

Study on contemporary Malaysian Chinese comic to investigate whether the Malaysian comic style has emerged

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1.0 Introduction

Decades back, Malaysians may only know the respected work by, journalist turn comic artist, Mohammad Nor Khalid or Lat from the late 1970s (Lat, 1979) (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, this has changed with the emergence of contemporary Malaysian comic in recent years. After the millennium, many companies in the country gained momentum and was founded; this is seen especially in the creative industry, broadcasting stations, music, art and design. The Malaysian comic is one of these industries which took flight only in the past decade (Media Prima, 2013).

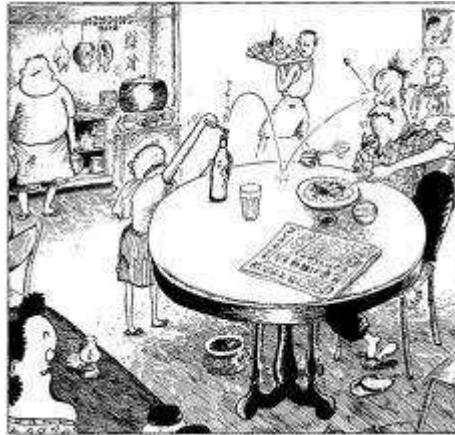


Fig. 1: Comic strips by Lat is very well-known among Malaysians

Unlike the 1990s and 2000s, today, Malaysian comic is easily available in local bookstores in Malaysia. A typical sight in book exhibitions and comic festivals explains the great support for contemporary local comic (Fig. 2-4). The popularity of general Malaysian comic is promising. Based on findings of a recent survey, 68% of general comic readers indicated they had either read or bought Malaysian comics (Appendix 1: question 1). Malaysian Chinese comic, in particular, shows promising reputation, the most known and read Malaysian comics are all Chinese comics (Appendix 1: question 4). All local comics can mainly be divided into Malay and Chinese comic. In comparison, the Chinese comic is popular for its children contents, servicing primarily readership from the Chinese educated student community (Media Prima, 2013) (Fig. 5-7).



Fig. 2: 15th World of Chinese Book Fair, The Mines Convention Centre, Gemilang Publishing Sdn. Bhd. booth



Fig. 3: 15th World of Chinese Book Fair, The Mines Convention Centre, Gempak Starz booth



Fig. 4: Comic Fiesta 2013, KLCC. Overshot from estimate 9000 visitors, 39855 visitors went to comic fiesta



Fig. 5: Children Chinese comic, *Xiao Ban Zhang* (Little Monitor)



Fig. 6: Chinese children comic, *Ling Jia De Xiao Hai* (The Kids Next Door)

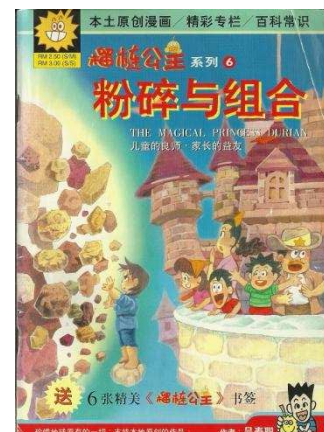


Fig. 7: Chinese children comic, *Liu Lian Gong Zhu* (The Magical Princess Durian)

There is clear evidence of rapid growth in the Malaysian comic industry in recent few years. With increase in comic publishers, like Gempak Starz, Gemilang Publishing Sdn. Bhd., Pinko Creative and so on, comic publication has increased in variety and quantity. Does this quantity and growth represent a movement in Malaysian comic? Among this quantity of comic in the market, has the local industry established a contemporary Malaysian comic style? Having a Malaysian comic style is important. Success in comic will motivate several other industries, because comic may be developed into animation, cartoon, or even film. Hence, a catalyst industry like the Malaysian comic must be taken seriously, and be continued with sophistication. Besides, with existing major comic influence, from Japan, Hong Kong, United States, and new wave of comics from Thailand, Korea and Taiwan, it is crucial to for Malaysian comic industry to achieve strong market position locally and internationally. To achieve this, it is important that the industry begin to identify and develop the unique elements that will brand the comic styles, both the Malay comic and the Chinese comic style.

On this basis, there will be a series of studies specifically on contemporary Malaysian Chinese comic. This dissertation will study the comic cultures that had influenced local Chinese comic artists and industry. Also, there will be research on the background, and study on identity within bestseller contemporary local Chinese comic. Comparison will be done between local Chinese comic and other comic cultures. Analysis on challenge and opportunities faced by the industry will also be included. At the end, this essay aims to determine the emergence of an identity and style of Malaysian Chinese comic.

2.0 Overview on comic

The term comic came from the word comical; it means something with humor (Huang and Yang, n.d., p.12). Comic today means comic book, a narrative made up of both image and text; image for impression and text for specific meaning (Gan, 2009, p.1). Cartoon, animation, emoticons and all motion graphics we see today came from still drawings on paper, like those in comic. That is why comic is one of the most fundamental medium used in creating visual narrative.

Within the medium itself, comic can be divided into several types. According to Hang and Yang (n.d., p.12), the Chinese comic from Hong Kong and China may be called continuous narrative or illustrated story (连环图/图画故事) for longer comic stories (Fig.8), there is also four panel comic (四格漫画) (Fig. 9) and single panel comic for short strips. A panel is one of the boxes on the page of a comic book (Hottolovecomics.com, n.d.). It is the tool artists use to control timing and pace in the story. "Panel with words (Fig. 10) in them convey a sense of time's passage"; while silent narrative (comic without words) is "more atmospheric, more energetic" (Fig. 11). Silent narrative makes the reader work hard to uncover a storyline. "It is precisely this lack of copy, and with it the lack of any sense of linear time or space, which provides the spooky atmosphere that is so important to the story's success" (Bell and Sinclair, 2005, p.10). Different from panels on sequence, "single panel denies any pictorial sense of 'before' or 'after' but instead captures a moment in time, using it to tell a larger story" (Bell and Sinclair, 2005, p.40) (Fig. 12).



Fig. 8: Continuous narrative or illustrated story



Fig. 9: Four panel comic

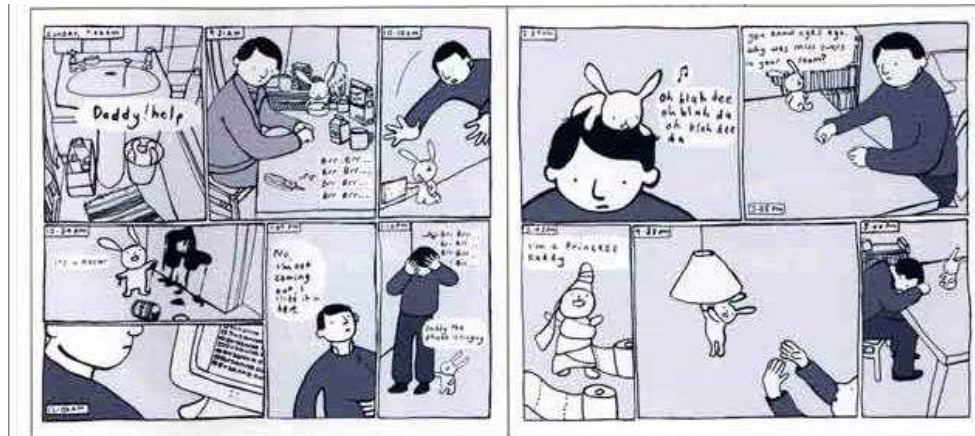


Fig. 10: Panel with words conveys a sense of time

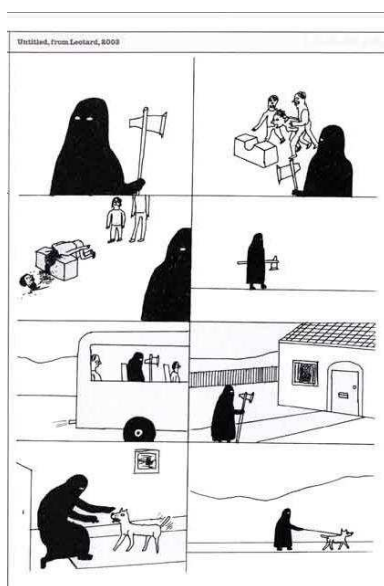


Fig. 11: Silent narrative

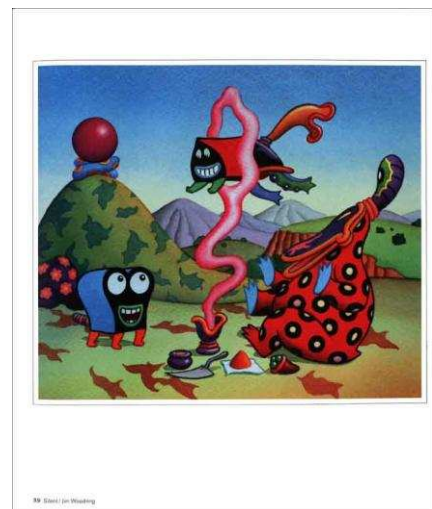


Fig. 12: Single panel comic

Comic we know today is made up of few prominent identities, the western comic, the superhero from DC and Marvel, the Japanese *manga*, and Chinese Kung Fu comic from Hong Kong; the last three mentioned are the ones who had influenced comic in Malaysia. They have different feature, language, and style, each is unique with its own culture and values. Below will be studies on these comic influences.

2.1 The beginning of western comic

The beginning of western comic was an evolution. In mid 1800s, Swiss artist, Rudolph Topffer began cartooning using panel borders and words-and-picture combination (Withrow, 2003). His contribution was only recently found in California, 1998. Topffer's *The Adventure of Oldbuck* (created in 1837) shows inspiration of early comic books. It was "a 40-page side stitched comic book, and made up of 6 to 12 panels per page and each illustration was captioned with text beneath the panels to describe the story" (Bell and Sinclair, 2005, p.68).

During late 19th century, American began publishing comic strips on newspaper. One of them is *The Yellow Kid* by Richard Felton Outcault, which was first published on February 16, 1896, on *Hearts New York America* (Geocities.com, 1998, cited in Gan, 2009, p.3). Thomas Rowlandson and James Gillray started using speech balloon earlier (Fig. 13-14). However it was in *The Yellow Kid* that the modern example of speech balloon was seen (Fig. 15). *The Yellow Kid* pioneered the publishing of comics on American press, and began the mass circulation of comic strips in the world (Bell and Sinclair, 2005, p.68).

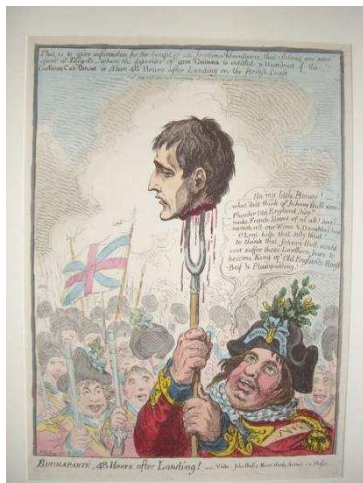


Fig. 13 : *Buonaparte, 48 Hours after Landing* by James Gillray, 1803



Fig. 14: *Sir Alan Gardiner at Covent Garden* by Thomas Rowlandson, 1796

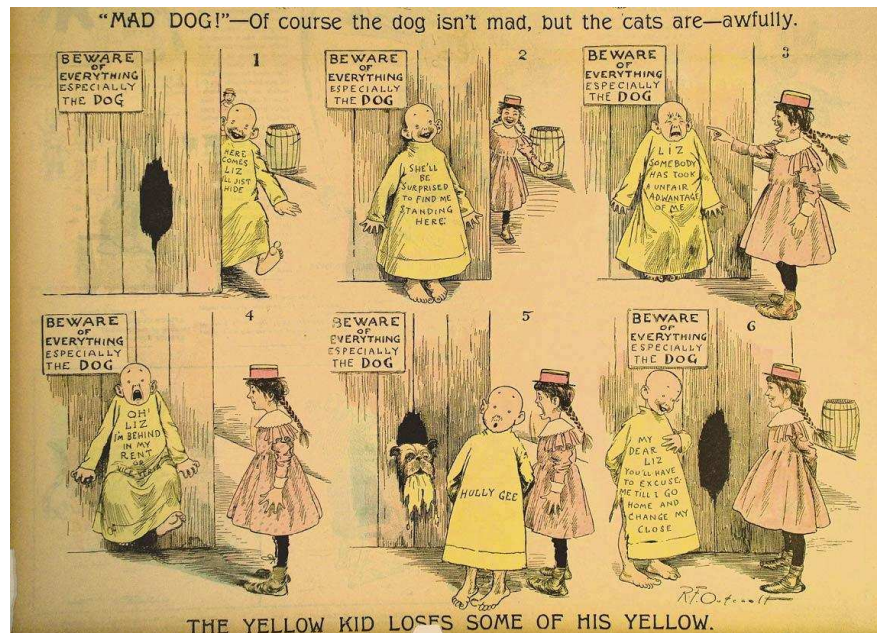


Fig. 15: *The Yellow Kid* comic strips

Western comic had great achievements, some long-running comics had even achieved iconic status in the industry; for example *Garfield* who began in 1978 (Anon, 1999), *Peanuts* from the year 1950 (Miss, 2011) (Fig. 16), *The Adventures of Tintin* from 1926 (us.tintin.com, n.d.), and *Archie's* comic series since 1939 (Dcindexes.com, n.d.) (Fig. 17).



Fig. 16: Characters from *Peanuts*, Charlie Brown and Snoopy



Fig. 17: *Archie's* comic

In present days, graphic novel is also a type of comic sold in the west; for example, *The Quitter* by Harvey Pekar (Fig. 18) and *Maus* by Art Spiegelman (Fig. 19) (renkellym, 2013). These graphic novels are similar to traditional comic, with panel, speech balloon narrative; however they are different. A graphic novel has plots that are more sophisticated than comic plots; it is more suitable

for adult. Graphic novel's story length much longer than comic book, it is sold in paperback cover and sometimes in hard cover (wisegeek, n.d.). Overall graphic novel have heavier contents than comic's light reading manner.



Fig. 18: The Quitter by Arc Spiegelman

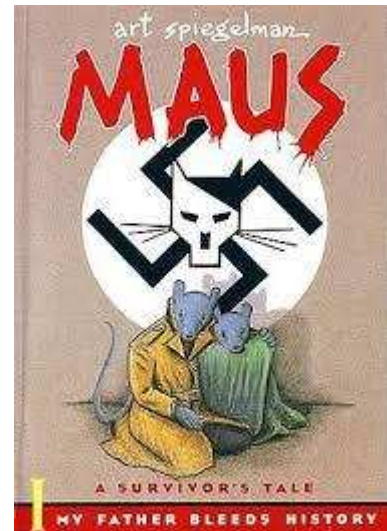


Fig. 19: Maus by Harvey Pekar

2.2 Influential comic cultures

DC and Marvel comic



Fig. 20: DC and Marvel Comic

Heroes like Superman, Spiderman, Batman who had been transformed into film and animated series since long ago were once comic books. These superhero comics by DC and Marvel are widely recognized as the main stream comic in America (Barry and Simpson, 2011). Given its popularity, history and identity, these comic superheroes are one of the major influences on international platform.

The visual trademark of DC and Marvel's superhero comics includes muscular body and facial structure (Fig. 21). Costume, gadget, automobile designs for superhero and villain; set design with skyscraper and back lanes inspired by New York city are also what is seen in many American superhero comics (Fig. 22). Vibrant colors and superhero logos are often used, this helped the characters to be more graphical, visually attractive and memorable. Light, fire, smokes are often seen in fighting scenes of these comics, therefore there are much use shading to create brightness and darkness (Fig. 23). DC and Marvel comic is also recognized through typography; notice some fonts are consistently used in their speech balloon (Fig. 24).



Fig. 21: Muscular body structure



Fig. 22: Typical setting of *The Amazing Spiderman*



Fig. 23: Comic strip from Justice League

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
 NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
 ABCDEFGHIJKLM
 NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
 0123456789!/?#
 &\$@*{(/ \) }

Fig. 24: Laffayette Comic Pro, one of the fonts often seen in comics

The contents of these comics surrounds the superhero himself, the problems he faced, hiding his identity from his family and friends and so on. Comic book artist, Jack Fallows, expressed the main

characters are often geeks or nerd, like Peter Parker, or the superhero, Spiderman. This is always a pulling factor as this is what makes superheroes easy to relate to (cited in Barry, 2011). DC and Marvel comic had also introduced shared universe storytelling with very strong serial component (Beaty, 2011). Over the years, content had evolved. Earlier when Batman was meant for children audience, content was more towards light entertainment. However stories now are more sophisticated involving issues of national security, mega corporations and politics. The content has changed towards the favor and maturity of young adult to adult reader (Soetedja, 2013). From the superhero stories, readers are also inspired of values such as justice, humility and so on.

“I think stories are important, stories are how you pass on ideas and values and morals. I think my morale base is kinda premise or predicated on the morale core of superheroes.” (Christian Kerr, comic critic, cited in Barry, 2011)

The elements within contents of superhero comics reflect the culture and mentality in America. Picturing superhero as underdog who saves the world reflects an example for Americans to embraces differences within society. Comic fan, Andrew Arrowsmith, said the superheroes from DC and Marvel are examples and role models for their fans (cited in Barry, 2011). Therefore, superhero comic are more than just comics, they spread a certain ideology and moral to their readers.

Japanese comic- *Manga*

Japanese *manga* and anime are very popular, as it is 60% of all cartoon animation broadcasted around the world. The readership of *manga* is the most saturated in its origin, Japan, as comic is more than 40% of all books and magazines sold in the country. There is no limit in genre and age; in Japan, even doctors, businessmen lawyers read *manga* (Discover Japan, 2012). Places like Akihabara (Fig. 25), cultures of 'otaku' and cosplay (Fig. 26) states the high popularity of Japanese *manga* in Japan and around the world.



Fig. 25: Akihabara electric town is the sales central of many *manga* and anime products



Fig. 26: Cosplayer dresses up to represent certain favorite characters from anime

According to Comiket comic market president, Yoshihiro Yonezawa, comic culture in Japan began before TV and movie; comic culture became so popular because it was cheaper and easier to get (cited in Discover Japan, 2012). Japanese cartoon started from *Ukiyo-e*, *Chojyugiga* (Fig. 27) and wood block printing (Fig. 28); however it was the artwork by K. Hakusai in the 1819 that was first regarded as *manga*. In 1868, British cartoonists, Charles Wagner, influenced the style in Japanese comic. *Manga* characters had European features such as blonde hair and green eyes (Fig. 29). In 1960s, comic became a trend among youth, more young people started drawing comic themselves

and entered the industry. (Discover Japan, 2012). Besides still having traces of European style, comics from this movement are decorative and fashionable (Fig. 30). In 70s, comics for adult and middle age audience emerge. According to Yoshihiro, comic since then was made with the same sophistication as films (cited in Discover Japan, 2012).



Fig. 27: *Chojuyugiga*



Fig. 28: Wood block printing



Fig. 29: First movement in Japanese comic



Fig. 30: Second movement of Japanese comic in the 1960s

In terms of illustration, Japanese *manga* is very strong in visual trade mark. Big eyes with variation in iris and reflection within the eye; colorful hair; narrow jaw and chin are some of the characteristics often seen in *manga* character design. Other than text in speech balloon, *Kanji* is often a part of the illustration as sound, expression or actions description in comics (Fig. 31-32). According to comic historian, Fusanosuke Natsume, it is very easy for Japanese to accept having character scripts and pictures on comic page as *Kanji* has the same iconographic quality as pictures (cited in Discover Japan, 2012).



Fig. 31: *Kanji* as the 'drizzling' sound if rain

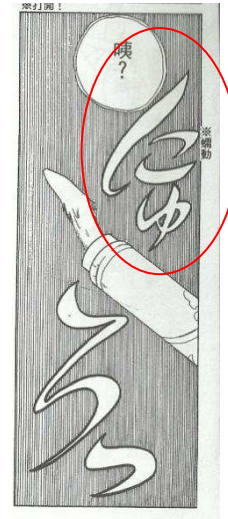


Fig. 32: *Kanji* describing an snake-like movement of a creature 'coming out'

Kawaii or cute is a big part of Japanese *manga*. In *manga*, values such as justice, friendship, family, and the strength from hardship are some of the moral included. It has been argued that *kawaii* is the tool to spread certain propaganda and ideology (Gan, 2009, p.42). In *manga*, there is often violence, bloodshed; however, when *kawaii* style is dominantly the context of *manga*, bloody heroes will never be taboo to children (Gan, 2009, p. 18). One of the genre, *Hentai* or adult *manga* mirrors its society. In Japanese society, there is a big difference from appearance and what is concealed. According to comic artist, Hajime Yamano, Japanese read comic to release their emotion, which they don't show in reality such as stress, anger and lust (cited in Discover Japan, 2012). In Japan, comics are not just entertainment, but also tools to project fantasy and emotion that cannot be expressed in reality.

Hong Kong comic

Hong Kong comic is another influential comic culture. Some Hong Kong comics had been made into movie in *Fong Wan* (风云/ Storm Rider), *Lao Fu Zi* (老夫子/ Old Master Q) and *Mak Dou* (麦兜/ McDull). During the peak of Hong Kong comic's success, *Siew Lao Man* (小流氓/ Little Gangster) sold over 1,000,000 copies; and *Zhong Wa Ying Hong* (中华英雄/ A Man Called Hero) sold over 2,000,000 copies (Lin, 2012b). Although not as great as the scale of the DC, Marvel and Japanese comics, Hong Kong comic is well-known in Hong Kong and in Malaysia during the 1980s to 1990s (Media Prima, 2013).

Comics in Hong Kong can be traced back to war days in China, with the comic *San Mao* (三毛/ A Three Haired Boy Named Sanmao) (Fig.33). This was followed by *Lao Fu Zi* (Old Master Q) from 1962 (Fig. 34), *Sap Sam Dim* (13 点/ 13 Dots) from 1966 (Fig. 36), *Ngao Zai* (牛仔/ Ngao Zai) from 1967 (Fig 35), and *Mak Dou* (McDull) from 1990s. In 70s and 80s, a movement of Kung Fu comics was seen, for instance *Long Fu Mun* (龙虎门/ Oriental Heroes) (Lin, 2012a). This had positioned Kung Fu comic as one of the most memorable identity of Hong Kong comic. However, Hong Kong comic is now facing a threat in its growth. With the increasing number of entertainment for youth, the popularity of comic is not growing anymore (Lin, 2012b).



Fig. 33: *San Mao* (三毛/ A Three Haired Boy Named Sanmao) first published in 1935

别惹高手

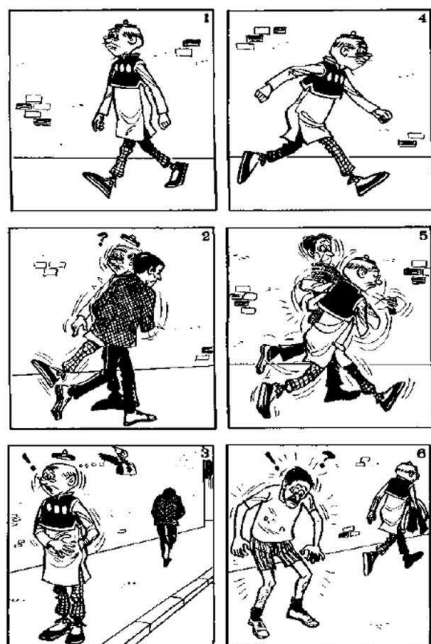


Fig 34: Lao Fu Zi (老夫子/ Old Master Q)



Fig 35: Ngao Zai (牛仔/ Ngao Zai)



Fig 36: Sap Sam Dim (13 点/ 13 Dots)

Comics from Hong Kong had presented style and identity from its Kung Fu comics. In early comic such as *Siew Lao Man* (Little Gangster) much violence was involved (Fig. 37), and illustration of fights was based on real Chinese martial arts (Fig. 38). As technology emerged, more complicated style is seen. In *Fong Wan* (Storm Rider) complicated weapon design (Fig. 41), realistic characters, use of wind, explosion and movement proves the amount of detail put into contemporary comic (Fig. 40). The combination of fantasy and traditional Chinese elements created a contemporary comic world of the Chinese Kung Fu.



Fig 37: Comic covers of *Siew Lao Man* (小流氓/ Little Gangster)

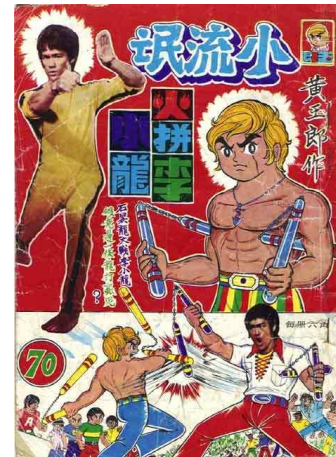


Fig 38: Inspired by Bruce Lee in the 70s or 80s, elements of the idol is used, including weapon sansetsukon



Fig. 39: Comic strip of *Siew Lao Man* (小流氓/ Little Gangster)



Fig. 40: Comic strip of *Fong Wan* (风云/ Storm Rider)

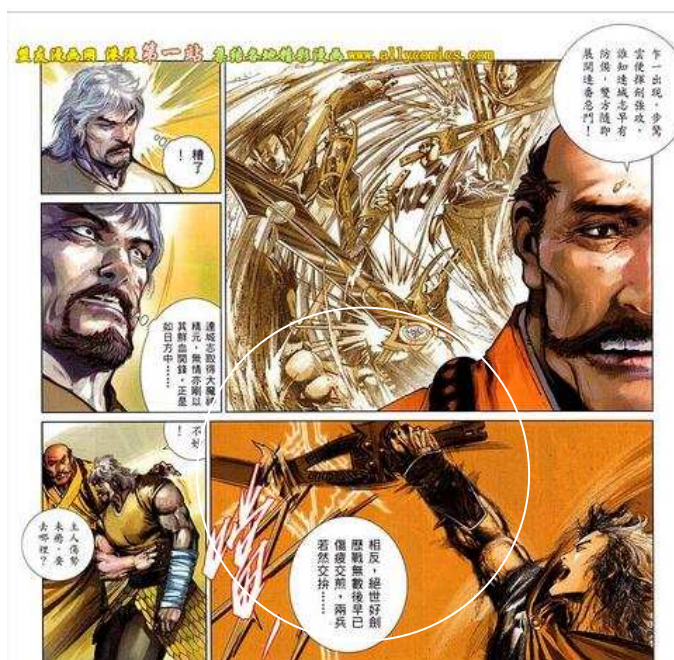


Fig. 41: Comic strip of *Fong Wan* (风云/ Storm Rider) with circled Jut Sai Hou Kim (The Great Sword)



Fig. 42: Comic strip of *Fong Wan* (风云/ Storm Rider).

The contents of Hong Kong comic reflect Hong Kong society in different times. In the 70s, *Siew Lao Man* (Little Gangster) was written based on the social issue of bullies being nuisance around new flat areas (屋村) (Fig. 43) (Lin, 2012a). By creating justice in the comic, *Siew Lao Man* (Little Gangster) reflects the dissatisfaction among people (Huang and Yang, 1999, p.21). This is also seen in the comic, *Mak Dou* (McDull) (Fig. 44-45). Culture analyst, Pang Zi Ming (彭志銘) explained that Hong Kong society during and after the 1989 was about to be returned to China.

Emotions in the society were rather heavyhearted and gloomy; this had contributed to *Mak Dou's* success because society then needed simplicity and escape from reality (Lin, 2012b).



Fig. 43: The emergence of new flat areas (屋村) in 1970s of Hong Kong



Fig. 44: *Mak Dou* (麦兜/ McDull)



Fig. 45: *Mak Dou* (麦兜/ McDull) comic strip

2.3 Malaysian Chinese comic

Unlike the international comic influences mentioned, the awareness of Malaysian comic in international platform is still relatively low. In fact, the Malaysian comic has just lately gained some momentum within local publication industry. Among comics published within Malaysia, the Chinese local comic is a big part of the local comic publications sold today.

The Malaysian Chinese comic first started in the 70s, by Ding Xi's (丁喜) comics on social issues (Fig. 46). In the 80s, Zhang Rui Cheng (张瑞成), Huang Yi Qi (黄奕棋) and Sen Ling Mu (森林木) founded Man Hua Ren Publisher (漫画人出版社) (Fig. 47). These comics are regarded as the pioneer of Malaysian Chinese comic (Kheng Seng, 2010). Nevertheless, the rising of Hong Kong and Japanese comic during the 90s greatly challenged local Chinese comic. Things only recovered at the late 90s, comic like *Ujang*, began comic publication for Malay audience (Kheng Seng, 2010). In late 90s and early 2000s, Malaysia saw the emergence of children Chinese comic, such as *Gemeilia* (哥妹俩/Brother and Sister) and *Liu Lian Gong Zhu* (榴莲公主/ The Magical Princess Durian) (Fig. 48-49) (Kheng Seng, 2010).

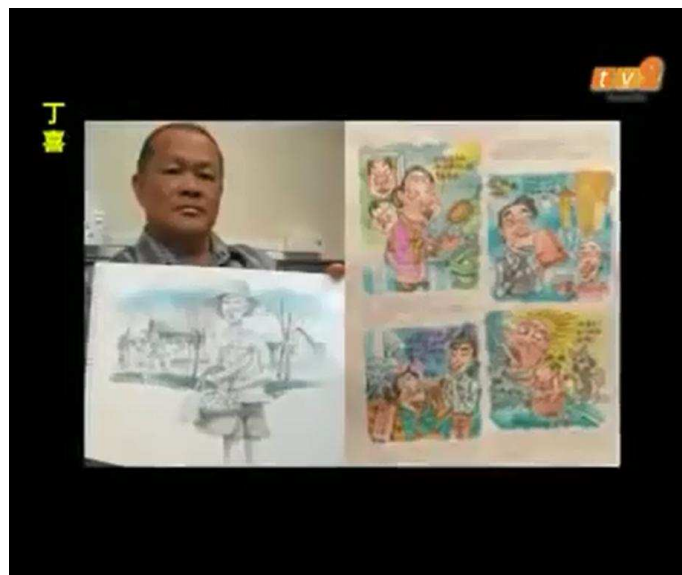


Fig. 46: Comic artist, Ding Xi, and his artworks



Fig. 47: Comics by Man Hua Ren Publisher during 1980s

Children comic, since the late 90s, is a dominating material among all local comic (Media Prima, 2013). Comic for children is specifically targeted for Chinese primary school students, as educational contents such as language, history, math, science are part of children Chinese comic today. This nature of the contemporary Malaysian children comic has ultimately changed the negative impression by parents on comics (Liu Shao Ming cited in Media Prima, 2013). Most children comic sold today have shown a consistent format in hand held size, simili paper printing, and with fully colored illustration. Due to printing on simili paper, color scheme in children comic seem similarly solid and plain. In general, Malaysian Chinese comic incorporates its unique heritage and culture; such as the *Kampung* (village) houses, games, food and language of the Malaysians; this is one of the element that sets local Chinese comic apart from other international comic (Fig. 49).

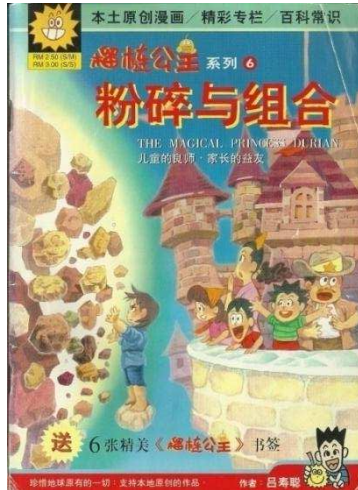


Fig. 48: Cover of *Liu Lian Gong Zhu* (榴莲公主/ The Magical Princess Durian)



Fig. 49: Elements of Malaysian *Kampung* life is embraced in its stories

The Malaysian Chinese comic has since established much. In 2009, the Mandarin Comic Society was founded; the society organizes annual award ceremony and several other activities to further motivate the industry (Mandarin Comic Society, 2013). Furthermore, the annual event of Comic Fiesta also marks a milestone of comics in Malaysia. It even involves international cosplayer and comic artists from Japan. The overwhelming crowd, who keeps increasing in number every year, shows the increase of comic influence in Malaysia (Comic Fiesta, 2013).

3.0 Finding the Malaysian Chinese comic style

Malaysian Chinese comic had achieved significant progress. With much effort invested into the industry lately, the Malaysian comic industry is moving towards a brighter future. However, with many established international comic influences around, the Malaysian comic needs a progressive growth to be more competitive to secure its future. Only when strengthen with a certain unique element can the Malaysian comic excel and sustain its progress. Therefore it is important that the local comic establish a style and identity of its own.

Below are case studies of 2 local Chinese comic series, *Gemeilia* and *Hei Se Shui Mu*. These comics are selected due to their high brand awareness and recognition by Malaysian comic readers (Appendix 1, question 4). These case studies will investigate the style in each of these comics.

Gemeilia

The comic, *Gemeilia* (哥妹俩, Brother and Sister) consists of stories of the main characters, an elder brother and his little sister (Fig. 50). The comic series by Xu You Li (徐宥利) was first published in *Nan Yang Xue Sheng* (南洋学生, Nan Yang Students) in the year 1997 (Xu, n.d.). *Gemeilia* is well-known even among non comic readers (Appendix 1: question 4). It is well established, furthermore it has been developed into film in year 2013 (Media Prima, 2013) (Fig. 51).



Fig. 50: Characters and main characters (circled) in *Gemeilia*



Fig. 51: *Gemeilia* 2013 film poster

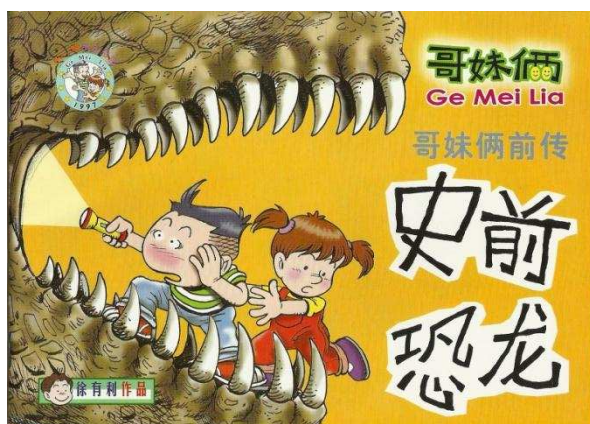


Fig. 52: *Ge Mei Lia Qian Zhuan – Shi Qian Kong Long* (哥妹俩前传-事前恐龙/ Gemeilia- Prehistoric Dinosaur)



Fig. 53: Comic strip of *Mei Mei Yi Nian Ji Le* (妹妹一年级了/ It's Standard 1 for Little Sister)

The story of *Gemeilia* (Brother and Sister) consists of educational contents for children readers, for example, dinosaurs and science behind dinosaur artifacts (Xu, n.d.) (Fig.52). Story lines are easy for young primary school children to relate, because what they experience and see in school and life is taken into story making. As shown on Fig. 53, Guo Guo showed care and responsibility while guiding her sister, Mei Mei, into the school on the first day of Primary standard 1. This method is common in many children comic these days. Applying moral concepts into children context and logic makes these values easily reasonable and familiar to children.

Guo Guo, the character of an elder brother, is strategically a contrast to his little sister, Mei Mei; Guo Guo is mischievous while Mei Mei is a nice and obedient child. Guo Guo's character and behavior is often how children should not behave, yet, Guo Guo is one of the most interesting element from the comic. His mischievous actions show the curiosity of children. His playful expressions and personality is similar to many boys his age, making him similar to a brother or friend from school around children readers. It is clear that the author had put much effort in making *Gemeilia* (Brother and Sister) relatable specifically to children readers.

From *Gemeilia* (Brother and Sister), Xu had shown a personal illustration style. Children characters are often given rounded, chubby cheeks. The crisscross hair of Guo Guo is also one of the trade marks to many of *Gemeilia*'s fans. Story telling from body, facial expression, expressing emotions from lines and colour is effective. This is convenient for children readers who are often without high knowledge in vocabulary, and for children who only read comics from panel to panel of drawing, without reading any speech balloon. Colour scheme is similar to many local Chinese children comics series, solid and plain (Fig. 53). Cultural illustration such as school, tropical forests is seen.

In terms of culture, this comic shows trace of local language culture. In the comic, Guo Guo (elder brother), Mei Mei (little sister), Ba Ba (father) and Mami (mother) are names ordinary Malaysian Chinese address each other in a family unit. Other than showing local language culture, these names made the characters very similar to family of the readers, hence, making a humane connection between these comic characters and the readers. This too is another example of much effort in making *Gemeilia* (Brother and Sister) relatable specifically to Malaysian children readers.

Hei Se Shui Mu

Hei Se Shui Mu is the artist and author of *Hei Se Shui Mu* (黑色水母/ The Black Jellyfish) comics. The artist's first comic began with personal postings on the internet. He is now a part of Pinko Creative Publisher, the publisher of *Gemeilia* (Hei Se Shui Mu, 2013, p.106). *Hei Se Shui Mu* (The Black Jellyfish) is one of the comics regarded as the new wave in Malaysia Chinese comic industry (Keng Seng, 2010). In the 3rd Mandarin Comic Award Ceremony by Mandarin Comic Society, *Hei Se Shui Mu* (The Black Jellyfish) comic was accorded the Special Recognition Award. This young artists is one of the great potentials in the industry.

Hei Se Shui Mu comic (The Black Jellyfish) is mainly a blog comic, although some of strips are fiction, stories are surrounding the character, Hei Se Shui Mu, himself (Hei Se Shui Mu, 2013). The tone of voice of this comic is random and humorous. His pace and humour speak of the feeling and sense of humour of youth aged between 18 to 23. Most blog comic by Hei Se Shui Mu is what everyone had encounter at some point, for instance a ruin hair cut from the barber; this helped build a resonance, and consequently a close relationship between readers and the comic artist. By making humour out of bad lucks also teaches his readers to think positive, and see life with sense of humour.

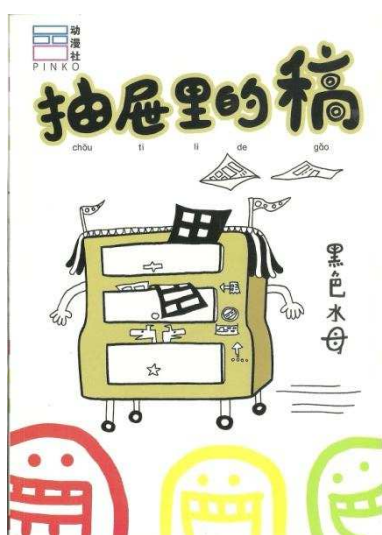


Fig. 54: *Chou Ti Li De Gao* (Sketches in my drawer) by Hei Se Shui Mu



Fig. 55: comic strip from *Hei Se Shui Mu*

In visual, *Hei Se Shui Mu* comic (The Black Jellyfish) had established strong style. The color scheme is black and white, with one to 3 earth colors (Fig.55, 56, 58). Panel arrangement is

intuitive and not fixed, at times, comics are even drawn without panel (Fig.57). Text is one of the elements the artist experimented with (Fig. 56). There are often long dialogs involved, and the repeated 'la' or 'ah' slang at the end of sentences, these has become a known style of the artist to his loyal readers. The characters' expression is exaggerated to enhance the laugh factor; for example, tears from crying characters burst out of the eyes instead of drip down the cheek (Fig. 58).



Fig. 56: comic strip by *Hei Se Shui Mu*.
Exploration on speech balloon with none
change in illustration

Hei Se Shui Mu (The Black Jellyfish) comic captures culture of young people well. For example, sarcastic joke, Malaysian slang, dependency on smartphone, cynism on television commercial and movie, all these reflect thoughts and conversation among Malaysian youth (Hei Se Shui Mu, 2013). Furthermore, ambition and dreams of the youth is also reflected. The artists draws about struggles working as a comic artist, like the rejections he faced before entering the industry (Fig. 59). Despite these struggles, this young artist proves the importance of passion, determination and positive attitude through his success in this comic series. *Hei Se Shui Mu* (The Black Jellyfish) is more than just pictures and text, but a spread of positive values, and an inspiration to many youth who have unconventional ambitions and struggles in life. It is exactly this sort of connection and resonance between artist and young readers that is so important to *Hei Se Shui Mu*'s success as a youth comic.

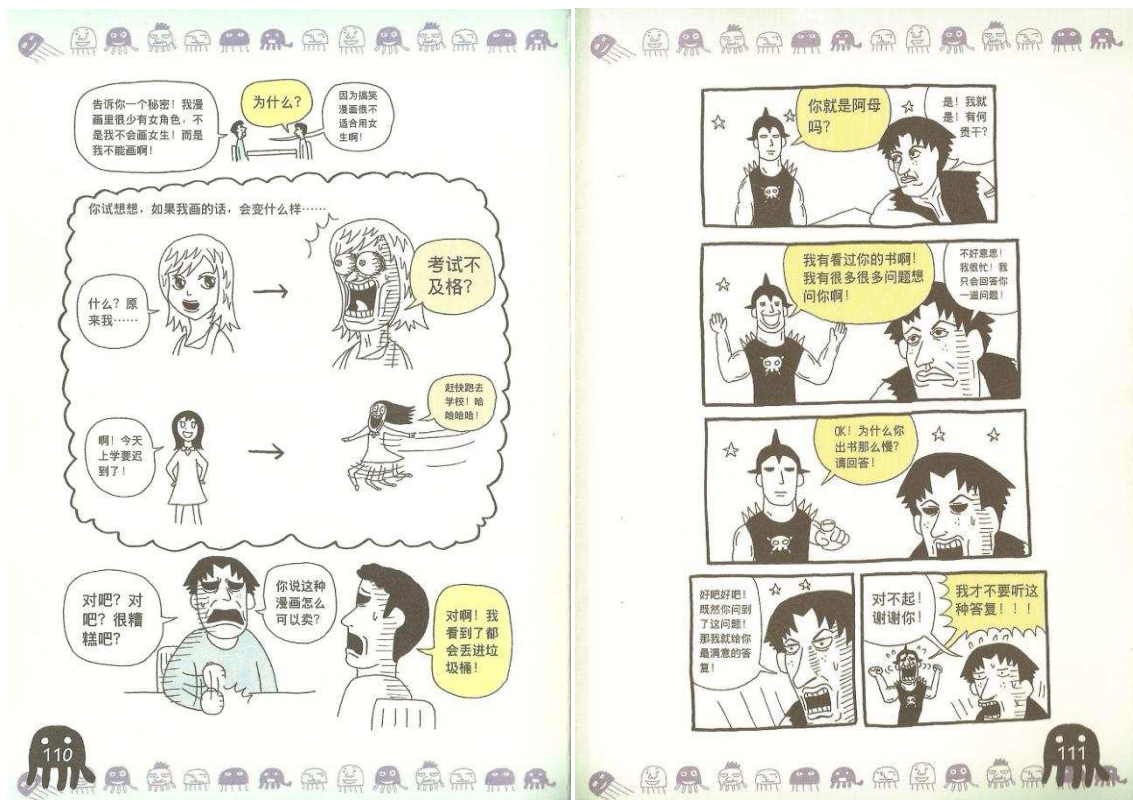


Fig. 57: Comic strips by Hei Se Shui Mu



Fig. 58: comic strips by Hei Se Shui Mu

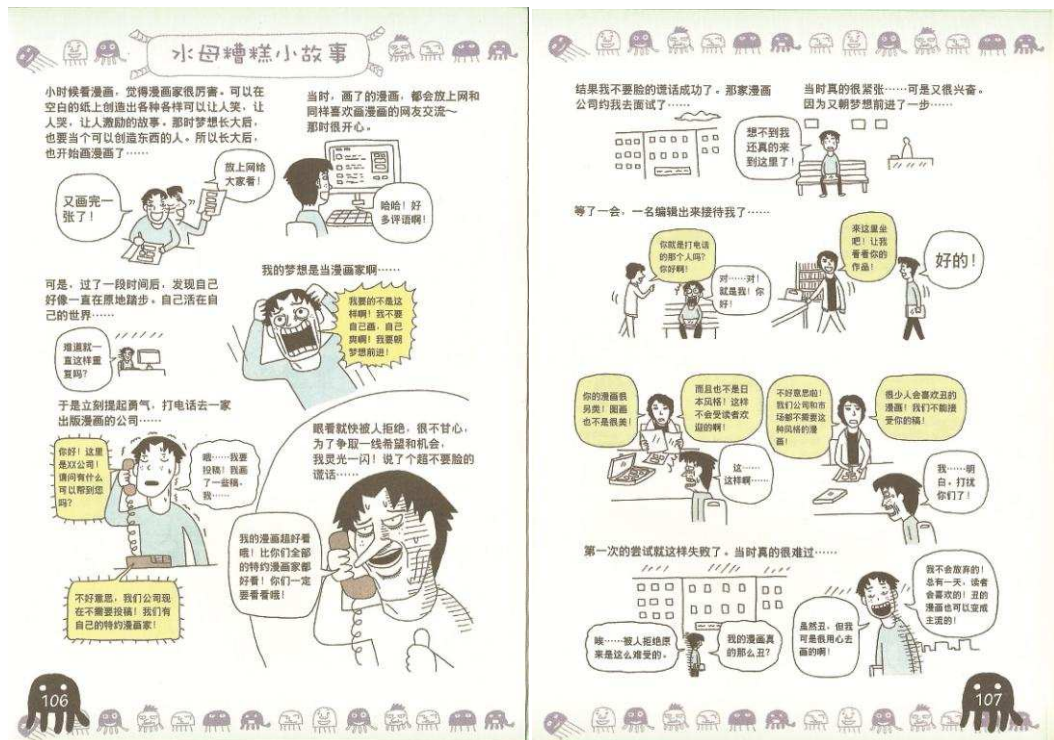


Fig. 59: Comic strips by Hei Se Shui Mu, strip of becoming a comic artist

4.0 Analysis

4.1 Compare and contrast of Malaysian Chinese comic and other comic cultures

4.1.1 Comic culture and content

Malaysian Chinese comic shows a lot of its unique linguistic culture. As analyzed in chapter 3.0, case study of *Gemeilia*, this is often what made local comics uniquely personal to the Malaysian readers. The habit of including several languages in one sentence is a norm in Malaysian verbal communication. This unique linguistic culture also helps deliver humor the Malaysian way, such is seen in *Ping Ton comic* (平旦漫画) (Fig. 62), and *Xiu Dou Gao Xiao* (秀逗高校/ Kuso High School) (Fig. 63). This is a contrast to other comic cultures. By reading comics from DC, Marvel, Hong Kong and Japan, the language used reflects language slang and culture from respective countries, however, the usage of few languages in speech balloon is a unique element only seen in Malaysian Chinese comic.



Fig. 60: Hong Kong comic, *Mak Dou* (McDull) with Cantonese



Fig. 61: DC, Marvel comic with English language



Fig. 62: *Ping Ton Comic* uses Mandarin language and other Chinese dialects



Fig. 63: *Xiu Dou Gao Xiao* (Kuso High School) uses Chinese language, Cantonese, and English language

Content wise, the Malaysian Chinese comic tends to prefer 4 panel comic, or short stories, for example, *Hei Se Shui Mu* (The Black Jellyfish), *Ping Ton comic*, *Xiu Dou Gao Xiao* (Kuso High School). This is a contrast to other comic cultures that publish long comic series. In Japan, comic is explored with continuity who allows growth and sophisticated twist in plots, for example *Katekeyo Hitman Reborn* (Fig. 64) and *One Piece* (Fig. 65). In America, DC and Marvel comic had created shared universe storytelling, allowing extensions from individual superheroes comic (Beaty, 2011). In comparison, long comic series allow more depth and development in characters and contents than short strips.



Fig. 64: *Katekeyo Hitman Reborn*

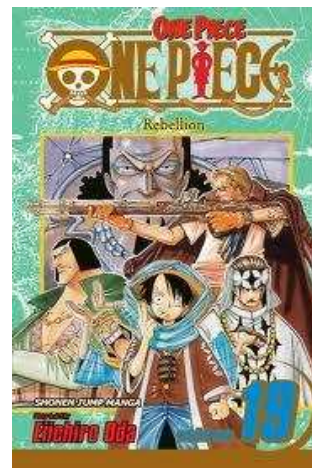


Fig. 65: *One Piece*

4.1.2 How *manga* helped improvement in Malaysian Chinese comic

To access the recognition level on contemporary Malaysian Chinese comic, a survey was held with the 125 comic readers. In comic style, 34% said no Malaysian identity is noticeable in Malaysian comics, that most local comics are influenced by Japanese *manga* (Appendix 1: question 8). These *manga*-styled comic from Malaysia (Fig. 66-67) is believed to have contributed to the low appreciation for local comic (Appendix 1: question 5-6). These comics (Fig. 66-67) had achieved fans, fame and recognition in the industry. Following *manga* style is even encouraged by certain publisher. (Hei Se Shui Mu, 2013, p.107). Nevertheless, in another perspective it is seen as copying or a shadow of the Japanese *manga*. 'Influenced by' is seen by certain local readers as negative. It is important to know 'being influenced' is an important part in a creative process.

"You take existing songs, you chop them up, you transform the pieces, you combine them back together again. ... These aren't just the components of remixing, I think these are the basic elements of all creativity." — Kirby Ferguson (Ted.com, n.d.)

Although the comic is influenced, development and innovation should be highlighted and appreciated, as that is what makes a comic better than its influence.



Fig. 66: *Kachigo*

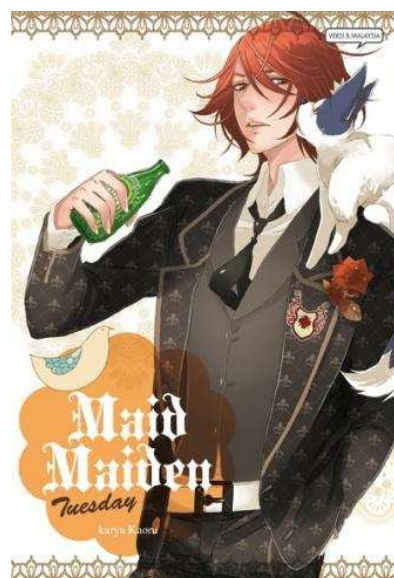


Fig. 67: *Maid Maiden*

As seen in several local comics, innovation can be created by incorporating local context. For example, the magical creatures from *Oka!* are similar with Hayao Miyazaki's animation, *The Cat Return* (Fig. 68-69) and Peyo's comic, *The Smurfs* (Fig. 70-71). But set in the forest, significant Malaysian traces of the native *orang asli* culture are seen; such as their costume, and ways of co-existence with the nature (Fig. 71-72). In another example, *Yu Wang Zi Lu* (羽王之路/ Badminton Champion)(Chen and Lee, 2012), there is illustration style and contents about battle, that is clearly

inspired by *manga* (Fig. 73). Nevertheless there are interesting local contexts, such as training life in national athlete academy and the story of national badminton athlete, Lee Chong Wei. In these two cases, local context made these comics creative innovations and easily relatable to its Malaysian readers.



Fig. 68: Oka!'s magical creatures



Fig. 69: Illustration from The Cat's Return by Ghibli Studio



Fig. 70: The Smurf

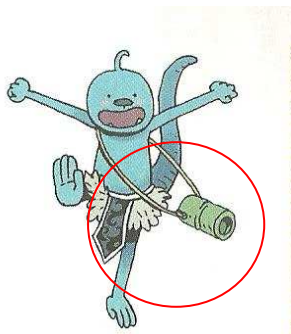


Fig.71: Blue magical creatures from *Oka!* shows inspiration from Smurf, and innovation with element of *orang asli*



Fig. 72: Elements of native *orang asli* culture in *Oka!*



Fig. 73: comic strip of *Yu Wang Zhi Lu* (Badminton Champion)



Fig. 74: cover of *Yu Wang Zhi Lu* (Badminton Champion)

Apart from common comic theme such as secondary school, humor, and children comic, local artist are inspired by Japanese *manga* to write about more diverse themes. For example, *Yu Wang Zhi Lu* (Badminton Champion) speaks about badminton sports, *Kachigo* on culinary adventure, and *Oka!* Introduces travel in Malaysia. In Japanese *manga*, the strategy of diversifying comic theme can be done in few ways. First, fantasy story may do so by creating a fantasy world as seen in *Naruto*, and *Fairy Tail*. This is the same strategy used by local comic, *Kachigo*, and *Oka!*, where the story is set completely unrelated to reality world. Second strategy is to create fantasy in the reality world as seen in *Bleach* and *Katekyo Hitman Reborn*, often made with portals between two worlds. Another strategy is by exploring occupations or different industry, as seen in *Bakuman* (Fig. 75) and *Prince of Tennis* (Fig. 76) This is seen the strategy used by local Chinese comic, *Yu Wang Zhi Lu* (Badminton Champion) (Fig. 77). By learning from these *manga* strategies, local comic may have more diverse comic themes; combined with local ideas, local comic becomes innovation. The use of Japanese influence is not necessarily negative, where as it is a tool to help this young industry in Malaysia to grow in many ways.



Fig. 75: *Bakuman*, a manga about comic artist



Fig. 76: *Prince of Tennis*, a manga about tennis sport



Fig. 77: *Yu Wang Zhi Lu* (Badminton Champion), a Malaysian comic about badminton sport

4.2 Challenges faced by the Malaysian Chinese comic industry

There are challenges faced by the Malaysian Chinese comic industry today. Of all local Chinese comic, children comic takes up a major percentage of the market today. According to Liu Shao Ming, secretary of Mandarin Comic Society, this had been the situation for the past 10 years (cited in Media Prima, 2013). The continued emphasis towards development only in children comic raises some doubts about the future of this industry.

“Malaysian comic is aim for children, not for teenagers and adult, so I got no comment, I’m not a children now.” Anonymous sample, respond on Appendix 1, question 8

“Malaysian comic is suitable for children.” Anonymous sample, respond on Appendix 1, question 8

It seems that the publishers have found a comfort zone with children comic, and at the same time it is a danger zone for the industry. This is supported with the prediction by Liu that the industry will see 5 more years of flourishing in children comic (cited in Media Prima, 2013). Instead of development in other areas, the industry seems to be limiting itself to children comic. Is this all Malaysian comic can achieve?

The Malaysian Chinese comic industry is also facing the same challenge faced by the Hong Kong comic industry. As mentioned in chapter 2.2, youth are packed with options of other leisure entertainment these days, such as Internet and karaoke. The popularity of Hong Kong comic is consequently affected, when youth choose more interesting and exciting ways to spend their leisure hours (Lin, 2012b). According to Liu, this is the same struggle faced by Malaysian Chinese teenage and youth comic (cited in Media Prima, 2013). This area of comic development is important as it allows discovery of more matured and sophisticated comic style and contents in future. Without support from teenagers and adult readership communities, Malaysian Chinese comic will be left behind, and remain limited in children comic.

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Fig. 78: Malaysian animation, *Upin dan Ipin*

With the growth of animation (Fig. 78) and comic industry in Malaysia these few years, the expectation of making comic animation is natural. However, according to experts from this field, sustained development in this area is not possible at the moment. Liu explained that this is due to the demand for high budget in creating animation. This is also due to the small market of Malaysia. According to Xu You Li, artist of *Gemeilia* (Brother and Sister), depending on this amount of profit from local market, it is not possible to support an entire production team for the animation (cited in Media Prima, 2013). Before local Chinese comic can be made into animation, it needs to have more readers from local and international audience, a wider market, and big investment.

4.3 Opportunities in Malaysian Chinese comic industry

The challenges faced by Malaysian Chinese comic shows a harsh road ahead. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for its future.

With the overwhelming support for international comic, especially Japanese *manga* and anime (Appendix 1: question: 2-3), it is seemingly impossible to be competitive against these comics. In recent years, there are new comic influences that have emerged in the market, the Thailand, Korea and Taiwan comics (Fig. 79-81). Similar to circumstances in local comic, these new comics had achieved much. Although these are not mega comic cultures like Japanese, DC and Marvel comic, national and personal identity are visible. They tend to outshine and win the hearts of their fans. With the cultural and stylistic identity already seen among Malaysian Chinese comic, Malaysia comic certainly has the potential to shine and flourish in South East Asia.



Fig. 79: *World Disaster* from Thailand



Fig. 80: comic from Korea

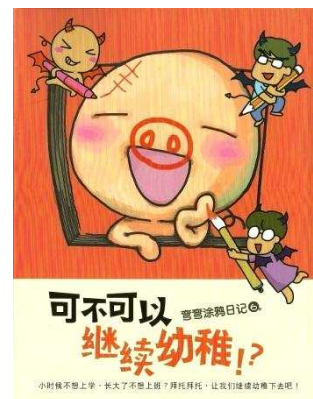


Fig. 81: Wan Wan's comic from Taiwan

Publishing comic on the web has been done for a while. This is seen in United States and Europe (Withrow, 2003, p. 68) Taiwan, Korea and recently in Malaysia too. Some Malaysian web-based comic had already been published into book, for example, *Bro Don't Like That La Bro* by Ernest Ng (Fig. 82) (Dontlikethatbrobook, n.d.), and *When I Was A Kid* by Boey (Fig. 83) (Lastgasp.com, n.d.). Web-based comic serves many advantages in terms of audience outreach, cost and dilution from editing (Withrow, 2003, p.68). The web provides the platform for amateur artists to test their skills prior to joining mainstream book publication, and helps scouting of new talents (kakoiicomic.com, n.d.). Success in web-based comic often leads the artist to opportunities in other media: as seen in Korean web toon, *I Steal Peeks At Him Every Day* (Fig. 84) who had been made into Korean drama *Flower Boys Next Door* (Fig. 85) (Lovetsar143, 2012). In Malaysia, this is seen in Nutella's

collaboration with *Chii Bird* (Fig. 86) (Jacqueline, 2011), and in Ng and Boey's example. With these evidences, web comic has high potential to be the next breakthrough in Malaysian comic.

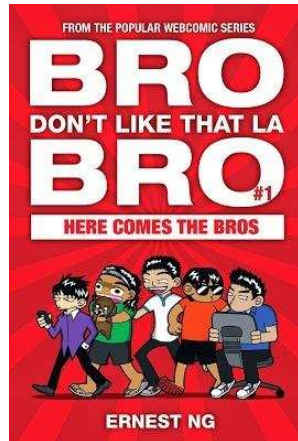


Fig. 82: Book cover of *Bro Don't Like That La Bro #1*

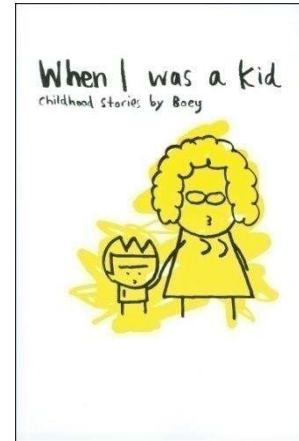


Fig. 83: Book cover of *When I Was A Kid*



Fig. 84: Original webtoon, *I Steal Peeks At Him Every Day*



Fig. 85: Korean drama *Flower Boy Next Door*



Fig. 86: Collaboration of Nutella with web-based comic, Chii Bird

5.0 Conclusion

All in all, contemporary Malaysian Chinese comic style has not yet emerged. It is still evolving in the developing stage. By studying the major comic cultures, the key determinants of an established comic style are defined in (i) Illustration; (ii) Contents; and (iii) Culture. However, the Malaysian Chinese comic has not fulfilled all the above criteria. Local Chinese comic demonstrates defined style in contents and culture but not in illustration.

In Illustration, general Malaysian Chinese comic do not demonstrate one defined style. Nevertheless, there are strong personal styles visible from individual comic series. Most children comic have shown a consistent format of fully colored illustrations. Each comic shows different illustration style, although they all display a cute and child-like appearance (Fig. 87-90). In comics for teenagers and youth, there are many strong personal illustrations, with different strength and color schemes (Fig. 91-93). Most local Chinese comics contain traces of Malaysia local elements through visual, for example, school uniform, tropical forest on *kampung* houses (Fig. 87, 89).

Majority of Malaysian Chinese comic shared one common idea in Contents and Culture, a unique Malaysian element. In Culture, several comics have shown the multi-lingual culture of Malaysian speaking, as seen in *Gemeilia* (Brother and Sister), *Hei Se Shui Mu* (The Black Jellyfish), *Ping Ton Comic* and *Xiu Dou Gao Xiao* (Kuso High School) These are evident in names in addressing each other in a family, slang, and multi-lingual speaking. Topics such as school, conversation among Malaysian youth, *orang asli* culture, Lee Chong Wei and badminton sports shows that Malaysian Chinese comic share one emphasis on using contents related to Malaysia. From case studies in chapter 3.0, it is learned that these little Malaysian detail creates resonance and connection between comic and readers. Specifically from bestselling local comic, *Hei Se Shui Mu* (The Black Jellyfish), it is learnt that illustrating Malaysia through visual is not too important; whereas it is more important to make local audience feel personal with associations, through language, optimistic attitude and by capturing lives of ordinary Malaysians. These are seen as the selling factors of contemporary Malaysian Chinese comic.

Local Chinese comic has shown significant accomplishment of personal visual style and Malaysian contents. However there is still much room to diversify Malaysian Chinese comic, and develop more sophisticated story. This industry needs wider local and international audience, not forgetting more support for teenage and youth comic. Liu Shao Ming, secretary of Mandarin Comic Society, predicted that the industry will see 5 more years of flourishing in children comic (cited in Media Prima, 2013). It is also predicted that web-based comic will support the future development of Malaysian Chinese comic.



Fig. 91: Comics for teenagers and youth, *Xiu Dou Gao Xiao* (Kuso High School)



Fig. 92: Comics for teenagers and youth, *Hei Se Shui Mu* (The Black Jellyfish)



Fig. 93: Comics for teenagers and youth, *Ping Ton Comic*

(6269 words)

Glossary

Panel- A panel is one of the boxes on the page of a comic book

Manga - Japanese comics. These comics are read right to left, opposed to left to right like western comics

Otaku- Japanese men who are an avid collector or enthusiast, of anime or manga, video games or computer, and he rarely leaves home

Cosplay- A type performing art that involves *manga* fans dressing up as characters

Kanji- A system of Japanese writing using Chinese characters

Mangaka- Japanese comic, manga artists

Kawaii- cute and adorable

Anime- Japanese animation

Hentai- Japanese adult comic and animation

Kampung- The Malay language of village

Orang Asli- natives from Malaysia

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