Indonesian Islamic Comic Development

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Abstract. Islam bring the philosophy of beauty influence in Indonesia. This can be seen from the basic changes of Hindu-Buddhist era’s artworks, when it is compared to artworks that were later born in Islam influence. This study examines the history and philosophy of Islamic art, especially comic media, from the pre-Islamic to the post-modern period in Indonesia. Data analysis used in this study was interpretation analysis on the data collected from document review and literature study. Islamic art excludes works that are sacred or cultured. Islamic artworks are not ritual means, or they cannot connecting humans with God. Islamic art in Indonesia then continues to adapt to the influence of the renaissance and industrial revolution brought by colonialism to Asia. New art media emerged as a result of the meeting of those two different cultures, one of which was comic media. Islamic comics in Indonesia began to appear in the 1960s. Industrialization requires the development of various lines, they forms the Islamic comics that exist today. Now the comic industry is not only about questioning how to sell printed paper. Digital and internet media make the comic market develop into a level that cannot be imagined before.

1 Introduction

Islamic da’wah (preaching/mission) comics are visual media in the form of a combination of pictures and writings in the form of panels to narrate the teachings of Islam. As an art form, the existence of Islamic da’wah comics is influenced by the intertextuality of the work. It mean that the use of comic media as an Islamic da’wah does not immediately appear, but rather influenced by various surrounding factors.

This study examines the effect of changes in fundamental thinking (philosophy) about the beauty that occurs in Indonesia, to the existence of Islamic mission comics that exist today. This is interesting, considering that religion and art exist side by side for so long in Indonesia and have faced a variety of socio-cultural changes, giving rise to religious art media that have typical characteristics. The study results aimed to describe the changes in the philosophy of beauty in Indonesia which influence the characteristics of Islamic mission comics that exist today. With an understanding of those characteristics, comics can be used as a medium for delivering religious teachings in accordance with Islamic rules (sharia), as well as easily understood by its readers. The periods of changes in the philosophy of beauty related to the comics’s existence as an Islamic da’wah media in Indonesia consists of 1)

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Religious art, 2) Art as guidance and spectacle, 3) Expressive factual art, and 4) Art as discourse.

2 Literature Review

The comic researches as cultural artifact were ever carried out by previous researchers, namely Seno Gumira Ajidarma entitled *Panji Tengkorak: Kebudayaan dalam Perbincangan* and Marcel Bonneff in a book *Komik Indonesia*. Both discussed Indonesian comic trends in the 1960-1970s as part of cultural phenomenon. Different with those, this research studies the comics existence as an Islamic media, specifically discusses material objects in the form of Islamic mission comics in Indonesia and examines the influence of changes in the philosophy of beauty that occurred from pre-history to post-modern.

3 Method

Research data analysis was carried out by using analysis interpretation with cultural approach. Culture is a set or collection of symbols that humans get through the learning process. Here humans are assumed to be creatures who can create and utilize symbols to communicate and build social life, so that human life is a symbolic life [1]. The symbols’ appearances in a culture cannot be separated from the influence of pre-existing symbols. Similarly, Islamic *da’wah* comics cannot be separated from the influence of an earlier set of symbols in the form of a dynamic philosophy of beauty.

4 Discussion

Art is an aspect that humanizes humans. It is different from hunting and gathering which can also be done by animals. Art can only be done and become a human characteristic. In other words, art is a sign of humanity. The beginning of human life on earth can be studied through various art artifacts found today. Although the validity of the periodization of the artifacts of the owner is still a debate, because it is not possible to empirically test the age of an artifact that is thousands of years old or tens of thousands of years old.

4.1 Religious Art

4.1.1 Religious art in prehistoric times

The form of art at the beginning of human life was dominated by works that were religious in nature, meaning that the art blended into the means of worship ritual. The order of life that guides human life with its surroundings and the awareness of the power of the Almighty outside the human self, has become the peak value of human thought since prehistoric times. These conventions in human thought are called culture, and one of its elements is art. The values of these thoughts consciously or unconsciously form on the objects they use everyday. These objects were buried together with one civilized change to another new civilization until now it has been rediscovered and become a cultural artifact.

The migration of a tribe helped bring the culture they professed to spread to various places. In Indonesia there was a Central Asian migration about 2,000 BC. Central Asian Migration one passes through two lines, namely the west route through the Malacca Peninsula and the northern route through North Sulawesi. Next is the Central Asian migrations two that occurred around 300 BC. Central Asian Migration two brings a new
culture of metal culture or also called the Dongson culture. In contrast to the culture of the previous times, Dongson culture was rich in ornaments or ornamental variety in the heritage artifacts [2].

Long before the Dongson culture, humans were familiar with visual culture. One form of visual culture can be found in cave painting artifacts. However, the cave paintings do not contain the "sign" that formed them into language, but have already shown a message. Cave paintings that are commonly found in Indonesia are hand stamped images. Hand-painted cave paintings can be found in cave paintings in Borneo, Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua [3]. The exact meaning of these cave paintings is unknown. Instructions indicate that its function is not just decorating the living room, because the cave has no signs of being permanent place to live. In addition, the cave is in an area that is not easily accessible. There is a theory which states that this cave painting is a way of communicating with others; other theories regard it as a means of worship or certain ceremonies.

Kosasih said that the cave paintings purpose was related to the makers' beliefs. It means that the artwork they made not directly related to the artistic goals (adding to the beauty of an object that was painted), but an attempt to be able to communicate with supernatural powers. Therefore, the researchers estimate that the idea of cave wall painting at first is a request to certain powers so that what is desired can be achieved, in accordance with what was painted [4]. Van Heekeren said that the painting had something to do with the ceremony of death and life in another world (life after death). Furthermore, Van Heekeren, using the ethnoarchaeology study, he links hand drawing and religion. He stated that the hand stamp depicts a journey of dead spirits groping towards the spirit realm [5]. All that is depicted in cave paintings in prehistoric times is a form of reflection of life lived in its time. Their lives are always dependent on nature and nature is a place for them to replace their lives. The cave as a place for them to take shelter and rest or as a place to live is used as a place to express their life's journey.

**Fig. 1.** From left to right: Hand drawing on cave paintings in Indonesia; Nekara which is full of ornament; Relief of Borobudur and Prambanan temple.

Other cultural artifacts that indicate the relationship between art and religion, namely nekara. Nekara is a bronze drum shaped like a waisted pan in the middle with a metallic sound membrane. Nekara is a relic of Dongson culture in the bronze age. Nekara was beaten in various ceremonies such as rain calling ceremonies, war preparation, corpse funeral ceremonies. Besides that, it also has functions as a dowry and grave stock. Nekara made with metal casting techniques is full of decorative styles. Like the ornamental variety of people dancing and corpse boats that brought the deceased spirit to the afterlife, and the variety of people riding horses and buffaloes as the symbol of the sun or moon in nekara from the Dayak tribe, Kalimantan. Ornamental variety of frog animals that are connected with the ceremony to call rain, and Meander's ornamental variety is the row of letters ‘T’ that stand perpendicular and inverted to change, in nekara from Bima. Various types of ornaments on nekara are made with a specific purpose. If the functional aspect of nekara is only as a musical instrument, then nekara will be made as long as it can emit sounds and plain without ornaments. The existence of ornaments in nekara shows the importance of
these ornaments for the life of the user community. The beliefs or rules towards regularity of life are the most important knowledge for prehistoric people. The beliefs that include the supreme power beyond human ability are the highest forms of knowledge compared to worldly technical knowledge such as agriculture, livestock, and so on. So it is very possible that the reason for the existence of ornaments that bothered affixed to the nekara relates to the knowledge of these beliefs.

4.1.2 Religious art during Hindu-Buddhist times

After Christian era, the religious art spirit is still evolving along with the spread of cultural religion or pagan. The oldest written historical record about the territory of Indonesia, one of which was the news of a Buddhist priest from mainland China named Fa-Hsien, in 414 AD in his book Fa-Kao-Chi. It tells that he lived in Java for 5 months (December 412 to May 413) waiting for the ship to be boarded. Here he found little people who were Buddhists, many of whom were Hindus and some still embraced animism [6].

Artifact evidence shows that art with religious spirit is so thick in Indonesia during the Hindu-Buddhist era. Temple reliefs in Central Java visualize religious teachings which become the spirit of making temples. Borobudur Temple (8th century AD) with reliefs of Buddhist teachings, and the Prambanan temple (9th century AD) with reliefs of Hinduism teachings, even today those two temples are still a religious means of worship for the Buddhist and Hinduism.

Turning to East Java, art as a worship ritual mean continues to grow, starting from the time of Mpu Sindok, Kingdom of Kediri, Singasari, and Majapahit. The temples’ relics in East Java differ in function from central Javanese temples which are generally as worship places. The East Javanese temples is mostly burial places for deceased kings’ ashes. This still shows the relationship between the temples with Hindu-Buddhism that exist in society.

Art with religious spirit can be interpreted as a means that connects humans with their God. The philosophy of the highest beauty of religious art is about God. Art works are presented to God or kings as God’s representatives (Dewaraja). This makes religious art works anonymously. Cave paintings, nekara, temple reliefs and other artifacts do not have the maker’s signature like modern art. These artworks are made as a form of human devotion to their God, by devoting noble values about life to every work of art they created.

Religious art shows that the relationship of art and religion has been intertwined for so long. Even in this era the level of sanctity of a religious device is influenced by the aesthetics of its physical form. This we can see in the main building of the most cultured temple, generally in the form of a larger, taller, rich ornament compared to ancillary or companion temples. There are also rules in designing the shape of the main building of the temple to meet certain cult values.

4.2 Art as Guidance and Spectacle

Art as a ritual worship mean in Indonesia dominated the art existence until the collapse of Majapahit Kingdom. Widespread influence of Islamic religion caused fundamental shift in thinking about art. Religious art began to shift into art as guidance and spectacle. Art is no longer as a means of worship, art began to experience deconstruction as a means of preaching religious teachings. This is closely related to Islamic rules which forbid the intermediaries (statue/sculpture) between humans and their God while worshiping.

Islam came to Indonesia in the 7th century AD [7]. Early Islamic artifacts found in Indonesia in the form of tombstone inscribed with Arabic letters from the 13th century AD. In the 16th century, the Islamic influence on Java accelerated with evidence of the emergence of Islamic powers such as Demak, Pajang, Mataram, Cirebon, and Banten.
There are concepts of Khalik (Creator) and beings (creations). The term Khalik only refers to God, while beings refer to all realities other than Himself, or those created by Him, such as angels, humans, genie, celestial bodies and others [8]. Creating Khalik is impossible, because Khalik is the Creator itself and cannot be created. Dealing with shaping the God is forbidden in Islam. The Islamic concept believes that God is the single Dzat, powerful or Almighty Essence (Tauhid), the perfect entity, so that it will be impossible to be constrained by the limitations of human thought. When Khalik is created, shaped, that is humiliating God, the degree will become a creature. The Islamic art ideology is different from the other religious arts. In Islam there are rules regarding art. One of them as described above is that creating, blocking, decorating God is forbidden. So that the form of the beauty of Islamic art is also judged from obeying these rules. The Islamic view makes art work no longer as a means which capable of connecting humans with their God. In other words, the art of being is for the creature itself. This Islamic art ideology is then followed by society as Islam develops in Indonesia.

**Fig. 2.** Changes in the philosophy of beauty after the arrival of Islam (left), the shape of the purwa shadow puppets does not resemble humans (Source: Novi, 2018, and https://pramukaxp2.files.wordpress.com/2009/10/wayang-kulit24.jpg)

The concept of art as guidance and spectacle is the novelty of preaching Islamic teachings through art. The Hindu-Buddhist art which was popular before was used as a means in the cultural strategy of spreading Islam. This cultural strategy was successful, even art from this Hindu-Buddhist era experienced its peak at this time. This is evidenced by the teachings of Islam which became widely adopted by people who previously embraced heterogeneous beliefs. Art as a guide and spectacle means while enjoying beautiful artwork, as well as learning the guide to the order of Islamic life. In this concept there is absolutely no concept of art to be a link between humans and God. Art as guidance and spectacle is a concept that is able to bridge the beauty with Islamic rules. Middle Eastern stories were introduced and became the inspiration for the new art creation. Popular folk art adapts the stories so that it becomes an attractive medium to spreading Islam. One example is the story of Amir Hamzah or Javanese Serat Menak [9].

On the other hand spreading religion through art, especially visuals brings its own polemic in Islamic rules, because there are no clear sources of Islamic rules. The Islamic view of the law of drawing Hanafi, Shafi’i, and Hambali school is forbidden, while the Malikii school considers it permitted. The school’s view is related to images with symbolic, decorative and expressive functions, even in certain cases such as images of humans, animals, and glorified images. There is no strict law regarding the object of the image with the narrative function especially the narrative of Islamic propagation itself. The law regarding this issue should be determined through *ijtihad* (negotiations) of the ulemas (Islamic scholars). In the *Walisongo* era there were negotiations, where Sunan Kudus, Sunan Kalijogo, Sunan Gunung Jati, and Sunan Muria differed in their views on local customs with Sunan Bonang, Sunan Ampel, Sunan Giri, and Sunan Drajat.

Abstract forms in the Islamic artwork become characteristics of Islamic influence on Indonesian art. Puppets in temple buildings and wayang Bali look more like humans than
Purwa puppet. Nevertheless abstract style has actually been known since the Hindu-Buddhist era, but abstract forms are present not as the main object of a visual work. The arrival of Islam with its artistic rules, to strengthen the abstract style of art in Indonesia.

Art as guidance and spectacle is the art of Islamic nuances. In Islamic art, forms of art no longer affect their sanctity. Islam occupies artworks as a medium delivering religious messages that guide the human life. If a mosque is made simple without ornaments and painted in plain white, it will not affect the value of its function, even when compared to a magnificent mosque, full of ornaments, and painted with stunning color combinations. In the view of Islamic art, an artwork’s aesthetics do not influence the value of its function.

4.3 Factual and Expressive Art

The spirit of European Renaissance succeeded in purifying the essence of art. This spirit is then transmitted throughout the world through the expansion of European nations. Nusantara which is famous for its fertility, certainly attracts European who are looking for natural resources for industrial purposes. Portugal, Spain, Netherlands, France and Britain also came to Indonesia, initially to trade. In Indonesia, colonialism has brought the spirit of fine art. The highest philosophy of beauty about God that existed before began to be mixed with embodied beauties (formal aesthetics). Sacred aesthetics become profane aesthetics.

In addition to the spirit of fine art, Colonialism also brings the spirit of gospel. Gospel is the spirit of the spread of Christianity based on the Todesillas agreement [10]. So that the art concept as a link between humans and God is back in Indonesia. The cross use clearly becomes medium for connecting Christians with God and becomes mean for their ritual. Colonialism on the one hand brings the spirit of fine art, but on the other hand it revives the religious art. So the colonialists need the understanding to bridge the two contradictory things, namely secularism, the separation of religious life with worldly life. This is a form of mental occupation in the indigenous population who previously recognized the harmony between religious life and worldly life. Religion which is a guide to the regularity of life not only regulates human relations with their God, but also regulates human relations with the surrounding environment. The secularism influence on the Indonesian art world is the emergence of factual and expressive profane works. Art are just as a beautiful spectacle.

4.3.1 History of Islamic Comics in Indonesia

During Dutch colonialism, a new media called comics emerged. The first mass-published comic was created and published by Rudolphe Topffer (Swiss artist) in 1837 entitled "Les Amours de Mr. Vieux Bois". Comic (began in 1827) was later translated into the United States (1842) become "The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck", published in the form of 6 to 12 panels per page, as many as 40 pages with a page size of about 8.5 x 11 inches.

Scott McCloud said that Rudolphe Topffer was the father of modern comics because he introduced the panel boundaries concept in comics also combining images and words, whereas Topffer himself when making the comics, he did not mean to publish it, only to be read by his close friends. Topffer is a decontractor of illustrations that is an explanatory image. If in the illustration, the text’s role is more dominant in conveying the message than the image, while comic will predominantly speak using images rather than text.

In Indonesia, in fact media such as comics have been known since time immemorial, although the form is unlike modern comics today. Examples of the form of the comic tradition in Indonesia are in the wayang beber and temple reliefs. The comics’ tradition in Indonesia can be said to have lasted long time. This fact can be seen from the number of 18-19th century Javanese and Balinese manuscripts which are similar to comics [10]. It can
be said that comics in their traditional forms in Indonesia already existed, before the ancient society knew the printing machines and publishing systems.

Modern comics became known here in the 1930s. Indonesian comics initially were more in the form of comic strips in various newspapers. The homeland comics at that time can also be found in Dutch newspapers such as *De Java Bode* and *D'orient*, along with outside comics such as *Flippie Flink* and *Flash Gordon. Put On* is the first character of Indonesian comics, created by Kho Wan Gie and published in the daily *Sin Po*. In addition to the Put On, in Solo there was also *Mentjari Poetri Hidjaoe* comic, created by Nasroen A.S. and published by the Ratu Timur weekly. In the late 1940s, many American strip comics were recorded by local publishers. The strip comics had previously routinely appeared as a weekly newspaper supplement. When that American comic flooded, Siaw Tik Kwei then came up with the action genre that managed to defeat Tarzan's popularity among local readers. Adapted from Chinese legends, the comic main character is *Sie Djin Koei*. The American comics’ popularity at this time later inspired R.A. Kosasih to make his own Indonesian superhero character. Then Sri Asih was born, a character who was Wonder Woman adaptation. Kosasih later became known as the Father of Indonesian Comics and his work inspired the birth of superhero characters created by other local artists, such as *Siti Gahara*, *Puteri Bintang* and *Garuda Putih*.

The 1960s and 1970s period was recognized by many people as the era of the glory of Indonesian comics. Many talented comic artists were born to produce legendary works. *Si Buta Dari Gua Hantu* (Ganes TH), *Mahabharata* series (RA Kosasih), *Gundala Putra Petir* (Hasmi), *Godam* (Wid NS), *Panji Tengkorak* (Hans Jadalar), *Jaka Sembung* (Djair), *Rio Purbaya* (Jan Mintaraga) are some of the comic characters that were popular at that time.

Indonesian Islamic genre comics began in this period. *Taman Surga* by K.T. Ahmar, was the first Islamic comic published (1961). Following that was the comic *Taman Surga dan Siksa Neraka* in the 1970s by Ema Wardana. The depiction of these comics is naive, even tends to make it up, for example, describing the terrible conditions of hell torture, but lacking in accordance with Islamic law. After this period Islamic comics arose and sank along the journey of Indonesian comics that competed with imported comics from America, Japan, China, and so on. But Islamic values still continue to exist in Indonesian comics, either in the form of revitalization, reinterpretation, or symbolic expression, for example in the stories of prophets, walisongo comics, and comic stories from the Middle East.

In the 1980s Indonesian comics entered a grim period. The invasion of Japanese, Hong Kong and European comics (after American comics earlier) as well as the reduction of published Indonesian comic artists, were mentioned as a number of reasons for the decline. Losing to compete in bookstores, making homeland comics 'move actively' back through comic strips and caricatures in national newspapers. One of the comic strips that was quite phenomenal at that time and still faithfully present to this day is *Panji Koming* (Dwi Koen). But in the midst of this grim and sink period, there are still comic artists who have managed to penetrate the Indonesian comic market, selling comic books not through large publishers or bookstores but through traveling children's toy vendors. The comic artist is Tatang S. with his comic series, *Tumaritis* (Petruk, Gareng, Bagong) combined with foreign superhero characters, producing characters such as *Megaloman Tumaritis, Batman Tumaritis, Spiderman Tumaritis* and the others.

After the reformation, with the opening of the free information tap, the Indonesian comic world once again writhed trying to get up. Large publishers such as Gramedia (Elex Media Komputindo) also began trying to publish the work of local comic artists, such as the comics of the *Imperium Majapahit* by Jan Mintaraga. Then Mizan Komik also published the *Legenda Sawung Kampret* by Dwi Koen. After that new works of local comic artists re-emerged trying to seize the Indonesian comic market.
4.4 Art as a Discourse

The current era of art is now called postmodern, where the contemporary arts dominate roles and seek identity. The developing aesthetic is non-formal aesthetics, that are not based on the form of an artwork but based on taste and feels, so everything can be highlighted. Unlike previous eras that conceptualized art as a social status indicator, postmodern makes anyone have the freedom to enjoy any artwork. In this era many arts communities emerged which conceptualized their beauty. There is no dominating philosophy of art, art communities have their own aesthetic standards. The philosophy of beauty is relatively small in scope and very sensitive in facing socio-cultural changes in society so that it is easy to change. The new philosophy of beauty that was born here is only momentary discourse, without ever achieving a perfectly form, like fruit plucked before it is ripe.

The Islamic mission community in Indonesia grew in this era. Muslim target audiences who are the Indonesian majority become one of the factors that shape this community. One of the national Islamic comic communities in Indonesia is Liqomik (Lingkar Komik). The presence of comic communities has an impact on the courage of the expression of comic artists in their work. With the existence of a community, a comic artist is not worried about marketing and appreciating of his work. The courage of the comic artist in expressing their work can be seen in the form of Islamic missionary comics which are increasingly trying to adjust to the Islamic rules. Abstract forms like in the wayang kulit purwa began to be used again in this comic media. The Islamic law sources (verses of the Qur'an and Hadith) which are the story ideas are displayed in comics, so that the reader is not confused with the teachings of Islam. In contrast to 1960s and 1990s Islamic comics, where the visual style was more realistic and the story was only based on interpretation.

The combination of the 4.0 industrial revolution and the postmodern era, makes the internet network’s role as digital art distributor very important. Through the internet, the aesthetic satisfaction level can be channeled even to the individual level. Services in the art field that are very personal, for example facial illustrations can be ordered by anyone, anytime, anywhere. The comic industry as part of the creative industry, inevitably must adapt to the industrial revolution 4.0. In Indonesia there are Android-based application developers that are able to bridge comic producers (comic artists) and readers through the internet. Among the comic distributor applications are Webtoon and Ciayo Comics. It is proven that through these applications, the local comics which were previously unable to compete with imported comics in the case of print comics, were able to break through digital comics. Digital comics through Android-based applications have many advantages in distribution. Readers can read digital comics through their smart phones for free. Whereas application developers and comic artists get payments from those who advertise through the application. Not surprisingly, digital comics by local artists distributed through Android-based applications can become popular by reaching many readers.
Islamic genre does not have an android-based application that is able to distribute it. Islamic comics adapt to the internet of things from the industrial revolution 4.0 at the level of print comic sales through the internet. Of course the distribution level is much narrower than marketing through Android-based applications. The Internet has also become a channel for the Islamic comic writers’ expression. They no longer need to mess around with the publishing bureaucracy, to make their comics read publicly. Seeing the Islamic comics’ potential as an Islamic religious education medium, the majority Muslims, and Islamic educational institutions that are widely spread in Indonesia, the development of android-based applications for Islamic comic distribution is effective.

5 Conclusion

Islamic missionary comics are a media produced by combination of art and religion. The art and religion relationship has occurred since prehistoric times. At that time knowledge of religion occupied an important position and was contained in art objects. These religious arts can be seen in cave paintings, prehistoric ornaments, to Hindu-Buddhist temple reliefs.

In the colonial era, Indonesian society was introduced to the art philosophy resulting from European Renaissance. This art philosophy states art in its purest form (fine art). Expressive beauty in an artwork does not require a companion role such as religious interests, communication media, practical functions, and so on. In this era too, new art media were known by local artists, one of them was comics. Nevertheless, this western art philosophy still has to experience adaptation to the art philosophy as a guide and spectacle that has existed before. The Islamic missionary comic works that appear in Indonesia in the 1960s showed the art spirit as a religious medium through new Western media.

The industrial world has experienced to the Revolution 4.0 that relies on data transmission over the internet. In this era, the aesthetic satisfaction level can be channeled easily even to the individual level, thus giving rise to art communities who dare to conceptualize their respective beauty. Likewise with the Islamic comic community that is more daring to express by holding strong to the Islamic artistic rules. As part of the creative industry the Islamic da’wah comic industry is required to adapt to the concept of "Internet of Things" which is a marker of the industrial revolution 4.0. With the internet Islamic teachings in the media of comics can be spreaded wider and accessed easier by the readers.

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