CULTURAL IDENTITY OF *MANGA KURABU* COMMUNITY

Arcci Tusita
Universitas Brawijaya, Malang
arcci_tusita@ub.ac.id; arcci.tusita@gmail.com

Abstract

Globalization leads to the increase of global connection and the decrease of spatial barriers. This tendency makes people easily enable to consume culture from other regions even countries. Accordingly, it is interesting to see that the process of cultural consumption cannot be separated from the production which portrays cultural identity through cultural expressions. This can be strikingly seen from Manga Kurabu. Manga Kurabu is a community of the students of Japanese study program, faculty of cultural studies Universitas Brawijaya, Malang. Thus, this research was done to explore how the members of Manga Kurabu create new cultural products from their consumption which then influences their cultural identity. Ethnographic approach was employed as a method, covering field observation and interview of the members of Manga Kurabu. The result of the research revealed that cultural hybridity has clearly been shown from the products of Manga Kurabu community. The members of Manga Kurabu actively intermingle Japanese pop culture and Indonesian local figures. Finally, globalization, along with technology and electronic media in particular, makes the barrier between local and global fluid.

Keywords: Cultural identity, Hibridity, Manga Kurabu community.

INTRODUCTION

There are many disputes related to the effects of globalization. Some believe that someday globalization will destroy local culture and cultural identity because of the homogeinity it brings, similarly, others think that globalization is negative phenomenon, the modern form of colonialism. Whatever the dispute related the effects of globalization, one thing is clear, that globalization has a certain impact toward the construction of cultural identity. Tomlison (1999) states that cultural identity is the *product* of globalization. Thus, another argument is that globalization, instead of destroying cultural identity, has significant role in creating and proliferating cultural identity. In this perspective, people are seen not mere objects of cultural influences, but subjects who can reject or integrate culture. Globalization makes them increasingly have exposure to different cultures and a global world. These facts make cultural identity development becomes a more complex process.

One factor that can change people's perspective about cultural identity is the growth of popular culture. Storey (1993: p.3) defines pop culture as mass culture. As mass culture, the text and practices of pop culture produced massively so that it can be consumed and enjoyed by large group of people. In Indonesia, Japanese pop culture, especially *manga* (Japanese comics) has become a part of Indonesian global youth culture, especially since the late 1990s. There were time when Sunday TV programs were full of animation movies derived from Japanese *manga,* such as Fujiko Fujio's *Doraemon* and Tezuka Osamu's *Astro Boy*. Nowadays, the popularity of manga grows even bigger since new innovations and creativities added. The vast consumption of manga change not only the life of Japanese society but also other countries like Indonesia. In indonesia, manga becomes a hobby and lifestyle. Not only they consume the culture, but they also create something to express their existence.

One of the communities that consume Japanese pop culture manga is *Manga Kurabu*. It is a club of Japanese Literature Department students of Universitas Brawijaya for those who love manga. Formed in 2012, this club offers activity of drawing manga characters and putting the ideas and stories into manga. It is interesting to investigate the expression of Manga Kurabu members' cultural identity in the style of their drawings and works. Therefore, this paper examines how the members of *Manga Kurabu* articulate their cultural identity seen from their products of culture, that are their drawings

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND HIBRIDITY

Broadly speaking, cultural identity may refer to identification with, or sense of belonging to, a particular group based on various cultural categories, including nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and religion. Hall in Rutherford (1990: 611) mentions that cultural identity is constructed and maintained through the process of sharing collective knowledge such as traditions, heritage, language, aesthetics, norms and customs. As individuals typically affiliate with more than one cultural group, cultural identity

is complex and multifaceted. In the globalized world with increasing intercultural encounters, cultural identity is constantly enacted, negotiated, maintained, and challenged through communicative practices. Furthermore, Hall in Rutherford (1990: 225) regards identity as a flexible construction, a process covers not only 'being', but also 'becoming', a principle difference between "who we are" and "what we become". This becoming process is also continuously progressing depending on social and cultural condition of certain place and time. As a result, the values will always change along with the changing of culture and history.

Globalization opens unlimited acess on worldwide social relations, that create cultural diversity. In this kind of diversity, people often question about authenticity. Globalization according to Tomlison "alters the context of meaning construction .... it affect people's sense of identity, the experience of place and of self in relation of place". Furthermore, Pym in Sell (2011: 94) argues that the existence of space where two or more culture overlap and can then form an identity of their own. It means a new text can be placed in the intersection between cultures, and thus they are called as a media to articulate a new undertanding about cultural identity. It correlates with Babha's argument that the 'in-between' spaces, defy claims to any essential way of being, and lie between fixed identifications, are sites that open up possibilities of cultural hybridity 'without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (Bhabha, 1994: 4). Therefore, hybrid interaction can be viewed as cultural exchange whose position involved is considered as equal, and human as subject, in which an individual has power to position himself in a certain constellation in everyday life. Furthermore, he also contends that hybridization is not merely the mixing, blending and synthesizing of different elements that ultimately forms a culturally faceless whole, generate new forms and meaning, in this sense, new identity.

METHOD

Ethnographic approach is employed in conducting the research. Generally, ethnography is a description of people and their actions or behaviour. It describes the everyday, routine of culture. Ethnography belongs within the field of qualitative research, it is supported by Kirk's and Miller's (1986, p.9) definition below.

> Qualitative research is a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms. As identified with sociology, cultural anthropology and political science among other disciplines, qualitative research has been seen to be "naturalistic," "ethnographic" and "participatory.

It can be said that ethnography involves participation and observation of the other. Therefore, the data of this research drawn from observation of *Manga Kurabu* club activities and also interview with its members. However, not all members are qualified to be respondent, the basic requirement is that the respondents are the members that are able to draw manga characters. In this way, they have established their styles and preference in drawing manga.

For this field of study, the researcher conducted one month obsorvasion and interview toward Manga Kurabu community members. The observations were done particularly when Manga Kurabu held Japanese Culture Festival in the Faculty, while interview is done toward eight members of the club.

HIBRIDITY IN MANGA KURABU COMMUNITY

Being a good manga artist takes time, effort, and commitment. One must read manga regularly. Most of manga artist in Manga Kurabu begin to read manga at a very young age, around 8 or 9 years old. One of members explained her decision to join Manga Kurabu in University.

> *Kita semua suka baca komik-komik Jepang dan suka banget sama gambarnya, karakternya. Aku sekitar umuran SMP udah suka nggambar-nggambar karakter komik Jepang sih. Cuma masih tataran iseng. Pas masuk universitas dan ambil sastra Jepang ya sekalian aja masuk UKM Manga Kurabu.*

From the qoutation, it can be said that the love of reading manga and the hobby of drawing are the students' common motivation to join *Manga Kurabu* community.

In Manga Kurabu community, one of the regular agenda is learning to draw. Chen (2007) said that most manga fans are infatuated with the characters rather than the plot. It explains the phenomenon in *Manga Kurabu* in which the artists in the beginning tend to focus on how to make the characters in their drawing look 'Japanese' or 'Manga-like'. Further, Orbaugh (2003) illustrates that Manga has specific style of characters, for examples big eyes for woman characters and the representation on less realistic body, or lean, for male characters. These kind of phenomenon can also be found in all drawing of Manga Kurabu. Most of them admit that the portrayal of character is important and is seen as an essence in the center of manga drawing activity.

As a cultural product of human being, Manga can be seen as a cultural package, which also deliver cultural elements. For example, a manga set in Japanese school will include a potrayal about Japanese language, educational system, fashion, food, and other specific values. However Pymm asserts the view that culture as network of interrelated systems and subsystems, which are constantly in state of change within and in relation to one another. This kind of understanding fits the condition in Manga Kurabu community, in which young artists of Manga Kurabu create their own manga characters, draw strories taken from their surroundings and local culture and share them with others. This group of people are active cultural producers who are engaged in the reproduction of the materials they consume and in the alteration of ideas, meanings and cultural references they perceive. The conventions in drawing manga seem to function as essential ground before they cretae distinct features of their sociocultural identities. It is in line with Fiske's (1992) statement that the meanings or values of such fan art are changed or distorted.

This kind of drawing can be found in the poster made by Manga Kurabu members to invite new member in the beginning of school year. Figure 3 below is official poster funtioned as advertisement to attract freshmen to join Manga Kurabu. Although the setting is not really clear, the characters are quite interesting to be discussed further. The drawing depicts a girl with headdress which is common fashion of Indonesian woman, particularly of Universitas Brawijaya, Malang. According to the artist, the drawing is made such way to familiarize Japanese culture, which is manga, to students. In this way, the students will not think that manga culture is something too foreign and eventually they are willing to join the club.

Figure 1. Manga Kurabu poster

Another interesting point about picture above is that the artist deliberately uses more than one language, those are Indonesian, Japanese and Javanese. The usage of ndonesian language is dominant in the poster, while Japanese is represented by "Jyanee" in Javanese is represented by "*Ojo lali yo*" means do not forget. The artists admits she inserts Japanese and Javanese languages to 'enrich' the text; Javanese language represents the locality and Japanese language represents identity of the club as Manga lovers. Through using multiple languages, the artist leverages her own transnational identities and multilingual skill to gain status within community.

Another example of the recreation of manga characters done by one of Manga Kurabu members shown by figure 2 below. Both figures show the drawing use typical manga style but take the Indonesian police officer figure as characters.
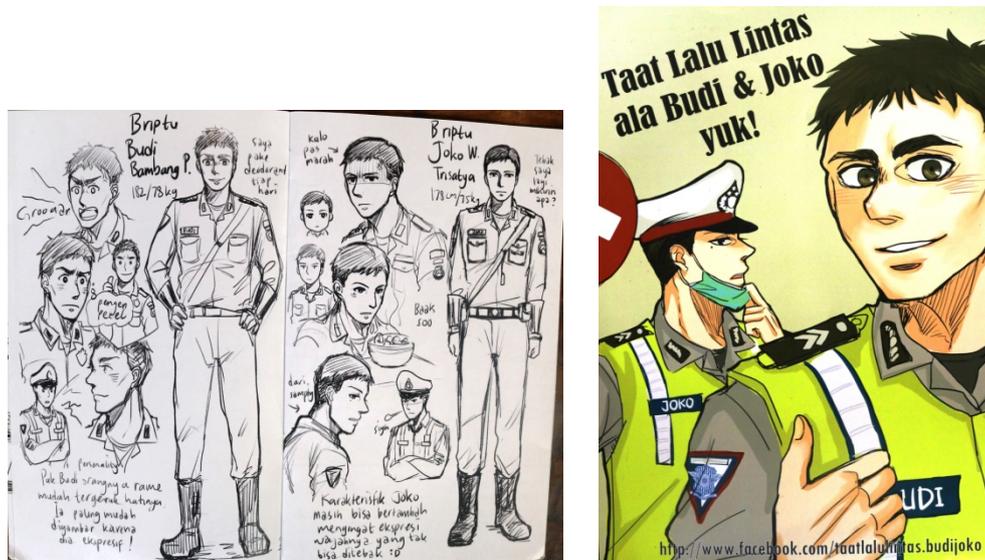

Figure 2
Left: Budi-Joko manga; Right: Budi-Joko campaign

Locality in figure 2 can be explained further by the names of the character, Budi and Joko, which are common names for Indonesian men. Another interesting thing is the exploration of Indonesian culture through depiction of Indonesian food in the drawings. In fact, *bakso* or meatball shown in the figure 2. left above is popular food in Malang. Figure 2 right is made specifically as a campaign for young generation to be law abiding citizen. The artist posts this drawing on her facebook page and gets many comments from other facebook users, especially young people. Important factor that influence Manga Kurabu artist to put locality aspects into their drawing is the positive impact brought by the rise of Indonesian local comic artist. The most prominent work that influence young Manga Kurabu artists is *Garudayana*. Garudayana is Indonesian adventure comic book written by Is Yulianto released in 2009. This comic is considered fresh and unique because although it uses manga style in the drawing, but it tells the story of *wayang* (Indonesian traditional puppet story). Prabowo (2012) in his thesis argues that *Garudayana* is a wake up call for Indonesian local artists. Further, he states that one factor that determine the success of Garudayana in Indonesian market is that Yuniarto deliberately employs manga packaging, which is popular among young generation in Indonesia, in creating comic with local content.

In fact, the success of Garudayana did trigger a senior member of manga Kurabu to further explore Indonesian local culture and tradition in her drawing. Taking the opportunity to compete in an events for young Indonesian artists held by ministry of cooperatives and small & medium enterprises, she creates a comic entitled *Perindu Hujan dan Batu yang Tertulis* or longing for the rain and writing on the stone. Figure 3 below is the cover of *Perindu Hujan dan Batu yang Tertulis.*
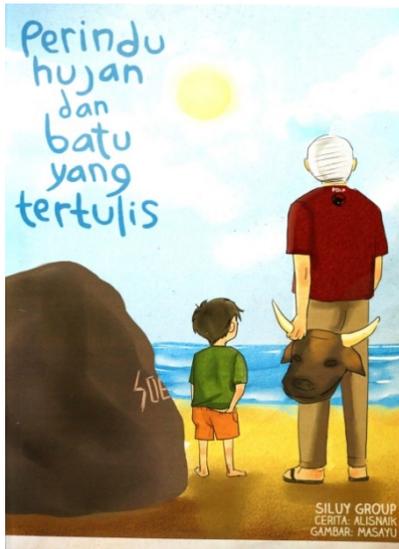
Figure 3. *Perindu Hujan* **cover**

Perindu Hujan dan Batu yang Tertulis tells about the diversity of Indonesian culture. It is explored through the depiction of old man who performs rainmaker ritual by throwing a cow head to the sea as offering which can be seen from figure 4, right below. The rainmaking ritual is a common phenomenon in Indonesia and this practice is done by many local tribes especially during dry season. In addition, the setting chosen in the drawing is "*Laut pantai selatan, Sendang Biru, Kabupaten Malang*". *Sendang Biru* is fishing village in Malang region which becomes famous not only as tourism object, but also the site to conduct the practices of many rituals related with sea.

Figure 4

Left: Local setting in *Perindu Hujan*; Right: Indonesian culture in *Perindu Hujan*

It means that manga is a media for the artist to bring about what she viewed as important issues. She used her manga drawings to explore topics about historical and cultural aspects of Indonesia such as social change, generational gap and cultural diversity. By creating these texts, the artist is taking her local perspective at a level beyond the borders of her local community. Thus, their identity patterns are becoming more complex, as they assert local loyalties but want to share in global values and lifestyles.

The fact that this comic won top 5 in the competition triggers the artist to be consistent in drawing similar projects. She admits that she enjoys the experience of being a successful artist. Being able to create

distict product means that she has additional value as manga artist. She is not the only succesful artist in Manga Kurabu, one of the members even already sell her own drawing which has specific characteristics in her online shop. The customers are varied, both from Indonesia and abroad. Her 'global' success can to separated from the repackaging of ethnic story for a global audiencesThus, the mixture of 'own' and foreign cultures in the drawing as its uniqueness has tight relationship with the desire to be acknowledged as manga artist in broader scope. These artists blend their manga style drawing with other aspects and information which rooted from their original culture source. This kind of Manga Kurabu artists put themselves in "between space" to allow themselves creating new products inspired by their love toward manga culture while at the same time express their identity as Indonesian. Chaubet (2015) explains this condition as hybridity, in which cultural forms and practices intermingle and traverse across social boundaries.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study illuminates that *Manga Kurabu* artists develop their own style and preference in drawing manga and some already add locality that make their products different from what so called original Japanese manga. These cultural products serve as a reflection of personal narrative of cultural identity. In addition, there are many factors that give impact to the molding of cultural identity: personal motives, the exposure of other works and support from government.

This study provides evidence that globalization does not always lead to the homogenous identity since the members of *Manga Kurabu* do intermingle Japanese pop culture and Indonesian local figures and culture. In the globalized world, all creative acts influence and affect each other, providing a cultural background for manga to draw upon as materials for further expression. In the process, manga grows in the space of 'betweenness' with many additional elements evolving within the interculture. Later, it begins to form an identity of its own. The researcher believes that these young artists' efforts in searching new way in presenting their ideas in drawings reveal the way they identify themselves as Indonesian in this globalized world.

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