Featured animation design for cultural respect and understanding in Tjap Go Meh's narration

I. Wirasari

Telkom University, Bandung, Indonesia

F.B. Mohamed

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia

D.K. Aditya, N.D. Nugraha, A. Erdhina & S. Fathiani

Telkom University, Bandung, Indonesia

ABSTRACT: *Lontong Tjap Go Meh* is one of the most popular *Chinese Peranakan* dishes in Indonesia. Initially, this dish was served at the *Tjap Go Meh* celebration. Uniquely, this dish is actually not found in China. The similarity with *Ketupat Lebaran* has a connection with the spread of Islam in Java and the acculturation with the local culture. Unfortunately, not many people know about the origin and philosophy of this dish. In the *Chinese Peranakan* community in Indonesia itself, especially the younger generation, they mostly do not know about the history behind the *Lontong Tjap Go Meh*, other than it is a dish passed down by previous generations. *Tjap Go Meh*'s celebration in Indonesia can be said as something new for them, especially since this celebration was banned during the New Order regime. This cultural-based research intends to reintroduce the origins and philosophy of *Lontong Tjap Go Meh* through media that can be enjoyed by the younger generation, namely short animation.;his media form is easily accessed easily and is more effective, especially in this COVID-19 pandemic era. With qualitative research supported by observational data collection, literature study, and interviews with the qualitative method, it is hoped that the messages tconveyed through character and setting designs can be effectively received.

Keywords: Lontong Tjap Go Meh, Chinese Peranakan, acculturation, featured animation

1 INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that has a variety of cultural wealth, starting from the original cultural heritage of the archipelago as well as the culture of migrants overseas. Historical records prove that many civilizations of other nations entered Nusantara through international trade, learning, exploration, the spread of religion, and colonial conquest. One of the overseas cultures that most influences the culture of the Nusantara is the Chinese overseas culture. The Chinese overseas culture manifests itself in a number of cultural artifacts in the archipelago, ranging from architecture, fashion, absorption language, culinary, to some Islamic culture in several places. The Chinese overseas that live in Nusantara for generations are called the *Chinese Peranakan*. The most sublime influence of the *Chinese Peranakan* culture in our daily life is the culinary culture. Without us knowing, several culinary dishes that we enjoy every day come from the process of acculturation, assimilation, and amalgamation, which originated from the results of Chinese initiatives spreading across the country. Most of the Chinese Peranakan were born from inter-marriage and do not speak in their father's language anymore. Most of the Chinese Peranakan live in Java and they often view themselves as Javanese people, but on other hand, the patrilineal system among the Chinese makes them consider themselves Chinese.

The reason why this research connects with the COVID-19 pandemic is because of the philosophy within the *Lontong Tjap Go Meh* itself. The origin of the rice cakes originally came from rice balls, meaning of the family reunion. COVID-19 greatly changed social interactions, therefore many families could not gather because of need to social distance in order to reduce and stop the spread of the virus. That is why this animation project discusses the value of celebrating family gatherings for the younger generations.

The philosophy in *Lontong Tjap Go Meh* sounds simple, but it is also complicated to describe as the narration needs some deep cultural understanding because of the acculturations and lengthy and complicated historical trivia. It is said that, for the Chinese, dishes are not only something that is served for eating, but also play a role in diplomacy, friendship, as a cure for diseases, respect for one's ancestors, and also to avoid negative energy. It is a pity due to Soeharto's New Order Regime, which lasted over 30 years, that the *Chinese Peranakan* lost their relationship with their ancestors' cultural artifacts and values. Back then, not many *Chinese Peranakan* celebrated *Tjap Go Meh* until 1999, when former president, Abdulrahman Wahid, changed Soeharto's regulations in the Indonesian-Chinese society. Because of that, the celebration of the *Tjap Go Meh* was merely new for all children and teenagers who live after 1998.

Lontong Tjap Go Meh is one of the most famous *Chinese Peranakan* culinary dishes in Indonesia. Everybody in Indonesia, especially the *Chinese Peranakan* community, knows the taste of this unique dish well. Contrary to the dish, not everyone in Indonesia knows about the history and origins behind the dish. In fact, even in China, there are no dishes similar to *Lontong Tjap Go Meh* itself. *Lontong Tjap Go Meh* has similar components as *Ketupat Lebaran*, the famous dish served in Idul Fitri celebrations. The dish contains solid steamed rice cakes mixed with chicken curry, which is served with marrow slice, bean sprouts, fried shallots, and crackers. In Malaysia and Singapore, the dish is very similar with their *Laksa*. The similar components and the philosophy with the *Ketupat Lebaran* (which also did not exist in the Arab and other Middle Eastern countries, except the curry) made the two dishes become parts of Indonesian people's traditional culinary assets that came from two different custom and religion's assimilation. Some of stories of its origin state that the two dishes were introduced by either Sunan Kalijagaone of the Muslim's Nine apostles, or *Wali Sanga*, who spread Islam in the Java Island. Sunan Kalijaga used the cultural and acculturation approach during his missionary to spread Islam, such as *Wayang Kulit*/Shadow Puppet. The term *Tjap Go Meh* itself refers to the Hokkian people's celebration on the 15th day of the Lunar New Year [In Chinese, *Tjap Go Meh* is known as *Yuan Xiao Jie* (元宵节)]. In the traditional Chinese custom, on the 15th day, the Chinese should serve rice balls or rice cakes. *Lontong*, or the rice cakes themselves, are believed to be adapted from the traditional rice cakes that was served with pork soup. But, to honor the native Muslims community, the Chinese serve this rice cake with chicken curry called *Opor Ayam*. From this narration, we have learned that the Chinese overseas in the past had a relationship with the Islamic culture in Indonesia, especially in Java. It is also believed that Admiral Zhang He, from Ming's dynasty, has brought and spread Islam in North Java's coast during his diplomatic journey.

2 RESEARCH METHODS

Since the research wants to create animation assets such as character and background designs, the research will use the visual methodology approach. Visual terms here are referred to everything that is seen and made by human beings, such as paintings, drawings, posters, advertisements, and also statues, monuments, and constructions. Those things were created by human beings with messages that could be interpreted. Meanwhile, the data collecting for this research will use three models namely observation, interviews, and literacy studies.

- (1) Observation: The research will observe some objects related to *Tjap Go Meh* festivals in Indonesia, especially in some places in Java. Any details on Chinese cultural artifacts that are related to the *Tjap Go Meh* festival will be observed as data, and then will be used as visual references;

- (2) Interviews: The research will interview some Chinese cultural expertise and some Chinese descendants to obtain primary data on their origin and knowledge about the history of the *Tjap Go Meh* celebration in Indonesia, as well as its relationship with the *Lontong Tjap Go Meh*. But due to the pandemic, this step is still pending.
- (3) Literacy Studies: They are conducted to obtain secondary data. Literacy studies are also carried out with a view to getting visual references, and to get references about everything related to the origin, including documentation about *Tjap Go Meh* in Indonesia and also in Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia, which has similarities to Indonesia. Visual references in this study are not only in the form of photographic recording data, but also the work of several character designs and settings from a number of comics and animations with the visual communication approach.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research wants to explore some media that could inform and communicate the message about the philosophy. The medium that this research would take is a short feature animation. The short feature animation should use the suitable media because it will be broadcasted through social media such as a YouTube, Instagram, or even in another online or broadcasting channel. This research has considered to use these online media because it is significant due to the increasing numbers of internet users during the work from home and, of course, study from home in this COVID-19 pandemic era.

This is not the first time for us to find other animation projects that share the history and philosophy about *Tjap Go Meh*. The previous research and project created by the students of the multimedia concentration in Telkom University's Visual Communication Design Department had brought a dynamic and good quality of the animation for this topic. However, it lacks the historical facts due to the limitation of the final project timeline. This condition is understandable for this research because the previous project teams did not have any more details of the Chinese Peranakan references. Furthermore, this research wants to flesh out what the previous project had done before, especially with more historical accuracy.

The new narrations of the animation will consist of the reunion of a small Indonesian-Chinese *Peranakan* family for the celebration of the 15th day of the Lunar New Year during a pandemic era. The small family will have a chat at the dining table, discussing the history of the dishes that are served on the table. Then, the story rewinds back to how the Chinese overseas came to Nusantara and established a good relationship with their fellow Muslim natives, and how the dishes were introduced.

There will be two types of animation styles used in the project: first, the usual 2D animations that are commonly used in children's animations to illustrate the situations today; and second, 2D animations based on the Chinese puppet and Javanese Shadow puppet to illustrate the past scenes. The collaboration between the two styles is considered to deliver the message that we should remember and respect the past, learn how our ancestors paid respect to others, how they have established the values of tolerance, and how the diversity builds our customs.

4 CONCLUSION

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has changed every aspect of our lives, including this research and the project within, the research is still ongoing. The research only changes the media, which is easy to access during the study from home policy. In order to adopt the messages and the spirit to communicate to make a relationship with the audience to get the cultural respect like the *Lontong Tjap Go Meh* philosophy, this research will continue the project. With this short animation project, the researchers hope that the messages about respecting the diversity in values and the philosophy of gatherings and reunions delivered to young audiences, either to local natives or the *Chinese*

Figure 1. Sample of animation asset design. (Source: Priska Agari, Asy SyifaRahma, Firda Ayu Nopianty, 2019).

Peranakan, will show that this nation will strengthen in numbers when it searches for similarities in others as well as learns to value generations of the past while still embracing the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher wants to thank and show appreciation for Priska Agari, Asy SyifaRahma, Firda Ayu Nopianty, and Mr. Arief Budiman., S.sn., M.Sn. from the Visual Communication Design, Telkom University, Department in the Multimedia Program for helping with the visualization concept.

REFERENCES

- Agari, P. and Budiman, A. 2019. Perancangan Storyboard Untuk Film Animasi 2D Lontong Cap Gomeh. *e-Proceeding Art Des.*, 6(3):4050
- Arikunto, Suharsimi. 2013. *Prosedur Penelitian Suatu Pendekatan Praktik*. Jakarta: Penerbit Rineka Cipta
- Bromokusumo, A. 2013. *Peranakan Tionghoa dalam Kuliner Nusantara*. Jakarta: Kompas Media Nusantara.
- Ghifari, A. S. R. *Perancangan Background Untuk Film Animasi Pendek 2d Lontong Cap Gomeh*. Universitas Telkom, 2019.
- Gondomono. 2002. "Pengantar Untuk Pelangi Cina Indonesia." PT. Intisari Mediatama, Jakarta
- KOMINFO, 2020. "Penggunaan Internet Naik 40% Saat Bekerja dan Belajar dari Rumah." Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika RI, Jakarta
- Nopianty, et al. 2019. Perancangan Karakter Untuk Film Animasi Pendek 2d Lontong Cap Go Meh, *e-Proceeding Art Des.*, 6(3):3835
- Setiono, B.G. 2003. *Tionghoa dalam pusaran politik*. Jakarta: Trans Media.
- Sidharta, M. 2006. Jejak-jejak Koki Diplomat. In Wibisono (ed.), *Etnik Tionghoa di Indonesia*, 52–61, Jakarta: PT. Intisari Mediatama
- Soewardikoen, D.W. 2019. *Metodologi Penelitian Desain Komunikasi Visual*. Jakarta: PT Kanisius.