Dewa Ruci Graphic Narrative Adaptation: Popular Media to Introduce Classical Wayang Mythology and Alternative Character Education Content for Generation Z

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Abstract. Dewa Ruci is one of the original Indonesian classical mythologies containing educational values that have been socialized for a hundred years through traditional Wayang performances and considered as guidance in behavior. This research will discuss the educational value contained in Dewa Ruci that is beneficial for Generation Z and how graphic narratives may allow the message to be more easily accepted. This research uses a qualitative research approach. Firstly, will explain the research result from the previous researcher in the field of graphic narrative and its role in education. As a comparative study, the analysis carried out towards visualization and narration contained in three Dewa Ruci comics from three different eras to become references and as initial evidence that graphic narrative can be used as an alternative solution. Then, the explanation will be given towards the content of the classic mythology that is relevant as character education and graphic narrative as alternative media to deliver the educational content from the classic mythology can be suggested. This research aims to provide an overview of the importance of adopting educational content on classic mythology and to understand the suitable media to deliver educational content that matches current learning requirements and Generation Z characteristics.

1 Introduction

Wayang, one of the traditional arts that has lived for centuries in Indonesia and has been recognized by UNESCO as the World Master Piece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. It has been some arguments about what the word Wayang came from and when it has been used. In Javanese society, Wayang as Javanese term that means “shadow” refers to shadow play in traditional Wayang kulit (leather puppet) performance, or the shadow that has philosophical meaning as a reflection of human life and characters that are represented in Wayang. According to the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language, Wayang are defined as human-like puppets with deformed shapes that made of leather or sculptured wood, and other materials, that can be used to represent characters from the mythology in the traditional performances that played by Dalang (puppet master). The existance of Wayang has firstly reported in the early 15th Century by Ma Huan, who accompanied the Chinese Admiral, Zheng He, on his expedition expedition and docked in Central Java. The report was described Wayang Beber performance, which the Dalang narrating a story while unrolled (Beber, Javanese term) certain painting that illustrate the story [1]. Based on these historical facts, it can be said that Wayang has become part of Javanese society for hundred years, especially on the island of Java where the traditional art have been preserved.

For Javanese people, Wayang has three meanings. The first is Wayang as a story. Secondly Wayang as "puppets". And lastly, Wayang as traditional stage performance. For the Javanese, all of these meanings are considered correct and commonly understood [2]. Even though Wayang can be interpreted differently, the three meaning are as one entity, as a unique universe with all of its complexities which that only take place in areas where Wayang has preserved. Wayang as the traditional stage performance distinguished in two basic plays, Mahabharata and Ramayana. The classic mythology in Indonesia, especially in the island of Java and Bali, have socialized in traditional performance such as on Wayang Kulit (leather puppets), Wayang Golek (wooden puppets), and Wayang Orang/Wong (live theatrical performance). Wayang Orang that may have been performed since the 18th century, as transposition of Wayang Kulit [3], as evidence of Wayang's openness to innovation and acceptance of outside influences. In term of Wayang as "puppet" the shape of Wayang similar to the depiction of human figure on the relief of ancient Javanese temple as human figure in two-dimensional model on the East Java Penataran temple (14th century). The deformation shapes of Wayang assumed due to Islamic Syariah that figural image considered as a tantalizing to Islamic faith so the extreme distortion of human anatomy applied to avoid problems and make Wayang remains acceptable [4]. This fact proves that Wayang adapts to social changes that occur in society so that it can still be accepted by the

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Muslim community. As historical fact, Wayang was once part of the Da'wah in the early days of the spread of Islam on the island of Java and until now, traditional wayang performances are still often found starting with prayer or reciting verses from the Koran. While Wayang as the story, Mahabharata and Ramayana which are originally from Hinduism, have been enriched with local elements that some of them come from Javanese literature [5]. “The stories on Wayang considered as Javanese mythology that reflects real life, each of the figure on the mythology represents various human characters, and their noble values become role models in behaving” [6]. Based on these two statements, it can be said that the Wayang story which have been added with elements from the Javanese literature that consist of important messages related to character education, Wayang have been contribute to shape the personality of the Javanese people and the society.

2 Literature review

This section will present the literature study which related to the fact that the guidance in behaving which has been socialized for hundreds of years through traditional Wayang performances and graphic narrative has been proven as as a popular media that became a solution to the problem of learning effectiveness.

2.1 Dewa Ruci: Character education on classical mythology

One of the additional stories on great epic of Mahabharata is Dewa Ruci. The classic mythology was written by Raden Ngabehi Yasadipura I in 1796 during the reign of Pakubuwono IV (1788-1820), the King of Surakarta. The story published on printed media in 1870 and was well received by the Javanese people and delivered as a separate episode in the traditional performance. The main reason that makes Dewa Ruci favored by Javanese people is because they also love Mahabharata where the figure of Bima, the main character on Dewa Ruci, who considered as the true knight by Javanese society. In addition, Dewa Ruci is containing Javanese spiritual values so that the Dewa Ruci becomes the right medium to fulfill the desire of spiritual needs [7]. However, based on this opinion that Dewa Ruci's story can provide "enlightenment", it is required contemplation to comprehend the message and there is a fact that the message might have different interpretations for each person, depending on their level of understanding.

The summary of the episode can be described as follow: Bima, the strongest warrior of the Pandawa family, was ordered by his teacher, Durna, to find the water of life. At the beginning Bima was directed to search it on Mount Candradimuka where there were two cursed giants who would test his determination. However, Bima managed to kill the two giants and makes them turned back into Gods. They told Bima that there was no living water in that place and ask Bima to go back to his teacher. Bima comes home and complains to his teacher who is overjoyed because Bima passed the initial test on his determination and loyalty to his teacher. Then Bima was asked to look for the water in its actual location, under the sea. When diving to the bottom of the sea, Bima is attacked by a giant dragon and manages to kill the dragon with his thumb nails. Then he met a figure who resembled Bima, only in smaller size, named Dewa Ruci. who asked Bima to enter his body through his left ear. Inside Dewa Ruci's body, Bima displayed a vast and boundless empty space without direction, only four colours which are black, red, yellow, and white as Dewa Ruci explain the meaning of each colour that contained in the heart. “Black is the strongest, it generates anger and hatred. It is the nature that gets in the way of goodness. While red indicates evil intentions, yellow has the power to take over all intentions that lead to goodness. Only white colour is the essence of a calm, pure heart, possessing the power of happiness, a place where goodness leads to eternal unite with the One and Only. After getting advice from Dewa Ruci, Bima was asked to leave his body and go back to meet his teacher. Bima has never been prejudiced against Durna and considered him as a true teacher who had bringing Bima to success [8]. The scene of Bima entering Dewa Ruci's body can be interpreted as a mystical unification between humans and the Almighty, it the story associated with the above opinion regarding the existence of spiritual content in Dewa Ruci. Many also say that the story is about a search for identity where in the end the main character succeeded. Thus, the story of Dewa Ruci which has been socialized through various traditional and popular media makes it not only as an "entertainment", but also as a guidance in behaving, that are relevant to the present day.

2.2 Graphic Narrative: Popular Media as learning tools

Graphic narrative or simply called comic, firstly introduced by David Kunzle in the book The History of the Comic Strip, as a form that combines the still image composition with narration to form a story [9]. Media that combines text with images as a unique advantage of the media, has been applied in various purposes that can be easily accepted in society across generations. As a familiar entertainment medium, raphic narrative is accessible and enjoyed by a wide range of audience demographics, and readily able to be shared on social media for efficient mass dissemination of information [10] so that it can be said that graphic narrative is a medium that is able to adapt to changes in technology and media.

The search for pedagogical techniques and tools to improve teaching methods for students is important for the development of education. Much has been made of multimedia and IT solutions to improve educational experiences that in line with the development of technology and concern to the characteristics of generations who are familiar with digital technology. However, these solutions tend to be costly and are short-lived due to the fast pace of technological advancements. One alternative approach that has been suggested is the use of comic books, which are popular and relatively cheap to produce [11]. Therefore, besides having the advantage of comic which is communicating through written text and images, besides the ability to adapt the
changes in media and technology, comics have advantages in terms of cost efficiency that making it possible to be accessed even by wider range of audiences. The concept of using graphic narrative in education purpose back to the late 1940s in the USA when Hutchinson (1949) reported a study of teacher attitudes towards the use of comics in schools [12]. Although there was negative public image towards comic books in 1950s’, several studies in USA have been published suggesting the possibilities of using comics in educational settings in the next few decades. People's perception towards comics in Indonesia in the 1950s’ were not much different to the situation in USA. Comics are considered as children's reading that not educated and accused as the cause of the laziness so that educators had thought to stopping it [13]. Despite the historical fact that there has been resistance from educators towards comics in Indonesia and in the USA, where comics were born, comics in Indonesia actually became one of the solutions to the problem of illiteracy and learning difficulties that still occur in Indonesia in 1950’s [14] when adequate learning materials were limited and the illiteracy rate was still high at that time, the presence of comics as entertainment readings that communicate through written text and images are became a non-formal learning medium to the social problem.

After various studies conducted in the field of comic and educational purpose for several decades, todays in the USA comics have become one of the tools for teaching and have received by more academic disciplines including geography, linguistics and even medical humanities. Furthermore, several authors have suggested the positive benefits of using comics to teach children with learning difficulties [15]. By looking at the facts obtained on the previous research as mentioned above, it can be concluded that graphic narrative, a popular media that is proven to be able to adapt the technology and media changes, is acknowledged to be able to contribute in conveying educational content that is easier to understand, and the information easier to remember, since it communicates through text and images, in addition from being more efficient, can be easily disseminated across various digital platforms.

2.3 Wayang graphic narrative adaptation: Classical mythology on popular media

In addition to traditional performances as a medium to socialize Dewa Ruci, classical mythology is also conveyed through popular media, such as novels, as the Dewa Ruci's original manuscripts which are in written text. The role of popular media in disseminating Wayang mythology can be considered as a solution to the problem of the younger generation's appreciation towards traditional performances, as stated by Suparmin Sunjaya, chairman of the National Secretariat of Indonesian Puppetry (Sena Wangi), about the low interest of the young generation towards the traditional Wayang performances. Sunjaya explain that the young generation consider traditional Wayang performance economically inefficient, the long 7-9 hours duration of the performance not align with the dynamics of modern society that required consuming time effectively and efficiently [16]. Moreover, the heavy storyline that requires contemplation makes the story on traditional Wayang performance even more difficult to understand for those who are not familiar with Wayang. The story that delivered in a local language, Javanese, Sundanese, or in Balinese, makes classical Wayang performance not fit to the generations who are more familiar with National language or foreign languages that more commonly used in various mass media.

Since the Wayang comic displaying the visualisation that inspired by traditional performances, it might bringing the reader's imagination to the stage of traditional Wayang performances, so it is true to be said that Wayang comic as a good introduction to the world of the Wayang [17] although to comprehend Wayang completely requires deeper understanding and the sacred traditional performances atmosphere is still irreplaceable. With the characteristics of Graphic Narratives that communicate through text and images, graphic narratives have advantages over other popular media which is enjoyed by a wide range of audience demographics. The Long sacred rituals on the traditional Wayang performance are transformed into a more practical medium that make Wayang comics contribute in create the generation who appreciate the traditional art which threatened to be forgotten [18]. Although Wayang comics are refers to the traditional Wayang performances that delivered in local languages, especially Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese, Wayang comics successfully strengthens its national identity by using Indonesian language [19]. These facts make the Wayang comics readers easier to understand the story, even for someone who is not familiar with Wayang so that the universal messages that are in the Javanese mythology can be understood by a wider range of audience.

In terms of socializing classical mythology through popular media, graphic narrative (comic), Wayang comic with title Dewa Ruci comic was once part of the golden age of Indonesian comics, in 1955 the Dewa Ruci comic was created by R. A. Kosasih, then in 1983 by Teguh Santosa which was republished in 2017, and finally, the Dewa Ruci that created by Akhmad Fadly which was published on WebToon, an online comic portal. The classical mythology of Dewa Ruci socialized in popular media be said as an attempt to convey Dewa Ruci to a wider group of audience as well as the preservation of national heritage across generations.

3 Method

This research using a qualitative research approach. Firstly, the research result from the previous researcher in the field of graphic narrative and its role in education will be explained. As comparative study, the fact that Wayang comics have ever been a solution to social problems in society will be analyzed. The analysis was carried out by observing the visualization and narration contained in three Dewa Ruci comics from three different eras to become references and as initial evidence that graphic narrative can be used as an alternative solution in education. Then, the explanation will be given towards educational content on the classic mythology that relevant as character education for Gen Z, so that by looking at the fact about the ability of graphic narrative in education
context, the popular media as alternative solution to deliver the educational content from the classic mythology will be suggested.

4 Results and discussions

There are strong theoretical reasons for the use of comics in this manner in educational settings. The “Dual coding” theory proposes that both a visual and a verbal code contribute to cognitive processing and overall comprehension and memorability of textual material [20]. In terms of education, comics that leverage “Dual coding” theory which presenting educational material in both a verbal and visual manner would improve both the comprehension and retention of information [21]. Since the theory allows the audience get the information through visual and written text, visualization take an important role to make the audience not only understand the information conveyed but also remembered so that its required visualization that match with its taste of the audience and appropriate as a learning material.

In terms of the role of Wayang comics in education, the popular media actually help a certain generation absorb a vital cultural insight without any difficulty [22]. It is easier for the readers to understand the story and the characters involved which are important cultural heritages that need to be preserved and recognized across generations. Evenmore, at the beginning of its appearance, the wayang comic was used by a young Dalang who claimed to have studied Wayang from comics due to the difficulty to find adequate literature at that time [23]. Although there has been no scientific measurement regarding the impact of the presence of Wayang comics on education, historical facts show that Wayang comics contribute to educating and introducing the nation’s cultural heritage.

The main education’s objective which is to produce an intelligent generation, it also needs to be equipped with character education to foster generation that intelligent and also has good behavior and exemplary character that would be needed for the learners themselves and society [24]. Character is the person's nature in responding to certain situations morally. This nature is implemented in concrete actions through good behavior, honesty, responsibility, respect others, and other noble characters [25]. Referring to the objectives of education as mentioned above, the character education has aligned objectives, which are to develop individual potential to be able to live being kind, noble, resilient, well behaved, and tolerant. Furthermore, the function of character education is as a filter for other culture that is not in accordance with the nation’s character and cultural values, which today can be easily accessed through various media due to the development of technology and globalization [26], so that Indonesian government considers that character education as an important part in order to build the quality of human resources that responsible to the continuity of the nation and culture, the government’s concern about character education is none other than as a respond to the predicted challenges ahead that increasingly complex and uncertain that will be faced by the young generation. Moreover, character education at the higher education level is needed to prevent the moral degradation such as disrespect, dishonesty, and selfishness, as a phenomenon that may lead to committing corruption. For that reason, Generation Z (Gen Z) considered as the nation's successor that currently at learning age, ranging from primary education to higher education, as the generation that becomes prioritized to obtain the character education. According to the population census data, from the total 270.2 million Indonesian population in 2020, there are 74.93 million Gen Z or 27.94% of the total population in Indonesia, who was born between year 1997-2012 that currently 9 to 23 years old, from elementary to higher education level [27]. As an addition, the generation who were born with digital technology around them, considered as the successor and determinant for the sustainability of the national culture, 75.5% of Gen Z are the Internet users, familiar with digital technology and also globally connected in a virtual world [28]. Based on these data it can be assumed that innovative learning media that utilize technology and digital media will be in accordance with the characteristics of gen z.

The Dewa Ruci mythology that have been disseminated through traditional performances and have become guidance in behavior for hundreds of years across generations must continue to be preserved and conveyed in ways and media that are more easily accepted by Gen Z. The use of graphic narrative in educational settings, the “Dual coding” theory which presenting educational material in both a verbal and visual manner would improve both the comprehension and retention of information, graphic narrative adaptation could makes storyline easier to understand and remember the message on the mythology which is very relevant as character education, at the same time, it is expected to contribute in preserving the national heritage through the media that preferred by Gen Z.

The story of Dewa Ruci as guidelines in behaving for young generation that confirmed by Supanggah (2002) as “tenacity of a student to acquire knowledge”, that explained firstly, the importance of perseverance, persistence, and believe, while educational institutions and teachers are only as the facilitators in order to achieve the goals. Secondly, work earnestly and seriously, dare to take all risks on every step that have been taken, while keep learning until it succeeds [29]. Supanggah's opinion, as explained above, agreed by Musbikin (2010) who affirmed that Dewa Ruci's story should become learning content for character education. Dewa Ruci teaches many values of life, and the most important thing from the mythology is the persistence of a student to learn until succeed [30]. Even though this message is very important and relevant to Gen Z, who are currently at the education level from elementary to higher education, the message is not conveyed explicitly and requires certain level of understanding to comprehend the message completely. The encounter of Bima with Dewa Ruci, as mentioned in the summary of the story as described in the previous section, where dialogue occurs which consists of important advice about life are conveyed more clearly and have been considered as the core of Dewa Ruci's story [31]. Therefore, to make the message about "the tenacity of a student to acquire knowledge" more easily recognized, required clearer and more structured way of delivery. Furthermore, to make the messages and their
educational value that are suitable for Gen Z to be easily understood and remembered, various approaches are needed to deliver the story, including on the visualization and sequences that is able to grab readers' attention. As a comparative study of the visualization applied to three graphic narratives of Dewa Ruci, the 1955 Dewa Ruci created by R. A. Kosasih, then the 1983 Dewa Ruci by Teguh Santosita which was republished in 2017, and the Dewa Ruci by Ahmad Fadly which was published on WebToon. In the three Wayang comics, the visualization implement illustration style that adapts to the tastes of the readers on each era. As in Dewa Ruci by Ahmad Fadly which was published on WebToon, it uses an illustration style that refers to Manga, comic from Japan that has unique illustration features, which is currently the illustration style can easily accepted by that readers. In terms of storytelling, Dewa Ruci created by R. A. Kosasih and by Teguh Santosa tries to transform the traditional performances into comic. This is not only recognised from the visualized character that resembling those in the Wayang Wong (traditional live action Wayang performance), also the storyline refers to the traditional performance which features long dialogues and less action schemes. Different things are applied to Dewa Ruci by Ahmad Fadly where it prioritises action scenes, the storytelling opens with a fighting scene to provide appealing visuals to grab readers' attention. In terms of conveying information and messages, the different approaches to visualization and storyline are the right thing to do, considering the characteristics of the media and its readers that different in each era.

By looking at the characteristics of generation Z and the potential of graphics narrative as a popular media that is proven to be flexible towards the changes in technology and the tastes of its readers, graphic narrative as a familiar popular media can contribute to disseminate the character education in the Dewa Ruci, though not to replace the traditional Wayang performance, become an alternative learning media for character education that adopt the local content that has been practiced for hundreds of years.

5 Conclusion

Wayang for the Javanese society is considered as a guidance in behaving which has been socialized for hundreds of years through traditional performances. The openness as the basis for Wayang makes it survive for such a long time which is opens up opportunities for exploration, including moving traditional performances into the popular medium of graphic narratives which in fact are able to help readers understand Wayang stories more easily. Referring to previous research that has been conducted in the USA, as mentioned in the previous section where graphic narratives with all their advantages in conveying messages can be effective learning media, the combination of images and written text makes the messages conveyed become easier to remember and potentially become alternative earning tool for character education that suitable for Gen Z.

The Dewa Ruci comic adaptation from the traditional Wayang performance, has succeeded in making it easier for readers to understand the story, even though the message contained in the mythology regarding the persistence of a student in seeking knowledge, which is suitable as character education content for Gen Z, is not conveyed explicitly. This opens up opportunities for further research on how to convey the educational value implicitly and what suitable media that will be recommended that suit to gen Z characteristic. Further research required to make the local wisdom on the classical mythology that have been socialised through traditional performance become a formal learning content for character education in Higher Education Institutions.

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