Developing Indonesian Animation Based on Local Culture

Ranang Agung Sugihartono [1]

[1] Television and Film Study Program, Faculty Fine Art and Design
Indonesia Institute of the Arts in Surakarta, Surakarta, Indonesia

ranang.as@gmail.com / ranang@isi-ska.ac.id (Ranang Agung Sugihartono)

Abstract   In developing the Indonesian animation, it has a lot of opportunities in using the potential of local culture. The animation creation that referring on the characteristics of traditional arts is the best choice. This study uses a prac- tice-based research. Research procedures conducted in two phases, namely analysis and development/implementation. Analysis involves identifying and studying the research object such as puppet motion, *wayang beber*, batik, relief of temple as a reference and the creation of animated films. The results of this research showed that a) Indonesian folklore as inspira- tion for animation stories can be explored with new narratives style such as remaking the stories, so it can be relevant with taste and development of the times. b) Elements of traditional arts can be applied in character and environment visualiza- tion, and provide imaginative effects, and c) Movement shadow puppets can be used as a reference animated motion. The development of stories, character designs, and animated movements that refer to the ancestral art tradition is an attempt to discover the uniqueness of Indonesian animation that has a clear base. So that, Indonesian animation can be an identity for the Indonesian people to be different from other nations.

Keywords Indonesian animation, local, and culture

1. Introduction

According to John A. Lent, compared to China, India and Japan, Southeast Asia has had a halting and lack of history of animation. No known animated film predates World War II; in most countries the first works appeared in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The amount of production in any given country, save for overseas work-for-hire [1]. Indonesia is a part of Southeast Asia; the condition of the animated film is also like the explanation by Lent above. Even in recent years, Indonesian animation cannot compete with animated film from Malaysia. Malaysian animated films already aired on Turkish television. In order to compete with Western animation, various countries have sought a distinctive and distinct animation style from other countries as well as having global competitiveness. Malaysia also does so. In his article entitled Animation in Asia and the Pacific, Lent writes that Muliyadi Mahamood's chapter on "The History of Ma- laysian Animated Cartoons," offers an exploration of the cultural specificities and thickness of Malaysian animation. He teases out the history, themes, and styles of Malaysian animation, drawing attention to the importance of the mousedeer as a pivotal figure within Malay folklore and oral tradition [2]. They are exploring the growing local potential in their community, and are not oriented towards the Western animated feature of the film.

Meanwhile in Thailand, the Thai government also has the attention and support to the animation industry as it did in Malaysia. Thailand Information and Communications Technology Minister said short-term targeted joint-stock agreements with the private sector to produce animated movies of "world-class content with a Thai brand name .." [2] . While in Singapore, as a more prosperous country has different strategies in developing the animation industry, the government lent a hand in furthering animation by helping to set up animation training programs, combining local com- panies with international counterparts to co-produce and distribute for the overseas market, and enticing a number of foreign firms to set up studios in Singapore [2] .

Various efforts to develop animation in the neighbouring countries mentioned above, need to be balanced with serious efforts in our country. So far, the uniqueness of Indonesia's animated movie has not appeared yet, cartoon characters are still strongly influenced by Japanese comic characters. Ac- tually, Indonesia has a strong potential to develop cartoon character. Ishizawa Takeshi (2005) said that he sincerely hopes to the appearance unique of Indonesian cartoons. But to create a unique and interesting work, they must learn from superior works that already exist. As Tezuka Osamu did, in the beginnings of the modern Japanese comics, which were initially strongly influenced by the Walt Disney animated film, but he later expressed the movement in Japanese comics [3] .

In terms of regulations related to animation development, the government has given Presidential Regulation no. 6 of 2015 which revised through Presidential Regulation no. 72 in 2015, the creative economy is divided into 16 subsectors, including fashion, film and animation, culinary, craft, fine arts, performing arts, musical arts, and others. In that gov- ernment regulation, animation became one of the sub-sectors of the government's attention. Thus, it is very appropriate if

the development of animated films immediately encouraged by various efforts both community, industry, educational institutions, and government.

With the above reality, it shows us how the importance of this study needs to be done. The study as an academic spirit in higher education is an effort to develop animated film scientifically. For that reason, the problem in this study can be formulated as how to develop an animated film by using elements of traditional culture? And this study aims to obtain an alternative effort for the development of animation based on the traditional culture elements.

2. Method

This study is based on the results of my previous research using a practice-based research approach focusing on the creation of an animated film entitled *Timun Mas*. That research procedure was carried out in two stages: Analysis and Development / Implementation. The analysis included identification activities and reviewing the object of research (puppet motion as a reference) and the formulation of basic motion concepts for the animation. *Wayang beber* is rich with the depth of story on a picture frame, and *wayang kulit* which is rich with deformation of original Indonesian motion shape and expression [3] . From the analysis activities, followed by Development / Implementation activities included writing synopsis, scenario, storyboard, character creation, motion creation, digital animation, dubbing, video editing and post production. Cartoon characters created are the characters with Indonesian characters, and local stories.

In addition, this study also focuses on analizing the final outcomes of undergraduate students who I supervised to in the form of animated film entitled *Seribu Satu Candi* by Koko Is Proyogo and *Si Joe* by Satria. Both of these works are directed to create animation film with sources from the art of *Nusantara* (Archipelago) tradition. In the discussion of this study, it is also associated with similar efforts in animation development of other countries.

3. Discussion

3.1. Remake Story

Indonesia has a lot of folklore from Sabang to Merauke, such as folklores, myths, and legends. Some of them have been animated, such as a TV series entitled *Timun Mas* (The Golden Cucumber) produced by PPFN, was a fifteen-minute cut out animation based on a famous Indonesian folktale. And in 1998, several animation titles based on famous Indonesian folk tales, such as *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih* (The Red Onion and White Onion), The Golden Cucumber, and *Petualangan Si Kancil* (The Adventure of Kancil) began to appear in the form of video CDs (VCD) sold directly to consumers [4]. Most of the animation is presented purely like the original story, no modification of the storytelling. Even the folklore entitled *Timun Mas* has been animated several times, by different animators or producers, including one animation created by Ranang AS and team.

The story in the animated film entitled is *Seribu Satu Candi* (Thousand One Temple) by Koko Is Proyogo supervised by Ranang AS., was slightly different from other animated works that also raised the folklore of *Legenda Candi Prambanan* (Legend of Prambanan Temple). If other works of animation usually raise the stories about the aggression of Pengging kingdom to Prambanan and love story of Bandung Bondowoso to Roro Jonggrang. As for the story for the animation film just tells about a long-time story before the conflict occurred. A parody that tells of a time when Bandung Bondowoso has not become a powerful and high-minded prince yet, his silliness until the joy and bad times of the prince who is still a teenager in finding his identity [5] . The setting of the story is described as follows:

In the kingdom of Pengging there was the trend of stone crafts such as statues and temples. At that time the prince of Bandung Bondowoso told to have a handicraft shop, Bonny Handycraft and Stonework. Although he set up a handicraft business, he found himself less skilled at it. So, his business is very quiet for visitors because the goods are very ugly and scary. For the reason he did not try to learn the art of crafts, but he was looking for a shortcut in order to create a beautiful craft. One of them, he created a craft/statue with a spirit named John, to achieve his dream [5] .

Figure 1. The character of John, a spirit who Bandung Bondowoso asked for help

Likewise, with what had been done by Satria in the process of supervision by researcher / author, creating an animated film entitled is *Si Joe* developed from folklore *Timun Mas*. The film explores more in the story when Buto Ijo is waiting for Timun Mas to grow bigger. Buto Ijo was waiting while occasionally he orders fast-food through delivery order by *Gojek*. In his waiting time, Buto Ijo always watches Timun Mas from a distance with a telescope, even protecting small Timun Mas when she will be disturbed by snakes, spelling a snake into a worm, protecting her when she will be disturbed by tiger, or protecting her when she will fall out of bed. Buto Ijo was not described as a frightening character as in the original story. Nevertheless, the values contained in the story are still well preserved.

One of the efforts to make the folklores acceptable by the children today, creative breakthrough through storytelling processed is needed, namely the deconstruction of the story, as in the two animated films above, *Seribu Satu Candi* (One Thousand Temple) and *Si Joe*. The stories as a part of a language, always possible to be interpreted by humans in every age. As Boje (2008) suggests that deconstruction implies, as noted above, implies, deconstruction implies, as

mentioned above, language instability and persistent interpretation and thus words, concepts and actions are always open to new interpretations and new meanings [6] . Deconstruction of the story is an artist that giving a new perspective and meaning to a story. Today's animators who were born far away from the time in which the story appeared and flourished, had a different perspective from the previous generation. Stories and languages are not limited by rigid and deadlines. Derrida captured this instability in the concept of story which has no border lines; it is at once larger and smaller than itself [6] .

What happens in the films *Seribu Satu Candi* (One Thousand Temple) and the *Si Joe* are the creation of the artist in viewing and treating the story of their ancestors' tradition with the taste of the times. This is relevant to Slaven's opinion when researching Anime in relation to Japanese folklore that this is an important task for a folklorist who enjoys looking at tradition and how cultures utilize their traditions or adopt, alter and adjust those traditions to suit their purposes [6].

The development of animation by remaking the story of the above tradition into an animated film story, in Slaven's view that this genre creates shows that act as animated tales as well as demonstrating a new storytelling aesthetic [7]. Animators have the space and freedom to re-create folklore from the past into animated stories that fit the needs of the times (the present).

3.2. Character Design

Besides the storyline, in the film animation that also important became the main thing is the character design. Referring to the opinion of Toby Gard (2000), the visual design for developing character is divided into two categories which are physical form and costume [8] . In the image of the animated cartoon character Timun Mas, the author uses deformation, stylization, and shape transformation techniques in drawing both physical and costumed of the cartoons. Actually, those technique has been known for a long time in the arts of Indonesian tradition, especially in *wayang kulit* and *wayang beber*. The shape of the objects is visualized in such a way that they are not realistic but more symbolic. The principle of changing the form on matching between *wayang kulit* and *wayang beber* with the cartoon, becoming one of the considerations in making the work of the animation. However, the cartoon character of this film is not pure shape of *wayang*, adaptation from *wayang* is more on some visual elements.

In the animated film, the visualization of the human character is not made as highly decorative as in the *wayang kulit* and *wayang beber* characters, but like the typical cartoon, with deformed shapes still close to its original form (human). Deformation is meant to get the uniqueness of each character. Except for the character of Buto Ijo, the symbols of the puppets are included, such as crowns, belts, bracelets, and pants. The golden yellow crown which is meant as a symbol of the greatness of Buto Ijo as the giant king.

Figure 2. Some characters in animated film *Timun Mas* by Ranang and Mujiyono

While on the other characters, white beard looks and sticks on the character of the character Grandpa that represents the symbol of wisdom, oldness (*meneb*, Jv), as a character worthy of giving advice (*wejangan*) to others. Thus, the hair bun (mBok Sarni and Surti), clothing and jarik (Timun Mas, mBok Sarni, Surti) are also the representation of the way the Javanese dress. Visualization of the character is intended to highlight the characteristics of Javanese in the animation *Timun Mas* as the folklore is derived from Java. Visualization is not only through body shape, but also with clothes (*kemben*, *jarik*, pants *komprang*) and supporting accessories (stick, bandage/*udeng*). As Khalis and Mustaffa say that besides a good storyline, animation must have a strong character design with a good personality, appropriate costumes and accessories [10].

Visualization of the landscape that setting in the background is described decoratively, such as trees, clouds, mountains, houses, and the surrounding environment. This visualization refers to a typical *wayang beber* image with its decorative and the ornamentic. The ornamentic can be seen in the form of clouds made with curved lines. The graded coloring technique from the dark color to the light / whitish color clearly apparently adopted the coloring technique in *wayang beber*. The colours used in almost all elements of this cartoon use light pastel color, which is intended match to the development of children who like bright colours / flashy. The landscape is not portrayed as naturalistic as possible, but more decorative. In the composition there are more empty areas, not filled with many elements of nature, because it is intended to provide more space for the audience's imagination to imagine with the visualization. It is like in the leather puppets background colour, looks blank white, giving the imagination room for the audience. Likewise, in Eastern painting such as in China and Japan, which are dominant with empty fields/ area in their paintings. It is related to the Eastern philosophy of the relationship between the macrocosm and microcosm, or the relationship of nature and human, in which human is a part of the "greatness" of nature. The imaginative illusion is relevant to the ornamental forms in the shape of leaves, trees, mountains, clouds and other natural elements. Ornamentic forms seem more imaginative than the visualization of naturalistic forms.

3.3. Motion Adaptation

Movement is an element that makes a still image into a live template. Movement of the characters in the world of animated films generally base on 12 movements according to Frank Thomas & Ollie Johnston in a book titled Illusion of

Life. Even so, Indonesia has an original motion picture which is known as puppet. In the animated film Timun Mas, the movement used is an adaptation of the *wayang kulit* movement. The movement of walking and running in this animation refers to the *wayang kulit* movement.

Movement of the cartoon characters from out-of-frame, incoming frames, and out frames does not use panning techniques as in Western animations or Western video camera techniques, but their movements are like the motion of a shadow puppet. Characters move from left to right or vice versa, on the right side of frame (1/4) and the left side of frame (1/4) made shift without part of bodies motion. Parts of the body (legs and hands) move like a person walking / running only on 1/2 frame in the middle. At the movement on the left / right ends of the frame, the image is made to appear blurred / transparent, as a representation of the getting away movement, less visible, and finally disappeared. The getting away of the character movement is not visualized with the diminishing size as in the principle of Western perspective, because in the Eastern tradition it is not knowing about the science of perspective, but they have their own visual language. The movement of the characters as in the *wayang kulit* (puppet), motion of the puppet is very dominant in the middle of the screen, and when the character is out the screen, it appears their body parts (hands / feet) are rarely moved.
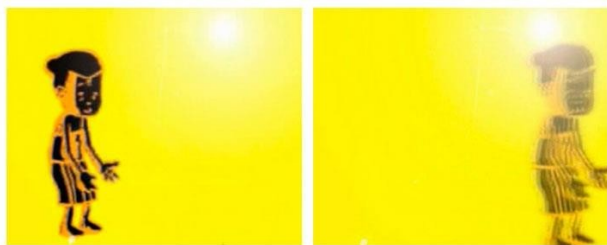

Figure 3. Adaptation of character moving from *wayang kulit*

Buto Ijo is an antagonist character in Timun Mas's story, for it shows his cruelness not only through the visualization of its great shape and his green color, but also through his movements. Movements are made to seem rough, gradual/broken motion, with the number of images fewer in each second than the movement of Timun Mas. Those rough and broken movements are like in the movement of giant figure / character in the shadow puppets. Besides, Buto Ijo movement dominates the screen area, almost the screen area is reached by Buto Ijo movement. Buto Ijo's red eyes reflect anger. The visualization of Buto Ijo and his movement is an attempt to visualize the cruelness, mean, strength, and the frightening character.

The approaching / moving away motion is applied to the depiction of the environment such as the dense forest before entering the gates and the kingdom of Jenggala in Kediri. The technique used is the enlarged / shrunken movement as in the *gunungan* movement in the puppet screen, by moving it closer / away from the lamp (*blencong*). This is similar with the zoom-in / zoom-out technique in Western videog-

raphy. This suggests that the motion picture technique about approaching / moving away is native to Indonesia long before the videography technique was discovered.

The three elements, such as stories, character designs, and animated movements mentioned above, all those three refers to the art of our ancestral traditions. The approach is an attempt to discover the uniqueness of Indonesian animation that has a clear base, that is tradition art. This is in accordance with Paul Du Gay's opinion quoted by Khalis and Mustaffa (2017) that culture is a social construct where people live, learn, experience, interact and tolerate with another person, thus influencing a person in creating and growing their identity among society [8]. So that the Indonesian animation can be an identity for the Indonesian people to be different from other nations.

The creation of the animated film is relevant to Slaven's opinion that they draw not only on the tales themselves and characters and creatures but they also adapt and alter these traditional elements to suit their own storytelling needs and preferences. These elements can be explicit in their connection to folk tales, in some cases nearly replicating the original story in its entirety, while others merely hint at their folk tale connection [7]. Although the characters and stories have been adapted to the need, the spirit of tradition art is still felt in the animated work. What the animator does, shows that the animator has a close relationship with the tradition as his background. This does not only happen in Indonesia, but it also happens in Japan, as Levi said and quoted by Slaven (2012) that the strong connection between animators and the indigenous folk tale tradition of Japan [7].

Slaven also shows folk tales, not only Japanese, as sources of inspiration for animator in Japan. Besides, according to him, in any case, it becomes obvious that Japanese animators in their creations have consciously used folk tales and other genres of folk narrative from different geographical regions [7]. The use of folklores as sources of inspiration for the creation of film animation has surpassed the borders of the country as well, many indigenous folklores of Indonesia raised and produced by animation industry outside of our countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia. Like the animated film entitled are *Timun Mas* and *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih* produced by Glue Studios Malaysia, both derived from the folklores in Central Java, Indonesia.

The existence of inspiration sources (folk tales) and creators, especially the animators can be also far apart like Indonesia and Malaysia, even across the continent. As Korniakova studied, how the Aboriginal legends in Australia can be a source of inspiration and creation by filmmakers in Canada and Russia. Korniakova (2014) explains that when adapted to films by non-Aboriginal filmmakers, Aboriginal legends are often interpreted in ways which modify connections between human and non-human characters of legends [9]. Like folk tales in Indonesia and other Eastern countries, Korniakova sees the relationship between human and nature is the primary element of Northern Aboriginal cultures and their folklore [9].

4. Conclusion

It needs a creative idea to see the potential of a lot of folk-lores in Indonesia. Original folklore can be processed and modified either by deconstruction of stories or remake stories, to make it more interesting and not monotonous. Nevertheless, the values contained in the story are still well preserved. Stories as part of the language, always possible to be interpreted by humans in every period. What happens in the *Seribu Satu Candi* and *Si Joe* films are the creation of the artist in seeing and treating the story of his ancestors' tradition with the taste of the times. Animators have the space and freedom to re-create folklore from the past into animated stories that fit the needs of the times.

In the animated film that become the main thing is the character design. The techniques of deformation, stylization, and transformation of shapes in *wayang kulit* and *wayang beber* can be adopted in drawing cartoons. The shape of the object is altered in such a way that the visualization of human characters is not realistic, nor very decorative, but the cartoon characters are still visible. The *wayang* adaptation is not absolute, but more on some visual elements. Visualization of these figures is intended to highlight the characteristics of Java as the folklore is derived from Java. Visualization of landscapes (trees, clouds, leaves, mountains, etc.) is decoratively and ornamentally capable of giving the impression of imaginative illusion. The impression was stronger and more interesting than the naturalistic form of visualization.

Movement is an important element that makes a still image into a live template. Although the movement of characters in the world of animated films generally base on 12 Western versions of movement, in fact Indonesia has the original motion picture known as the puppet. Animation movement can be developed by adapting the *wayang kulit* movement, either walking, running, or moving away / approaching. The rhythm and the quality of character movements also have different dimensions between characters, for example the walking movement of Buto Ijo is very different from the running movement of Timun Mas which is a smart little girl and funny. Stories, character designs, and animated movements, all three refer to the art of ancestral traditions. This approach is an attempt to discover the uniqueness of Indonesian animation that has a clear base, that is, traditional art. So that, Indonesian animation can be an identity for the Indonesian people to be different from other nations.

REFERENCES

[1]   J. A. Lent, *Animation in Southeast Asia*. 1999.

[2]   R. A. Sugihartono, B. H. Prilosadoso, and A. N. Panindias, *Cartoon Animation : From Analog to Digital (Animasi Kartun: Dari Analog Sampai Digital)*. Jakarta: Penerbit Indeks, 2010.

[3]   *Art of the Shadow*. Jakarta: Trade Research & Development Agency, Ministry of Trade Republic of Indonesia, 2009.

[4]   K. I. Prayogo and R. A. Sugihartono, "Directing Animation in The Thousand One Temple Film (Directing Animation dalam Film Seri Seribu Satu Candi)," *CAPTURE*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2016.

[5]   D. M. Boje and K. M. Jørgensen, "Deconstructing The Narrative Story Duality : Constructing A Space for Ethics," presented at the The Symposium of Derrida, Business, Ethics, University of Leicester, 2008.

[6]   A. N. Slaven, "The Japanimated Folktale: Analysis Concerning the Use and Adaptation of Folktale Characteristics in Anime," Western Kentucky University, Kentucky, 2012.

[7]   F. M. Khalis and N. Mustaffa, "Cultural Inspirations towards Malaysian Animation Character Design," *Malays. J. Commun.*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2017.

[8]   E. Korniakova, "Canadian and Russian Animation on Northern Aboriginal Folklore," Degree of Master of Arts at Concordia University, 2014.

[9]   R. A. Sugihartono, T. Murtono, and A. Rahman, "Animasi Kartun 2D Berbasis Seni Pertunjukan Tradisi," *Brokolase J.*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2012.

[10] J. A. Lent, *Animation in Asia and the Pacific*. 2004.