

Animating and Anthropomorphic Creatures in Southeast Asia

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Abstract - Anthropomorphic creatures are popularly depicted in contemporary animations but also held a long history as storytelling tools in religions and fairy tales. In the *Fables of La Fontaine*, they are described as creatures that assume and highlight symbolic human characteristics, and function as mouthpieces voicing political or social questions without the weight of rebelliousness and dissidence.¹

As the roots of anthropomorphism and religion have always been closely intertwined, it is unsurprising to find a wealth of anthropomorphic depictions in Southeast Asia traditional art, where religious stories and gods are given visual forms and representations.

This research will examine the bird and monkey's narratives and how characters, such as the Hindu monkey god Hanuman, were visualized in Southeast Asian shadow puppetry (*wayang kulit*) and in the storytelling traditions of indigenous communities within Malaysia and Indonesia. It will inform my reinterpretation of Southeast Asian anthropomorphic characters in a contemporary context.

While there is a growing number of modern-day Southeast Asian animations and comics, local character designs are argued to have been heavily influenced by the inflows of Japanese and Western works.² Thus, my outcome will be to design a cast of anthropomorphic characters for the contemporary comic book platform based on the traditional *wayang kulit* style using their anthropomorphic bird and monkey representations in Malaysia and Indonesia. These style choices will be projected upon other Southeast Asian animals to explore the character design process through lens of traditional Southeast Asian art.

Keywords – Anthropomorphism, Southeast Asian Art, Wayang Kulit, Character Design

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Due to globalization and cartoon imports, the growth of national identity and local creativity in modern-day animations and comics in Southeast Asia are said to have been impeded in their early years.³

*“Japanese-made media productions have additionally served as an example and a model for media-collaborated productions in East Asia, providing an alternative to American models. In East Asia of today, many of the music, television, comic books, and animation products might incorporate a mix of locally drawn motifs and languages, while the format they are shaped in is Japanese.”*⁴

On the other hand, traditional arts involving storytelling such as the traditional shadow puppet play, *wayang kulit*, steadily diminishes due to economic, political and cultural factors such as the banning of *wayang kulit siam* performances in Kelantan on certain occasions and the decreasing number of *wayang kulit* puppeteers.⁵

Traditional arts could provide the solution in reconnecting people to their roots and nurture a different Southeast Asian national identity in modern animation and comic platforms, and perhaps take the future of storytelling in a different design direction away from where Japanese and Western designs that have hugely influenced our nations before.

¹ Constantine Christofides, *Fables of La Fontaine* (London: University of Washington Press, 2006), xx.

² Giannalberto Bendazzi, *Animation: A World History (Volume III: Contemporary Times)* (Florida: CRC Press, 2016), 282.

³ Giannalberto Bendazzi, *Animation: A World History (Volume III: Contemporary Times)* (Florida: CRC Press, 2016), 282.

⁴ Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin, “Cultural commodities and regionalization in East Asia,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 27, no. 3 (2005): 509, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25798755>.

⁵ Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, *The Encyclopaedia of Malaysia V08: Performing Arts*. (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet), 26.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this project is to design a cast of anthropomorphic characters for the contemporary comic book platform based on research done on traditional shadow puppet play, *wayang kulit*, in the Southeast Asian region – in particular, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The visual look of anthropomorphic figures has great potential to develop a strong artistic through the adaptation of characteristics from their pre-established history in *wayang kulit*.

The *wayang kulit* style and the significance of Southeast Asian animals, the monkey and bird specifically, will be adapted into a style that aligns with local significances and projected onto popular creatures in Southeast Asia, to create compelling character designs based on traditional art for the modern comic and animation platform.

1.3 ANTHROPOMORPHISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Southeast Asia features a plethora of gods, deities and supernatural entities that have been described and visually interpreted as composite figures in early art forms like ceramics, carvings and fabrics. In *Gods and Monsters: Image and cognition in Neolithic societies*, David Wengrow defines composite figures as those “comprising incongruous elements of human and/or animal anatomy”.⁶

The gods in Southeast Asia religions who bear both human and animal characteristics are composite figures. Each entity exhibits varying degrees of both human and animal characteristics and those figures whose animal characteristics remain dominant would then be defined as anthropomorphic.⁷ An example of an anthropomorphic god would be the monkey god Hanuman. Hanuman is popularly depicted in *wayang kulit* as a god with the head of a monkey and body of a human.⁸ These half-human and half-animal gods are anthropomorphic figures as they are recognized as animal-dominant figures.

⁶ David Wengrow, “Gods and Monsters: Image and cognition in Neolithic societies,” *Paléorient* (2011): 153, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41496928>.

⁷ Rahimidin Zahari, *Wayang Kulit - Shadow Play: The Folk Epic Of The Malay Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia, 2013), 63.

⁸ Rahimidin Zahari, *Wayang Kulit - Shadow Play: The Folk Epic Of The Malay Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia, 2013), 63.

⁹ Jim Supangkat, *Indonesian Heritage V07: Visual Art* (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1999), 36.

Through the study of several anthropomorphic creature representations in Malaysia and Indonesia’s *wayang kulit*, I seek to compare how the creatures are interpreted and how visual marks are made on the *wayang kulit* puppets in order to convey the anthropomorphic characters and their role in their narratives.

2 RESEARCH / METHODOLOGY

WAYANG KULIT IN MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA

Believed to have originated during c. AD 907, the ancient art of shadow puppet play is most concentrated in Southeast Asia and referred to as *wayang kulit*, meaning “shadows from hide”.^{9 10 11} The *wayang kulit* consists of a puppet made from animal hide that is lit from behind, casting the shadow of the puppet upon a screen in front.

“The best-known example of shadow play is the classical Javanese *wayang kulit purwa*, which is also active in other parts of Indonesia as well as the southern sections of the Malay Peninsula, particularly in Johor.”¹²

Wayang kulit purwa refers to traditional Javanese plays that are a collection of epics. The most popular *wayang kulit purwa* epics performed are the ancient Sanskrit epic poems *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.¹³

The *Mahabharata* is an epic poetry telling the heroic narrative of the great battle between the descendants of Bharata who have divided into two sides, one side struggling to recover their nobility and heritage that was usurped by the other side.

The *Ramayana* is also an epic poetry and it narrates the life of *Rama*, a prince of the Kosala kingdom and an avatar of a principal Hindu deity, Vishnu.

Both the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are sequences of morality plays that intend to demonstrate the inevitable triumph of good over

¹⁰ Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, *The Encyclopaedia of Malaysia V08: Performing Arts*. (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet), 24.

¹¹ Endon Salleh, “Wayang Kulit,” National Library Board, accessed June 26, 2019, http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_19_3_2004-12-23.html.

¹² Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, *The Encyclopaedia of Malaysia V08: Performing Arts*. (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet), 23.

¹³ Felicia Katz-Harris, *Inside the Puppet Box* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 48.

evil.¹⁴ To the locals, the characters of *wayang kulit* are treated as role models where evil and selfishness begets humiliation, and virtue is rewarded.¹⁵

Malaysia's *wayang kulit siam* was likely to have been derived from an older version of Java's *wayang kulit purwa* when *wayang kulit siam* was imported into Kelantan in the 14th century. *Wayang kulit siam* is visually influenced by the classical *wayang kulit purwa*, and they share similarities in their puppet design, ritualistic style of play and characters.¹⁶ The two styles both perform stories from *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, featuring similar puppets with moveable arms and static mouths.¹⁷ Both styles have also incorporate pre-Hindu elements such as characters based on indigenous deities like Semar, who left the heavens to be a protector to the protagonist in the form of a clown.



Figure 1: Semar puppet (Java)¹⁸

Wayang kulit siam mainly performs the *Ramayana* as the primary story and unlike how *wayang kulit*

purwa eventually incorporated Islamic teachings, they sought to be a form of entertainment.

The Hindu epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, are very popular and characters may be found interpreted differently in different regions. The different *wayang kulit* styles across regions vary in the visual aesthetics of the puppet designs. In *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam*, the puppets are made from buffalo hide. The ornate patterns on them are made from intricate incisions into the hide. The intricate incisions and unique silhouettes are strong identifiers for specific characters.

I will examine the bird and the monkey puppets' narratives and how characters, such as the Hindu monkey god Hanuman, were visualized in *wayang kulit*. I will also discuss the significance carried in the precise details on the puppets that plays a vital role in the storytelling traditions of the indigenous communities within Malaysia and Indonesia.

THE MONKEY IN MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA

Prominent anthropomorphic monkey puppets in the *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam* are Hanuman and Sugriwa. Hanuman is one of the most famous characters depicted in the *Ramayana*. He plays an important role in the *Ramayana* and represents the purest symbol of karma in *wayang kulit purwa*.

"In Javanese mythology, he was born a wanara, with a hairy human body and the head, arms and feet of an ape, son of Bathara Guru and Dewi Anjani."¹⁹

Wanara refers to the humanoid monkey characters in *wayang* and particularly in the *Ramayana*. These anthropomorphic monkey characters are said to be destined to live forever and it takes the conscious decision of the gods for them to die.²⁰ As the son of Bathara Bayu, the God of Wind, Hanuman dresses in a poleng cloth of reds, yellows, whites and blacks. He could also fly and has the long, magical *Pancanaka* thumbnail.²¹

¹⁴ David Irvine, *Leather gods & wooden heroes: Java's classical wayang* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 1996), 334.

¹⁵ James Fox, *Indonesian Heritage V09: Religion and Ritual* (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1999), 64.

¹⁶ Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, *The Encyclopaedia of Malaysia V08: Performing Arts*. (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet), 25.

¹⁷ Rahimidin Zahari, *Wayang Kulit - Shadow Play: The Folk Epic Of The Malay Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia), 5.

¹⁸ David Irvine, *Leather gods & wooden heroes: Java's classical wayang* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 1996), 123.

¹⁹ David Irvine, *Leather gods & wooden heroes: Java's classical wayang* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 1996), 219.

²⁰ David Irvine, *Leather gods & wooden heroes: Java's classical wayang* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 1996), 340.

²¹ David Irvine, *Leather gods & wooden heroes: Java's classical wayang* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 1996), 219.

The design of the *wayang kulit purwa wanara* puppets are medium sized, with round bulging eyes and fangs. The Hanuman puppet is a *wanara* puppet represented in Figure 2 as a white monkey, in his representative colours and with the *Pancanaka* thumbnail.



Figure 2: Angered Hanuman puppet from Java ²²

The colours on the faces of the puppets are used to represent the character's personality or mood. This puppet has a red face and represents an angered Hanuman.

"A gold face signifies dignity and calmness; back can represent a strong character, or age; red symbolizes an intense, sometimes violent anger, or one who is easily upset or offended; and a white face indicates a person's youth, innocence, or honesty." ²³

As white is a symbol of youth, Hanuman as a white monkey with a white body is likely symbolic of his vigour, while the sharp fangs and armaments are a symbol of his strength and nobility.



Figure 3: Hanuman puppet from Kelantan ²⁴

Figure 3's Hanuman is another version of a Hanuman puppet from a collection of *wayang kulit siam* puppets from Kelantan, Malaysia.

The Kelantanese Hanuman, when compared to the Javanese Hanuman, expresses more beast-like traits while the Javanese Hanuman is more human-like. This version of Hanuman expresses thicker limbs compared to its Javanese counterpart and it is also less detailed and ornate. There are much fewer patterns on the Kelantanese Hanuman.

Both still share certain similarities, such as their white skin, prominent eyes, a mouth full of sharp teeth and fangs, as well as gold ornaments that help to convey Hanuman as a powerful figure.

²² Felicia Katz-Harris, *Inside the Puppet Box* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 77.

²³ Felicia Katz-Harris, *Inside the Puppet Box* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 26.

²⁴ Rahimidin Zahari, *Wayang Kulit - Shadow Play: The Folk Epic Of The Malay Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia, 2013), 62.

THE BIRD IN MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA

Prominent anthropomorphic birds in *wayang kulit siam* and *wayang kulit purwa* performances are the Garuda characters. In *Leather gods & wooden heroes: Java's classical wayang*, the term Garuda is used as a classification to describe the half-man and half-bird mythical beasts such as Ngruni, Ngruna, Jatayu and Sempati.

The name Garuda is also used to refer to the divine king of birds and vehicle of the Hindu deity Vishnu, and used synonymously with Ngruni, the ancestor of the snakes. As there are conflicting texts on the use of the name Garuda, this research will use the term Garuda as a classification in reference to the *Pustakaraja Purwa* referring to half-man and half-bird beings. The *Pustakaraja Purwa* is a 19th century collection of *wayang kulit purwa* stories, mythology and music by Ranggawarsita.

Jatayu and Sempati, as half-birds, are commonly assigned the traits of an eagle or vulture. In Bali, the Garuda bird is also thought to be a crow.²⁵ There are conflicting texts as to which half they are assigned. Ngruna is described as the wife of the Sun God Surya and is depicted as a divine bird.²⁶

In *Pustakaraja Purwa*, Jatayu and Sempati hatched from an egg that was given to Ngruna.



Figure 4: Ngruna ²⁷

²⁵ Angela Hobert, *Dancing shadows of Bali* (London: Routledge, 1987), 95.

²⁶ David Irvine, *Leather gods & wooden heroes: Java's classical wayang* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 1996), 329.

²⁷ David Irvine, *Leather gods & wooden heroes: Java's classical wayang* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 1996), 248.



Figure 5: The Garuda bird, Jatayu ²⁸

In the *Ramayana*, Jatayu imparts loyalty and protection as an ally who gives his life to aid the protagonist of the epic, Rama.

"Jatayu witnessed the abduction of Dewi Sinta by the ogre king of Alengka, Rahwana. He immediately flew to Sinta's aid and engaged Rahwana in a mighty battle across the skies. However, he failed to wrest Sinta from the giant's grasp and fell to the ground mortally wounded. There he was found by the distraught Rama. Jatayu was able to inform Rama of his wife's abduction before he died."



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Figure 6: Garuda Puppets from Java ³⁰

Inside the Puppet Box features another anthropomorphic bird puppet who appears in the scene in *Ramayana* labelled "Garudha" (Figure 6). It retains most qualities of a bird, but like Ngruna's representation in *Leather gods & wooden heroes*:

²⁸ David Irvine, *Leather gods & wooden heroes: Java's classical wayang* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 1996), 119.

²⁹ David Irvine, *Leather gods & wooden heroes: Java's classical wayang* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 1996), 226.

³⁰ Felicia Katz-Harris, *Inside the Puppet Box* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 180.

Java's classical wayang, the faces of the Garuda birds are designed to be almost human, but with a bird's beak and sharp teeth lining the beak.

Comparing the designs of the puppets in Figure 5 and Figure 6, it is likely that they are representations of the same character as they are both *wayang kulit purwa* puppets that share the same design of rounded tail feathers and upward-curling feathers on its wings.

They are also depicted with both eyes showing and casting a sideways glance, other examples of puppets with two eyes showing being some of the ogre puppets, such as the Brahala Ireng puppet, and the Bathari Durga puppet, transcribed in Javanese tradition as the goddess of evil, darkness and destruction.^{31 32}

This trait displays a greater degree of dimension and power. The two bulging eyes casting a sideways glance and the numerous sharp fangs of these characters insinuate terrifying power.

The *wayang kulit* designs of the anthropomorphic birds do not seem to bear a close resemblance to the eagle nor the vulture. They share similarities in their hooked beak and predatory nature. Instead of adhering to the colours of the bird, the mythical bird puppets, such as the Garuda puppet in Figure 6, are treated with strong, attractive colours like red, blues, greens and golds. This creates difficulty in identifying the type of bird that this anthropomorphic creature is based on.

The Garuda puppet in Figure 6 also shares other similar traits to Ngruna in Figure 4 and Jatayu in Figure 5. Both the wings and the tail of the Garuda birds are spread out to show an imposing form, majesty and to insinuate movement as if it were mid-flight. There is also great attention paid to the detail on the face of the Garuda. They all share an ornate crown and feature a smaller face at the back of the puppet's head. The smaller face is the *Garuda mungkur*, a griffin hair-clasp shaped like the head of a Garuda bird. The *Garuda mungkur* is worn by senior characters and is a representation of supernatural powers.³³

The juxtaposition of the concentration of ornate patterns on the face of the Garuda against the rest of its body creates a focal point and different silhouette for their head from other characters in the *wayang kulit* cast.

The head and feet of the creature also features a multitude of sharp forms through its beak, teeth, ornaments and talons. When compared to

Hanuman's interpretation, the Garuda's form takes on more animal characteristics as the body resembles a predatory bird's proportions, rather than a human's proportions like in Hanuman's puppets.

USAGE OF VISUAL ELEMENTS IN OUTCOME

The humanoid puppets of *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam* have arms held together at the joints in order to provide the puppets mobility in their gestures during the performance. This results in intriguing postures and silhouettes for the puppets when their shadows and the cut patterns are cast upon the screen.

There is also a great consideration for the silhouette of creature and different treatments in the patterns on different parts of the creature's anatomy.

3 OUTCOME

3.1 DESIGN RATIONALE

I have decided to adopt silhouettes, patterns and motifs to use as a base and consideration for my anthropomorphic character designs in the outcome. From the study of the Hanuman and Garuda bird figures, the details in the silhouettes of the anthropomorphic creatures' forms, such as the curled feathers and rounded tail of Jatayu, is highly important in defining the personality and creating the identity of the characters in *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam*.

In my outcome, I have designed a cast of five figures based on the interpretations of anthropomorphic figures in the puppet designs of the traditional *wayang kulit* in Malaysia and Indonesia. Taking into consideration that the characters are created with the modern-day comic platform in mind, the traditional *wayang kulit* characteristics have been adapted into motifs.



³¹ Felicia Katz-Harris, *Inside the Puppet Box* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 180.

³² Felicia Katz-Harris, *Inside the Puppet Box* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 79.

³³ Angela Hobert, *Dancing shadows of Bali* (London: Routledge, 1987), 95.

Figure 7: Final character cast line-up

Like how the intricate *wayang kulit* patterns decorate entire portions to create identity, personality, material differences and clear sections in the anatomy of the character, the reduced patterns in the outcome signify identity, texture and produces an illusion of sections on the character.

For example, the cracked lines on the rooster Doo's comb alludes to the jagged and wrinkled shape of a real rooster's comb, as well as the tough personality of this character.

The outcome is also designed with different head shapes for clear identification, based on the nuanced but different silhouettes of the Ngruna and Garuda puppets in Figures 4 and 6. The outcome also bears a closer resemblance Hanuman's proportions rather than the proportions of the Garuda and Ngruna puppet designs, where the two still largely retain the posture of the animal despite having human qualities.

While having animal head and traits, they are more human-like in personality as they assume upright postures and proportions.

The shadows of the characters, represented in red, are also modelled after the base that joins the feet of the characters for the *wayang kulit* puppets, often in red or black.



Figure 9: Expanding the silhouettes to create characters

3.2 INITIAL SKETCHES

The initial sketches were based on my earlier study of anthropomorphic creatures within Southeast Asian Buddhist narratives such as the Buddhist Jataka tales. The animals significant to my study of Buddhism had been different and thus I started my sketches with silhouettes of rabbits and birds.

As my research progressed and began to focus on the *wayang kulit* visuals in Malaysia and Indonesia, the designs gradually grew towards the exploration of silhouettes and anthropomorphic character depictions in Southeast Asian's shadow puppet play.



Figure 8: Conceptualization of anthropomorphic characters, beginning from the silhouettes

After the initial set of silhouette line-ups in Figure 8 and sketches in Figure 9, I chose to expand on the dark rabbit silhouette in the bottom right hand corner of Figure 9 into different forms.



Figure 10: Creating variations in the same type of animals and form

3.2 CHARACTER CONCEPT: THE MONKEY

The monkey characters are based on the interpretation of Hanuman and the *wanara* puppets in *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam*.



Figure 11: Rumble, the tough monkey



Figure 12: Chatter, the slender monkey

I have created two forms of a monkey – a tough form and a slender form. I applied the two different puppets' difference in build to two different monkeys to create a juxtaposition of personalities. In *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam*, the builds of the monkeys are shaped similarly. They used the skin colour, face shape, hair, ornamentations and other elements such as voice and sound to differentiate the characters. To create a greater variation in the two monkeys, the outcome was based on the Hanuman interpretation from both Kelantan and Java.

For the tough form of the monkey, I adapted characteristics from the Kelantanese Hanuman puppet. The less ornate and stockier form keeps the entire figure more rigid and gives the silhouette power.

For the slender form, I have decided to adapt the slender limbs of the Javanese Hanuman puppet into expressive gestures. The slender monkey, with its thin limbs and dramatic joints, takes on a cheeky and slinky personality, with an agile body.

They both carry similar degrees of dress which conveys some beast-like characteristics. Their

hands are also bunched and curled, and their fingertips are sharp. Their joints at the elbows and wrists are also sharp and deliberate to show purposeful actions, modelled after the joints of the *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam* puppets.

3.3 CHARACTER CONCEPT: THE BIRD

The rooster character is based on the fierce interpretation of the Garuda puppet in *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam*. However, it also draws elements from the *wanara* puppets through adopting more human elements in the way the bird form is postured, as the Garuda puppet has a more beast-like form.



Figure 13: Doo, the rooster

The body of the anthropomorphic bird in *wayang kulit* is less angular. There is greater focus on the head, legs, talons and feathers on the bird. In this figure, I created simple patterns on the rooster to insinuate texture, such as in the comb and the leg of the rooster. The wattle that hangs from the neck of the rooster is represented by simple shapes as well.

3.4 CHARACTER CONCEPT: THE CAT

I have chosen to design an anthropomorphic cat as cats are popular modern-day household companions in Southeast Asia. A close anthropomorphic figure to a cat form in *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam* is an anthropomorphic monkey with the face of a tiger, Sima Amara.



Figure 14: Sima Amara ³⁴

The Sima Amara puppet seem to express half-lid eyes and also looks more ferocious than the other *wanara* puppets due to its tiger characteristics.

Taking a leaf from Sima Amara's design and *rakshasa* (demon) puppets of *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam*, I have taken liberties with the shape of the cat's head and exaggerated its claws, producing more sharp edges that would convey a sense of danger and hostility.



Figure 15: Trill, the cat

³⁴ Felicia Katz-Harris, *Inside the Puppet Box* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 176.

³⁵ Erik Meijaard and Nico V. Strien. "The Asian Tapir (*Tapirus indicus*)" in Briefing book, Malay Tapir

3.5 CHARACTER CONCEPT: THE TAPIR

I based anthropomorphic tapir on the Malayan tapir. The Malayan tapir has a dramatic black and white coat that leaves the middle portion of their body white.³⁵ I decided to include a simple flora pattern on the white section based on the *Pohon Beringin*, also known as the Tree of Life, that is used in *wayang kulit* and is based on natural patterns such as flora and fauna.³⁶



Figure 16: Whistle, the tapir

3.6 DESIGN CONCERNS

There is a limitation in the range of colours used for lines as the characters are filled black, with red accent for shadow. The characters may not be very visually stimulating when it comes to colour and may not be appealing at first glance as they would appear to all be similar, especially if they are close in height and shape. In *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam*, there were many similar puppets. Without the aid of colour, narration and music, these characters may end up hard to differentiate from each other.

As the style is limited to black with accent colours, the accent colours would be extremely vital as they would immediately pull the viewer's eyes.

The ratio of blacks to negative spaces on each character was important as well, as each negative space within the character denoted traits, personality and movement for the character, such as the beak and creases in their clothes. The negative spaces are based on the patterns and cut-out designs made on the *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam* puppets.

Conservation Workshop. (Pahang: Krau Wildlife Reserve, 2003), 1.

³⁶ Rahimidin Zahari, *Wayang Kulit - Shadow Play: The Folk Epic Of The Malay Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia, 2013), 60.

3.7 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The limitation in colour could be replaced through creating interesting marks and patterns. Characters could also be varied more drastically in terms of body size and proportions in order to create memorable character silhouettes.

Different accent colours can also be assigned to characters to symbolize the role they play in the story, much like how *wayang kulit purwa* and *wayang kulit siam* uses colours to symbolize the qualities and moral stories to be imparted by the character, such as the white monkey Hanuman representing the purest karma, as well as unfaltering loyalty.

4 CONCLUSION

*"Competing against the more popular forms of contemporary media, such as film, television, and videotapes, many dhalangs are eager to popularize wayang kulit."*³⁷

While the traditional *wayang kulit* performances may face a gradual decline, I believe that the visual style and essence of *wayang kulit* could face a revival on digital platforms that are easily accessible worldwide. In this way, I believe that *wayang kulit* does not need to compete against contemporary media as they could complement modern-day media by serving as inspiration for storytelling and visual design, for people who have taken to the digital platform.

There have been previous attempts in repurposing *wayang kulit* for modern platforms, such as incorporating popular Western superhero figures, political figures and repurposing *wayang kulit* for the television. In these attempts, artists have done their best to retain a great part of the visual form of the original *wayang kulit* puppets.

I believe that *wayang kulit* has many different motifs and design processes to offer to character design in animation and comics. In this manner, Southeast Asian artists, who do not have to be *wayang kulit* puppeteers, could also play a part in contributing to the growth of the long history of traditional arts and cultivate new ways of viewing storytelling.

The aesthetics of my character designs in this project are influenced by my consumption of modern-day animation, yet also informed by my research of traditional *wayang kulit* processes and aesthetics in Malaysia and Indonesia. While these anthropomorphic characters are neither created from buffalo hide nor mounted on horns, they represent my interpretation of the anthropomorphic monkey and bird in Southeast Asia's *wayang kulit*

purwa and *wayang kulit siam* for the contemporary comic platform.

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³⁷ Jan Mrázek, Puppets Theater in Contemporary Indonesia: New Approaches to Performance Events

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