**Trio Hantu Cs: A Comic and Animation Series**

**Adaptations of Indonesian Ghost Stories**

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**ABSTRACT**

Since 2015, the Government of Indonesia through Badan Ekonomi Kreatif (Bekraf) has developed creative economy seriously. Animation is one of the sectors of the creative industries which have developed significantly in Indonesia. Unique characters and interesting narrative are essential element which made animation succeed. Legends, myths, and folklore existed in various ethnic groups in many regions are inspiring creators to produce comics and animation movies. This article aims to analyze how the ghost stories as urban legends are adapted into the comics and animation series “Trio Hantu Cs”, and how the creator reinterpreted the stories. The method used in this research is qualitative research approach. data were collected by interviewing the creator of “Trio Hantu Cs” and, observing the animation series and also the comics. The ghosts are described as the creature who living in the different world to the human world, but they do not interrupt the human life. The animation series which are distributed through YouTube channel and social media successfully attracted many viewers as well as its comics. The research result indicates that the scary ghost stories are adapted into comic and animation movie by reinterpreting the story and the characters and to suit the current modern society. This case indicates how the Indonesian folklore and urban legends has successfully adapted into comic and animation movie in the digital age.

**Keywords:** Ghost story, Urban legend, Adaptation, Comic, Animation, Creative economy

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Creative economy is one of the priorities programs of the Indonesia economy development. Indonesian animation industry started in the 1950s when President Soekarno through PPFN assigned Dukut Hendronoto alias Pak Ook to Walt Disney office to learn how to make animation film. With simple tool, Pak Ook made the first Indonesian 2D animated film *Si Doel Memilih (Si Doel Vote)* aimed to election education. In the 1970s Pak Ook created five minutes length-animated film *Kayak Beruang* (Like Bear). In addition, Drs Suryadi who is also known as Pak Raden produced animated film *Batu Setahun, Trondolo, and Timun Mas* (The Gold Cucumber). The national state broadcasting station, TVRI (Television of Republic of Indonesia), aired the first Indonesian commercial animation video in 1974. The 2D animation was produced by GM. Shidharta and Faiz Sunyoto under Studio Anima Indah, Jakarta Pusat by using BIC pencil [1].

Numerous Indonesian animation movies have been produced in different form such as short movie, animation television series, cinema, and YouTube series. The animations illustrate the everyday life children and their family such as *Nusa Rara, Diva the Series, Adit Sopo Jarwo and Petualangan Si Unyil*. Animation movie *Battle of Surabaya* produced by MSV Pictures in 2005 inspired the war between Indonesian and British forces after Indonesian declared independence in 1945. Another Indonesian animated film *Knight Kris* (2017) brings a kid adventure story and some of the characters are adapted from wayang figures.

Indonesian comic industry is older than animation. In 1931 comic strip *Put On* created by Kho Wan Gie published in Sin Po newspaper and it is known as the first Indonesian comic. Character *Put On* was popular because wittily and clumsy. In 1950s comic book released by Melodi Publisher in Bandung which also published Sri Asih Comic created by comic legend RA Kosasih. Indonesian comic was booming in 1970s-1980s when many local superhero characters sprung up as main theme such as *Gundala Putra Petir* (Gundala the Thunderman). However, in 1990s-2000s Indonesian comic industry was declining since Japanese comic or *manga* widely circulated in Indonesia. *Manga* that bring various themes was more attracted many comic readers rather than Indonesian comic that mostly adopted local hero and
colossal genre. Doraemon, Candy Candy, Dragon Ball, Naruto and Kung Fu Boy are popular among young readers. Nowadays, Indonesian comic has been rising along with the emergence of digital media as distribution channel for art works. Readers have many choices to read comics because of there are many various genre such as comedy, romance, horror, superhero, and etc in a various media.

Unlike other Indonesian comic and animation stories, *Trio Hantu Cs* (2014- now) adopts the ghost stories and myths in many regions in Indonesia in unique ways. Ghosts are mostly illustrated as scary figures, but *Trio Hantu Cs* made the creatures as funny. In other series, the creators are inspired by urban ghost story in Surabaya City. Thus, this article aims to analyze how the ghost stories as urban legends and folklore are adapted in the comics and animation series *Trio Hantu Cs* and how the creator reinterpreted the stories.

2. METHOD

This study used qualitative method which focuses on adaptation of ghost stories and urban legend into comic and animation series and creator’s reinterpretation. Data was collected by watching Trio Hantu animation series in Youtube and reading its comic form. The aims of Interviewing the Trio Hantu creators is to find out the creative process of comic and animation production and also their reinterpretation of ghosts and urban legends.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Trio Hantu Cs*

*Trio Hantu* (Trio of Ghost) is three main fictional characters namely Udis, Cawa and Kibro in the books, comics and animation series which tell ghost stories and urban legends. The characters actually represent the three creators, Misbakul Bahtiar (Broki), Yudi Sutanto (Yudis) and Wiryadi Dharmawan (Cak Waw). *Trio Hantu* is also used as title series of comics and animation, and creator group name. In 2001 that was coincidently with the Halloween Celebration on October 31, *Trio Hantu* released the first comic book titled *101 Hantu Nusantara* (101 Archipelago Ghost) describing various ghosts in Indonesia. The comic has successfully attracted many Indonesian comic readers, and gets high appreciation. The way how Trio Hantu tell ghost stories that scary as well as funny make this work distinct from another horror comics. Since then, Trio Hantu has been popular among comic readers.

Trio Hantu also published other books such as *Hantupedia: Ensiklopedia Hantu-hantu Nusantara* (Hantupedia: Encyclopedia of Archipelago Ghosts) in 2016 and comics series *Hantu Nusantara* published in 2018-2020. Moreover, Trio Hantu uses digital media such as Instagram, Facebook, Website, Webtoon, and Youtube to distribute their work such as comic strip, short story, and animation series to reach wider audiences. *Trio Hantu* stories are inspired by everyday life experience, urban legends circulated in Surabaya City and ghost stories thrived in many regions in Indonesia. The following part will explain adaptation of urban legend and ghost stories in comic animation series.

3.2. The Folklore of Ghosts: The Reviving Urban Legend

This part discussed about folklore in the city of Surabaya, Indonesia which is attached in the memory of citizens about ghosts in town. The storyline of the animation film series produced by the *Trio Hantu Cs* comes from the type of folklore, “urban legend” which needed by cultural supporters about the memory of the city. Urban legends are not only about ghosts as objects but also how human respond to the ghost is constructed by the Javanese tradition in most of Surabaya citizens. According to James Danandjaja (1986), folklore is a collection of society traditions that are circulated from generation to generation, including traditional tradition in different versions [2]. The traditions are delivered orally which some of them are shown with gestures or mnemonic device. Relations between community with supernatural is categorized as folklore that has certain functions one of them is emotional or belief.

The humans believed that there is a space created by the God which different from the human space. The space inhabited by ghosts. Scholars who study folklore using tradition to view how human culture in space works. Folklore is a part of cultural space contains the traditions and sometimes became a strategy to overcome limitations of human’s life. The society adapted thus situation by build narratives about ghosts. This system sometimes works when certain events, certain human and certain space find the time. For example, most of Javanese people tell the story of urban legend in Kliwon’s Wednesday night. Based on Java’s oral traditions, that day is sacred and has become an event that connects ghosts and humans. Thus, the event is important because they believed that anyone who has experience and abilities, in a certain time and place could contact the ghost by seeing, hearing and even talking to them that makes the ghost story still exist. The thriller stories and other haunted narratives are still found by most Surabaya’s citizens and developed from scary feelings to the pleasant feelings.

There are numbers of *Trio Hantu Cs* comics based on urban legend from Surabaya posted to Trio Cs Instagram with more than 90,000 followers such as:

1. *Misteri Ceveek Dugemers Dari Driyorejo* (Mystery of the Dugemers Girl from Driyorejo)
2. *Kisah horor di kedai Demmokali Surabaya* (Horror Story at Darmokali stall in Surabaya)
3. *Hantu Smooth di Rungkut* (Smooth Ghost in Rungkut)
5. *Kiriman Tengah Malam RSUD Surabaya* (Midnight Deliveries at RSUD Surabaya)
6. *Orang Penyet di Rumah Sakit Surabaya* (Penyet People at Surabaya Hospital)
7. Minum Cukrik di Rumah Tuwowo Surabaya
   (Drinking Cukrik at Tuwowo House Surabaya)
8. Orang-orang Menyelam di Kolam Renang Delta Surabaya
   (People Dive into the Delta Surabaya Swimming Pool)
9. Penyet Vakum di MERR Surabaya
    (Mysterious Stopper in MERR Surabaya)
10. Gadis dibawah Jembatan Viaduk Stasiun Gubeng
    (Girl under the Gubeng Station Viaduk Bridge)
11. Kisah Misteri Gedung Jawa Pos Kembang Jepun Surabaya
    (Mystery of the Kembang Jepun Post Java Building) etc.

One of the most popular stories is Orang Penyet at Surabaya Hospital. The word of Penyet come from Javanese language which means flat due to being crushed by heavy objects. The penyet story originally come from the story of "Dokter and Suster Gepeng" who served in a Dutch Hospital located in the center of Surabaya. Both of them were crushed by the damage elevator, and made them a flat-shape ghost. The story is confusing because in that era there was no elevator, however this story was taken for granted and was a scourge in every hospital. According to some old stories, the hospital has been turned into the Delta Surabaya mall. That is what makes it a feature of folklore, which is sometimes confusing because the source is anonymized. This story also shifted from the previous ghosts from medical officers with uniform who are a doctor and a nurse to become an ordinary people who roamed.

Folklore, which is interpreted as a collective tradition of society, considers that ghosts are part of God’s creatures, and humans should not be greedy in constructing building. The ritual like selametan tradition commonly is held by the Javanese community before constructing new building. The ritual is not merely a matter of belief, but also related to social cohesion process and social rule about preventing loss of life in the development project. Visual productions created by Trio Hantu Cs are supported the narratives of this urban legend which come from older generations and ghost hunter communities. The production also referred to people who share horror stories through online media. They are understood and still have an opportunity to enjoy the changing of the modern city. The reviving of ghost stories originating from urban legend in new media is a form of social activity that was deliberately recreated, and by Sahab [3] it is called the creation of traditions. Local folklore was told in a "cangkrukan" as pleasant atmosphere (casual conversation in a space without being planned). This activity has an educational function and also social cohesion among the people of Surabaya. The process of social cohesion is in line with the findings of Sahab [3] that efforts in the process of traditional manipulation in general are not intended or realized by the perpetrators who have implications for efforts or strategies to achieve harmony in the face of diversity. It is at this position that the role of this traditional creator can have higher quality and intensity than the original goal [3].

These creative efforts consider the conditions of progress in the era and for some Surabaya’s citizens, especially the young ones, they do not know the stories presented because maybe some of the places mentioned have changed to other places. Commodification of symbols for the expression of developing communities through agents in the context of interpreting other worlds is limited to human understanding. The message from Cak Waw is that ghosts have different spatial dimensions and the behavior of the mystery genre in Indonesia does not only come from certain cultural ritual practices but also has a message of cultural preservation. Folklore ghost stories attached to places in the Javanese tradition are considered as residents or who have a place to grow in urban space.

The analysis of oral tradition about contacts with the other world in a context, from it emerges, namely the landscape, showed that the living space remained empty, safe.” [4] The study of the relationship between folklore and urban space is related to human perception and their understanding of their environment through certain knowledge and experience. This is closely related to cognition which embedded in memory and past experience. The response of most people to the content of ghost stories in several places is not always a form of fear, for Cak Waw actually believes that ghosts live as human beings with various characters and do not intend to interfere if not disturbed. We see that urban legend and folklore is part of human psychological negotiation of the city spaces. This study is also in line with Bourdieu's thinking that spaces have to be integrated with practice and habitus, so it would be meaningful. These also required involvement of active agents by social practice. Spatial meaning is not always attached in space but is how and who interpret it by means of actors who have the knowledge and interest [4]–[6].

This study also examines the context of the people of Surabaya related to traditional Javanese culture, namely the belief that humans use folklore as a reinforcement of their social system, such as the rule of not coming home late at night, not speaking and behaving badly in a new place, and obeying the prevailing customs in a place. Moreover this folklore has changed its way of telling stories and also the media, starts from storytelling before going to bed, chatting in coffee shops, sharing experiences on local radio on Wednesday night until currently generations who share stories through online media. The creative industry for animation subsector has elevates local culture as produced by the Trio Hantu Cs who uses ghost stories that belongs to the community and still have cultural positions.

3.3. Folklore, Animation and the Challenges of Indonesian Creative Industries

Trio Hantu has produced at least 300 comic strips. In the same works, the three characters of Trio Hantu are presented in diverse shapes; Kibro is in a triangle shape, Cawa is in an oval-shape, and Udis is in a square shape. The distinctive form of each characters makes them strong visually and can be differentiated from other fictional characters. Since 2014 some of Trio Hantu comic strips are successfully transformed into animation series and uploaded in Youtube channel. There are at least two seasons’ animations videos and each season consists of 10 episodes. The animation movie is less than 45 seconds
length per episode, no dialog, colorful, and similar music in each episode. The animation production is lead by Cak Waw who has long experience in the making 2D animation and he got several awards on animation production. Before adapted in the animation series, ghosts has been the main theme in many Indonesian horror movies, and successfully attracted many viewers. For instance Sundelbolong (1980), Jelangkung (2001), Terowongan Casblanca (2007), Kuntilanak (2006), Pocong (2008) and the latest horror movie Pengabdi Setan or Satan’s Slaves (2017). These movies depict everyday life of Indonesian society, and ghosts were represented as haunted creatures which disturbed human life. Sundelbolong was played by a legend actress Suzanna. She is eating Sate or Satay at once with the skewer creepily in that movie. In the Pocong movie (2008) the three different ghost, Pocong, Kuntilanak and half-body ghost, terrorize the resident in a haunted house and causing some of them to die. The most viewed film in 2017, Satan’s Slave’ depicts supernatural events that horrified a family whose mother already passed away due to mysterious sickness.

Different with other ghost stories which mostly terrifying, Trio Hantu Cs animated series are funny and entertaining. The creators use popular ghosts that have strong cultural presence and characters in animation series, for instance Pocong, Sundelbolong, Kuntilanak, Ndas Glandung, Weve Gombel, and Jerangkong. In each episode, the uniqueness of the ghost characters wrapped by sense of humor in a narrative. One the episode illustrates Kuntilanak, a ghost which is perceived as long-hair woman, wearing white dress, and often laughing and crying consecutively. Based on stories told by people, Kuntilanak was a woman who unnaturally died while pregnant or giving birth, and they often revealed themselves to human. In the animation movie, Udis, Cawa and Kibro came across Kuntilanak, and then it is chasing them. Because its long hair covers her eyes, Kuntilanak hit forest trees many times, thus they were able to escape. Another ghost which depicted in the Trio Hantu Cs series is Pocong. People perceive that the entity can spit acid liquid on them, and it made their skin burn. In animation series, the trio characters who are Udis, Cawa, and Kibro, meet Pocong, then, the creature chasing and trying to spit acid liquid on them. But, suddenly the liquid is dripping the creature itself. All this series are closed with funny frames. In these series, the creators want to deliver messages that that human should not fear the ghosts and have to appreciate them. They are also creature who living in the different spatial dimensions. The narrative is similar to another ghost animation movie series Casper which is depicted as a friendly ghost.

Discuss about animation industries could not leave behind the Japanese animation which known as anime. Japanese animation is the third biggest in the world. Some of the animation movies are inspired by the Japanese folklore. Anime produced by Ghibli Studios such as Princess Mononoke, My Neighbor Totoro and Spirited Away are mostly influenced by Japanese folklore which related to yokai or monster. Hartman [7] analyzed the transformation of the spirits in the Japanese folklore to anime characters in the Spirited Away. Yubaba one of the characters in Spirited Away is adapted from Yama-Uba, a mythical mountain witch with dark origins. Bakeneko, a character in My Neighbor Totoro, literally means “changed cat”. According to Japanese folklore, the cat has changed into a yokai or supernatural creature, however by Hayao Miyazaki Bakeneko it was described as the feline bus with moon eyes in the anime. The stories and characters in the animation movie are adapted from traditional folklore, but it have been removed from the original context to meet the audience’s preference. Therefore, in an anime world there is popular terms “from yokai to kawaii” which means that monster can be transformed into kawaii or cute character.

Indonesia consists of 1,300 ethnic groups with various folklores, myths, and tales. The cultural capital can be used to develop animation industries by adapting and modifying these folklore characters and stories. However, there is a few of animation movies which successfully adapting and modifying Indonesian folklore. It challenges stakeholders in the creative sector to apply the traditional culture into best animation movies. Animators and other stakeholders in the animation industries should relearn various references of legends, folklore and myths which believed by Indonesian society in the past time. The important factor that should be considered by the animators is capability to adapt folklore into animation movie that relevant with recent social cultural situation especially the congeniality with Indonesian youth culture.

Some Indonesian traditional folklore has been adapted into the animation movies too. However, there are limited innovation in the story and characters such as Timun Mas and Bawang Merah dan Bawang Putih. It is the same story we heard when we were a child. On the other hand, the creators Trio Hantu Cs movie are success to adapt the creatures that mostly perceived as frightening things, into the unique anime characters and entertaining narrative. The animators aim to convey their ideas that creatures who living in another world are not human enemy. One of the strategies to adapt folklore into animation movie is looking the elements of the folklore and blends them with pieces of others to make new character and story [8]. This strategy is applied by Japanese animators to make anime. It is possible that an anime consists of various folklore which combines into new story like Spirited Away movie. Media and technology has mutual relationship with folklore; borrowing and adapting the folklore fit needs of modern consumers [9]. Animation is digital storytelling that can be used to preserve and revive the Indonesian folklore. Social and cultural value in the folklore can be inserted in the good story such as plot and character in the animation movie thus, the animation were able to attract youth and children. However, this strategy led to a good result if the film creator doing research on Indonesian folklore before producing the animation movie. The collaboration between movie industries and humanities research is necessary to develop animation movies as well as to preserve Indonesian folklore. Moreover, it is a new way for humanities research to become more and more relevant to wider audience.
4. CONCLUSION

Indonesian folklore are abundant resources to create characters and stories in the comic and animation movie. Thus, folklore can be used to develop creative industry especially animations sectors. Moreover, the animation movie comes to be contemporary medium for retelling of the folklore figures, and also re-envision them to suit the consumers. Therefore, it is important to animators and other creative workers to study Indonesian folklore seriously.

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