

VISUALIZATIONS OF *WAYANG* CHARACTERS IN COMICS (CASE STUDY: BIMA AND ARJUNA CHARACTERS IN THE ARTS OF ARDISOMA, TEGUH SANTOSA AND IS YUNIARTO)

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Abstract: Comic is a popular art with significant socio-cultural impact in Indonesia, through decades. One of the most prominent genres of Indonesian comic is *wayang* stories, based on the traditional arts of *wayang* which frequently retold Indian epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana. In accordance with the passing of time, visual styles of *wayang* comic also changed. Each comic artist of different generations exhibits different visual styles that also indicated their references and reinterpretations on *wayang*'s characterizations and storytelling. Using modified Art Critic methods, this paper will analyze and compare the visual styles of three comic artists which represent three generations, focusing on their visualization of Arjuna and Bima characters. The analysis results indicate that the visualization of *wayang* comic continues to develop in accordance with the readers, society in general.

Keywords: *Wayang, Comic Artist, Visual Style, Generation, Characterization*

1. INTRODUCTION

Comic as a form of popular art has significant impact on socio-cultural aspects around the world, including Indonesia. Its traits which combine pictures and text has become its unparalleled charisma, appealing to both children, teenagers even adults. Some of the comicbooks were considered equal to high literature, because of its critical capability toward modern society and embodied deep philosophical insights as well. For instance, there were 'Master Race', 'Maus' and others in USA, not to mention many more in Europe (Beatty 2012:101-128).

There are many genres of comics, such as adventure, comedy, romance, and others in Indonesia, but *wayang* stories become the prominent identity of Indonesian comic. This genre was one of few (history, folklore) that was propagated and most celebrated by the Old Order (*Orde Lama*) government as the part of nationalism propaganda which was being held dearly at the time, and continued till New Order (*Orde Baru*) regime (Ardaya, 2007).

Wayang comic was based on the traditional arts of *wayang* that has diversified in many forms such as classic literatures, shadowplay theatres, mask dances, and much more. The arts of *wayang* frequently recount Indian-origin epics such as Mahabharata and Ramayana that has already acculturated with local cultures, especially Javanese and Balinese. The stories of *wayang* with their Indian-origin characters are well-known to society, being integrated part of it, became the teaching media of ideal values, regarded as 'classical' art and claimed as national culture. Due to that reasons, the traditional arts of *wayang* has been acknowledged by UNESCO and rewarded as *Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible World of Humanity* in 2003 (Solichin, 2010: 13-24; Sudjarwo, 2010:8, 9, 15-19).

Hybridization between comic and *wayang* story took place, gave birth to *wayang* comic. Due the industrial support of distribution capability, comics as popular media have significant roles in introducing Indonesian heritages, *wayang* for example, to the younger generation whose resides in urban areas which has already unfamiliar with most of traditional arts. *Wayang* comics became significant and reliable, even being endorsed by government, due to the fact that their existence

were initial means for urban children (which have already unfamiliar) to get know and more acquainted the *Wayang* story (Soewirjo, 1997:20; Soewardikoen, 2015:42-44).

Indonesian comic itself began in the form of comicstrip entitled 'Put-On' in 1930's which was published periodically in Sin Po daily, and evolved into book form with more solid storyline since then. Along with the visual styles, the evolution of Indonesian (*wayang* especially) comics can be divided into several generations: (1) 1950's-1960's, with notable artists such as A. Ruhiyat, Ardisoma, R.A. Kosasih; (2) 1970's-1980's, with artists like Teguh Santosa, Jan Mintaraga, Hasmi, Wid N.S.; (3) 2000's generation, with artists Is Yuniarto, Sweta Kartika, and others (Ardaya, 2007).

The research questions here are: How did each comic artists of three generations visualize the story of *wayang*, especially the characters? What were the differences? How the differences could occur?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Scott McCloud stated the art of comic as 'sequential art', because of its narrative capability that emerged as the result of visual and text combination. Comic consists both visual and non visual aspects, and characters are the intersection between both aspects. Characters as the focal point are vital in comicbook. The story of comic can be established due the existence of characters. Mc Cloud said that imaginations and sterotype was used to make some successful characters. The goals of developing characters is to make them unique and important. A good characters must have these three components: 1) Inner life; 2) Distinctive looks; and 3) Expressive traits (McCloud, 2007:62-79).

As a traditional form of narration, the arts of *wayang* pretty much connected with roles and characterizations as well, similar to comics. *wayang* stories told us a lot about relations and struggle between many kinds of characters, as the representation of human life itself, described in Javanese sayings '*wayang* is the reflection of both soul and character of human life (*wewayanganing ngaurip*)'. 'Characters' here are consisting two aspects: both figure and personality (Sudjarwo, 2010:15).

By McCloud's definition, we found three kinds of characters in *wayang* story: Bima represented the strong and brutish like hero archetype; Arjuna represented the handsome and refine hero archetype. What we got here is, the comic artists developed the characters based on traditional narratives, but in order to make them successful and adorable, they also considered the readers' preferences that reside within society.

Arnold Hauser's theory of Sociology of Art become the basic assumption here. Hauser stated that the form of arts reflect the society and the spectators where the artist belongs. Comic as a kind of popular art definitely connected and entangled with its society, which is vulnerable to changes. In other words, the work of art such as comicbook, heavily related to the spatio-temporal contexts. Art is the reflection of society's values, ideology, *volksgeist* and *zeitgeist* (Koesoemadinata, 2013:64, 97).

3. THE RESEARCH METHODS

This paper is based on qualitative research, which is suitable to the study of art and culture, include comic art as well, since there are interpretations involved here. The objects of this research are *wayang* comicbooks, as artifacts. The aspect studied here is the visual style or the visualization of characters, brought from selected samples which represents the works of comic artists Ardisoma, Teguh Santosa and Is Yuniarto. These artists is selected due their popularity, each has his own visual style that represent their generation and era. Ardisoma represents 50-60's generation, Teguh Santosa represents 70-80's generation, and Is Yuniarto represents 2000's generation, the contemporary. The selected *wayang* comic characters that will be analyzed here are Arjuna and Bima, due their popularity and frequent appearances in *wayang* stories, also easy remembered in readers' mind.

The selected titles of their works are *Ulam Sari* by Ardisoma (1959, republished by Elex Media Komputindo in 2010), *Mahabharata* series (insert bonus of weekly children magazine Ananda in 1983) and *Dewa Ruci* (Balai Pustaka, 1985), and *Garudayana* by Is Yuniarto (published by M&C in 2006 and later CAB in 2014). The similarity among those titles because all are made in black and white, mostly referring to Javanese version of *wayang* characterizations, and definitely featuring the characters that will be analysed. Those comicbook artifacts are belong to authors' private collections.

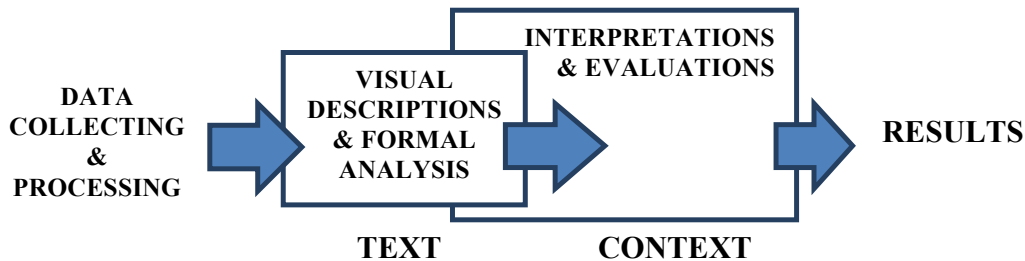


Figure 1 frame of analysis, modified from Feldman
Source: personal documentation

The analysis method used here are the modified and simplified version of Feldman's Art Critics. There are several steps: visual description, formal analysis, interpretation and evaluation. The description step is combined with formal analysis that is to describe and seek every visual elements differences and variations detected on the objects to be compared each others (Aditya, 2015). The visual analysis will be conducted upon the particular traits as the identity of a *wayang* character, includes: (1) the biological anatomy, whole and partial (physical, face, hair); and (2) the outfit (clothes and accessories) such as garbs, pants, headband, bracelets, weapons and others. These first two steps (visual analysis) focus on the visual aspect of artifacts (the text), or internal aspects.

Then the authors move to next level of analysis, the interpretation step. This step will be conducted upon the analysis results, which will be associated to the external aspects. The external aspects include socio-cultural context such as the traditional narratives of Javanese *wayang*, and the popular culture regarding the artists' background (50's vintage style, 70's, and Manga style).

The last step is evaluation, which the goal here is not to judge the excellence among the samples, but rather to understand why and how the visual differences occur among those artists' works. The analysis comes to a hypothesis that each artists give the characters treat that we could appreciate and understand through the time. Every generations of Indonesian *wayang* comic artists has their own styles which gave the new looks and features of the characters which represented the audiences.

Literature studies being conducted toward comic-related, popular culture-related and *wayang* arts-related literatures (as the external context). Interviews also being conducted toward the comic artists and art scholars that studied comics as their major field.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

These following paragraphs are the interpretations and evaluations of the visual analysis regarding three comic artists' visualisations of *wayang* characters: Bima and Arjuna (table 1 and 2).



4.1 Interpretations


Ardisoma depicted Bima (see table 1) in naturalistic manner yet simple with tall and large body, adopting Caucasian male ideal standard, possibly inspired by Superman (comic) or Tarzan (Hollywood movie, played by actor Johnny Weissmuller). He referred to both *wayang kulit* and *wayang golek* puppet's size, which Bima's puppet is usually large and distinguished than other characters. He visualised the 'catur poleng' garb used by Bima in simplistic manner, plain,

ordinary sarong-like. Teguh Santosa added beard, and ‘polished’ the thick eyebrows and mustache along with more details, especially in facial expressions. All aspects of the character are drawn in naturalistic way. The ‘catur poleng’ garb and other accessories were detail, filled with decorations.

Is Yuniarto retains unique yet traditional traits of Bima such as large and muscular body, thick mustache and beard, but depicted in Manga style. Clothes and accessories based loosely on *wayang wong* costumes and adopts some elements from *wayang kulit* with ‘catur poleng’ motive outfit and armed with Pancanaka talon while the long and loose hair style referring to Bratasena (Bima in his youth) puppet. The snake necklace, adopted from *wayang golek*, was shown here, which the pervious artists had never done before. But he added a wolf head shaped bangle as a new accessory. This accessory refers to the meaning of Bima’s other alias, ‘Werkodara’ which means ‘wolf’s belly’. Overall, Bima looks are more like a street brawler than a warrior instead.



Table 1 the visual analysis of Bima character

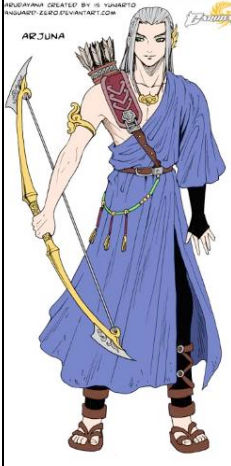
Character	Artist	Title/ Year	Visualization	Descriptions
Bima	Ardisoma	‘Ulamsari’ (1959, republished 2010)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naturalistic, normal male proportion. • Bima was drawn as a giant, two times normal human. • Strongmen archetype was used to show the strength and fearsomeness (in accordance with the narrative), with thick moustaches and facial hair. • Clothes and accessories are based on <i>wayang wong</i> costumes and adopted some elements (head accessory) from <i>wayang golek</i> • the Pancanaka Nail, made from bones and always stick in his thumbs
	Teguh Santosa	‘Mahabarata’ (1984)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bima was drawn huge, one and a half times normal human size, but still using normal proportion, in naturalistic manner • strongmen archetype was used to show strength and fearsomeness (according to the narrative), thick eyebrows, thick moustaches and beard, including hairy chest • Clothes and accessories are based on <i>wayang wong</i> costumes and adopted some elements from <i>wayang kulit</i>, especially the Cathur Poleng motives’ sarong being visualized clear and detail • the Pancanaka Nail, made from bones, always stick in his thumbs

	Is Yuniarto	'Garudayana' (2006)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bima was depicted huge and brutish, one and a half times normal human size, drawn in Manga proportion, • Strongmen archetype was used to show strength and fearsomeness along with thick moustaches and facial hair (in accordance with the narrative). Long and loose hair also being added • Clothes and accessories still based loosely on <i>wayang wong</i> costumes and adopts some elements from <i>wayang kulit</i> (<i>catur poleng</i> motive) or <i>wayang golek</i> (The snake necklace) • Some modern elements, (knot in his pants, hand band, foot wear) added. • the Pancanaka Nail, made of metal and popped from his thumbs
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Source: personal documentation

Table 2 the visual analysis of Arjuna character

Character	Artist	Title/ Year	Visualization	Descriptions
Arjuna	Ardisoma	'Ulamsari' (1959, (republished 2010)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple, naturalistic with normal male proportion • Caucasian male imageries inspired to show handsomeness (according the narrative), with thin moustaches • clothes and accessories are based on <i>wayang wong</i> costumes and adopted some elements (head accessory) as shown in <i>wayang golek</i> visualizations • bows and arrows were drawn inconsistent, they're shown depend on the story or scenes
	Teguh Santosa	'Mahabarata' (1984)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naturalistic, normal male proportion, • Contemporary male models imageries being used to shown the handsomeness (according to the narrative). Square chin, clean face, without any facial hairs. • Even in his handsomeness, Arjuna drawn with strong will expressions • The detail of the clothes and accessories are based from <i>wayang wong</i> costumes and adopted 'gelung' hairdo as shown in <i>wayang kulit</i> visualizations • mostly drawn with bow and arrows at any conditions in the stories

Is Yuniarto	'Garudayana' (2006)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • normal male proportion in manga style (slender) • Is adopted Asian male models' looks ('bishonen' archetype) to show the handsomeness (according to the narrative), clean and smoothly face with white long hair being added, so the outcomes make him rather beautiful instead • Long garb worn, less details compared to <i>wayang wong</i> or <i>wayang golek</i>. It was modified to be more simple • modern style accessories (armband, belt, black spandex, footwear) added • Always depicted with bow and arrows at any conditions
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Source: personal documentation

In naturalistic and simple manner, Ardisoma depicted Arjuna (see table 2) as subtle, handsome and flamboyant with thin moustache, which reminds us to 50's actor Clark Gable. The moustache indicated Arjuna in his mature years, fathered teenage children. The entire costume and accessories based on *wayang golek* puppet and *wayang wong* costume. Teguh Santosa also depicted Arjuna naturalistic. Arjuna being depicted clean shaved, wearing *gelung* hairdo (similar to *wayang kulit* puppet). Facial expressions strongly depicted here. Teguh referring to Ardisoma's, but also possibly influenced by James Bond depictizations in Hollywood movies. In his biography, it is mentioned that Teguh has affinity towards James Bond movies, and heavily inspired by them (Malik, 2016:16.). Clothes and accessories are based on *wayang wong* costumes and *wayang kulit* features. Although having differences in visualizing Arjuna, both Ardisoma and Teguh still referred to the traditional narrative firmly.

Is Yuniarto took further visualisations. Arjuna was depicted in Manga style, which commonly used nowadays, slender body, femininly handsome, long white haired without any head accessory beside the ear accessory (*sumping*). It reminds us to Legolas character of Lords of The Rings movie trilogy, also clearly referring to 'bishonen' (pretty boy) type of Japanese manga and animation. With frequent smiles all the time, this version of Arjuna shows 'narcissistic' tendencies. The garb he wore was simple, but clearly fits the narrative description. Is Yuniarto's version of Arjuna is the most distinctive than other versions and characters.

The ideal standard of handsome and flamboyant character type (Arjuna) differs from time to time, from generation to generation. For examples, the popular Hollywood actor Clark Gable as the model for 1950's (Soewardikoen, 2015:51-53), James Bond's features for the 70's and (perhaps) Asian boyband (equivalent to 'bishonen' type in Japanese Manga) looks for 2000's. Is Yuniarto's version of Arjuna is the most distinctive than other versions and compared to other characters alterations. But actually it really captured the essence of the traditional narrative that Arjuna oftenly played by female actress in *wayang wong* theatre in order to show his subtleness.

Visualization of strong and vigorous type (Bima like) relatively still the same; big, tall, muscular with mustache and beard, with other minor details that differs. The next generation tend to improve and enhance the details, whether being visualized in naturalistic manner or Manga style. Is' version retained some features that indicate strength and fearsomeness, but modified the outfit and made Bima as a martial arts fighter than a warrior instead. But Is visualized the snake necklace which was originated in *wayang golek* puppet, which has never done before by previous artists.

4.2 Evaluation

The 50's and 70's artists still referring directly to the primary sources, observing the traditional sources, such as watching directly the *wayang* puppet theatres, or referring the statements of the puppetry art practitioners, such as the puppeteers (*dalangs*), dancers and others. Even some artists intimately involved in traditional theatre, Teguh for example (Malik, 2016:13).

50's-60's generation references still limited due the anti-Western political conditions of Old Order, while 70's-80's generation gaining more references due the different political conditions of New Order which allowed Western popular cultures, and the 2000's generation which more richer in references due to era of globalization, free market economy that encourages the 'invasions' of foreign popular cultures. Not limited to Western cultures only, but also Asian (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Indian), and others.

It seems that 2000's generation has already 'broke up' with the primary sources and relies on secondary sources (the already existed *wayang* comics or contemporary *wayang* literatures), or the tertiary sources (television series of Indian versions of Ramayana and Mahabharata which were aired in local TV stations like TPI in 90's and Anteve lately). This generation has already heavily acquainted with literature and online references, audiovisual and multimedia. Costume's references heavily influenced by fantasy video games (RPG), Asian cultures (Japanese), American animation and comic.

Hasmi, a senior comic artist, the creator of famous superhero character Gundala, stated that the tendencies of 70's comic artists were to express their personal artistic views, which are accommodated by the publishers, along with economical motive. In character creation, usually the visualization followed the previous, the publisher's demand or based on fictional characters archetype (comics and movies) which was popular at that time. It is understandable considering most of senior comic artists gained their 'art' education through informal channels, like being an apprentice of famous artists, self-taught, or else. These efforts definitely influenced their level of visual understanding and artistic ideas, respectfully, they relied only on their technical skills, and work individually. This statement was confirmed by Toni Masdiono, a fellow comic artist, illustrator and also an art scholar (Interviews, STDI Bandung, June, 26th – 29th 2016).

But nowadays artists' individual expressions no longer served as the sole nor primary influence on the characterization. Contrary to their predecessors, most of 2000's comic artists obtained formal education (Is Yuniarto graduated from Visual Communication Design of Petra University in Surabaya). This academical background makes the artistic creation more methodical, focusing on the research as the base of creation. They conducted researches on the target audiences, including style preferences (or character visualisations), what strategy used to communicate narration, and others. So, the contemporary *wayang* comic has visual styles and narration that suits to the current readers' liking (Is Yuniarto, informal interviews, 526 Centre, Paskal Hypersquare, 2007)

Based on the passages above, there are significant differences of 'visual strategy' in *wayang* comic visualisations among 50's, 70's and 2000's artists. The 50's comic artists were doing adaptation process, from the traditional narrative into comicbook. Then the 70's artists did some improvisations by adding their individual style on it, and finally those works were modified furthermore by the 2000's artists, both in visual style and storytelling. Those differences are described in figure 2.

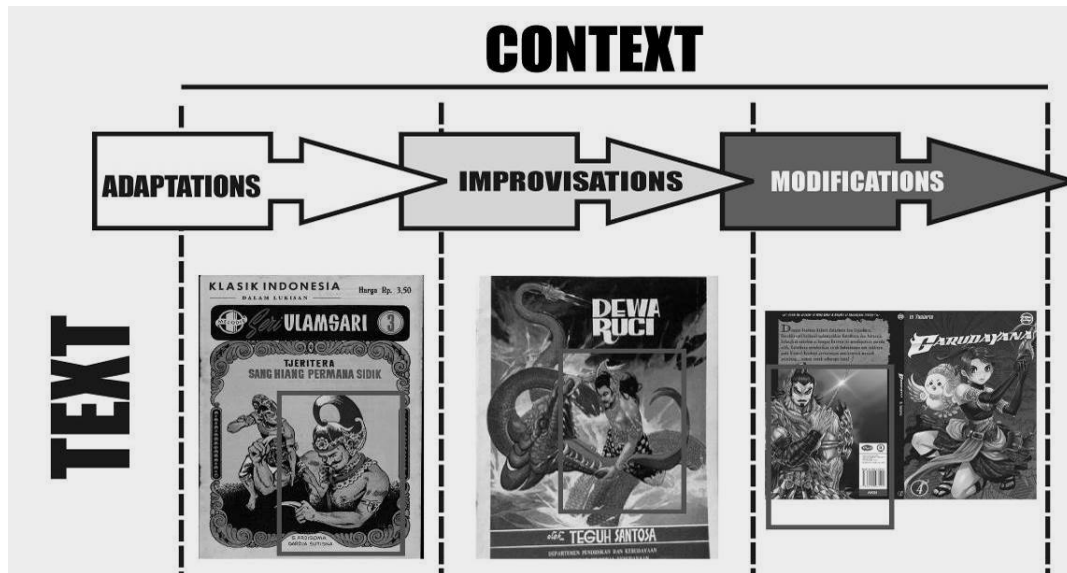


Figure 2 the visual strategy comparisons of 50's, 70's and 2000's comic artists
Source: Personal documentation

5. CONCLUSIONS

Visual references of the 2000's artists seems inconsistent yet richer, absorbs a lot of contemporary popular cultures, including animations and video games. Back in 70's, preferences of popular cultures are still limited to American comicbooks and western movies, Indian Bollywoods and Chinese kung-fu movies. In '70's, character visualization tend to referring the previous, while in 2000's they are more eclectic, a sort of combination of cross-references, both traditional and popular culture elements adaptations. Looking by visualizations, there were still some correlations between 70's and 50's artists, but 2000's artists clearly has 'broke up' with the previous.

However, the visual styles of Indonesian comic still continue to develop in accordance with the changes of time, popular media and cultural references which are dominant, as well as *wayang* genre. Literature and visual style references constantly changed as well as social class, education and artistic taste of the comic artists that has also shifted. The visual style shiftings did occur due the needs of communication and actualization toward the readers market, much like the purpose of design scope itself. The target audiences of 'classical' comic tend to adjust their taste to the visual style that has been presented by the artists, while the present comic artists, on the contrary, adjusting their style to the audience's taste which was influenced by current popular cultures.

Despite of all critics and disapprovals due their 'deviations' or 'lost of roots' to the *wayang* traditions unlike their predecessors, the comic artists of 2000's still retain and sustain the *wayang* genre with their contemporary approaches that much familiar to younger generation and visually attractive. Comicbook spectators nowadays are much more attentive, observant and critical to the visual details. Afterall, interest, appreciation and knowledge of current generation on *wayang* genre has becoming more decreasing, as well as on Indonesian comic. Therefore 2000's comics' existence definitely conserve the very existence of Indonesian comic in general.

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