Hybridities and Deep Histories in Indonesian Wayang Manga Comics

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Abstract

Since the late 2000s, the Indonesian comic world has witnessed a boom in local comics that are based on traditional Hindu-Javanese *wayang* (shadow-puppet) tales, yet stylistically emulate Japanese manga aesthetics. This article analyses these comics and their online fan communities, exploring how artists and audiences characterise and value both the manga and wayang aspects of these hybrid forms. In doing so, I offer new insights into questions of social capital and changing circuits of distribution and consumption in the Indonesian mediascape, with particular focus on inter-Asian popular culture flows. In addition, I suggest that the aesthetic syncretism featured in wayang manga comics is not a new phenomenon but has been a key feature of both Indonesian comics and of traditional wayang performances throughout history. Ambivalent public reactions to wayang manga's hybrid characteristics should therefore be understood as deeply enmeshed in histories of how mimicry, hybridity, and foreign influences are both celebrated and contested in Indonesian visual cultures.

Keywords: aesthetics, comics, history, hybridity, Indonesia, manga, social capital, trans-Asia, *wayang*

Wayang is an ancient performance genre primarily associated with Java and Bali. Although there are many regional variations, in its most recognisable form *wayang* involves leather shadow-puppets operated behind a screen by a skilled *dalang* (puppet-master, see figure 1).[1] *Wayang* storylines are largely drawn from the Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, but performances also allow significant scope for improvisation and allegories to contemporary events. In Indonesia, *wayang* is a broad cultural force rather than simply a traditional performance genre; its features and storylines have long been appropriated and adapted in television and literature to provide contemporary social commentary and promote a sense of local identity. This article focuses on one particular media form that *wayang* has occupied in the first decade of the twenty-first century: comic books.

The '*wayang* comic' genre has been familiar to Indonesian comic fans, since being pioneered by the renowned 'father' of Indonesian comics, R.A. Kosasih, in the early 1960s. Yet although local Indonesian comic

Figure 1. Wayang Kulit performance in Java, c. 1890 (KITLV)

books flourished throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the production and consumption of local comics dwindled dramatically from the late 1980s until the early 2000s. The market domination of Japanese manga was widely held to be the main cause of this decline in local comics.[2] The popularity of manga is part of broader trends towards consuming East Asian popular culture throughout Southeast Asia.[3] Japanese and Korean popular culture in particular represent a source of cultural capital amongst young Indonesian consumers who associate these products with hip, modern, global tastes.

During the past decade, however, Indonesian comic fans have embraced an emerging genre pioneered by local artists such as Is Yuniarto and Hendranto Pratama Putra, who base their comics on traditional *wayang* tales while stylistically emulating Japanese manga aesthetics. Two of the most well-known examples of *wayang* manga are *Garudayana* and *Prajurit Dewa*. Known variously on comic forums as '*wayang keren*' (cool *wayang*), '*wayang* cyber' or '*wayang* manga,' these graphic novels attract praise and debate from thousands of Indonesian comic fans. In this article I analyse these comics and their online fan communities, revealing a range of (sometimes ambivalent) reactions to their hybrid aesthetics. I situate this analysis within the context of contemporary theories around globalisation and the flow of East Asian popular culture in Southeast Asia. In addition, I seek to draw parallels with the comic book trends of earlier eras, as well as deeper historical resonances with the development of *wayang* as a hybrid performance genre and forerunner of the graphic novel.[4] Ultimately I argue that while circuits of production and distribution have changed dramatically in the digital era, aesthetic hybridity has been an important characteristic of Indonesian comics since the 1950s, as well as in traditional *wayang* performances over many hundreds of years.

Indonesian *wayang* manga: a hybrid comic genre

To introduce *wayang* manga, I will focus on two prominent comic artists producing this kind of work in Indonesia today: Is Yuniarto and Hendranto Pratama Putra. Born in Semarang in 1981, Yuniarto

spent much of his childhood reading classic *wayang* comics.[5] Yet, when publishing his own work in the comic book market of the early 2000s, Japanese manga had clearly become his most important influence. His first two published comics, *Wind Rider* (2005) and *Knights of Apocalypse* (3 volumes, 2007–2009), are almost indistinguishable from Japanese manga. It was not until *Garudayana* (*Tale of Garuda*, 4 volumes, 2009–2013) that Yuniarto began including *wayang* elements in his work, a move that met with great success.[6] *Garudayana* is set in the time before the *Bharatayudha* (great war) between the Pandawa and Korawa clans in the Mahabharata epic. In Yuniarto's comic, an adventurous young girl named Kinara discovers a strange egg, which eventually hatches the young 'Garu,' who is destined to become the Mahabharata's legendary Garuda eagle.

Yuniarto describes his *Garudayana* story as a kind of '*wayang carangan*,' a term used to describe locally invented *wayang* stories or characters that are not in the original Ramayana or Mahabharata. This is a practice going back many hundreds of years amongst traditional *wayang* puppet-masters: indigenous Indonesian *wayang* characters include the '*Punakawan*' clown servants, as well as knights Wisanggeni, Antareja and Antasena. The purpose of many of these additional characters is often to resonate more deeply with local audiences, by providing characters they can relate to. Similarly, in the case of *Garudayana*, Yuniarto's lead character Kinara was created to 'attract female readers' to *wayang* tales, which have typically been dominated by male characters.[7] Given that female readers make up a significant portion of the comic book market, this is an astute commercial move. Yuniarto also cites deeper motivations: as a long-time fan of *wayang* himself, he explains that 'through *Garudayana*, I want to introduce *wayang* to a wider range of young people.'[8]

While the *Garudayana* story is inspired primarily by *wayang* tales, the cover art (figure 2) indicates that this comic is aesthetically hybrid. There are a number of visual markers from Javanese *wayang*, including ornate gold headdresses, wrapped sarongs, and weapons resembling *keris* (traditional daggers). However, the rest of the design is heavily indebted to manga aesthetics. Kirana's wild purple hair and enlarged eyes are typical of *anime* designs, as is the overall visual characterisation

Figure 2. Cover art from *Garudayana* vol. 1 & 4 (originally published by m&c! Koloni)

of the 'cutesy' young Garu, who appears as a fluffy yellow baby bird. According to Yuniarto, these design decisions were made in an attempt to create 'images that click with kids these days.'[9] And indeed, it was precisely this unique blending of *wayang* and manga elements that captured the attention of Indonesian comic fans, as I will illustrate in the next section.

Another Indonesian comic artist who has had great success with *wayang* manga comics is Hendranto Pratama Putra. Born in Bandung in 1986, his first comic *Prajurit Dewa*: *Hero After Death* was published in 2011. Also based on the Mahabharata's Garuda story, *Prajurit Dewa* is set in the future, where a young soldier named Mandala must call on the power of Garuda once again as evil forces begin to stir in the land. Just as in Yuniarto's *Garudayana*, *Prajurit Dewa* displays hybrid aesthetics, including the Javanese script used to introduce the *anime*-style characters. In addition to his conventional comic work, Pratama also sells large colour prints of his *wayang* characters (figure 3), and his most recent
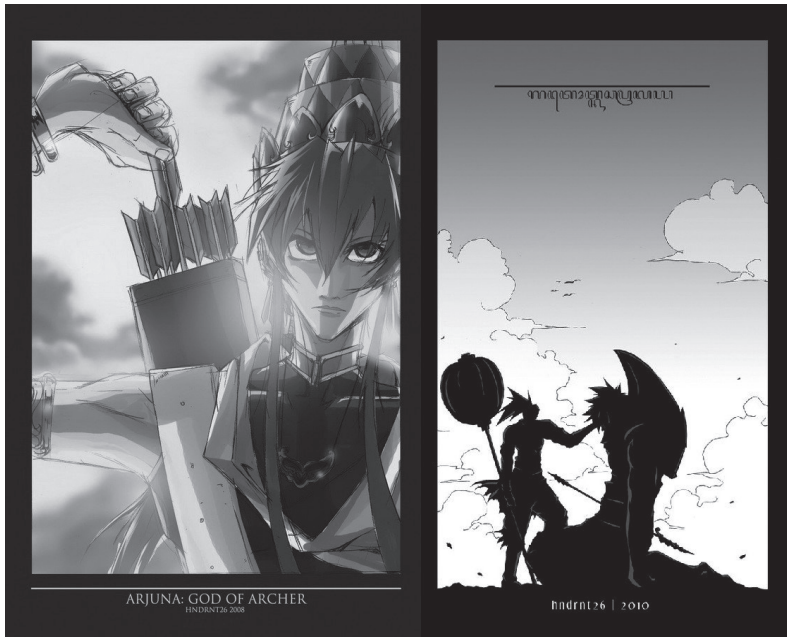
Figure 3. *Prajurit* Dewa posters (Hendranto Pratama Putra)

project is a fully online comic collaboration entitled *Nusantaranger* about a group of five young Indonesians with special powers, tasked with preventing the evil 'Kelana' from destroying the world. This overarching storyline echoes the Mahabharata's tale of the five Pandawa brothers' struggle against the Korawa clan.

Notably, while Yuniarto's childhood memories of the early 1980s are filled with *wayang* comics, Pratama's experience growing up in the 1990s was entirely different. He describes how his first contact with *wayang* did not occur until his last year at university in 2008, when his final assignment was to remake a Snakes and Ladders game with content from traditional Indonesian folklore. Shortly afterwards, when playing a Japanese computer game called *Dynasty Warriors*, he was struck by how the animators could 'remake history' with such interesting visuals, allowing audiences to learn 'cultural and historical content' in a fun way:

> And I just thought, why not bring Indonesian culture with
> the similar method? And the first thing that came in mind is
> "WAYANG." So I started to learn everything about Mahabharata
> from scratch, which I never try to learn before. And surprisingly,
> the story and the concept of Wayang is very interesting, it's all
> about a fantasy world, surreal concepts, and amazing characters
> which can be modified into something suitable with recent visual
> taste.[10]

In order to enrich his knowledge of *wayang*, Pratama bought a number
of R.A. Kosasih's classic *wayang* comics, and also began listening to
recorded shows by renowned *Wayang Golek* (wooden puppet) *dalang*
Asep Sunandar Sunarya:

> If R.A. Kosasih's comics just give me the visual experience, Asep
> Sunandar Sunarya gives me the sound and voice reference for
> the character so that I can imagine how the character should be.
> So from these two maestros I have learned [much] Indonesian
> wayang knowledge.[11]

Yet in a market dominated by Japanese manga, Pratama recognised
that traditional *wayang* comic aesthetics required updating: 'I put my
manga style into it, bring the latest outfit, style, and weapon to the
characters, and try to make it out-of-the-box.'[12] Again, we can see the
manga aesthetics being characterised as cool, hip and modern, a source
of cultural capital with which to attract young readers to *wayang* stories.
A close analysis of online comic forums confirms that Yuniarto and
Pratama's stylistic fusions of manga and *wayang* have indeed struck a
chord with thousands of Indonesian comic fans.

Wayang manga is a popular topic of conversation for online fan
communities. There are several forums on 'Kaskus,' Indonesia's largest
online discussion website, dedicated to the subject. When a Kaskus user
posted images of Pratama's *Prajurit Dewa* characters under the heading
'Cool: When Wayang Characters are Turned into Manga' in May 2014, the
discussion thread attracted responses from more than 1,000 other users

over the next few months.[13] Contributors praise Pratama's *wayang* manga as 'cool' and 'fresh,' describing it as 'Japanese *anime* with Indonesian cultural nuances.' One user observes, 'so it looks like wayang characters are globalising,' while another states poetically that 'wayang is becoming manga, and manga is becoming wayang.' There are several calls for Prajurit Dewa to be adapted into an animated series or live action film:

> Whoa … this could be made into a great action film, which could be even better than the marvel comic films…. I'm sure that such a film would beat any American film….

> This is really great, the concept of taking wayang stories and giving them modern packaging. If I was a child of [billionaire] Bill Gates, I'd finance this as an animated series … Hopefully it could be as well-made as a Japanese anime.

> Yeah, this could outsell [famous Japanese animated series] Naruto if it's made into an anime.

Many of the comic fans' responses tend to focus on the potential for *wayang* manga to introduce new generations to Indonesian folklore. One user describes Pratama's hybrid comic as 'a cultural object that's been modified, not deformed, but made fresher … so it can be easily accepted by younger generations.' Another contributor states that 'this is a great way to encourage Indonesian kids to know more about their own culture.' Some readers explain how their own understanding of *wayang* has been enhanced by their engagement with these comics:

> Cool … I've only just realised that Gatotkaca is Bima's son…. I'm sure they must have mentioned it in my elementary school Javanese classes, but I wasn't paying attention.

Overall, forums like this are flooded with support for the continued production of *wayang* manga. One user encourages Pratama to:

> Keep it up…. This kind of thing must be appreciated and encouraged to grow…. Who knows, maybe in the future we'll see people wanting to dress up cosplay-style as wayang characters.

Such opinions are echoed in discussions about Yuniarto's *Garudayana* comics on similar online forums.[14] Reviewing the *Garudayana* series, one comic fan writes how delighted they are that:

> [T]here are still Indonesian manga artists who want to use *wayang* stories from their own country … that is great … cheers to you … keep up the good work … and by the way, your drawing skills are just as good as Japanese manga artists.

Another exclaims:

> Finally, the reappearance of a comic with wayang theme…. A must-read for all comic lovers and wayang lovers. Hopefully with the release of this book, wayang stories can live on in our next generation.

Throughout the discussion on these forums, one of the key themes to emerge is a certain kind of ambivalent cultural nationalism, evident in comic fans' emphasis on 'beating' or 'matching' or 'not being outdone by' the quality of foreign cultural products:

> I'd love to read an Indonesian comic that can compete with manga or [Korean] manhwa.

> [A] great way for Indonesian kids to know less about Korea and more about their own culture.

> This is so cool. Make it into an *anime* for kids (these days, even kids shows are all imported from other countries). Rather that stealing from other countries, our own nation is rich in culture and history.

Kaskus users' desire to see local content is tempered somewhat by ambivalence about the quality and accessibility of this content. Generally, they characterise Japanese *manga* or Korean manhwa as hip, modern, high quality, and easy to engage with: 'It's much easier to learn about *wayang* if the characters are made into *anime* characters.' In contrast, *wayang*, especially in its traditional form, is seen as old-fashioned and boring. One user notes appreciatively that, 'this is so cool to look at … they don't look anything like wayang characters,' while another exclaims that 'when the Mahabharata story is done like this, it's definitely not boring anymore.' Yet while *wayang* is, for the most part, characterised as dry and outdated, some users continue to value it as an important source of cultural identity and values. 'Besides preserving our culture, there are also lots of good moral values in *wayang*,' points out one respondent, while another says that *wayang manga* 'can help today's generation to study about *wayang* stories and the important lessons that are contained within them.' Ultimately, the majority of users see the hybrid form of '*wayang manga*' as a way to fulfil their simultaneous cosmopolitan and nationalist desires to consume both trendy foreign products (*manga*) and local cultural content (*wayang*).

Of course, responses are not universally positive. Some users dispute the description of Yuniarto and Pratama's work as '*wayang manga*', arguing that the artwork looks more like Korean manhwa cartoons, or the Hollywood animated blockbuster *Avatar*. In reviews of both *Prajurit Dewa* and *Garudayana*, contributors note that it is 'weird' to see 'Arjuna appearing like Legolas from *Lord of the Rings*.' Other respondents have deeper concerns with the way that *wayang* has been mixed with foreign aesthetics:

> This is all pretty cool and good, but in my opinion it doesn't look very Indonesian … maybe because the character designs don't really display the distinctive characteristics of each original wayang character.

> It's not that I don't appreciate it, but I feel like it's not very appropriate to have wayang characters made into *manga*.

> I am a big fan of wayang stories, especially the Mahabharata
> tales … seeing Mahabharata characters made into manga is not
> right, they look really terrible and not a single one resembles the
> original…. Truly an eyesore.

One user even goes as far as saying 'this is destroying our culture.' As I
will explore in subsequent sections of this paper, these kinds of anxieties
around the hybrid form are familiar ones, particularly in post-colonial
contexts where questions of mimicry and cultural imperialism are often
central concerns. But ultimately, in the world of online comic fandom,
positive evaluations of *wayang manga* like *Garudayana* and *Prajurit Dewa*
far outnumber the negative ones. The artists appear to have fulfilled their
stated aims of introducing *wayang* to young Indonesians by combining
classic tales with contemporary aesthetic trends. Yet these two influences
are not always equally weighted; when analysing these discussion
forums, it becomes clear that consumers assign different values to the
wayang aspects (tradition, culture, nationalism) and the *manga* aspects
(modernity, social capital). In the next section, I will situate these
different values in the context of contemporary trans-Asian popular
culture flows and also within more general discourses around hybridity
in postcolonial perspectives.

Locating *Manga* Aesthetics in Trans–Asian Cultural Flows

The characterisation of *manga* aesthetics as hip and modern by artists and
audiences must be viewed in the wider context of consumption trends
throughout Asia. During the 1990s and 2000s, East Asian popular culture,
including music, film, television and fashion, became increasingly
dominant in Southeast Asian mediascapes. While the spread of Japanese
popular culture has attracted the widest scholarly attention, there have
also been important studies of the 'Hallyu wave' of Korean pop music,
as well as the transnational appeal of Taiwanese television dramas.[15]
The popularity of these East Asian products in Southeast Asian contexts
has been interpreted in a variety of ways by media and cultural studies

scholars. Early studies proposed that local consumers' reorientation away from 'Western' pop culture towards 'Asian' pop culture was due to a sense of 'cultural proximity' based on the 'Eastern values' believed to be shared across the region. For example, when analysing the popularity of Japanese television dramas in East and Southeast Asia in the 1990s, Iwao Sumiko emphasised the significance of 'shared sensibilities,' Honda Shino used the term 'East Asian psyche,' and Igarashi Akio employed the concept of 'cultural sensibility,' to explain the regional success of Japanese pop culture.[16] Subsequent work in this area has complicated the 'cultural proximity' thesis, by introducing concepts of hybrid Asian modernities. In his 2002 collection *Recentering Globalization,* Koichi Iwabuchi characterises Japan as a 'non-Western semi-centre,' which exports a 'mode of indigenized modernity for culturally and/or geographically contiguous nations.'[17] In other words, Japanese media companies export hybridised Japanese experiences of 'Western' culture to elsewhere in Asia. It is this hybrid Asian modernity that carries the cultural capital evident in Indonesian public discourse around *manga.*

Studies like Iwabuchi's are useful in countering dominant conceptions of media-cultural imperialism and homogenisation put forward in much Western globalisation theory. In such theories, globalisation has been understood mainly as Western (specifically, U.S.) cultural domination, or, at best, as a process in which Western influences are adapted and negotiated in local contexts.[18] Examining flows of media and cultural influences *within* Asia enables us to instead grasp some of the new circuits of distribution and consumption through which non-Western societies participate in globalisation. However, much of the scholarly work around 'Asianization' ultimately continues to retain a global-local paradigm. Prominent studies describing 'Japanization,' 'Pop Asianism,' and 'Trans-Asian Cultural Traffic' tend to characterise these phenomena as basically a regional process of globalization occurring in East and Southeast Asia.[19] This in many ways simply re-produces the media-cultural imperialism thesis on a regional scale, overlooking the varied ways in which influences from Japanese pop culture are appropriated and transformed in local contexts. My own study complicates this view, by examining more closely processes of hybridisation at work in the

contemporary Indonesian context.

Existing studies of trans-Asian popular cultural flows have primarily focused on East Asian products being consumed in Southeast Asian contexts. The case of *wayang manga* comics, however, involves more hybrid forms, raising questions around how East Asian *aesthetics* are valued and appropriated in *local products*. From my earlier analysis of online comic forums, it is clear that these hybrid products are valued more highly than either foreign products or local copies–but also that, although generally embraced, they can provoke some anxiety. This is typical of attitudes in many post-colonial contexts. The sentiments that online fan communities display towards hybrid forms of *manga* have much in common with attitudes towards local versions of U.S. cultural products from the 1950s onwards as well as hybrid Dutch-Indonesian cultural products during the colonial era. Of course, it is impossible to disentangle these cultural phenomena from questions of power, both economic and symbolic. In his study of late 19th century popular theatre in the Dutch East Indies, Cohen astutely summarises the shifting attitudes towards hybridity that often emerge in post-colonial situations:

> Hybrid sites of art and culture initially evoke mockery and derision from European colonizers, Western-educated members of the indigenous elite, and sometimes the traditional elite as well. An indigenous brass band, a nativist crucifix, an adapted form of cricket–all are constituted as acts of mimicry that are potential embarrassments to both colonized and colonizer, as these genres unsettle cultural and racial boundaries … At what is usually a later stage of cultural interaction, this embarrassment fades as intellectuals begin to emphasize the local genius for appropriating and modifying the culture of the colonizer to serve the needs of the indigenous population…. A third phase of popular cultural discourse understands popular culture as a site of interaction … and cross-fertilization.[20]

Although in the passage cited above, Cohen is focussed on a very different era and socio-political context, many of these hopes and

anxieties around hybridity are evident in attitudes towards Japanese and Korean popular cultural influences in Indonesia today. In the case of online comic forums, the 'mockery and derision' is evident in users' characterisation of *wayang manga* as a cheap imitation of foreign comics, and also in their concern that this kind of mimicry is 'destroying' or 'diluting' local culture. At the same time, comic forums are increasingly filled with widespread celebration of the comic artists' skills in 'appropriating and modifying' foreign aesthetics to serve local needs, and ultimately beating cultural imperialists at their own game. In drawing a parallel with Cohen's analysis here, I do not mean to suggest that contemporary market domination of East Asian pop culture is analogous to European colonialism; merely that many of the same questions of economic and symbolic power remain relevant across different historical contexts.

Histories of Hybridity

The range of different, and sometimes ambivalent, reactions to contemporary *wayang manga* comics in Indonesia also display significant parallels with the original 'golden age' of *wayang* comics in the 1960-70s, to which I will now turn. Early local comic strips appeared in local papers throughout the 1930s and 1940s in what was then the Dutch East Indies, but these dwindled during Indonesia's struggle for independence in the late 1940s.[21] In the early 1950s, translations of U.S. comics, including *Phantom*, *Flash Gordon* and *Superman*, entered the Indonesian market, and became hugely popular, prompting local artists to begin emulating these U.S. superhero stories. In 1954, R.A. Kosasih published the first full Indonesian comic book, about a female superhero called Sri Asih, and many other Indonesian comic artists followed suit.[22] While these local versions of superhero comics were widely consumed, familiar anxieties about mimicry were never far from the surface. In much the same way as Yuniarto and Pratama began searching for more 'local' content in the late 2000s, Indonesian comic artists of the early 1960s, most famously Kosasih, turned to the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (figure 4). There are also strong parallels evident in the attitudes of both publishers

and audiences of these two eras. In a foreword to the first edition of a Ramayana comic published in Solo in 1962, the publisher explains:

> This story was created to counter the negative effects of foreign cultural influence on young spirits…. This graphic novel will galvanise society … demonstrating that we do not need to import foreign comics, which may poison the spirit of our nation, or at least not fit with our own national character.[23]

The sentiment expressed in this statement from the early 1960s is not far removed from comic publisher statements of the 2010s. Take, for instance, this mission statement from the *Nusantaranger* website:

> Nusantaranger emerged from our concern at the lack of native Indonesian role-model figures for children. America has figures like Superman, Batman, Spiderman. Japan also has plenty. Indonesia is very much lacking in this area … so Nusantaranger hopes to fill that void … we believe that this format [using five young Indonesian protagonists] is appropriate for representing Indonesia's spirit of mutual co-operation and togetherness. We also want to introduce the diversity of Indonesian culture through the medium of pop culture, so it can be enjoyed by many people.[24]

As was evident on the comic fan forums I cited earlier, such efforts have an eager audience. These forums praise *wayang manga* creators like Yuniarto and Pratama for 'introducing younger generations to *wayang* stories.' Similarly, throughout the 1960s–80s, as the 'father' of Indonesian *wayang* comics, Kosasih was widely credited with 're-acquainting' Indonesians with *wayang*, an art-form that had come to be seen as old-fashioned and irrelevant in the new republic of Indonesia.[25]

   While it is often tempting to characterise contemporary hybrid forms like *wayang manga* as new and unprecedented, it is also vital to take into account the way that cultural flows are embedded in broader cycles and historical processes. The similarities between the 1960s and 2000s, in terms of local artists first copying foreign comics (whether from the U.S.

Figure 4. R.A. Kosasih's Classic *Wayang* Comics, 'Leluhur Pandawa' (Goedang Djadul) and 'Rama Sinta' (Sang Kolektor).

or Japan), then increasingly hybridising them using *wayang* stories and aesthetics, reminds us that 'new' or 'emerging' forms are often part of wider historical cycles. A comparison between the two eras is also useful in analysing parallels in power relations, and helping to determine what specifically differentiates 'new' media forms like *wayang manga* from past comic trends.

Arguably, there are also deeper historical resonances between contemporary *wayang manga* comics and the history and function of traditional *wayang* performances throughout many hundreds of years in Indonesia. The comic genre shares many creative conventions with *wayang* puppetry, including the importance of visual language, the central role of bodily forms in characterisation, as well as a somewhat slap-stick approach to humour. Moreover, hybridity is not simply a twenty-first century development in the history of *wayang*, for the improvised nature of *wayang* performances has long lent itself to experimentation, innovation and hybridity.[26] There have been many,

varied external influences on *wayang*. The Ramayana and Mahabharata epics were themselves integrated with local Javanese mythology and characters during the Majapahit era. Later, after Islam became an important social force on the archipelago, religious regulations against creating life-like images of people or animals impacted the shape of *wayang* puppets, and they became increasingly abstract and stylised. During the eighteenth century, contact with European traders resulted in the creation of a new set of *wayang* characters–the 'ogres'–figures who are widely believed to represent the Dutch. In many ways, the twenty-first century migration of *wayang* into online *manga*-style comics is simply another example of *wayang*'s interaction with external cultural influences. In a 1976 study on Indonesian comic production, Bonneff traces the history of Indonesian comics all the way back to reliefs carved into ancient temples such as Borobudur (750 AD) and Prambanan (850 AD), which he characterises as 'prototypes' of 1970s *wayang* comics.[27] Similarly, I argue that we can trace histories of hybridity from ancient fusions of Hindu epics with local mythologies and Islamic decorative artwork, all the way through to contemporary *wayang manga*. As such, the contemporary comic artist can be characterised as a '*dalang*' puppet-master of the twenty-first century.

Ultimately, when comparing early twenty-first century *wayang manga* with mid-twentieth century comics or even ancient *wayang* puppetry performances, it is primarily the circuits of distribution and consumption that change. In contrast to comic artists or *wayang dalang* of earlier eras, artists like Yuniarto and Pratama are highly active in online spaces, distributing and promoting their comics through various websites, and interacting with their readers in a range of forums. Pratama in particular makes full use of the opportunities offered by social media: he is active on Twitter; he has his own website, as well as a full profile on 'deviantart,' a forum for independent artists to share their work; and he posts regular online journal updates, which his followers are able to comment on. When uploading his work in progress (figure 5), Pratama receives instant feedback on his designs, and integrates the suggestions of his readers into the revision process.[28] Pratama's most recent project, the comic collaboration *Nusantaranger*, is fully online. Access to this comic is free;

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however, the *Nusantaranger* team have created a number of merchandise lines, which are for sale on their website. Contemporary Indonesian *wayang manga* artists are operating in an entirely different marketplace to their predecessors: audiences can obtain online access to a whole range of comics from all over the world, and this access is largely unaffected by government restrictions or import policies. In this context, these artists' pursuit of a unique fusion of 'cool' *manga* aesthetics and 'local' *wayang* content can be seen as a way to stand out in an increasingly competitive field.

Yet in many ways, new online circuits of distribution and consumption are only 'new' at a surface level. It is vital to avoid the common twenty-first century conceit that we are living in a radically unique moment of connectivity and exchange, without historical precedent.[29] As I indicated earlier, strong resonances are apparent between contemporary *wayang manga* comics and *wayang* comics of earlier eras, as well as with the deeper histories of hybridity in *wayang* more broadly. A 'write to the artist' page that readers could tear out of a 1970s R.A. Kosasih *wayang* comic shares the same fundamental principle
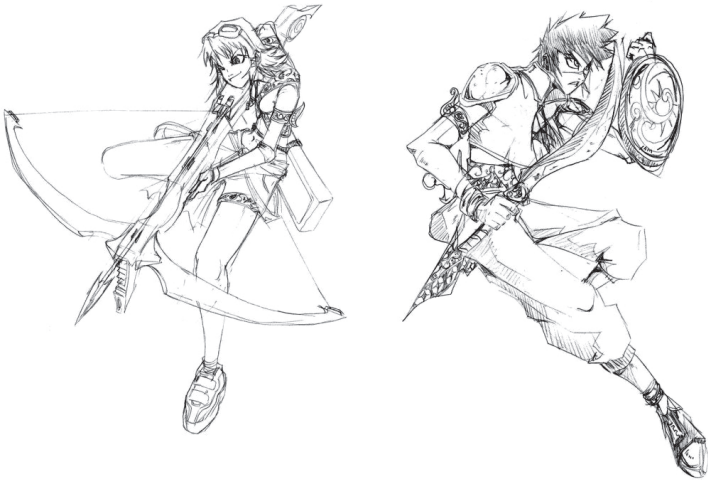

Figure 5. Concept Art for Srikandi and Abimanyu (Hendranto Pratama Putra)

as Pratama's online interaction with his followers. The recovery of these historical resonances is a way in which to develop perspective on contemporary cultural conditions, and assist in determining what is or is not profoundly new about 'new' forms of cultural expression.

In the case of *wayang* comics, the same stories continue to circulate, with aesthetics and meanings shifting, according to contemporary socio-political power relations and associated cultural capital. Here, Iwabuchi's argument about hybrid Asian modernities and the cultural capital of Japanese popular culture remains relevant. In a similar way that Hindu and Islamic influences shaped *wayang* puppetry in centuries past, and U.S. comics shaped the popular urban comic form that *wayang* was to take in the 1960s and 1970s, the *manga* aesthetics of Indonesia's twenty-first century *wayang* comics are deeply embedded in the way that different foreign influences are valued, as well as the anxieties that such influences can create.

This paper has demonstrated that contemporary Indonesian *wayang manga* comics are a hybrid form, aimed at satisfying audiences' cosmopolitan desires for trendy global aesthetics, as well as nationalist yearnings for 'local' cultural content. These hybrid products have certainly struck a chord with readers, as revealed in my analysis of several online comic forums. By situating my study of *wayang manga* comics within wider literature about East Asian popular culture in Southeast Asia, I have revealed a more complex picture beyond notions of regional globalisation or East Asian cultural domination. Ultimately, I have proposed that it is important to view the *wayang manga* phenomena within broader processes of hybridisation, including the history of Indonesian comic book production, and in deeper histories of *wayang* as a highly syncretic performance genre.

Notes

[1] The multiple and contradictory accounts available on *wayang*'s history and functions (both aesthetic and political) illustrate the complex and evolving role of *wayang* in Indonesia. My own understanding is framed by a range of studies, including Benedict Anderson, *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern

Indonesia Project, 1965); W.H. Rassers, "On the Origin of Javanese Theatre," in *Panji the Culture Hero*: *A Structural Study of Religion in Java*, ed. W.H. Rassers (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1959 [1931]); Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia*: *Continuities and Change* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967); James R Brandon, *On Thrones of Gold*: *Three Javanese Shadow Plays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970); Sri Mulyono, *Human Character in the Wayang* (Jakarta: Pustaka Wayang, 1977); Edward C Van Ness and Shita Prawirohardjo, *Javanese Wayang Kulit* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1980); Roger Long, *Javanese Shadow Theatre*: *Movement and Characterization in Ngayogyakarta Wayang Kulit* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982); Ruth McVey, "The Wayang Controversy in Indonesian Communism," in *Meaning and Power in Southeast Asia*, ed. M. Hobart and R. Taylor (Ithaca: CSEAP, 1986); Ward Keeler, *Javanese Shadow Plays*, *Javanese Selves* (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); Laurie. J. Sears, *Shadows of Empire*: *Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996).

[2] Hafiz Ahmad, Alvanov Zpalanzani, and Beny Maulana, *Histeria*! *Komikita*, *Membedah Komikita Masa Lalu*, *Sekarang dan Masa Depan* (Jakarta: Elek Media Komputindo, 2006). See also *Illustrating Asia*: *Comics*, *Humor Magazines*, *and Picture Books*, ed. John A Lent (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

[3] See, for example Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*: *Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin, "Contesting Soft Power: Japanese Popular Culture in East and Southeast Asia," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 8, no. 1 (2008).

[4] My use of 'hybridity' in this article is informed by the work of Homi Bhabha and Pnina Werbner, who emphasise the complexities around hybrid sites of cultural production, and argue against 'self-congratulatory' celebration of hybridity, in favour of 'processual' models of hybridity that examine not just origins and influences but also the anxieties that push people to create new forms of culture as well as preserving or reviving older forms. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Pnina Werbner, "Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity," in *Debating Cultural Hybridity*: *Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, ed. Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (London: Zed, 1997).

[5] Quoted in Henry, "Is Yuniarto: Membuat Komik Wayang Carangan," *Henrykomik*, March 7, 2011, accessed June 26, 2015, http://henrykomik.com/wp/2011/03/is-yuniarto-membuat-komik-wayang-carangan. All translations are my own.

[6] Mikha Widy, Alvanov Zpalanzani Mansoor, and Naomi Haswanto, "Kajian Visualisasi Karakter dalam Seri Komik Garudayana," *WIMBA*, *Journal Komunikasi Visual & Multimedia* 5, no. 2 (2013); Luthfi Fazar Ridho et al., "Memahami Identitas Hibrida pada Komik Indonesia Kontemporer (Analisis Semiotika Komik Garudayana)," *Interaksi Online* 3, no. 2 (2014).

[7] Quoted in Widy, Mansoor, and Haswanto, "Kajian Visualisasi Karakter dalam Seri Komik Garudayana," 58.

[8] Quoted in Henry, "Is Yuniarto: Membuat Komik Wayang Carangan."

[9] Quoted in Henry, "Garudayana: Wayang Carangan Is Yuniarto," *Henrykomik*, April 17, 2011, accessed June 26, 2015, http://henrykomik.com/wp/2011/04/ garudayana-wayang-carangan-is-yuniarto.

[10] Hendranto Pratama Putra, personal communication, May 2015, English in original.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Kaskus, "[Cool] When Wayang Characters are Turned into *Manga*," *Kaskus*, accessed June 25, 2015, http://www.kaskus.co.id/thread/5361b04ecb07e776678b45ce/ keren-kalau-karakter-pewayangan-dijadikan-karakter-manga.

[14] Kaskus, "Manga 'GARUDAYANA', by Is Yuniarto," *Kaskus*, accessed June 25, 2015, http://www.kaskus.co.id/thread/000000000000000002215996/manga-039 garudayana039-by-is-yuniarto; Goodreads, "Garudayana Vol. 1," http://www.good reads.com/book/show/6685824-garudayana-vol-1.

[15] For examples of scholarly work on the spread of Japanese popular culture, see Iwabuchi, *Recentering globalization*: *Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*; Otmazgin, "Contesting Soft Power: Japanese Popular Culture in East and Southeast Asia." On Korean popular culture see Sun Jung, "K-pop, Indonesian Fandom, and Social Media," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 8 (2011). For a study of Taiwanese soap opera fandom in Indonesia, see Rachmah Ida, "Consuming Taiwanese Boys Culture: Watching *Meteor Garden* with Urban Kampung Women in Indonesia," in *Popular Culture in Indonesia*: *Fluid Identities in Post-authoritarian Politics*, ed. Ariel Heryanto (London: Routledge, 2008). For a related study of Indian/Bollywood influences in Indonesian popular culture, see also Bettina David, "Intimate Neighbours: Bollywood, Dangdut Music, and Globalizing Modernities in Indonesia," in *Global Bollywood*: *Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, ed. Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2008).

[16] Iwao Sumiko (1994), Honda Shino (1994) and Igarashi Akio (1997), all quoted in Otmazgin, "Contesting Soft Power."

[17] Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 48.

[18] See, for example, Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Geopolitics and Geoculture*: *Essays on the Changing World-System* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Samuel P Huntington, "The West: Unique, not Universal," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 6 (1996).

[19] For "Japanization," see Shuhei Hosokawa and Akiko Otake, "Karaoke in East Asia: Modernization, Japanization, or Asianization," in *Karaoke Around the World*: *Global Technology, Local Singing*, ed. Toru Mitsui and Shuhei Hosokawa (New York: Routledge, 1998). For "Pop Asianism," see Leo Ching, "Imaginings in the Empires of the Sun: Japanese Mass Culture in Asia," in *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*, ed. John W Treat (London: Curzon, 1996). For "Trans-Asian Cultural Traffic," see *Feeling Asian Modernities*: *Transnational Consumption of Japanese TV Dramas*, ed. Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2004).

[20] Matthew Cohen, "Hybridity in Komedi Stambul," in *Chewing Over the West*, ed. D Jedamski (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 275-76. For more on postcolonial attitudes towards hybridity, see also Johannes Fabian, *Moments of Freedom*: *Anthropology and Popular Culture* (Charlottesville & London: UP of Virginia, 1998).

[21] Marcel Bonneff, *Komik Indonesia*, trans. Rahayu S. Hidayat (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 1998 [1976]), 21.

[22] Ibid., 24.

[23] Quoted ibid., 104.

[24] Shani Budi Pandita et al., "About Nusantaranger," *Nusantaranger*, accessed June 25, 2015, http://nusantaranger.com/about/.

[25] Dwi Koendoro, *Yuk, Bikin Komik Sambil Ketawa* (Bandung: DAR! Mizan, 2007). 49.

[26] See Anderson, *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese*; Meg Downes, "Shadows on the Page: Javanese *Wayang* in Contemporary Indonesian Literature," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 46, no. 1 (2012).

[27] Bonneff, *Komik Indonesia*.

[28] 'One by one, day by day, when a drawing finished, I upload it and see the feedback. Sometimes people amazed, and sometimes I just received good critiques and advices, which means I have to learn the concept/story further' (Hendranto Pratama Putra, personal communication, May 2015, English in original).

[29] Cohen has proposed a similar argument in his work on colonial era popular theatre in the Dutch East Indies, arguing that 'the creolization of cultures and the global ecumene of today emerged in the nineteenth century, not the twentieth.' For more detail, see Cohen, "Hybridity in Komedi Stambul," 298.