



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***CULTURAL HYBRIDIZATION IN THE PRODUCTION OF
SELF-PUBLISHED COMICS BY MALAY FAN ARTISTS OF JAPANESE
POPULAR CULTURE***

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By

IMAN JUNID

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

November 2016

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of
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The development of Malaysian comic industry can be witnessed throughout the years from the changes it has undergone and the availability of its varieties in the local market. A new market of the creative art has also emerged from fan conventions in Malaysia, where fans of Japanese popular culture participated to showcase and sell their (re)produced works including self-published comics. Few past studies have highlighted the presence of *manga* (Japanese comic) stylization in recent Malaysian comics. However, only one study has provided empirical evidence for such claim in the comics by one Malaysian Chinese artist, indicating cultural hybridity between manga and Malaysian comics. Such attribution in the comic production by other ethnicities is still unexplored. To further understand cultural hybridization in the production of self-published comics from the view of Malay fan artists of Japanese popular culture, a qualitative study was designed.

For the data generation, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten Malay comic artists who were actively producing self-published original comics and engaged in Malaysian fan conventions. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed by employing thematic analysis. In addition, the comics of the selected artists were also acquired as the supporting data for the analysis.

From the analysis, three main themes were developed, namely "Attribution to the Japanese Popular Culture", "Representations of Locality", and "Towards Transnationality". Firstly, the artists' comic production were found to be attributed to the Japanese popular culture. Their interests in drawing and producing comics were first initiated by their consumption of Japanese popular culture. They continued to develop their skills and got engaged in selling comics in Malaysian fan conventions through prosumption (simultaneous production and consumption). For the second theme, two ways of representations of locality were found in the artists' comics, namely realistic and fantastical representation. By these representations, the artists intended to portray the localities based on real life experiences or issues. For the final theme, the

artists showed a progress towards transnational identification by three circumstances. They negotiated with the locals' criticisms to adapt to the local moralities and publication guidelines. Moreover, due to technical difficulties or conflict with personal interests or principles, they have created elements that are situated in-between of its respective references. They also expressed their preference for individual identification over national identification on the originality of their comics.

The study concluded that cultural hybridization in the production of self-published comics by the Malay fan artists of Japanese popular culture is a development of transnational identification. Despite the artists were first initiated to draw by their consumption of Japanese popular culture, they did not intend to portray such attribution in their comics but portrayed the localities instead. The mixed references in their comics indicate displacement of fixed nationalities, leading to the artists' sense of originality belongs to neither their references' origins nor their own nation. Cultural hybridization in their comic production occurs not only at the global level among the nations, but also at the very individual level which could lead to more diversified cultural interpretations and understandings.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Sarjana Sastera

PENGHIBRIDAN BUDAYA DALAM PENGHASILAN KOMIK TERBITAN SENDIRI OLEH ARTIS MELAYU YANG MEMINATI BUDAYA POPULAR JEPUN

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Perkembangan industri komik di Malaysia boleh dilihat saban tahun melalui perubahan dan perkembangan variasinya dalam pasaran tempatan. Pasaran baru seni kreatif juga telah muncul di konvensyen peminat di Malaysia di mana peminat budaya popular Jepun menyertai konvensyen tersebut untuk mempamerkan dan menjual barangan penghasilan semula termasuk komik terbitan sendiri. Beberapa kajian sebelum ini telah menekankan tentang penampilan gaya *manga* (komik Jepun) dalam komik Malaysia yang terkini. Walau bagaimanapun, hanya satu sahaja kajian yang telah memberikan bukti empirikal bagi kenyataan tersebut yang ditemui dalam komik seorang artis Malaysia berbangsa Cina, menyarankan berlakunya penghibridan budaya di antara manga dan komik Malaysia. Atribusi seperti itu dalam komik terbitan etnik yang berlainan masih belum diterokai. Untuk memahami dengan lebih lanjut tentang penghibridan budaya dalam penghasilan komik terbitan sendiri dari pandangan artis Melayu yang meminati budaya popular Jepun, kajian kualitatif telah dirangkakan.

Bagi tujuan pengumpulan data, temu bual secara mendalam telah dijalankan bersama sepuluh artis komik Melayu yang aktif dalam penghasilan komik terbitan sendiri dan terlibat dalam konvensyen peminat di Malaysia. Temu bual tersebut telah ditranskripsikan secara kata demi kata (*verbatim*) dan dianalisa menggunakan kaedah analisis tematik. Bagi tujuan sokongan data, komik responden juga digunakan semasa temu bual bagi membolehkan responden menerangkan aspek atau kandungan komik.

Daripada analisis yang telah dijalankan, tiga tema utama telah ditemui iaitu "Atribusi kepada Budaya Popular Jepun", "Perlambangan Lokaliti", dan "Ke Arah Transnasionaliti". Bagi tema yang pertama, penghasilan komik oleh responden adalah atribusi kepada budaya popular Jepun. Minat mereka dalam melukis dan menghasilkan komik telah didorong oleh penggunaan budaya popular Jepun. Mereka berterusan membangunkan kemahiran mereka dan melibatkan diri mereka dalam penjualan komik di konvensyen peminat di Malaysia melalui *prosumption* (penghasilan dan penggunaan serentak). Tema yang kedua pula menunjukkan terdapat dua kaedah perlambangan

lokaliti yang telah ditemui dalam komik mereka iaitu perlambangan tepat dan perlambangan fantasi. Melalui kaedah perlambangan tersebut, responden bertujuan untuk memberi perlambangan lokaliti berdasarkan pengalaman hidup dan isu sebenar. Bagi tema yang terakhir, peserta menunjukkan kemajuan terhadap identifikasi transnasional dalam penghasilan komik mereka melalui tiga keadaan. Mereka membuat rundingan terhadap kritikan pembaca dan penerbit tempatan. Kemudian, disebabkan oleh kesukaran teknikal atau percanggahan dengan kehendak dan prinsip peribadi, mereka telah menghasilkan elemen yang terletak di pengantaraan rujukan yang berbeza. Responden juga memilih untuk dikenali dengan identiti secara individu berbanding identiti secara nasional untuk keaslian komik mereka.

Kesimpulannya, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa penghibridan budaya dalam penghasilan komik terbitan sendiri oleh artis Melayu adalah satu pembinaan identifikasi transnasional. Walaupun artis tersebut pada awalnya telah didorong untuk melukis oleh penggunaan budaya popular Jepun, mereka tidak berhasrat untuk menggambarkan atribusi itu ke dalam komik mereka tetapi sebaliknya menggambarkan lokaliti dalam komik. Penggunaan rujukan yang pelbagai dalam komik mereka menunjukkan pemisahan daripada tetapan nasional yang membawa kepada makna keaslian oleh artis tersebut yang tidak dipunyai oleh negara asal rujukan mereka mahupun negara mereka sendiri. Penghibridan budaya dalam pengeluaran komik mereka berlaku bukan hanya di peringkat global antara negara, malah ia juga berlaku di peringkat individu yang boleh menjurus kepada kepelbagaian tafsiran dan pemahaman budaya.

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to all Malaysian artists who embrace the beauty of art. I hope our passion in art will continue to grow regardless of differences in principles, inspirations, or the forms of art we produce.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this rapidly developing age of technology, transnational circulation of information and commodities are highly globalized. In countries where technologies are well-developed, the globalized information and commodities are easily accessible to be consumed and incorporated into people's lives. Consumers do not merely consume the commodities, but they reproduce them as new commodities in the form of local appropriation that bears transcultural attributions and expressions.

1.2 Background of the Study

Japanese government in the early post-war years was afraid that cultural exports could cause resistance and resentment by the receiving countries that are traumatised by the Japanese occupation during World War II (Otmazgin, 2012a), and therefore refrained from doing so. However, Japan has had a tremendous change in its cultural exports when its popular cultural products (e.g., animation, comic, television drama, etc.) have gained popularity especially in the Asian region starting in the early 1990s (Iwabuchi, 1998a; Otmazgin, 2012a). Japan has later established its creative policy called "Cool Japan" in 2002 with the purpose of selling its culture globally (Mandujano, 2013).

Japanese popular cultural products include *manga* (Japanese comic), *anime* (Japanese animation), video games, *J-drama* (Japanese television drama), music, and fashion. Manga, a form of comic art, can be dated back from the 17th century during the Edo period in the form of *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints) caricature, where one of the masters of *ukiyo-e* named Katsushika Hokusai coined the word manga for his own works by the combination of the Chinese characters, *man* and *ga*, which gives the literal meaning of involuntary picture (Lent, 2015). Manga henceforth evolved through time and became a reading material, progressively turning from *ukiyo-e* to illustrated books and to the present formats (e.g., comic book, strip, magazine). *Anime* (Japanese animation), has been attracting both academic and media attentions after its success in the U.S. market in the late 1980s with the anime *Akira* (see Table A.1 in Appendix A for information of popular cultural products) (Iwabuchi, 2002a). Japanese television programs such as J-drama and variety shows, on the other hand, have managed to take their presence in East Asia's television scene (Otmazgin, 2012b).

According to Lent (2015), the popularity of Japanese popular culture was found to have influenced the comic industry of East Asian countries. For example, in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea, the strong presence of Japanese manga is seen as a contribution to the early development of their comic industry (Lent, 2015). In addition to that, since the dissemination of the Japanese popular culture in the East Asian region

in 1990s, it has attracted more fans up until today, and this phenomenon has resulted in the changing of people's habits and lifestyles, such as their Internet surfing habit to gain access to the products (Yamato, 2011), participation in fan conventions (Lent, 2015) and the (re)production of artistic expressions by fans which is called as fan participatory culture (Jenkins & Bertozzi, 2008).

Jenkins and Bertozzi (2008) studied the participation by American fans of popular culture in the fan (re)production of artistic expressions. One of the artistic expressions included was fan fiction, where it is the written work that "involves the appropriation of characters or situations from an existing media property for the purpose of constructing original stories produced by impassioned amateurs" (Jenkins & Bertozzi, 2008, endnote 14). Fan (re)productions are often showcased and sold in fan conventions, as well as shared among fans through websites such as DeviantArt (<http://www.deviantart.com>) and Tumblr (<http://www.tumblr.com>).

In the case of Malaysia, the popularity of Japanese popular cultural products can be traced back as early in the late 1980s with illegal Chinese-translated copies of manga imported from Taiwan to serve the Chinese community (Lent, 2015). Since then, more Japanese popular cultural products (e.g., J-drama, anime, manga) were made available in Malaysia through local television networks and the Internet (Yamato, 2011) and were then consumed by audiences of different ethnicities.

From there, fan participatory culture in Malaysia has also emerged. Malaysian artists' participation in producing fan comics and artworks can be seen in various fan conventions in the country. For example, the biggest fan convention in Malaysia, Comic Fiesta, opens up a creative art market. In 2014, the creative art market of Comic Fiesta was able to gather more than 200 groups of local and international artists, both amateur and semi-professional (Comic Fiesta 2014, n.d.), in showcasing their artworks and products (e.g., fan artworks, original comics, accessories, posters, etc.) to approximately 49,000 visitors (Comic Fiesta, 2015; "Comics and cosplay fans unite!", 2015).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Aside from the influence of Japanese popular culture on the creative contents of East Asian countries mentioned in the previous section, the influence of manga and anime on Malaysian comics was also noticed by previous scholars (Lent, 2015; Karna Mustaqim & Mulyadi Mahamood, 2015; Gan, 2011). According to Lent (2015), though comic magazines in Malaysia were first fashioned by European and American prototypes, they were later affected by the popularity of Japanese popular culture throughout Asia in the 1990s. New comic magazines, such as *Gempak* and the younger generation of Malaysian comic artists, have started to imitate the manga stylization. Furthermore, Lent claimed that imitating the manga style has been appealing especially to the young amateur comic artists due to the wide opportunity for them to showcase and sell their self-published comics in fan conventions in Malaysia that are promoting Japanese popular culture.

Talking about imitating the manga style, a study by Gan (2011) has explored cultural hybridity in *shōjo* manga, which is a genre that often portrays themes revolving around romantic love (Ueno, 2006) and is targeted for the female audience, produced by Kaoru. Kaoru is a Malaysian Chinese professional comic artist attached to the comic publisher, *Gempak*. Gan described the portrayal of Japanese representations (e.g., Japanese school uniform, Japan's city scenery, Japanese fashions, etc.) in Kaoru's comics. However, such portrayals were also found to have been locally appropriated by the artist to make it suitable for the local readers, especially for the children and Malay readers. For example, an image of a female character wearing a short skirt on the cover of the artist's comic book was deemed too provocative from the local viewpoint, and therefore, was replaced with a different version. The alteration was made to locally adapt Japanese fashion for positive receptions by the local readers. The findings of Gan's study indicated instances of cultural hybridization between Japanese and Malaysian origins.

The scope of Gan's study was limited to the comic artworks only by a single Malaysian Chinese artist and one comic genre (i.e., *shōjo* manga). Since Lent (2015) argued that ethnicity affects the contents of the Malaysian comics, comic production by artists with other ethnic backgrounds, which serves for the local readers, need to be explored. Since Malay is the dominant ethnic in Malaysia, it is most likely to induce different findings on the matter. Furthermore, the emerging young amateur comic artists imitating the drawing style of manga, as noticed by Lent (2015), who participated in Malaysian fan conventions to showcase and sell their self-published comics, is also unexplored. Therefore, the present study aims to understand cultural hybridization in the production of self-published comics by Malay fan artists of Japanese popular culture.

1.4 Research Questions

The main purpose of this study is to understand cultural hybridization in the production of self-published comics by Malay fan artists of Japanese popular culture. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are the comic production by Malay artists attributed to the Japanese popular culture?
2. What are the representations of cultural origins in Malay artists' comics?
3. What are the transformations of artistic expressions Malay artists develop through cultural hybridization?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study employs qualitative research approach. It provides a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, which could address social or cultural issues entangled with it. Popular cultural influence may not be seen as favourable at times. A study by Jenkins and Bertozzi (2008) shows that, in the case of U.S., the older generation were still sceptical towards popular cultural influences in terms of fan participation in the (re)production of the cultural products. At times, fan (re)productions were seen as

subversive acts as they were charged with the infringement of intellectual property. However, as argued by Jenkins and Bertozzi, fan (re)production is a form of artistic expressions. Such engagement has been found to nurture the development and artistic productivity of the young artists. Therefore, findings from this study provide an understanding on the benefits of fan participatory culture towards the development of local artists themselves. Furthermore, as found in a study by Gan (2011), the findings give insights into the competency of the local artists in appropriating the contents of foreign culture to suit the local values and morality.

Aside from that, economic advantages may also be gained from fan participatory culture. The new Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) of Malaysia launched in 2010 has marked a new journey for various domestic industries to further develop in contributing to the economic development and growth of Malaysia (Economic Transformation Programme, n.d.). Under this programme, the development of the creative industry is among its agenda. The government has seen creative contents as a form of intellectual property that the nation is able to produce and benefit from. The findings from this study give insights that through fan (re)production in the fan participatory culture, such culture itself is nurturing the development of the creative industry.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

By employing qualitative research approach, this study focuses on selected Malaysian artists to seek insights into the comic production. The findings of this study thus do not make generalizations for all comic artists in Malaysia. Fans of Japanese popular culture are selected for this study for their noticeable impact on Malaysian comic production. Consumption and participation of the fans of Japanese popular culture in fan conventions are also highly observable. Aside from that, this study focuses on only one form of fan (re)production, namely comic. Other forms of fan (re)production, such as *cosplay* (costume play), games or music, are not covered since there are aspects that need to be looked into according to the respective forms.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

The key terms used in the context of the study are defined as follows:

Self-Published Comics

The term *comics* used to present the findings of the study includes single or multiple pictorial stories in deliberate sequence to convey information either in a single page or in several pages bound in covers. The term *self-published comics* indicates comics produced and published independently by the participants either in hard copies or soft copies shared on the internet.

Fan Comics

The term *fan comics* refer to comics produced by fans using backgrounds and characters from existing media products in producing different stories. Similarly, the term *fan artworks* refer to the same meaning but in the form of illustrations.

Fan (Re)production

Fan (re)production refers to the fans' activity of (re)producing media products inspired from existing media products (e.g., animation, comics, movies, literatures).

Prosumption

The term *prosumption* provides an elaboration to the term *fan (re)production* to indicate that fans' activity also involves the consumption of existing media products for the purpose of their own media (re)production.

Cultural Hybridization

Cultural hybridization is the process of mixing cultural elements between different cultural origins which occurs due to cultural globalization. In this study, it refers to the mix between the local and other cultural elements in fan (re)production.

Transnationality

Transnationality refers to the characteristics of cultural products that have mixes of different cultural portrayals that leads to ambivalent and ambiguous representation of nationality in the transformed products. Similarly, the term *transculturality* implies having mixes of cultural elements but are not limited to cultures that are inherent in nationality.

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