



Character Design Development for the Visualization of the Transnational Identity Narrative between South Korea and Indonesia

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Abstract. In the era of globalization, everyone can create relationships with others despite the limitations of distance and time, thanks to the development of communication and transportation technology. In this background, individuals who have transnational identities can be formed. Transnational identity is an identity that is formed when someone maintains their relationship with the culture of 2 or more countries; this often happens to immigrants or Peranakans. Transnational identity can make someone face a dilemma when adopting moral values and expectations of the surrounding community, especially if role models such as religious figures and parents are difficult to find during the development of a person's character. This study attempts to observe the transnational identity dilemma experienced by a group of individuals who grew up with South Korea and Peranakan Chinese culture in Indonesia using a qualitative method called narrative inquiry. The narrative inquiry method determines the process of identity formation and common challenges experienced by the informants. After the data from the narrative inquiry is obtained, through the method of creating works, the ideas obtained can be visualized into character designs that contain the right narratives and symbols. This character design was made to be used in a comic narrative with the theme of searching for identity. Character designs created based on research can strengthen themes in comic narratives that aim to foster self-confidence in individuals with transnational identities in socializing with the surrounding community.

Keyword: Character Design Development, Visualization, Transnational Identity Narrative, South Korea, Indonesia

1 Introduction

Acceleration in economic turnover and technological developments produce a new reality, namely globalization. In global reality, relations created by humans can be done without any territorial boundaries and can be achieved almost simultaneously, this can be done through computers connected to the internet or increasingly sophisticated transportation systems. In relations between humans in the world, it accumulates so that

there is an equalization of living standards [1] In global relations, an individual can join a group consisting of people from various countries and become a large village [2].

The concept of the global village that makes the existence of the state in the imagination of society fades. The elements that influence the formation of a unified state in the imagination of individuals are language, religion and unifying media (newspapers, organizations), but in the era of globalization these things are distracted. In the formation of the global village, western culture is considered a standard that eventually conquers many local cultures around the world, in this case globalization can be accused of killing cultural diversity. In the conquest of local culture, the domination that occurs does not always make local culture disappear but can occur the development and mixing of local culture with foreign culture. What is at stake in globalization is the essence of local culture in the form of noble values that are maintained by local communities.

Cultural mixing and the phenomenon of intermarriage between local residents and immigrants. This cultural mixing has actually occurred long before the era of globalization, this has occurred since the era of trade through the silk road in 200 years BC and the spice route which occurred approximately 4500 years ago [3]. Intermarriage and cultural mixing also occurred during the colonial era, especially during the Dutch and Japanese occupations.

From the accumulation of migration phenomena from various nations, an awareness of transnational identity or transnationalism was formed. Transnational identity/transnationalism is an awareness of identity formed from reciprocal relations between the country of origin and the country visited, in which there is negotiation regarding norms and morals, expectations, and sanctions given by society [4][5]. In contrast to the process of cultural assimilation in the *peranakan* phenomenon that occurred in the era before globalization, transnational individuals can now maintain relations and information with their country of origin with actual and strong because they are never isolated by time, distance and territorial boundaries, this is caused by virtual space via the internet.

The phenomenon of cultural mixing that occurs in a complex way can be described in the form of design characters. Depictions through design characters are needed for transnational teenagers who are going through the process of forming an identity. Transnational teenagers generally have difficulty in constructing an identity because parents and religion are no longer relevant as role models of norms and morals when living in a new community environment, especially in the background of post-modern conditions [6]. Design characters can be metaphors for human characters, nature, animals, phenomena and inanimate objects which then interact with other characters to create new meanings [7]

In character design there is a formation of frames or stereotypes that cause bias towards readers, therefore research is needed in the process of creating characters. The shape in character design can affect the reader's mentality, for example, a square shape that symbolizes strength, fortitude and order, a triangle shape that symbolizes intimidation, energy, and excitement, then a round shape that symbolizes calm, connection, friendly and safe [8]. Character design can also be a representation of the body by the creator that shows health conditions, age, gender, beauty standards, ethnicity and fashion style. [9]

This study was conducted to observe transnational individuals from Indonesia who interact with South Korean culture so that it can be depicted in characters. The characters

will interact with other characters in a narrative presented through comic media. Character formation can be a narrative suggestion that contains norms and moral values for readers who have a relationship with similar phenomena.

2 Research Method

The research was conducted using qualitative methods, namely narrative inquiry and semiotics. Narrative inquiry is a method carried out by collecting stories from someone's experiences which are then re-arranged into a biographical story [10][11]. In narrative inquiry research methods, the research pattern is referred to as narrative thinking which is divided into 3 stages of research. The first stage is to create a narrative scheme used to form a picture and structure of the situation told by the informant. Elaborating the knowledge and experience of interview respondents. The third stage is carried out with a cognitive strategy, in this stage the researcher will sort, draw conclusions, tidy up, and revise the knowledge and experience that has been obtained previously.

In the narrative inquiry method, interviews with sources are conducted for 30 to 90 minutes, adjusting to the presentation of answers and the development of questions asked. The interview process uses Google Meet facilities with active camera and sound conditions, Google Meet devices are also used to be able to communicate remotely with sources in South Korea or Indonesia.

The interview process in the study was conducted to describe the phenomenon of transnationalism which is divided into memories of objects, memories of locations, memories of media consumption and memories of political conditions. These components are obtained based on the cultural theory of memory.

According to the theory of cultural memory, the key questions asked are in the following points:

1. Background of descent, and duration of stay in South Korea
2. Places and events that are memorable when living in South Korea
3. Attitudes that are appreciated and disliked when assimilating with South Korean society
4. Perception of the body, changes in appearance and attitudes or gestures while living and interacting with South Korean society
5. Feelings of being accepted when and interacting with South Korean society

After the interview, the keywords frequently used by the informants will be translated into symbols used in the design characters. The symbols used refer to the semiotic method initiated by Charles Sander Pierce.

In Charles Sanders Peirce's theory, the components of a sign are divided into three: representamen, object, and interpretant. Representamen is a form of sign, which can be an object, sound, or image that represents a meaning [12]. An object is a real thing, which can

be a concept, creature, or abstract idea. After representamen and object, interpretant is the meaning produced by the mind, which comes from the understanding and relationship between representamen and the observed object.

A sign is an element in an object that carries a subliminal meaning in the form of interpretation. In the semiotic system, Peirce proposed three types of signs: index, symbol, and icon. In the design of the transnational characters of South Korea and Indonesia that were created, the creation of symbols is something that is done to respond to data from sources.

3 Result and Discussion

In the study, 5 sources were obtained and the names used in the writing were disguised to maintain privacy. Interviews in the study were conducted on November 2-3, 2024. In the study, the background of the sources is as follows:

1. Yandi (31 years old) - A Batakese-Indonesian, male office worker who has lived in Korea for 10 years
2. Anto (31 years old) - Peranakan Chinese-Indonesian, male, living and working in Korea for almost 12 years
3. Tini (30 years old) - Javanese Indonesian, female, living and working in Korea for almost 12 years.
4. Helen (28 years old) - Hybrid Korean- Javanese Indonesian, female, grew up in Indonesia but has been living and working in Korea for 8 years.
5. Wina (30 years old) - Peranakan Chinese-Indonesian, female office worker who has lived in Korea for 11 years.

After conducting interviews, the presentation of the experiences of the sources can be seen from the following points:

3.1 Friendship and Work Environment

Based on the interview, all informants agreed that in the process of assimilation into South Korean society, the most important capital is language proficiency. In this proficiency, the informant admitted that understanding and responding in interactions with South Korean individuals requires at least 8 years because in verbal communication there are also unwritten rules that must be obeyed. The way of responding to South Korean society is also different from in Indonesia, especially words of praise or advice. An example is the praise for having a small head given to the informant Helen, the context of the praise was initially not understood because it was considered normal in Indonesia.

Helen, a South Korean-born resource person, also admitted that the use of South Korean requires assimilation time, especially the change in formal and casual speech. In Indonesian, the use of formal and casual is not really considered in everyday conversation and tends to be used in conversations in certain situations (such as weddings, worship, and school situations), but in South Korea it is something essential in all conversations. In formal

conversations, it is not recommended to interact in the form of physical contact with older people.

In socializing with South Koreans according to Yandi's informant, there is also a time gap in friendships caused by military service. Because of military service, friendship groups can change, especially in the first year of college. South Korean men are required to postpone college for 2 years, so when they meet Indonesians again in the third year of college, the atmosphere is different. This results in a double assimilation process in friendships, especially with male friendships to adjust to people who have just come from military service.

The work environment in South Korea demands obedience based on structure and high dedication in the company, but according to sources Anto and Yandi, the work environment becomes more fluid if the leader or colleague has experience working abroad. Based on Yandi and Anto's experience in the job search process in South Korea, it is important to look for jobs in the multinational company category, not local, to facilitate communication. In the work culture with local companies, Yandi stated that there are habits that are difficult for Indonesians to do, namely social events after work which include the habit of drinking alcohol and the habit of waiting for seniors to go home from work. These habits are unwritten rules that must be obeyed, but in the conditions of multinational companies, this is not required.

3.2 Individuality

In personal life, all the informants also agreed that life in South Korea made them individual. Individual in this case is related to the ability to be independent so as not to bother others. In socializing in the workplace, initially the informants received assistance so that they could understand their obligations and rights. However, after the ability developed according to the company's expectations, interaction with seniors became limited only in the context of work and did not continue into the form of interpersonal friendships.

Individuality in South Korea for Indonesian immigrants is related to distance from family, language skills and facilities. Indonesian immigrants when living in South Korea usually rent a room to live alone. Facilities in South Korea do not require direct interaction with humans and can be accessed via the internet, so that if they can be understood everything can be done alone. Facilities that can be managed personally, for example, are the visa, tax and health systems whose rules are stated on the website, these rules are in accordance with the execution in the field. This is different from the system in Indonesia which sometimes needs to be clarified through direct meetings and the rules tend to change quickly so there is no certainty.

3.3 Beauty Standards, and the Meaning of the Body

In the interview, the source Wina in the perception of South Korean society, her body which is of Chinese descent looks inconspicuous, this is related to Asian white skin which

is considered ordinary. The standard of Asian white skin was confirmed by the source Helen because in South Korea she did not receive praise or ridicule because of her skin, this is different in Indonesia. In Indonesia, East Asian white skin is considered special or in contrast can be the subject of ridicule.

For the source Wina, the difference with the local population that was felt actually occurred when she was in a crowd with Indonesians, she felt that she was being noticed by the surrounding community when using gestures and the Indonesian language. The source Helen also tried not to stand out by wearing bright colors in South Korea, this was different when she socialized in Indonesia because the colors of clothes in tropical countries tend to be striking. In the assimilation process, Helen slowly changed clothes from Indonesia because of the colors, in South Korea she tends to use monochrome colors such as white and black.

In appearance, all female informants agreed that makeup is essential when going out of the house and doing daily activities. According to informant Wina, South Korean makeup culture is very different from Indonesia. In Indonesia, when using makeup in daily activities, people around her actually question her. People in Indonesia tend to only use makeup in formal situations.

3.4 Place Events, Important Political Conditions

In life as an immigrant, for Tini and Wina, the most memorable places were the immigration office and the hospital. In those places, everyone was forced to speak South Korean so they could explain their circumstances and background. The communication process at the immigration office and the hospital was considered important because it affected the residence permit.

In the experience of Yandi's informant, the most memorable place was the university because through that location, Yandi learned to understand how to socialize with South Korean society. During his working days, the most memorable incident was when he was waiting for his senior in his office who was working overtime in the winter, even though the task given to Yandi had been completed, he still had to stay in the office room as a sign of respect for his senior. The office where he worked at that time was a South Korean-style office where the average age of the workers was much older than Yandi.

Unlike Yandi, Anto felt that the office was the most memorable place because the office environment he had experienced was quite cheerful and had colleagues who cared about him until he moved to another workplace, but it should be noted that the office where Anto worked was a multinational office with young colleagues. This caused the work culture to be quite different from ordinary offices in South Korea in general.

Helen's interviewee has another perspective, for her the most influential places for her are community service communities, churches and language exchange places. There she can meet people with various needs so she feels appreciated when she contributes to South Korean society.

The political conditions in Indonesia influenced the decision to migrate and settle in South Korea for Tini, Wina and Helen. The Indonesian government's policies were deemed not to guarantee certainty, did not support young workers and there was no clarity on the distribution of funds from taxes for Tini, Wina and Helen. However, even though the political policies were deemed not to be supportive, for Wina, she still decided to return to Indonesia because she felt she did not fit in with South Korean culture. In this case, Wina became a transnational individual because after returning to Indonesia, she maintained relations with colleagues in South Korea and continued to work with South Korean companies even though in Indonesia.

3.5 Pop Culture Mediation and Distraction

In the consumption of popular culture, all informants were exposed to popular culture from Japan although the level of consumption was different. In informants Yandi, Anto, Helen and Tini, consumption of Japanese popular culture was quite routine because it was easy to obtain through comics, television soap operas and animations even though they had been translated into Indonesian. Even to informant Yandi, he admitted that he did not pay attention to South Korean culture before deciding to study in that country.

In consuming popular culture from South Korea, Anto's informant said that his exposure occurred not through television series but since the proliferation of internet cafes (warung internet). Through internet cafes, Anto can play online games from South Korea, namely Ragnarok Online and Audition, these games made Anto search further for the songs used during the game.

3.6 South Korean and Indonesian Transnational Individual Character Design

In designing transnational character designs, there are multiple identities owned by one individual, therefore the design created is not only one. In implementing the design, a character can have a narrative of the ability to change shape. Changes in shape can be found in fairy tales or myths of a region, for example, changes in shape in the character of Sun Wukong, changes in the shape of Punakawan and others. Changes in shape, apart from being a symbol of multiple identities, can also be a symbol of changes in mental state, changes in thinking and responses to the surrounding environment. In this study, the character designed was named Arunika, which comes from the sunrise in Sanskrit and also symbolizes South Korea because it is also known as the country of morning calm, which can be found in Figure 1.

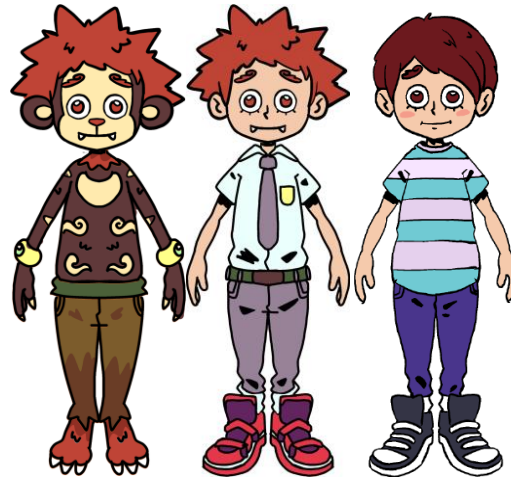


Fig. 1. Arunika Character Design, left: visualization of the soul, visualization of pre-assimilation and post-assimilation with South Korean society.

The main inspiration for the design of transnational individual characters from South Korea and Indonesia is the South Korean myth of the Bear, the Tiger, and the King of Heaven [13]. In the myth, the Bear succeeded in becoming human after being patient in a cave and eating mugwort and garlic, while the Tiger failed to survive in the Cave. The Bear became a beautiful woman and married the King of Heaven so that their descendants became the origin of the Korean nation. In the depiction of the South Korean myth in the character Arunika, the bear that is the symbol is the sun bear that lives in Southeast Asia. The sun bear has different characteristics from the Moon bear, this can be seen from its smaller physical size and different facial appearance. The sun bear in the design is shown as the appearance of the soul of the character who is actually energetic and dynamic. The energetic and dynamic values are enhanced by the messy and sharp hairstyle like the Japanese comic character (manga). Manga references are used because in the interviews, the informants were exposed to Japanese culture before coming to South Korea and used it as a standard of moral values before knowing the real state of South Korean society.

After depicting the soul of the character, the appearance of the character Arunika is also made according to the assimilation experience. The pre-assimilation form of the character Arunika is shown to have a striking appearance that can be seen from her appearance. Arunika's pre-assimilation appearance was inspired by the exposure of the source's experience before going to South Korea. The hairstyle refers to the hair that is often found in Japanese animation or comics. Japanese hairstyles are a symbol of media consumption experienced by individuals from Indonesia. Media from Japan is massively distributed and easily obtained in Indonesia compared to popular culture from South Korea in the 1990s. This causes the standard of living of Eastern society to be imagined by Japanese culture.

The clothes worn in the Pre-assimilation form are school uniforms in Indonesia as a symbol of growth and the desire to learn.

In the depiction of Arunika's character after assimilation into South Korean culture, there were several changes, especially in her hairstyle, face, and clothing style. Changes in Arunika's appearance were obtained from the interviewees' keywords: Manner, Respect Elder, order, not intimidating, tactful. The character's hairstyle became neater with a side parting as an interpretation of order and politeness. Then on the character's face, the fangs now shown are gone because they try not to be intimidating. On the face of the character Arunika there is also a red circle as a sign of facial care and make-up that is done. The clothes worn also do not use striking colors but calm and monochrome colors such as blue and white. In the pants worn to the feet, the character uses a universal symbol, namely jeans, to symbolize the soul of young people.

The following tables present Arunika's character design and explain its meaning: Table 1 describes Arunika's character design and explains its meaning; Table 2 discusses Decoding Meaning in Arunika's Pre-Assimilation Design of South Korean Culture; and Table 3 presents Decoding Meaning in Arunika's Post-Assimilation Design of South Korean Culture.

Table 1. Decoding the Meaning in Arunika Soul Design

Object	Representation	Symbol Interpretation
Hair	Bear ears, manga style hair, messy, red color	Energetic, dynamic and adventurous Bear from Korean myth mixed with Indonesian Sun Bear traits.
Face	Round eyes, fangs	Friendly but sometimes wild
Torso	Honey Bear with Warak Endok pattern	Cultural mixing within oneself openness of attitude
Waist	Cloth pants and belt	humility
Leg	Bear's paw	Honesty & authenticity.

Table 2. Decoding Meaning in Arunika's Pre-Assimilation Design of South Korean Culture

Object	Representation	Symbol Interpretation
Hair	Messy Hair, manga style hair, red color	Energetic, Dynamic and adventurous, Influenced by Japanese popular culture
Face	Round eyes, fangs	Friendly but sometimes wild
Torso	School uniform	During the study period in Indonesia
Waist	Uniform pants	During the study period in Indonesia
Leg	Basketball shoes	Moves quickly and is good at socializing

Table 3. Decoding Meaning in Arunika's Post-Assimilation Design of South Korean Culture

Object	Representation	Symbol Interpretation
Hair	Side bangs hair	Regularity, formality, common hairstyle in South Korean television series
Face	Round eyes, smile without fangs, face with red circles	Friendly, non-intimidating, facial care
Torso	Blue and white striped shirt	Calm and stable, everyday dressing style in South Korea
Waist	Jeans	universal and western culture
Leg	Cloth shoes, black color	Not flashy. Youngsters style

4 Conclusion

South Korean culture is suitable for Indonesian immigrants who crave order and certainty, this is felt after having good language skills. In the order and certainty of the lifestyle in South Korea, it is obtained through sophisticated technology and communication so that Indonesian immigrants feel independent and tend to be individualistic.

In the perception of the body by South Korean society felt by immigrants in the study, it can be concluded that the process of assimilation with society is carried out with an effort not to be conspicuous. This can be seen from the effort to use skincare products or make-up and the use of monotonous colors in South Korea. For immigrants who have typical Asian skin, especially Chinese descendants, these individuals can more easily sublimate with South Korean society.

For immigrants in the study, exposure to South Korean culture was mixed with the experience of consuming popular culture from Japan. South Korean culture has been consumed since the internet access was made easier for Indonesian people. In virtual space, Indonesian teenagers are exposed to South Korean culture through games or music.

In the study, it can be seen that the influence of Confucian thought remains strong in the era of technological and communication development in South Korea. This can be seen from the tendency to be able to take care of oneself so as not to bother others. The direct practice of Confucian teachings is also seen from the efforts to obtain an ideal physical appearance through make-up and facial treatments carried out by Indonesian immigrants to comply with community standards [14][15] Efforts not to appear different, neat and orderly when in South Korea can also be influenced by South Korean history. South Korea is a country that only has 1 ethnic group so that everyone tends to look the same.

The depiction of the adaptation of Confucian values can be seen from the changes in Arunika's character. In the pre-assimilation design, Arunika's character is more intimidating and dynamic, but in the post-assimilation design, Arunika's character looks more orderly, polite, calm and stable, adapting to social conditions in South Korea. However, even though it looks more orderly, the visualization of Arunika's soul does not change.

After character creation, this research can be developed with reverse observations obtained through interviews with South Korean immigrants living in Indonesia. The interviews can be compared to find striking similarities and differences experienced by both immigrant groups. In this research, a character can also be created so that a comprehensive narrative can be made in the narrative of South Korean and Indonesian transnationalism.

The limitation of this research is the limitation of conveying transnational narratives other than character depiction. Further research is needed on the formation of the world in the narrative after the character design is created. The formation of the world can be in accordance with reality or fiction, although it still takes references from the real world. The fictional world can be a frame or distortion of reality whose components are adjusted to the message the creator wants to convey. The influence of world formation can be seen in the work of Put On [16][17]. Put On's character design does not contain Peranakan characteristics because it is the result of imitating the American drawing style, but the surrounding environment and his interactions with other characters that Put On does make him feel like he has a Peranakan identity.

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