LOOKING AT THE JAPANESE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY THROUGH INDONESIAN PUBLISHED *MANGA*

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ABSTRACT

This article discussed manga and visual language that had been used on the Japanese fiction graphic narrative as a case study and graphic biography as a comparison. It implemented literature study approach on illustration, specifically, sequential art literature to obtain data as well as finding a theoretical framework to strengthen research results. The article began with a brief history of Japanese comics, then would be discussed the definition and common form of manga and how-to extent the media to convey the information and to identify the visual approach to narrating the information. It finds that modern manga has a potential to become an effective medium to narrate the Japanese culture, growth, and its technological advances that have gained global recognition.

Keywords: Japanese comic, manga, graphic narative, Japanese automotive industry

INTRODUCTION

The human ability to absorb information related to how the brain processes the information. Hall (2011) has explained that the brain will process each written letter that basically a symbol (image with certain meaning) to create a word. To read a series of words, the brain first needs to match the shape of the letter with symbol that has been stored as memories. The brain then combines a series of letters to form words, words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, and so on. Although the whole process lasted very quickly, the brain still needs more time to understand the sentence, compared to understand the information in the form of image or picture (Hall, 2011).

However, both pictures and words each have strengths that can be combined to become stronger media to deliver the message. Hall (2011) has described some of the strength of pictures, such as they are able to communicate quickly, suitable to a wider audience, not limited to age and location, can be enjoyed repeatedly that might build emotion, memories, and experiences, and pictures can be placed in order to produce a sequence. While, words are very strong to communicate accurately and to amuse through language and sentences (Hall, 2011). As an addition, Hall (2011) has said that illustration which is basically a picture with a certain message has become the way to deliver information for thousands of years. It has been proven that illustrations are no longer fulfills the function of the aesthetic that become an important part of delivering the information because of its ability to convey the message. Furthermore, it is able to build the perception in the visual language that has been accepted universally.

Darmawan (2011) has said that one of the illustration forms, the graphic narrative which is a term first introduced by David Kunzle in the book The History of the Comic Strip, as a form that combines the still image composition with narration to form a story. Referring to these definitions, Petersen (2011) has said that the terminology with a similar explanation in French called Bande

Dessinee which means the image in the sequence. The definition of Graphic Narrative, Graphic Novel or Comic Art, in another part of the world is simply called comic, *manga*, and others (Petersen, 2011). Similar to the Kunzle's definition, Darmawan (2011) has said that Scott McCloud which is a comic expert, define it as a series of pictures in deliberate sequence. Most of the graphic narrative in any definition using literal representation language or visualizing the actual form with meaning as what it is (Male, 2007).

Manga is the term for picture books or comics from Japan with all its unique characteristics as a graphic narrative. It has become graphic arts that accepted in many places in the world, including Indonesia. From all the Japanese pop cultures such as film, *dorama* (drama), anime, music, fashion, and others, the *manga* is one of the most popular ones in Indonesia (Venus & Helmi, 2010). Mentioned by Leung (2005), in 1995, former Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa was using *manga* as a medium to express political and social opinions. Furthermore, McCurry (2008) has mentioned that the Japanese Foreign Minister, Masahiko Komura, officially inaugurate the cartoon character *Doraemon* becomes the first Animations Ambassador as a Diplomatic Corp to promote Japanese popular culture. In other words, the modern *manga* which includes animation, not only as a medium to convey a fiction or non-fiction, but more than that, it can be a propaganda or a medium to convey opinions.

Manga in the form of comic books, animated movies, and games, has contributed to the Japanese economy and global markets which in 2001 alone has created the export value of more than 3 billion US dollars (Nakamura in Leung, 2005). With these conditions, *manga* has the potential to become an effective medium to narrate the Japanese culture and all the technological advances that also has gained the world recognition. Although the technology is from China (Petersen, 2011), the early period of Japanese Graphic narrative along with the invention of printing technology was more developed in Japan in the Nara period (710-794). Unlike in China, at that time, the publishing was controlled by the government. The Japanese were able to document and to duplicate their traditional storytelling richness in the caricatural form known as *toba-e*. The graphic narrative had accepted by the Japanese people who were at that time had already familiar with reading and writing.

The illustrated story is first introduced in Japan by Buddhist scholars from Central Asia to tell a story about the journey of Buddha, on scrolls (*emaki*) dominated with the picture. This Japan's narrative art has the unique characteristic which emphasizes the expressive visualization detail on clothing, gestures, and shows concern to the social customs. It still survives as one of the Japanese comic books that have unique characteristics until now. One of the most important points in Japanese visual culture is the rise of caricature art that flourished in the Edo period.

The art work depicts public figure like geisha, sumo wrestler, and *kabuki* actors in the Yoshiwara entertainment district. The caricature art that has become souvenirs of Yoshiwara called *Ukiyo-e*, that means "pictures of the floating world" to express the excitement and also can be translated literally as the district that built on a swamp. One of the *Ukiyo-e* artists is Katsushika Hokusai. He is known for his dramatic depictions of Mount Fuji and The Great Wave of Kanagawa. Parts of his artwork series entitled *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*. Hokusai is also known as the artist who popularized the word *manga* that derived from the Mandarin, *manhua*, which has the meaning as spontaneous sketches. The word *manga* is popularized through his book title, *Hokusai Manga*, which is first published in 1814. It is up to 12 editions that contain caricatures and studies of various poses of animals and humans in daily activities such as farming, hunting, sporting activities and games, including imaginative images of godlike and spirits (Petersen, 2011). The purpose of publishing the book is to promote his owns drawing style to a wider audience. However, what does not exist on the Hokusai *Manga* is an attempt to tell a story. Although Japan has a long history in terms of storytelling through pictures, none of these traditions are in accordance with the definition of *manga* in the 20th century.

At the early era of modern *manga* when comics from the United States become the reference, the *manga* does not visually present in a way people recognize today. Darmawan (2012) has said that Osamu Tezuka, the creator of Astro Boy, who is recognized as the father of modern *manga* that the comic becomes the blueprint of modern *manga*. Tezuka is emphasizing in time frame movement on his comic that gives filmic feeling to the comic readers, as perceived when watching the film. The visual language of Tezuka's comics is similar to Will Eisner's definition of the comic as framing time (Darmawan, 2012). The unique filmic visualization on *manga* has also dramatized the sequence. For example, a scene of fights does not complete in 1 book. It can be continued until the next two books that make the readers are more flicking through, rather than reading. Nevertheless, this approach allows characters or objects are visualized repeatedly that make the readers remember the object or character on the comic.

With many themes on *manga* like sports, romance, science fiction, action, automotive, and others, it can be classified into two major categories based on the target audience; *shounen* is designed for male readers and *shoujo* targets female readers. Regardless of there is any contribution from the Japanese government to the *manga* industry, such as *shounen manga* with automotive themes, sometimes in non-automotive themes, have been successfully introduced to the reader about the Japanese automotive industry that package in illustrated stories.

METHODS

This article is implementing literature study approach on illustration, specifically sequential art literature to obtain data as well as finding a theoretical framework to strengthen research results. Then, the reflective data analysis is explained by using visual language and narrative theory to find the meaning of the researched objects; the automotive theme *manga* that published in Indonesia, both fiction and non-fiction as the case study to conclude rational and scientific data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Akira is the first Japanese comic to be officially published in Indonesia in 1990 by Elex Media Komputindo, the publisher under Gramedia Group that is followed by *Candy Candy* which appeared in the same year. In 1991, the very popular comic, *Doraemon*, published and more Japanese comics published on the following years next up to now. Published by Level Comics, a division in Elex Media Komputindo, Indonesian publisher for more mature *manga* reader, has been the widely published automotive theme *manga* that was literally visualizing various Japanese made cars and motorcycles on its pages.

Cars and motorcycles in the automotive theme *mangas* are visualized in the right proportions and highly detailed, although the unique *manga* style still can be easily recognized such as line art and human figures which are often visualized not in the actual anatomy proportion. Moreover, the settings are usually taken from the real location, not imaginative, and visually portraying Japan in details. One of unique feature that only can be found in automotive theme *mangas* is the description pages about the vehicle that related to the story. It is usually displaying technical explanation, a brief history, or achievements of a particular product. This feature can be easily found at the beginning of chapters, like in *Restore Garage 251*, created by Ryuji Tsugihara.

A different approach to deliver technical information is done by Katsumi Yamaguchi in *My Favorite Bike* which the technical description as part of the storyline, though it often only informs the strengths of the product. The main short stories on three series *manga*s, which is published in

Indonesia by Level Comics in 2007, are about emotional bond between riders and their motorcycles, dominated by the big four Japanese motorcycle manufacturers, Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, and Kawasaki. The storylines also provide the overview of the various types and functions of the motorcycles that try to represent all types of motorcycles and varieties of engine capacity. The fictional *manga* is trying to show how the automotive has become part of the Japanese life that also shows the Japanese pride and loyalty to their own automotive products. BMW and Harley Davidson, the non-Japanese motorcycle brand, appear in several stories, but instead as a comparison, it implies to convey the message that the Japanese motorcycle is not inferior to the American and European manufacturer which already have much longer production history. *My Favorite Bike* also tells the success story of Japanese rider on the world motorcycle racing championships that seems to try to inform about the competitive combination of Japanese racer and Japanese motorcycle.

The other Yamaguchi's *manga* that also published in Indonesia is *Over Rev*. The main story is about a group of young people and illegal race in Japan. This *manga* shows a variety of Japanese cars, similar to *My Favorite Bike*. It has been trying to convey the diversity of Japanese automotive product as well as gives an overview to the reader about the durability and uniqueness of each vehicle. On this *manga,* the unique filmic visualization in narrating a scene of the racing scene does not complete in a single book that sometimes concludes on the next two books. It makes the cars visualized repeatedly which allows the reader to remember the specific cars on the comic. On the film-like visualization approach, the race scenes are shown in a stunning detail and dramatization to express the tension of the race. At the same time, the vehicles that are part of the main story are highly exposed, expressed in great detail and proportion, and visually narrating the capabilities of the cars on the comic. The artists seem trying to convince the reader about the car's performance to describe its true capabilities and at the same time to make the reader familiar with the vehicles on the story.

The massage about the Japanese automotive industry has been delivered in various ways. Motorsports are often as a story background. Such as in *Full Spec* which the main story is about a rally car driver career and Japanese rally cars become visually very dominant. However, what actually happened to the Japanese rally cars in the World Rally Championship in 2006, the year when Taro Sekiguchi's comic was published in Japan by Kodansha Ltd, did not actually dominate the championship. *Full Spec* seems like to remind the reader about the long successful years of the Japanese manufacturers such as Toyota, Mitsubishi, and Subaru in the World Rally Championship before their domination replaced by European car manufacturer. Another title, *Factory Z*, by Naotsugu Matsueda and Shigeo Makino which are in Indonesia published by Elex Media Komputindo in 2006, visualizes a variety of new vehicles that cover a story of a photo journalist who is assigned to lurk test cars from various leading manufacturers, most of them are Japanese manufacturers.

Not only fiction, but the *manga* has also become a medium for the biographical story. For example, *Project X Challengers* by Akira Yokoyama that published in 2010 by Elex Media Komputindo. The biographic series tells the success story of Japanese industries and business, one of those, about Honda in the title: *Conquer the World's Top Race*. The main story in this biographic comic is about Honda, one of the largest automotive industries in Japan, in getting international recognition by building a motorcycle that is able to win races in world competition level. It also talks about Soichiro Honda, the Managing Director and founder of Honda, whose ambition is to conquer the global motorcycle market.

Although the story at this *manga* is ended in the certain period when they finally are able to win an international motorcycle race, readers still recognize Honda as one of the biggest automotive industry in the world. In addition, according to the Indonesian Motorcycle Industry Association (2010), sales of motorcycles in 2010, when the comic was published, Honda leads the market share by 52,19%. This *manga* tries to give knowledge for the readers about their organizational ethic to pursue the dream about being the best in the world. At the same time, it is narrating the success story and the innovation for the world to recognize Japanese company.

In this comic, the vehicles are visualized in detail, as on the fictional automotive theme *manga*, although the main character is also visualized in the unique *manga's* style that simplifies the shape of the human figure. The artist seems like to put the detail of the vehicle, and all the parts are more important than visualizing the figures accurately, even when visualizing Soichiro Honda, the founder of the company. Honda's motorcycles from the different era, from the first production to the racing motorcycle in the 2000s as part of the storyline. It is also shown to the reader that the company has already got a long history and motor racing tradition as another motorcycle from America or Europe. However, though the comic is about Honda, it is also narrating Yamaha as a fellow Japanese motorcycle product at the same time as a competitor. It can easily recognize that the Honda's biography comic tries to promote the advance of the Japanese motorcycle industry. It also tries to convince the reader about Honda's superiority compared to its fellow Japanese competitors.

The presence of automotive products in the *manga* is not always as the main part of the story which Japanese people's daily life often portrayed more dominantly. As in *Restore Garage 251* created by Ryuji Tsugihara that was first published at Japan in 2001 and published in Indonesia by Level Comics, which the main stories about a restoration workshop and interactions between the shop owner and his customers despite the existence of the classic Japanese cars involved as the background story. In every edition of this *manga*, the cars appear as something with sentimental value and evoking memories which often related to Japanese economic growth and lifestyle; it indirectly tells the long history of the Japanese automotive industry. For example, on book 30, Hondaism has shortly explained as the company's challenging spirit. The comic also informs about Honda which is a motorcycle manufacturer in the 60's that tries to participate in Formula 1 Grand Prix racing.

In the automotive theme *manga*, cars appear deliberately dominant despite the main story might narrating fictional drama and human interaction. Though it is not displaying the latest technology or models from the automotive industry, the nostalgic and historical value can be delivered. Moreover, it has been contributed in delivering the information to build awareness, and perception for the readers about one of the world recognized Japan's leading industry.

CONCLUSIONS

The modern *manga* has the potential to become an effective medium to narrate the Japanese culture, growth. Its technological advances have gained global recognition. To convey the success stories of Japanese automotive businesses could be embedded in the story line in a various form that can be delivered through both automotive and non-automotive theme fiction comics. Although the automotive product itself is often not as the main story or through a biographical *manga*, the achievements and automotive industries figures can be found in it. The visualization and realistic details, one of its characteristics, is also part of an effort to provide the clear information about the growth of the Japanese automotive industries.

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