected and transformed into a usable calligraphic identity.

Arabic calligraphy has particular analytical relevance because the same stroke may simultaneously perform a linguistic, ornamental, and spatial function. Research into Arabic type design documents tensions between traditional script conventions and the demands of contemporary typographic production (Abu Hasna, 2021; Yazıcıgil & Izadpanah, 2026; Abdulmajid & Alamhouj, 2025). In Indonesian architectural settings, calligraphic decoration also reveals the close relationship between script, placement, and cultural interpretation (Dariyadi et al., 2025). Work with Arabic heritage-language learners suggests that creating text-based art can connect language, identity, and expressive exploration, although those learners and outcomes differ from the design projects examined here (Khaled & Anderson, 2024). The challenge for calligraphy branding is to integrate letter structure with a referent's visual character without

treating the resulting inscription as a merely ornamental contour. Such a distinction matters when visual expressiveness and textual legibility may not be equally apparent to viewers.

The empirical material comes from the Calligraphy Branding course in the Visual Communication Design program at Universitas Paramadina. Group 2 selected the Yogyakarta Monument, also known as Tugu Pal Putih, while Group 5 selected Betawi kembang goyang, a flower-shaped traditional confectionery. The first referent is marked by a tapering vertical outline, segmented architecture, and a stepped base; the second by repeated petal forms arranged around a center. As objects, they differ in scale, function, materiality, and cultural setting, yet both provide recognizable formal features for graphic abstraction. Heritage-branding literature suggests that the communicative value of such references depends on how their distinctive characteristics are reorganized for a contemporary purpose (Taha & Abdelfattah, 2023; Mumtaza et al., 2026). This contrast creates an opportunity to compare cultural translation within a shared educational assignment without assuming that either object dictates a single correct visual solution.

The documented learning context provides multiple types of intermediate design evidence rather than only finished logos. The two group portfolios include visual references, concept mapping, hand sketches, digital alternatives, selected identity elements, and application mock-ups. Studies of drawing and design ideation identify sketches as external representations that allow designers to revisit, modify, and compare emerging concepts (Novica et al., 2023; Härkki, 2023; Zhu et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). Iterative transformation research similarly shows why alternatives should be analyzed relationally rather than counted as evidence of creativity by themselves (Clancy et al., 2024; Abdullah et al., 2024). A systematic visuo-textual approach permits the simultaneous examination of drawn forms and accompanying project explanations, while preserving the distinction between observable records and unreported mental events (Brown & Collins, 2021). Consequently, a comparison of these two portfolios can reconstruct documented design pathways, but not directly measure changes in students' creative abilities.

Previous investigations approach cultural identity construction from several complementary directions. Research on visual identities derived from regional or indigenous references describes how symbols, color, typography, and social meanings may be coordinated into recognizable design systems (Wai & Sa-adchom, 2024; Masnuna & Firmansyah, 2026; Juniati et al., 2026). Studies of heritage packaging similarly consider the balance between historical references and contemporary formal treatment (Buschgens et al., 2025; Steila & Erlyana, 2026; Zhao et al., 2026). Indonesian projects have addressed landmark-based destination branding and culture-specific product imagery (Kristina et al., 2020; Setiawan & Khamadi, 2024). However, evidence about an identity's proposed internal coherence should not be confused with evidence that audiences recognize its cultural meanings or prefer the resulting brand. This study adopts the more restricted meaning of visual identity formation as the coordination of observable design components within the submitted projects.

Research on creative activity offers an additional, but distinct, interpretive lens. Wallas's preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification stages remain useful concepts, although contemporary work cautions against equating an artifact sequence with the actual chronology of internal thought (Simonton, 2026; Lee & Ostwald, 2024). Sawyer (2021) frames artistic creation as iterative and improvisational, and Botella et al. (2022) identify affective and process-specific dimensions that would require direct evidence to assess. Design education studies also differentiate idea production from the evaluation of creative outputs and the experiential processes underlying them (Zhu et al., 2026; Melker et al., 2025). At present, the two portfolios cannot establish precisely when incubation, insight, peer feedback, or individual decisions occurred. The more defensible research gap is the limited artifact-level comparison of how contrasting cultural geometries become successive visual decisions and coordinated branding applications under a shared calligraphy assignment.

Against this background, the study examines three questions: how are the creative processes represented in the two documented student projects; how are culturally associated forms, colors, and meanings translated into calligraphic marks; and how does visual coherence appear across branding applications? It employs a qualitative comparative case-study design with the group project, rather than the individual student, as the analytic unit. The article brings together a representational reading of cultural signs, a cautious creative-process perspective, and the denotation–connotation distinction associated with Barthesian semiotics. Its main contribution is a comparison between vertical-architectural fusion and radial-organic integration as two visible strategies of cultural translation. It also offers a five-part analytical synthesis that links cultural anchoring, formal selection, calligraphic exploration, identity stabilization, and application

across media. These are interpretive descriptions grounded in the surviving artifacts, not claims about universal design stages, classroom effectiveness, or audience reception.

METHOD

Research Design and Study Setting

The research used a qualitative comparative case-study design based on documentary and artifact analysis. Both cases came from the Calligraphy Branding course in the Visual Communication Design program at Universitas Paramadina, Jakarta, Indonesia. The design was appropriate to the objective of examining observable relationships among cultural references, exploratory drawings, finalized marks, and illustrated branding applications. It was not structured to test instructional effectiveness, measure individual achievement, or establish causal relationships. The comparison therefore concerns documented group-level project sequences and design outputs rather than psychological or performance changes in individual learners (Brown & Collins, 2021).

Cases, Sampling, and Data Sources

Two group projects were purposively selected for their contrasting cultural anchors and the availability of multiple development artifacts. Group 2, with four credited members, used the Yogyakarta Monument; Group 5, with five credited members, used Betawi kembang goyang. The group project was the unit of analysis, while individual students were not treated as interview or survey respondents. Data comprised the documented cultural references and explanatory texts, conceptual maps, manual sketches, digital design alternatives, selected graphic systems, and proposed applications to branded media. The comparison was intended to generate analytically informative contrasts rather than statistical representation of all course participants.

Analytical Instrument and Procedure

The authors organized the available materials using a structured six-category analysis matrix: cultural reference, concept development and mapping, manual sketching, digitalization and alternatives, final identity elements, and branded-media application. Within each case, observable formal features were traced from the chosen cultural object into preliminary marks and then into the selected identity. Images were examined alongside the corresponding project descriptions of form, color, and proposed symbolic meaning. The analysis distinguished denotative description, such as a pointed architectural profile or a six-petal arrangement, from connotative associations stated in the portfolios. No psychometric scale, test, questionnaire, or statistical reliability measure was involved, since the matrix functioned as an interpretive aid rather than a measurement instrument. Figure 1 summarizes the documented analytical workflow used to compare the two sets of project artifacts.



Figure 1. Analytical workflow for the documentary comparison of the two calligraphy-branding projects (Source: Authors' synthesis of the stated analysis procedure).

The workflow begins with the two group-level project records rather than with individual learner responses. The collected materials were organized by the six documented categories of visual evidence. Within-case examination traced recurring formal features across reference images, sketches, finalized marks, and applications. Cross-case interpretation then compared the different translation strategies without assigning unreported durations to design activities. The diagram represents the analysis undertaken for this article and does not purport to reconstruct a complete timetable of classroom events.

Cross-Case Interpretation and Trustworthiness

The authors compared the cases using descriptive visual analysis, semiotic interpretation, and a cross-case matrix. They first reconstructed an evidence chain for each project, then compared source geometry, calligraphic integration, chromatic choices, identity components, and media applications. Interpretations were checked against available sketches, digital boards, final visual outputs, and related written explanations within each case. When a proposed meaning was stated only by the student designers, it was identified as a project interpretation rather than attributed to viewers in general. No independent interviews, classroom observations, audience experiments, or consumer surveys

formed part of the corpus; correspondingly, the analysis makes no claim to coder-agreement statistics or measured educational or market outcomes.

RESULTS

Cultural Exploration and Selection of Formal References

The two projects began with recognizable but materially different cultural references. Group 2 located the Yogyakarta Monument within the city's historical and symbolic landscape and cataloged its stepped base, narrowing central mass, pointed apex, and distinctive architectural symmetry. Its project board associated the source object with the keywords luxury, nobility, cleanliness, harmony, sharpness, and balance. Group 5 first situated Betawi kembang goyang among other regional cultural forms, then focused on its flower-like appearance and its repeated radial components. Its selected keywords were flower, rotation, and beauty, reflecting the snack's form and production association. These documented explorations support comparison of two formal starting points, axial monumentality and radial repetition, without implying that either source was represented exhaustively. The source features that guided subsequent abstraction are presented schematically in Figure 2, using only descriptions already provided in the group documentation.

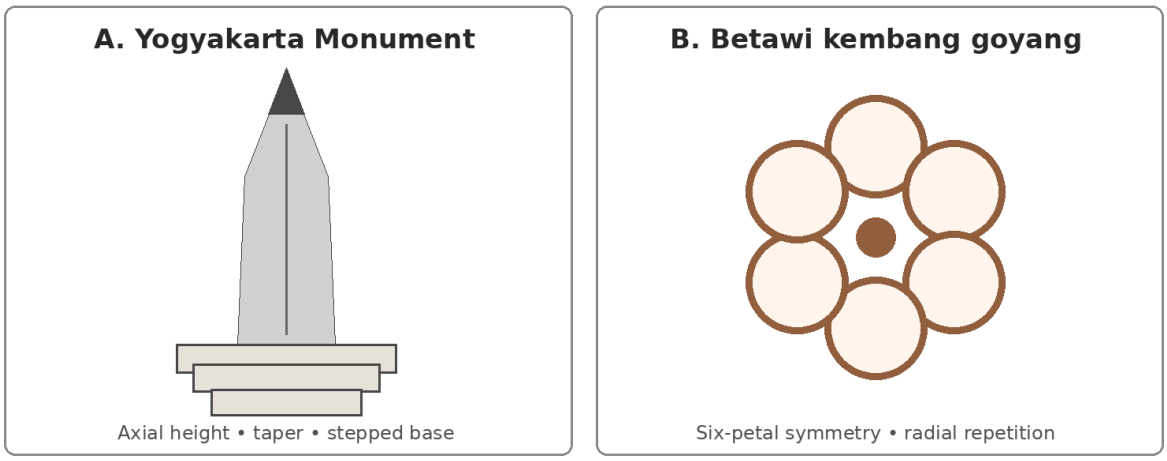


Figure 2. Schematic summary of the described cultural-reference geometries: Yogyakarta Monument and Betawi kembang goyang (Source: Authors' visual summary of student project descriptions; not original source photographs).

The monument schematic emphasizes a tall axis, a tapering upper form, and a stepped base. The confectionery schematic emphasizes repeated petal units arranged around a central point. These features summarize the documented characteristics that informed the projects rather than reproduce historical or photographic source images. The comparison shows why a vertical composition and a radial composition emerged as different constraints for later calligraphic work. The two schematic drawings should therefore be read as an analytic aid, not as independent ethnographic evidence.

The Yogyakarta team linked its form study to the Arabic phrase Ath-Thabātu wan-Numū, explained in the design materials as "Steadfastness and Growth." The Betawi team articulated its design aspiration through the statement "Mekar bersama tradisi, lestari bersama budaya" ("Blossom with tradition, endure through culture"). In both instances, cultural meanings were selectively attached to features judged useful for visual construction. The stated meanings provide evidence of the students' conceptual intentions, not an independent measure of cultural interpretation among viewers. The distinction matters because the subsequent identity systems are built from formal translations of selected characteristics rather than from complete representations of the two source objects.

Sketching, Digitalization, and Calligraphic Transformation

The strongest evidence of design development comes from the intermediate sketches and digital alternatives. Group 2 documented five manually drawn options and five digital logo alternatives, each varying the density of lettering, ornament, structural segmentation, or pedestal treatment. Across these alternatives, the tapering central structure and

stepped lower profile remained identifiable. Group 5 presented five preliminary sketches whose flower configurations differed in curvature, stroke density, negative space, and the integration of letter-shaped elements. Its digital board documented Adobe Illustrator, customized Calligraphic Brush variants, and Khat Diwani as the stated calligraphic approach. These artifacts reveal multiple representational options, although they do not disclose the precise order of all decisions or the reasons each option was accepted or rejected. Figure 3 juxtaposes the retained sketches and documented digital alternatives from the two projects.

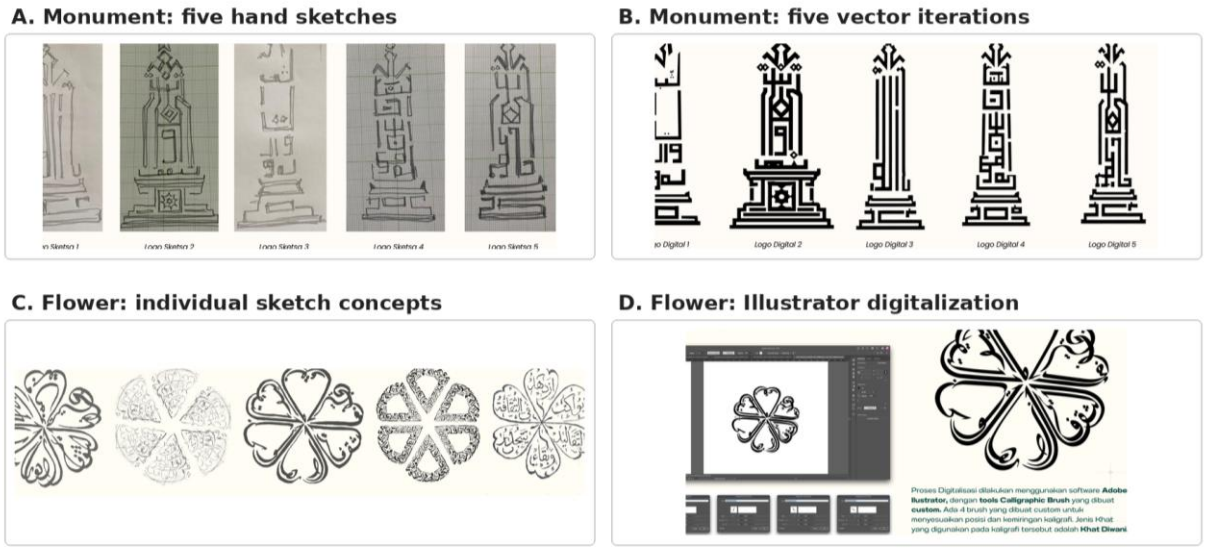


Figure 3. Selected preliminary sketches and digital alternatives for monument-based and flower-derived calligraphy (Source: Student project visual boards, Universitas Paramadina).

The monument alternatives retained an architectural vertical structure while changing lettering arrangements and ornamental complexity. The flower alternatives explored differences among looped petals, internal strokes, and radial balance. The Illustrator panel makes the transition to vector-based refinement visible for the kembang goyang case. Taken together, these materials show experimentation at the level of visible form and design alternatives. They do not establish individual authorship of every revision, the duration of each stage, or a complete psychological chronology. Across both cases, sketching provided opportunities to render alternative arrangements, while digitalization stabilized forms for repeated use. The formal logic of Group 2 may be described as vertical-architectural fusion because letter-shaped strokes were incorporated into the monument's silhouette. Group 5 followed radial-organic integration, bringing curved Diwani-inspired ornament into the six-petal configuration. These labels are interpretive descriptions of the completed project sequences, not categories that the students were documented as using themselves. The visual evidence supports a distinction between the two strategies more strongly than it supports any claim about comparative creativity or skill improvement.

Visual Identity Elements and Cultural Interpretation

The final identity systems differed in visual hierarchy, palette, and naming strategy. Group 2 selected a vertically arranged calligraphic monument emblem with a narrow center, defined upper termination, layered pedestal, and repeatable supporting ornament. The reported palette used muted beige (#B8A687) with dark brown-black (#1A1712), rather than literally repeating the monument's white-gold exterior. Group 5 selected a six-petal logogram supported by a bold "Kembang Goyang" logotype and the regional tagline "Ciri Khas-nye Betawi." Its palette paired Deep Forest Teal (#004740) with Terracotta (#D84E00), and the designers associated these colors with heritage and the confectionery's appearance. In both cases, the chromatic and symbolic explanations are documentary accounts of design intentions and were not independently validated through audience research. The finalized identity marks are compared in Figure 4 to show their distinct compositional hierarchies.



Figure 4. Final monument-derived calligraphic mark and selected Kembang Goyang visual identity (Source: Student project design works, Universitas Paramadina).

The monument mark integrates the calligraphic structure into a tall graphic emblem. The kembang goyang identity sets a radial symbol above a separate typographic name and regional tagline. Their composition reveals different relationships between icon, writing, and the verbal identification of the referent. At a denotative level, the visual structures recall the source geometry, while their proposed connotations depend on the accompanying cultural explanations. Neither image alone can confirm whether an unfamiliar viewer recognizes the intended landmark, snack, or Arabic text. Table 1 brings together the observed differences in cultural references, creative records, selected components, and applications across the two cases.

Table 1. Cross-Case Matrix of Cultural Translation and Visual Identity Construction

Analytical dimension	Group 2: Yogyakarta Monument	Group 5: Kembang Goyang
Cultural anchor	Architectural landmark	Betawi culinary heritage
Dominant source geometry	Tapering vertical axis and stepped base	Six-petal radial symmetry and repetition
Calligraphic translation	Letter-shaped strokes within monument silhouette	Curvilinear, Diwani-inspired strokes within petals
Documented exploration	Five manual sketches; five digital alternatives	Five member sketches; Illustrator brush development
Stated symbolic associations	Steadfastness, growth, harmony, balance	Flourishing tradition, community, beauty, local pride
Primary colors	Beige #B8A687; dark #1A1712	Deep Forest Teal #004740; Terracotta #D84E00
Identity system	Calligraphic emblem and repeatable ornamental motif	Logogram, product logotype, regional tagline
Illustrated media	Bakpia packaging, bags, drinkware, clothing, keychains	Snack packages, jars, retail mock-ups, uniforms, bags, keychains
Interpretive strategy	Vertical-architectural fusion	Radial-organic integration

The matrix shows that the projects began from two different types of cultural objects and arrived at different compositional solutions. Both retained recognizable features of their references during calligraphic abstraction. The Yogyakarta identity relied on a primarily integrated monument-shaped emblem, whereas the Betawi identity combined a separate product name and tagline with the radial mark. The recorded design alternatives support comparisons of visual decisions, but not measured differences in students' creativity. Across the applications, coherence refers to repeated identity cues rather than verified public recognition or brand effectiveness.

Application of the Visual Systems in Branded Media

The proposed applications were important because they showed how each visual identity was adapted to surfaces beyond a presentation board. Group 2 placed its emblem and ornamental derivatives on bakpia packaging, bags, a tumbler, a mug, clothing, an apron, and an acrylic keychain. Dark lettering and subdued substrate colors were repeatedly used to connect these illustrated items. Group 5 coordinated its floral emblem, product naming, tagline, and teal-terracotta palette across snack boxes, jars, retail visualization, uniforms, shopping bags, and accessories. The applications demonstrate intended graphic transferability across differing shapes and formats, but the documentation does not establish manufacturing quality, purchase behavior, or consumer comprehension. Figure 5 presents a selection of packaging and merchandise mock-ups showing how the final identities were extended into different media.

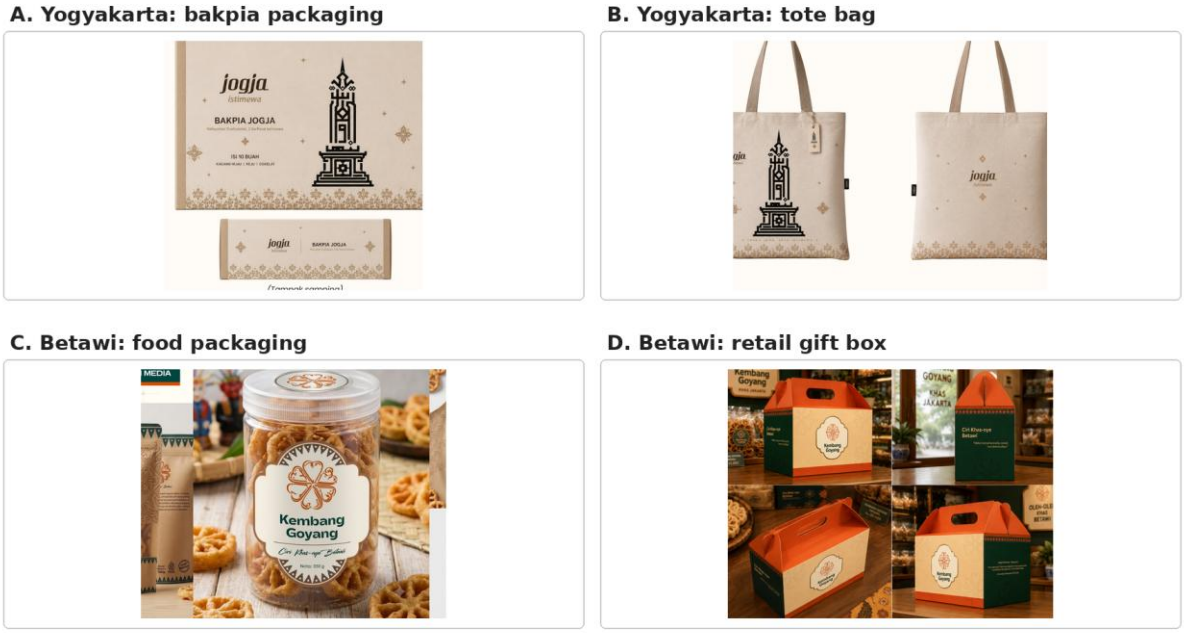


Figure 5. Selected branded applications from the monument and kembang goyang cases (Source: Student project mock-ups, Universitas Paramadina).

The Yogyakarta case applies a tall emblem to rectangular packaging and a tote bag. The Betawi case places its rounded symbol and product typography on a jar and on gift-box packaging. These examples show that the core motifs were retained across media of different proportions. The visual variations also reveal how size, background, and product context may change the prominence of script and symbol. As documented mock-ups, they provide evidence of proposed design consistency rather than observation of real retail performance.

The architectural emblem appeared particularly suited to vertical placement on clothing and drinkware, while its intricate internal strokes might become less legible at very small sizes. The kembang goyang symbol offered a compact floral configuration, but its relationship to a specific food product was clarified by the accompanying name and tagline. These observations follow from visible geometry and placement; actual legibility or recognition would require audience testing. In the documented works, repeated palette choices, motifs, and typographic treatments provided the available indicators of coherence. The comparison therefore treats branding as a proposed visual communication system, not as a measured market intervention.

Cross-Case Synthesis

The two case sequences support a five-part analytical synthesis: cultural anchoring, formal-attribute selection, calligraphic exploration, identity-system stabilization, and application across media. The first stage identifies an object and its cultural associations; the second selects proportions or motifs suitable for visual abstraction. The third involves manually sketched alternatives and digital refinement, followed by the fourth stage in which a symbol is coordinated with color, typography, or ornament. The final stage traces how these components are reproduced or adapted across

illustrated products and settings. This synthesis describes relationships visible in the available evidence rather than a validated timeline or a model of individual student learning. Figure 6 displays the proposed synthesis and the specific cross-case patterns identified during comparison.

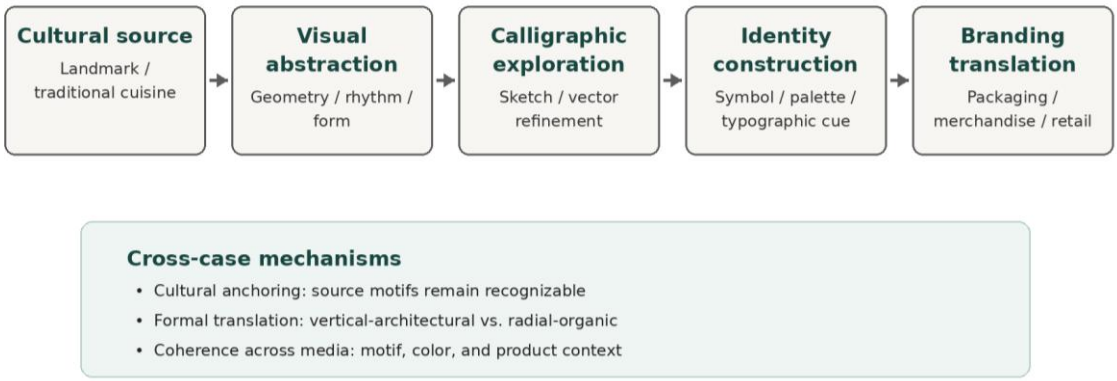


Figure 6. Interpretive model of cultural translation and visual identity formation in calligraphy-branding coursework (Source: Authors' cross-case synthesis; noncausal conceptual interpretation).

The model connects source selection to formal abstraction, calligraphic experimentation, identity organization, and branding application. Its structure captures a logical relationship among documented artifacts rather than a sequence whose timing was independently observed. The upper row provides the common analytical structure shared by the two portfolios. The accompanying notes distinguish cultural anchoring, different geometries of transformation, and recognizable formal cues across applications. The model should be tested with additional cases and process evidence before it is used as a general account of creative learning.

Discussion

The first comparative finding concerns the selective character of cultural interpretation. Both projects began with recognizable Nusantara references, yet the designers retained only those attributes that could be reorganized into a graphic system. This reading is consistent with accounts of culture-led design education in which identity becomes a resource for inquiry rather than a requirement to replicate inherited motifs (St John & Suhendra, 2024; Mensah Bonsu et al., 2025; Garcia-Lazo et al., 2024; Williams et al., 2026). The Yogyakarta group privileged the landmark's axial proportion and geometric stability, whereas the Betawi group privileged the snack's radial repetition and sense of movement. Comparable cultural design projects document similar movement between local referents and graphic simplification, though their objects, participants, and evaluative procedures differ (Wai & Sa-adchom, 2024; Masnuna & Firmansyah, 2026). The two cases consequently extend this literature by showing how the geometry of a chosen cultural object can become a distinctive formal constraint within one shared calligraphy assignment.

The relationship between source geometry and calligraphic form provides the most specific cross-case distinction. The monument identity fused Arabic-inspired lettering with a tapering architectural profile, while the kembang goyang identity combined curved strokes with sixfold floral symmetry. These strategies can be understood as two routes for integrating a written sign with an image-derived compositional structure. Scholarship on Arabic lettering emphasizes that script transformation involves more than surface ornament because stroke connection and spatial proportion are intertwined (Abu Hasna, 2021; Yazıcıgil & Izadpanah, 2026; Abdulmajid & Alamhouj, 2025). A study of calligraphy within Indonesian architecture likewise shows that inscription and surrounding geometry participate together in visual interpretation (Dariyadi et al., 2025). The portfolios illustrate this formal negotiation, although neither provides a specialist test of the linguistic accuracy or public legibility of the final letterforms. Claims about the successful communication of Arabic text must therefore remain separate from the observable achievement of graphic integration.

The intermediate artifacts also help clarify what can be inferred about creative processes from a design portfolio. Multiple sketches and digital alternatives make differences in proportion, stroke density, and arrangement visible, offering a basis for comparison that finished logos alone would not provide. Research on drawing, spatial reasoning, and iterative concept generation similarly treats external representations as resources for developing and examining alternatives (Novica et al., 2023; Clancy et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2024). Härkki (2023) further shows how collaborative

design can be analyzed through observed representational activity, although the present portfolios do not contain comparable observation records. In this study, the visual sequence supports a description of exploration and refinement but does not reveal how much time students spent, what feedback was exchanged, or how decisions were negotiated. The methodological value of the artifact approach lies in its traceable evidence chain, not in the assumption that every psychological event leaves a visible mark.

Creative-process theory provides a useful explanation only when its epistemic limits are respected. Reference gathering resembles what Wallas called preparation, and the refinement of selected designs offers an observable parallel to verification. Incubation and sudden illumination, however, are internal experiences that cannot be reconstructed reliably from the submitted boards, an issue also raised in contemporary discussion of stage theories (Simonton, 2026; Lee & Ostwald, 2024). Sawyer (2021) places greater emphasis on iterative and improvisational movement, while Botella et al. (2022) document emotional dimensions that would require additional forms of evidence. Research that assesses design creativity through comparative judgment also shows the distinction between evaluating visible outputs and investigating the processes that produced them (Zhu et al., 2026). The present comparison consequently supports a restrained process interpretation rather than a claim to have observed or measured every stage of learning.

The semiotic reading further distinguishes visible form from proposed cultural meaning. A stepped pedestal and pointed apex can be identified descriptively in the monument-derived emblem, just as six petal-like units can be identified in the food-derived identity. The corresponding meanings, such as steadfastness, growth, celebration, and cultural continuity, come from the documented concept narratives rather than from audiences. This distinction accords with studies that examine how heritage visual elements acquire meaning through their arrangement with other signs and explanatory contexts (Steila & Erlyana, 2026; Mumtaza et al., 2026; Moțăianu, 2023). Empirical branding research finds that typography, color, and packaging can play different roles in cultural cognition and preference, but those outcomes were directly measured in the referenced setting rather than in the present coursework (Zhao et al., 2026). Visual-symbol analysis and audience interpretation are thus related research problems, not interchangeable kinds of evidence.

The findings on identity-system coherence are similarly bounded but informative. Group 2 extended its monument emblem and ornamental cues across souvenir-oriented products, whereas Group 5 coordinated a six-petal mark with a separate name, vernacular tagline, and contrasting palette for confectionery packaging. Heritage packaging studies suggest that the balance between recognizable tradition and contemporary treatment may matter for design reception, but the relevant responses depend on context and audience (Buschgens et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2024; Chandra & Hasjim, 2026; Julier, 2026). Work on institutional cultural identity further illustrates how the same symbolic system may require coordination across logos, typography, and associated visual materials (Wai & Sa-adchom, 2024). Here, application mock-ups show stable identity cues, together with changes required by package shape and placement. They do not demonstrate that the marks would perform equally well across actual production methods or commercial settings. The educationally relevant observation is that students moved from a single emblem toward a more interconnected proposed identity system.

The study also contributes a cautious practical perspective on design pedagogy. The two portfolios can be used to discuss how source research, manual drawing, digital production, and contextual presentation relate within a culture-anchored assignment. Studies of idea-generation strategies and design support tools indicate that different media and representational processes may shape exploration, although their methods do not justify claims about improvement in these particular groups (Bayırlı & Börekçi, 2025; Melker et al., 2025; Sim & Jung, 2026; van Gameren et al., 2025). Research on creativity in design education also highlights uncertainty and the diversity of students' experiences, dimensions not recoverable from the available boards (McInerney, 2023; Fleischmann, 2025; Kerr & Kelly, 2025). The five-part model derived here may therefore serve as an organizing guide for portfolio discussion or future observation protocols. Its pedagogical usefulness remains a proposition based on the case interpretation rather than a tested instructional intervention. Additional process documentation and teacher reflection would be necessary to examine how learners themselves understood and navigated these decisions (Lousberg et al., 2020; Rutherford, 2020; Hay, 2024).

Finally, the comparative design and documentary corpus define the study's contribution and its limits. The shared coursework setting makes it possible to compare two different geometries of cultural translation without conflating the portfolios with independent instructional programs. The resulting vertical-architectural and radial-organic strategies

are analytically grounded in illustrated formal decisions, but their usefulness beyond these projects remains open. Unlike studies incorporating interviews, community participation, or audience evaluation, the present research does not provide evidence of authentic recognition, identity attachment, or changes in individual competence (Juniati et al., 2026; Khaled & Anderson, 2024; Zhao et al., 2026). A stronger extension would triangulate project documentation with process interviews, instructor observations, visual-legibility assessment, and reception studies while preserving attention to the cultural specificity of each object. Within the available evidence, the article offers a comparative account of how cultural references were reorganized into coherent proposed calligraphic identities, without treating interpretive plausibility as proof of learning or market effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative comparative study examined the documented transformation of Nusantara visual references into calligraphic branding systems in two Visual Communication Design student projects. Both cases showed a visible relationship among cultural inquiry, selection of defining forms, sketches, digital development, identity components, and branded applications. Their main contrast concerned the formal strategy of translation: Group 2 integrated calligraphic strokes into a vertical architectural silhouette derived from the Yogyakarta Monument, while Group 5 organized Diwani-inspired curves around the sixfold floral structure of Betawi kembang goyang. The resulting systems maintained recognizable visual elements across their illustrated packaging and merchandise, although they differed in naming, chromatic organization, and composition. These observations support a five-part comparative interpretation of cultural anchoring, abstraction, calligraphic exploration, identity stabilization, and media application. The interpretation refers to available group artifacts and does not measure individual creativity, the psychological stages of learning, public comprehension, or branding performance. Further research using observations, student reflections, and audience assessment could examine how the documented visual strategies operate as learning experiences and communicative identities beyond the two cases.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT
Ayoeningsih Dyah Woelandhary contributed to conceptualization, research design, supervision, and critical revision. Tasri Jatnika contributed to visual artifact collection, comparative analysis, interpretation, and manuscript preparation. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT
During manuscript preparation, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with academic language editing, structural organization, drafting, and proofreading. The authors remain responsible for reviewing the content and ensuring the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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